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What Does "Fear God" Mean?

EDITORIAL

People Not "Worth While"

MARION HARLAND

Four Pages About New Books

Destroying the Hunger for Cigarettes

The Wayfarer Tells of One Young Woman's Friends

Congregational Council Closes—J. A. Adams

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THE CONTINENT

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Pious Insults to God

WOULD YOU SLAP THE LORD ON THE BACK IF YOU MET HIM?

Shocking question, no doubt. But not more shocking than acting that way in public worship.

A vast deal of what happens, both in speech and behavior, inside churches and "evangelistic tabernacles" in this country during religious services, would seem to suggest that modern Christians have largely forgotten that reverence is a virtue and irreverence a sin.



Ritualism sprang from outraged reverence. There was nothing of ritual, of course, in the first stages of the apostolic church. But men who had felt the awesome holiness of God and his Son Jesus Christ, grew heartsick as they saw rude and crude converts, entering the church out of heathen thoughtlessness, bring with them the ribaldry with which they had rollicked before their pagan deities.

So they invented the idea of ritualism to counteract indignities that affronted Almighty God in his sanctuary.

Prescribing every word that should be uttered in public worship appeared the only way of insuring that the majesty of the divine presence should not be violated with gross familiarities.

And it must be admitted that the device served its purpose. The worship of the church, through even the darkest ages of mediæval vulgarity, remained wonderfully elevated and impressive.

But the awakening era of the Reformation brought consciousness of ritualism's failure. Dignity it had indeed; it offered before the face of the high and reverend God a homage fit in all outward forms; but it failed disastrously at the point after all the most vital:

It did not meet the call of Jesus for "worship in spirit and in truth." It produced neither spirituality nor sincerity.

So the reformers revolted against ritual. They indeed mostly sought to stop half-way—with substitution of less formal liturgies—but the reaction which they began carried their successors farther than they themselves desired to go.

The result is the practically complete exclusion of regulative forms and ceremonies from the public worship of all the foremost Protestant bodies save the Episcopalians and the Lutherans.

"Free prayer" and corresponding free speech in the sanctuary are the rule of the overwhelming majority of Protestant churches.



With what result? Well, the original ritualists would seem to be pretty well justified.

The doing of things decently and in order, which Paul recommended, is rare enough in Protestant churches to be remarkable where observed. Awe of the presence of the Lord is a feeling whereof lifelong church-goers often remain unconscious.

Indeed, negative lack of reverence is at times cultivated to positive irreverence by diligent and continuous endeavor to produce, in young Christians especially, a brash familiarity with God falsely supposed to be required in order to realize his nearness to them.

Particularly does this become painful and obnoxious in many evangelistic meetings where the leader seems to know no other way of bringing God near to the consciousness of his hearers than by making, in prayer and sermon, a sort of sample demonstration of what in informal terms of chummy friendship he himself manages to maintain with the Almighty.

It is not to be questioned for a minute that this sense of intimate fellowship is genuine; no doubt it fulfills the ideal of worship so far as concerns the stipulation, "in spirit and in truth." And doubtless God accepts it with pitying patience.

But that does not change some great facts that ought to be soberly faced by all who have any responsibility for leading the worship of Christians or shaping the religious ideas of the irreligious. Here is one tremendous fact never to be forgotten:

God is not a jolly comrade to be hailed with a "hello," nor a familiar equal with whom conversation may turn to unguarded chat.

Far different from all this, God is our ineffably mighty and majestic King and Creator, high and lifted up, filling his infinite temple of eternity with the glory of his presence and no less to be had in loving awe when he condescends to dwell in the lowly intimacy of a humble and contrite human heart.

Nor is Jesus Christ, friend of sinners though he be, one to be treated as a "hail fellow well met."

Americans, bumptious in their ideas of equality, seem to have lost the art of deferential association with a superior. They cannot even bear fellowship with the Lord himself without airs that are presuming and forward.

There is not the least danger that any longing soul will insist on pressing too close to the Master. But there is a gulf of difference between stealing near to kneel at his feet and marching up jauntily to shake hands.



This fault must not be specially attributed to evangelists and unconventional preachers. It perhaps does not break out so bizarrely in other places, but the demoralizing spirit of it runs through a sorry proportion of the services of American churches and a worse proportion still of Sunday school exercises.

Noisy, shouting singing, worked up to the top pitch of sound and fury, by choristers whose best ideal appears to be the splitting of the roof overhead, and rambling, mouthy prayers, full of pious twaddle addressed to human hearers and uttered in apparent forgetfulness of a listening God, are some of the worse symptoms of a common dullness of soul, capable of going through the forms of worship without any mystic sense of marvel at the grandeur of God.

Nothing can be worse for the future depth and strength of religion in any land than training children for manhood and womanhood without disciplining them in reverence. They may be religious in spite of the lack, but not profoundly religious.



The antidote of irreverence is the fear of God.

A man may have a host of other Christian virtues and in the strength of them he may be vastly useful in the kingdom of God. But if he sins in irreverence, he is not a complete Christian.

For irreverence in him proves the absence from him of the fear of God.

And fear means fear. A deal of harm has been done by trying to show that fear in the Bible means something else. It does not "Let all the earth fear Jehovah; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him."

"God is in heaven and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few."

People Who Are Not "Worth While"

BY MARION HARLAND

THE PHRASE IS IDIOMATIC. Perhaps it is not quite grammatical. It is surely expressive of what comes into our minds and falls from our lips every day. It stands for our fellow beings who cannot contribute to our pleasure or advance our material interests as far as we can see. It does not of necessity mean the poor relation or the social bore, nor yet the nonentity the purpose of whose being we have never been able to fathom.

