

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 1)

The Purpose Defines the Decorum

John W. Ritenbaugh

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When I spoke three weeks ago in my last message, we looked on the subject of where our hope should be. I went into this for two reasons. The lesser important of the two was the fact that one of the reasons the church has always lost the fellowship of people between the Feast of Tabernacles is because people lose hope, they get discouraged, and they drift off. I don't want to see that happen.

The second and far more important reason they lose hope is because their hope has been placed in the wrong thing all along. Their hope should have been in God Himself—the Being, the Person, the Almighty—perfect in character, powerful and pure and loving personality who is our Creator; to whom we are to be conformed because we are to marry Him, be at one with Him, and spend eternity with *Him* in perfect harmony. Their hope should have been in Him, in God Himself. We will be in perfect harmony with Him because we *know* Him, and recognize the supreme goodness of all that He is, and desire to be like Him, and therefore to think like He does.

In practical circumstances, the effect in life of placing one's hope in the wrong things is that we will not develop our relationship with Him. Our hope should not be in the place of safety. It shouldn't be in the resurrection of the dead. It shouldn't be in even the Kingdom of God, because as good as those promises are, there is still a sense of *getting* involved with them. Brethren, it is God Himself who is the issue in our life. Every good thing in life flows from the relationship with Him.

If I can put it this way, in one place He calls Himself "*the Fountain*." That's what He's indicating. The good things in life flow from Him because *He* is "*the Tree of life*." It is God Himself from whom all blessings flow. If there is no relationship, there are no blessings of the kind that make life abundant. In *Him* is the place of safety. In *Him* is the resurrection. In *Him* is the Kingdom of God.

Turn to Colossians 2. I won't do a great deal of expounding on these verses, but I want to give you an example or two of how important this is. We'll begin with verse 3, which is talking about Christ.

Colossians 2:3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:9-10 For in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And you are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.

Colossians 3:3-4 For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in

God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory.

Galatians 4:19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.

John 14:19 Yet a little while, and the world sees me no more; but you see me: because I live, you shall live also.

Our spiritual life flows from Him, not His promises. Those promises come from a *living* Being who wants to have a relationship with us. In each one of those scriptures, the verse is speaking of *Him*—the Giver of every good gift. That's the way James put it. "Every good gift comes from Him, who is above." The reality of our spiritual union is with Him, and therefore He is the source and the cause of our growth as Christians. Every good fruit flows from our having a relationship with Him. Our responsibility in this union is to reciprocate His gift back to Him. What He gives us, we give back to Him through submission to His will in our life.

Previous to our calling we had been cut off from Him through sin, but now we have access to Him through the work of Christ, our calling, and God's forgiveness, and the gift of His Holy Spirit. Now is the time for us to make good use of our access by seeking Him to discover what He is like. He has already revealed Himself. We don't have to look for God. He has already taken care of that, but now we have to *seek* to find out what He is like so that we can conform our thinking, our attitudes, and ways to His, and never be separated again, *ever!* Our trust is to be in Him. Our expectation of good is in Him, and our love comes from Him, and is to be first and foremost reciprocated back to Him. Is this not the first and the great commandment of the law? *He* is our life.

This sermon is devoted to yet another aspect of knowing His wide-ranging multi-dimensional personality, and what our relationship to Him should be. We're going to go back to Deuteronomy 14:23.

Deuteronomy 14:23 And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of your corn, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks; that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

We just kept another Feast of Tabernacles. One of the major reasons we are to keep the Feast is to *learn* to fear Him. Pertaining to this verse, the margin in my Bible says that an alternate translation of the word "fear" is "to stand in awe of." The practical reality though is that we moderns do not stand in awe of very much, because the general rule of life is that we think that we have seen it all. We have been there and done that, and so our cynical approach is, "What have you done for me today?" We think very highly of our opinions, and in many cases we don't think at all that we might be wrong. This is why Christ later said that we must become as a little child. The reality is that we are not little children. We just do without really questioning whether something is appropriate and respectful in God's eyes. At the foundation of why we do in this

matter is because *we don't really see God*. We are ignorantly unaware of His direct presence and interest in our lives through Christ.

David said "the fear of God" is something we must learn. It does not come naturally. The reason that fear, or respect, or reverence, or awe is so important is because we conform to what we fear, or respect, or reverence, or stand in awe of. We conform our perspectives, attitudes, and conduct to those or what we fear. Now because we don't really know God, we conform then to what we *do* know. This is a characteristic that is really noticeable in teens. They can become virtually slaves to conformity to their peers. They want to belong, and so they submit to what they feel is the group, or the fashion, the attitude, or whatever, of those that they respect.

