

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

by Jim Rector

It is written in the 96th psalm:

"Oh, sing unto the Lord a new song: Sing unto the Lord all the earth...For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised...Give unto the Lord, O you kindreds of the people; give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto Him the GLORY due unto His name" (Psa. 96:1,4,7-8).

It is a fact that David, though a man of fame, indeed the king of all Israel, remained nevertheless small in his own eyes, consistently looking to God, putting Him first and giving Him all the praise, honor, credit and glory.

The apostle John, on the other hand, speaks of the Pharisees by saying:

"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him (Christ); but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him,

lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they LOVED THE PRAISE OF MEN more than the praise of God" (John 12:42-43).

It is sad commentary indeed that human beings almost invariably tend to seek and keep the glory and praise for themselves. God has left us in His Word a strong witness to this effect. The Scriptures are replete with examples of those whose hearts were lifted up, who glorified themselves, who became proud of what they had achieved, who forgot that God was in charge, that He alone gives the blessings and that He alone deserves and desires ALL THE GLORY!!

As God's chosen people, we need to direct our attention to this serious subject. We need to study the Biblical examples, both good and bad, and really assess and examine our own lives and make certain that we are truly giving God the glory.

GOD RESISTS THE PROUD

God speaks strongly against the sin of pride, but never more strongly than He does against the father of the proud--namely, Satan the devil. The prophet Isaiah writes:

"How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!...For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt MY throne above the stars of God; I will set also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:12-14).

Ezekiel also contributes to the description of Lucifer as follows:

"You seal up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. You have been in Eden, the garden of God...You are the anointed cherub that covers; and I have set you so: You were upon the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in you...Your heart was LIFTED UP, because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness" (Ezek. 28:12-15, 17).

The great fall of Lucifer was the result of pride--of being lifted up or exalted in his own mind, of thinking too highly of himself. He forgot who and what he really was. He lost the right perspective. His relationship with his Creator was utterly out of synch. And what did God tell him? The Scriptures plainly testify:

"Yet you shall be brought down to hell (the grave), to the sides of the pit...By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled the midst of you with violence, and you have sinned; therefore I will cast you as profane out of the mountain of God; and I will

destroy you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire" (Isa. 14:15, Ezek. 28:16).

Whether referring to Satan or to man, God makes it abundantly clear that He hates pride of heart, self-righteousness and self-centeredness. There are numerous examples in the Scriptures to back up this statement. Let's consider just a few of them.

When Belshazzar saw the now famous handwriting on the wall, he immediately consulted the prophet Daniel as to its meaning. Daniel reminded the king of what had previously befallen his own father Nebuchadnezzar--how that because of his pride, he had been deposed and his glory taken from him. He concluded his remarks by saying:

"And you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this; but have LIFTED UP YOURSELF against the Lord of heaven...and the God in whose hand your breath is and whose are all your ways, have YOU NOT GLORIFIED...and in that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Mede took the kingdom" (Dan. 5:22-23, 30-31).

The Scriptures are certain. It is Almighty God who sets up kings and rulers upon the earth, and it is by His great power that thrones are cast down and the little, insignificant men who sit upon them are brought to nothing! Belshazzar abruptly learned this lesson when he followed in his father's footsteps and refused to recognize the hand of God and give Him the glory.

This very same pattern has been repeated time after time during the long, sordid history of man. In the initial days of the New Testament Church (44 A.D.), Herod Agrippa I wreaked havoc throughout the Judean Churches of God, first by putting to death the apostle James and then by imprisoning Peter (Acts 12:1-19).

This pompous king then proceeded down to his palace at Caesarea where he was to mediate a dispute among certain nobles from Tyre and Sidon. We pick up the narrative in Acts 12:21:

"And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel (Josephus states that his robes were made of pure silver, Ant. xix.8.2, pp. 343-352), sat upon his throne and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not GOD THE GLORY; and he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost" (Acts 12:21-23).

Ah, you say, but these were merely heathen kings, ungodly men. Show us a righteous man who fell victim to this same trap. Well, that really presents no problem. Notice first the account of II Chronicles 26, concerning the monarchy of Uzziah, king of Judah:

"Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem...and he did that which was RIGHT in the sight of the Lord (Yahweh)...and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper...But when he was strong, his heart was LIFTED UP to his destruction: for he

transgressed against the Lord his God...and Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked upon him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out thence; yea, himself hastened also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was leper unto the day of his death" (II Chron. 26:16, 20-21).

Though you would think that such striking examples of pride and ego and the disastrous results would be sufficient, God provides us with still others, and yes, of even more righteous men than Uzziah! Some twenty-five years after the death of Uzziah, Judah had fallen economically, militarily and most especially spiritually. She had become a vassal state under powerful Assyrian king Sargon, being compelled to pay a heavy tribute each year. But upon the death of Ahaz, his son Hezekiah acceded to the throne and thus commenced a period of religious reform unprecedented in previous Jewish history.