I heard it used only last week by a man who is beloved and revered by the community blessed by his indwelling. He is charming in personality; he is tender of heart and bountiful of hand. Those who know him best account his friendship an honor.

He was speaking of certain young folk to whom he is related, if somewhat distantly, by blood.

"I should like to know them better," he said, regretfully, "and to this end I have made advances more than once. They have never responded to my overtures of friendship. They evidently do not consider me worth while."

It was but natural that his young daughter should retort indignantly, "You are a thousand times 'worth-whiler' than any of them!"

I surmised shrewdly that the apparent neglect of the young relatives arose from sheer selfish absorption in their own affairs. Yet more shrewdly I said to myself that each one of them would have hastened to pay his respects if assured that the elder man could further the young person's own wishes in the matter of pecuniary gain or social position.

Charles II. of England is credited with a saying worthy of a more astute diplomat:

"Treat every man as if you knew you might some time have use for him."

None but the exceptionally cold-blooded and far-seeing lay the injunction to heart in the heyday of youth. It is quite safe to venture the computation that 50 per cent of those who neglect the practice live to regret it.

Finding Something Interesting in Every One

A higher principle is to accept each new acquaintance as a possible opportunity of doing good in some way or manner to be determined in the progress of our association. It is contrary to the genius of our holy religion to "cultivate" our fellows for what we may make out of them. That is reading the golden rule backward. Daily life is full of such reading.

"I believe that you find something interesting in everyone you meet!" was the impatient exclamation of a woman eminent in her circle for erudition and accomplishments.

The woman addressed was not a whit her inferior in personal gifts, and the speech had the ring of impatient wonder. The other met the attack smilingly:

"Of course I do! Don't you?"

"Indeed, I do not! Nor do I feign interest or even patience when I know the person I am talking to has not one idea or aim in common with me. Life is too short to be wasted upon bores. Half of the people I meet are not worth while!"

"You are singularly unfortunate!" rejoined the other quietly. "My experience has been very different. When I was a child I read in 'Display'—one of Miss Kennedy's books—a sentence that has stuck in my memory ever since. I think there is not a day in which I do not prove the truth of it:

"No human being is absolutely uninteresting."

Nobody reads Miss Kennedy nowadays. I shall be eternally grateful to her for writing that golden saying.

"'Eternally' is a long word!" Had the objector been less refined the retort would have been a sneer.

"I use it advisedly!" as seriously as before. "My gains from the practice of the great truth laid down by the forgotten novelist are not to be calculated fully in this life."

The brilliant woman brushed aside the topic with an airy gesture: "As I said, life is too short and things of real importance are too many for me to squander minutes and hours upon people who are not worth while!"

The same dogmatic phrase would seem to be of universal application.

It fell trippingly from the lips of a college girl to whose kindly notice I had commended a shy youth, a stranger in her circle, as "a nice boy whose mother was my early friend."

"Certainly, if it would please you, I will try to brighten him up a little—if I can! He looks very unlikely and, as you know, there are so few young men in the twentieth century who are worth while!"

She had no sordid subthought in the flippant phrase. Her mind is bent upon self-improvement, not upon making a "good match." The youth who does not promise diversion, entertainment or mental stimulus has no appeal to her sympathies or tastes. It would be a waste of time (her time!) to attempt to put the boy at ease in unfamiliar surroundings and to draw out what is best worth his thinking and seeking.

Our grandmothers never heard of "functions" as applied to social life. The word had a dozen other meanings in their schooldays, most of them pertaining to bodily exercises. It was reserved for our utilitarian age to supersede "amusement" and "hospitality" by the bisyllabic term. "Extended in recent use to cover social entertainments, such as operas, balls and receptions." Thus modern editions of the lexicons from which we used to learn the use of language.

How much has the cardinal consideration of asking to our homes people who are "worth while" to do with the aforesaid "extension," I wonder? How few of us in arranging lists of guests that are to furnish feasts, small and great, contemplate the pleasure we may give, and how many the advantages to ourselves from the attendance of people "who are worth while."

At a certain feast planned ages ago the latter class of guests declined to come for reasons at which we can now but guess. Perhaps the host was personally unpopular to the man who had bought a yoke of oxen, or politically obnoxious to the "ring" represented by the bridegroom whose devotion to his newly wedded spouse kept him away.

Some of us may not think in this connection of another feast—not allegorical—of which we read in the same book.

"One of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house and sat down."

Passing over the immortal episode of the fallen woman and the box of ointment, we come upon a significant passage:

"He said unto Simon: 'Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house; thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

"Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

"My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.'"

Simon the Pharisee and His Guest

Simon was thoroughly conversant with the etiquette of hospitality and the nice observances pertaining to even family meals. The Pharisees ate not except they had first washed the hands and arms up to the elbow, and water was ready for the travel-stained feet after the sandals were removed by obsequious servants, or, if the guest were a person of distinction, by the host himself. He girded himself with a towel and, kneeling, performed the gracious office. Ointment for the head was then proffered—still by the head of the house.

The conclusion is unavoidable: Clearly, our Lord was in the eyes of the Pharisaical host a guest who was "not worth while."

Hearing, as he could not help hearing, of the traveling Teacher whom the common people accounted a prophet, he had asked him to supper in an easy, informal way, thinking perhaps to see some miracle performed by him or to provoke a discussion upon certain weighty matters of the law, or it may have been out of good nature and compassion for the homeless wanderer. He rated his social consequence so low as to omit the simplest forms of common politeness. Every incident confirms the impression that to his way of thinking he had no reason to "cultivate" the itinerant evangelist.

Read with me the story and lay the lesson to heart, ye whose prime object in life is "self-improvement."

Who is to judge who is "worth while"?

"Those from whom, like Pharisees, we shrink
With Christ may eat and drink."

But for the woman who was a sinner, we should never have heard of Simon the Pharisee.