Before God's calling we are almost totally conformed to the world. There is a reason for that, and that is because we never really knew God. That's why we must seek Him. We must seek Him so that we can be conformed (transformed, converted, changed) into an image of Him rather than the world.

Turn now to Malachi 1:6. Understand that underlying this verse is fear—the fear of God. God complained against Israel when He says:

Malachi 1:6 A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is my honor? And if I be a master, where is my fear? Says the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests that despise my name. And you say, Wherein have we despised your name?

This principle that God enunciates here is important because it clearly shows what the results are of not fearing God. He is not honored, but contrariwise is despised. That's a strong word. The practical result in His people is also shown here in that the sacrifices of His children fall far short of His requirements, because those sacrifices don't do Him any honor at all.

When I say "sacrifices," I hope that you understand that I'm not really talking about animal sacrifices, because animal sacrifices are merely the illustration that is drawn from the period of time when Malachi wrote this. In New Covenant terms it is the sacrifice of our life as a *living* sacrifice [Romans 12:1-2]. It is obedience in conforming to His standard of living, and that requires sacrifice on our part. It requires sacrifice, because human nature doesn't want to conform to God. It wants to hold on to its opinions and stay conformed to the world because it feels *comfortable* that way. Human nature says to us, "Now this is the way *I* see it." That degenerate pull requires sacrifice on our part to overcome it and give it up, and therefore honor God.

We're going to go back to the book of Proverbs that touches on a rather frightening fruit that results from the failure to give God honor. It's very interesting that the book of Proverbs begins in this manner, with a warning.

Proverbs 1:22-31 How long, you simple [or naïve] ones, will you love simplicity [or naïveté]? And the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out

my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and you refused: I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: But you have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear [your terror] comes: When your fear comes as desolation, and your destruction comes as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish comes upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD [when they had the opportunity]: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

In other words, it's going to boomerang.

On September 14 an article appeared in *The Charlotte Observer* newspaper titled "Casting off casual Sunday." It explained that the pastor of the Central Church of God in downtown Charlotte, which has a membership of 6,500 people, announced to the membership that he was on a mission. He was on a mission to make sure that they honored God by dressing and acting appropriately in the sanctuary.

Those of you who are a bit older will remember the clichés about a person wearing "*his Sunday best*," or his Sunday "*Go to Meetin'*" clothes. The point of those clichés is that those people were wearing their best clothing reserved for Sunday church services when they appeared before God. I think that you have probably noticed that many people out there in the world, unless they are older, do not seem to care anymore how they dress when they go to church. They either do not care, or they don't know. The prevailing opinion seems to be that "God will just accept us as we are." But the Bible makes clear that *He will not*. What's really showing, in the way that they dress, is their ignorance of God's reality.

The pastor who was interviewed said, "In the face of all the informality that has crept into the church services, I want to preserve the sanctity of the sanctuary." A little later he said, "Therefore, among other things, tank tops, spaghetti straps, tight short skirts in which the hem is above the knee, tight tops, etc., are out, and the new model of that church is now 'cover and conceal.'" As was expected by me in this sort of article in a public newspaper, only one scripture was quoted, and that was from Isaiah 66 in reference to humility. Its use was appropriate though, because this is an issue of humility before God.

The article had many more inputs of "*This is the way I see it*" from both sides of this issue. The pastor further added that people shouldn't even begin to think about smoking anywhere on church grounds, and that he wants the sanctuary to be a *sane* place in an *insane* world, and that the church appreciates pretty women, but they should spend more time looking for Jesus than for just the right makeup.

I thought it was real interesting that he was saying that people who don't dress appropriately, in his mind, are insane. There's a lack of sanity there in the way that they are appearing before

God. The article reported that others though had jokingly told the pastor he has lost his mind, meaning that they knew he was right, but that he was foolish to fight the tide of public opinion, that he was sort of like Don Quixote tilting at windmills

Still others, not part of the Central Church congregation said that dress codes should be relaxed even further, and that services should then be held in a gym, in a fellowship hall for a secular setting, meaning that where one holds formal services makes a difference in dress and demeanor. That's kind of interesting.

Maybe some of you remember Dean Blackwell and his story about Deacon Brown telling about the most fervent prayer he ever gave in his life. He said it happened when he tripped and fell into a well and was hanging upside down, appealing to God to spare his life. Did it make a difference then where he was? Yes it did, but he had to be appealing to God to save his life.

We need to understand that the environment for services doesn't determine dress. The determining issue is God Himself. It's *His* holiness, *His* dignity of office, *His* majesty and power, and *His* laws that matter.

We're not done with the article yet. This was a long article. The article also said that one Methodist Church in Charlotte permits its people to wear their "game day attire" to services before going to the Charlotte Panthers professional football game in the afternoon. So when the Central Church pastor preached on the subject, the paper reported that there was no dissension, and very few violations. We wonder about the Methodist Church. What's more important? God, or the game?

I wanted to speak on this subject for a long time. In fact in the whole history of the Church of the Great God I haven't given it a full sermon's attention. But I think the time has come for us to look at what God says about conduct and formality before Him in our services because it is a part of coming to know *Him*, and respecting Him. This subject touches most directly on the overall subject of "Do we see God?" and then on the broad subject of "the fear of God," and of sin, but it also specifically focuses on the subject of holiness, and then under that into the "clean and unclean" areas.

God is holy, and we are commanded to be holy because He is holy. We're to conform to that holiness. The Bible shows that God is the Author of formality, and decorum, and both of those are aspects of His holiness. Remember that the word "holy" derives from a verbal root that means "to cut." It means "to cut out" or "to cut away from," and therefore to separate or set apart that which is cut out. When this word is applied to God and to godly things, it also indicates a sense of "a cut above." To be holy includes the sense of cleanliness and purity, and therefore *acceptability* to God, especially when one is in God's presence.

By contrast, sin is "to miss the mark." It is "to fail to reach the standard." It is "to turn aside." It is "to come short of the glory of God." It is sin. It is all sorts of sin. It is every sin that defiles. Sin makes one unclean. The Bible may use the term *profane*. This word has an interesting derivation in the Greek because the Greeks used it to indicate "far from the temple." In other words, anybody who was doing something that was profane was not at all like God. He completely missed the mark in attempting to be like Him. The result of uncleanness is that one is unacceptable to God. He has not met God's standards for His family.

Learn this that the book of Leviticus is *the* book of holiness in the Bible. All the books of the Bible instruct us in some aspect of holiness, but Leviticus' dominant theme, its subject, is holiness; how to be holy. It instructs us in what is acceptable for one to be in God's presence and/or service. For the most part it does not give specific instructions regarding each and every requirement, but rather it gives the instruction in principles, symbols, images, types, and metaphors.

Herbert Armstrong once said something very interesting in this regard. He said, "You can always spot a liberal because a liberal requires a 'thus saith the Lord' for everything." The word "liberal" means "generous." The question is, "To whom is the liberal generous?" He may be generous to some other person, but the way Herbert Armstrong meant was that the liberal was generous to himself.

We have to understand that God is looking for those who will worship Him "in spirit and in truth." Now if everything had to be written out in the Bible, the Bible would be as large as the Library of Congress. That's what man does. Instead, we have this Book that is really small compared to the territory it covers. It covers everything of any value in life. The answer can be found in this Book, but in order to do it we have to understand its imagery, its metaphors, its symbolism. We have to understand the *intent* of things. In John 4 Jesus said that God is looking for people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. They don't need everything spelled out for them. Because they read the word of God they are able to extrapolate honestly and truthfully from the things that they see and apply it in practical situations to themselves, and they come up with right answers.

A liberal gives himself permission to sin because he either cannot, or he refuses to discern the intent of many parts of God's word, and so the liberal will reason that because something isn't completely spelled out, it doesn't apply to him. Therefore he doesn't have to do it. Now learn this: we must always be looking for the spirit—the intent of what God intends. The spiritual problem with the liberal is that his heart is not right with God. He's not truly looking for correction in righteousness, but is in reality setting his own standard of righteousness.

Let's go back to the New Testament once again, to I Thessalonians 4: 7-8.

I Thessalonians 4: 6-8 That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despises, despises not man, but God, who has also given unto us his holy Spirit.

Remember I just said to you that Leviticus is the book of holiness, and I mentioned a few things about clean and unclean. The dominating terms in Leviticus are "clean" and "unclean." Verse 7 very clearly shows that *unclean* and *holy* are each others' opposites. Therefore, the word "holy" means "clean." It means "undefiled." It is not profane. The words "go beyond" in verse 6 ("that no man go beyond") means "to not overstep the moral law." The word "defraud" in this case means "to take advantage of," or "to cheat in any manner." It doesn't matter what it is, the

Christian will sacrifice himself for the well-being of his brother, and he will not overstep (go beyond) just to get his own way. And then the word "for" is the reason why. It's a conclusion.

Verse 8 is important to you and me because once again the word "despise" is brought up, and the situation parallels Malachi 1:6. He therefore that despises his brother (when he goes beyond the intent of God's law, to defraud, or to take advantage of his brother) is really not despising his brother, but God. Jesus made this principle very clear in Luke 10:16. He is speaking to His disciples.

Luke 10:16 He that hears you hears me.

I want you to think of this in terms of our union with Christ. I went through a few verses to show you how important that is to you and to me. Here we are beginning to see *why* it is so very important.

Luke 10:16 He that hears you hears me; and he that despises you despises me; and he that despises me despises him that sent me.

This is what Paul said back there in I Thessalonians 4. Our union with God is so perceived by Him, that if we defraud our brother, cheat our brother out of something, it is exactly the same thing as doing it to *Him*! That's how close our relationship is with Him. That's the way *He* looks at it. It goes right up the ladder, and so our sins against our brother are directly toward God. They just keep reverberating right on up through Jesus Christ and on to Him. It is defiling—making dirty—profaning the *name* of God. That breaks the Third Commandment. It's profanity. This has a great deal to do with honoring God, because in a good sense it applies that when we honor our brother, we are also honoring God. It reverberates right up to Him, because it brings honor to him when we honor our brother.

When we see the word "clean" and its synonyms, we should understand it as *holy, a cut above, acceptable for God's children, obedience, and permitting one to come into God's presence*. "Unclean" and its synonyms mean *sin, profane, unacceptable, and denied in God's presence*.

We're going to add a little bit more to this platform. This whole sermon is going to be devoted just to lay a foundation as to *why* formality and proper dress and decorum is our responsibility in order to bring honor to God. It's part of the sacrifice that we make because we know Him, and we know His dignity, and we know His majesty, and we know His power, and we know it's important to our life. I might add—*we know our place*.

We're going to back to the book of Leviticus again. Turn to Leviticus 23:1-4.

Leviticus 23:1-4 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations; even these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; you shall do no work therein: it is

the Sabbath of the bRD in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which you shall proclaim in their seasons.

Of course then what follows is all of the annual Sabbaths. The first thing to note here is that these are *commanded* assemblies. Some modern translations will say *solemn* assembly. They may say *sacred* assembly. I want to clarify something. We are *summoned* to appear before Him. I used the word "summoned," because it's not merely an invitation. A summons has a legal strength to it that an invitation does not. An invitation gives the impression that you can refuse it. It's like it's a suggestion rather than a command. These are commands. God is using the authority of His office, and we are *commanded* to come before Him. We are then to be instructed *by* Him, and we are to fellowship *with* Him, and we are to understand that the one giving the summons is the one who sets the dress and conduct standards. There is nothing unusual about this.

The host organizing a party issues the standards for that party. The invitation will say what kind of a party it is, whether it will be formal or informal in terms of dress. It will set the date and the time, and whether one is to bring anything. "Bring a gift for so-and-so." It may even say "BYOB." You get the point. That's what God does too. The same principle is true for government functions, and sometimes even the place where the function is held will help one determine conduct and dress. I'll tell you right here, that if you're ever in doubt, always err on the side of formality.

Before this overwhelming wave of informality hit our culture, universities issued dress, living, class attendance, and course requirements. Are we left to carelessly assume that God hasn't set standards along with this summons? Oh yes He has. He has set standards, and there are a lot of them.

Let's go back into the New Testament once again to Hebrews 8:5. We'll be breaking into the end of a thought.

Hebrews 8:5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, says he [God], that you make all things according to the pattern showed to you in the mount.

This we do. We look for patterns to give directions as to what we are to do. I'm going to give some definitions that might help you understand "*holy convocation*." First of all, I said that some Bibles use the word "*sacred*." Do you know what sacred means? You can look these up in your dictionary. Sacred means "exclusively dedicated to God." Some Bibles use "*solemn*." The word *solemn* means "serious, dignified, formal." You might wonder what the word "*formal*" means. The word formal means "according to the rules," or "in accordance with rules."

This is very interesting, because games have rules. Football has rules. Basketball has rules, and within the context of this definition they are formal occasions because they have rules while you are playing, and therefore if you violate the rules, what happens? You're penalized. Your team

loses. In fact, you might get thrown out of the game because you destroyed the formality of the situation by not cooperating with the rules. That's interesting to think, because when we get to the next time I speak on this, did not God kick somebody out of the Wedding Supper because he was not dressed properly? He violated the formality of the situation.

We cannot duplicate every last detail of what it says in the book of Leviticus, and we don't have to, because the circumstances have changed due to the giving of the New Covenant. But the general patterns of dedication of the day, reverence for God's presence, dignity of conduct, and formality at following His patterns absolutely must be adhered to, or we don't really see them.

We're going to go now to II Thessalonians 2:15. Here comes instruction from an apostle.

II Thessalonians 2:15 Wherefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

What is translated here as "stand fast" literally means "keep on clinging to the traditions." In other words it has a progressive active contact to it. "Don't let go," he says. "Keep on practicing them." But human nature's tendency is always to let down and degenerate from what is given. Right here Herbert Armstrong fits into this picture, because as the apostle of this era he was the original interpreter of the standards for the Church of God. Thought needs to be given to what God first of all did through this man.

Herbert Armstrong was God's end-time apostle. He was the man that God raised up at the end time to provide a remnant. Think about this. You cannot name a single person in the history of mankind from Christ's time until the present who did accomplish the same things that Herbert Armstrong did. Nobody even comes close! He is unique. And what was he used to do? He was used to re-establish the standards in the Church of God in doctrine and in customs, to set the policies, to set the procedures for those of us who were under him, to develop our relationship with God in the right way.

God used him to re-establish what had been lost. He was the one then God used to give the church guidelines for our relationship with Him—guidelines that were established through many years of trial and error, always striving to find what worked best by producing the most toward *God's* purpose. That is important.

There are other ways of doing things, but what Herbert Armstrong was interested in was, "What's going to produce the most and the best towards God's purposes?" He extracted those things from the principles that are given in the Bible—things like, let's say, the order in which our services are conducted and feast arrangements.

It might also be helpful for us to remember what Christ said to His apostles there in Matthew 10:32-33. There He said something very similar to what He said in Luke 10:16 which we read just a little while ago. He said there that for people to reject them, His apostles, was also to reject Him and His Father. This time He didn't use the word *despise*, but rather *reject*, which is a bit stronger. It's as though they heard, they considered it, and then said, "I'm not going to do that." We need to be careful that we're not rejecting the end-time apostle's word, because those things reverberate all the way to the Father. That is what we are to understand. That is

the *spirit*, the intent of that, and Jesus is saying to you and me that we had better be cautious about this, because the inference of what Christ said is that the apostle's words actually had their genesis in the Father and in the Son.

This is not to say that what Herbert Armstrong did was infallible. But we can check up on him. I would have to say that he had a tremendous batting average for what was right. It wasn't 33.3%. It was more like 90% or so.

Let's go now to I Timothy 6:20. Here we're talking about a church pastor—Timothy.

I Timothy 6:20 O Timothy, keep that which is committed to your trust, avoiding profane [defiled, unclean things] and vain babblings, and oppositions of science [or knowledge] falsely so called.

What was committed to Timothy's trust was the knowledge imparted to him by the apostle. If you will permit, let me put myself into this, because it's telling me here what *my* job is. My job is to pass on, and to remind you of what *I saw and heard*.

Let's go back to Nehemiah 8:5-6, and 9.

Nehemiah 8:5-6 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Nehemiah 8:9-12 And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha [meaning the governor], and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. [What respect!] Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be you sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be you grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

What a tremendous example of respect! I want you to consider this, because they were not in a dimly lighted cathedral with flickering tapers to lend any kind of atmosphere of solemnity. They weren't in a gym, or a motel, or a school assembly room. They were outside in a plaza area near one of the gates in the city wall. It was the purpose of the occasion that determined their decorum—the way that they acted.

We can understand this now because we see a priority here. It is the purpose of an occasion that has the highest priority in determining what the rules are going to be. In this case the purpose was to appear before God and to be instructed. We might argue, or reason, or whatever, but this was a really special occasion. Maybe it's just possible that they hadn't heard the word of God for quite a period of time, but I submit to you that the very fact that God reported their attitude is indicative that *it pleased Him*. It set a standard. They stood up even when they heard the word of God. Now He wants reverence from us when we appear before Him on His Sabbath. Do you really want to please Him?

Let's go to Matthew 18 because Jesus spoke on this.

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

The key thing here is "in My name." It indicates "by My authority," and it is indicating a formal occasion. We Americans have lost so much respect for offices and dignity of conduct in formal occasions, maybe even on the Sabbath. It doesn't matter on the Sabbath whether it is one person in the privacy of his home getting the broadcast over one telephone, or whether it's two people, or three, or forty. If they are assembled "in His name," then Christ is there. Whether one is listening over the phone or a computer, God Himself promises to be there, and that is an occasion that issues forth then in the right kind of response when it is formal. It is a determining factor of formality and dress, and we should treat it with dignity and deep respect during that period of service time because of the purpose and the direction of the occasion.

I heard a great deal of noise, and so did everybody else from at least one place out there. Those people were awfully noisy, and it was not appropriate. We've been summoned into His presence.

You might recall Herbert Armstrong using this illustration. He was informally visiting with the mayor of Jerusalem. Teddy Kollek was his name. It was only a gathering place, a stop-off place, because they were going to go see the Prime Minister of Israel. They got up to leave and went out of Teddy Kollek's office into the hallway, and then Teddy Kollek suddenly stopped, and said, "Wait a minute. We're going to appear before the Prime Minister!" He went back into his office and got on a jacket to go see the Prime Minister. Do you know who the Prime Minister was then? It was a little 70-year-old lady from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, named Golda Meir. It's not the person *it's the office!* It's the occasion and the office, not the person.

So if you're listening over the telephone in your own home, and it is God's service, it is a formal occasion, and kids shouldn't be running around doing things, and you shouldn't be getting up and going around just listening with your ears, walking around, unless there is some good reason why you're walking around.

It's no wonder that there are so many discipline and lack-of-control problems in the United States of America, because, by and large, baby-boomer parents are not teaching self-control to their children.

When I was a boy attending the Methodist Church, there was portion of the service dedicated to a responsive reading of the scriptures. Maybe some of you are familiar with these things. The

pastor would read a portion of scripture, and then the congregation would respond by reading another portion that dovetailed or continued what the pastor read. Now like the Jews in Nehemiah's day, the congregation in that Methodist Church back when I was a boy, out of respect for God's word, rose from their pews while they were reading their portion.

In school classes, most of the time when a teacher called upon us to respond, we had to rise from our chair and stand beside our desk while responding. Answers to all adults had to be accompanied by "Yes sir," "No sir," "Yes ma'am," "No ma'am." This was a public school. We weren't allowed to chew gum in class during school before a mere human teacher, but today unfortunately people want to be free to more or less mentally lounge around drinking coffee before God during services. Now do we see God's greatness, or are we ignorantly attempting to force Him to accept *us* on our terms? That's what it amounts to.

Let's go to Proverbs 29 and I think that we will end here for today. I think we have laid a pretty good foundation for more that is going to come.

Proverbs 29:15 The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame.

I'm taking this seriously, because in one sense my mother is the church, and I don't want this church to bring shame upon God in any way. It's interesting, because from my vantage point, usually on an elevated stage, I can look out and sometimes I see teenagers snickering to each other, passing notes back and forth. Most of the times it's girls, but sometimes it's fellows as well, and whatever they are doing it just can't seem to wait. Meanwhile dad and mom are oblivious. Well, God says shame will result. Why? Because God is faithful. We're really being dishonoring of Him, and our Father will punish, and the punishment will bring shame. It even happens on what we'll call a physical level, because the family reputation is going to be damaged. God doesn't want His family reputation damaged.

Teaching children respect for God and His office, and to control themselves for an hour and a quarter should have been taken care of long before the kids hit their teens. If it hasn't, it's because one or both of the parents hasn't got the picture yet. But that's not really a justification.

I want to make it clear that I am not expecting perfection. I would like it, but I'm realistic enough to know better. Solomon said that there are times and places for a variety of occasions. It's my responsibility before God, and you, to pass on and to set the standards we should shoot for in our service occasion.

When we begin the next time I'll probably just give a little background, and then we will begin in Exodus 25:8-9. For today I think that this is far enough because I think a pretty good platform has been laid to help us understand the kind of decorum and dress that God wants in His presence.