Aside from David, Hezekiah was one of the two most righteous rulers Judah ever had (Josiah was the other one). He destroyed the centers of pagan worship and completely restored the proper temple service. God also powerfully intervened on his behalf, perhaps on an unparalleled scale--first, by giving him a stupendous victory over the invading armies of Sennacherib, massacring 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night! Secondly, by healing him of an otherwise fatal illness, adding 15 years to his life. And thirdly, by granting him a special sign by which the very rotational movement of the earth was altered so that the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz went backward ten degrees - a miracle of monumental proportions!!

Because of these special blessings from God, Hezekiah become one of the most prominent leaders of his day and his fortune was unequalled since the days of Solomon. But when Berodach Baladin II sent ambassadors over from Babylon to honor Hezekiah, the king, utterly blinded by his own ego and his possessions, proceeded to flaunt his legendary wealth in front of these heathen emissaries (II Kings 20:12-13).

And God, who had mercifully given Hezekiah every blessing in his possession, was hot with anger! What was Hezekiah's great sin? Notice II Chronicles 32:25:

"But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his HEART WAS LIFTED UP; therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem."

Surely Hezekiah's example is enough! Would anyone ever need a stronger one than the error of a most righteous king? Well, perhaps God thought so, because He caused just such an incident to be recorded in the life of an even more prominent and righteous man. So let's go right to the top of the ladder!

There came a time during ancient Israel's sojourn in the wilderness of Zin when there was no water for the congregation (Num. 20:1-2). True to form, the Israelites lost faith and began to complain against Moses. So God commanded Moses to "take the rod and gather you the assembly together...and speak you unto the rock before their eyes and it shall give forth his water"(v.8).

This famous episode carries with it a great deal of symbolic meaning. Moses was told to speak (pray or entreat) to the rock (Christ) and it would pour out water (Holy Spirit) to quench the thirst and save the lives (salvation) of the Israelites (Church). But Moses made a grave mistake

--one that he would regret for the rest of his life. Instead of humbling himself before God in expectation of this great miracle, he was consumed with indignation against the people and perhaps full of his own self-importance, and this led him to commit a grievous sin. Note carefully:

"Moses said unto them, Hear now you rebels; MUST WE fetch water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand and with his rod he SMOTE the rock twice; and the water came out abundantly" (Num. 20:10-11).

Again there is much symbolism here, but suffice it to say that God was highly displeased with Moses. He responded to this sin by saying: "Because you believed me not to SANCTIFY ME in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring the congregation into the land which I have given them" (v. 12). This undoubtedly was the bitterest pill Moses ever had to swallow. That final panoramic view from the summit of Mt. Pisgah must have been heart-rending. But the Scriptures bear witness that those who forget or refuse to give the eternal God ALL THE GLORY, PRAISE AND CREDIT will suffer for their haughtiness, their pride, their self-righteousness and their ego! None will escape! Moses' example was merely a type for us. He was not allowed to go into the Promised Land. Canaan is a symbol of the coming spiritual Kingdom of God. I will let you draw your own conclusions about how serious God views this problem and sin among his truly converted people!!

FROM THE HEART

It is so easy to say, "Praise the Lord" or "Glory be." It has become almost commonplace. We hear it all the time. In fact, we usually tend to judge a person to be righteous or unrighteous based almost solely on the outward appearance. But empty words and pious sounding cliches do not impress God. The Messiah Himself issued a grave warning to this effect when he said: "This people draws near to me with their mouth and honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8).

Before God will respect and accept the praise and honor from our lips, He first requires that we draw near to Him with our hearts. We must build, in a sense, a foundation which will truly give substance and meaning to our words of praise. Here are a few important basic points that will help all of us to genuinely honor God from the heart.

KNOW YOURSELF: This is the starting point. Indeed, coming to see ourselves as we really are, to recognize and admit our weaknesses, our smallness, our inadequacy and our unworthiness is perhaps the single greatest lesson we can ever learn in this life!

James put the question in perspective when he said:

"You say today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year and buy and sell and get gain: whereas you know not what shall appear on the morrow. FOR WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? It is even a VAPOR, that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:13-14).

Very few people go through each day realizing that from God's point of view, their lives are like mere vapor, little puffs of steam that are quickly glimpsed and then just as quickly disappear into nothingness! Peter reiterated this same truth by reminding us that "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower thereof falls away" (I Pet. 1:24).

One of the most memorable examples of this kind of humility is King David. The 39th Psalm is a perfect case in point. David actually asked God to show him just how insignificant he really was. He said:

"Lord, make me to know my end and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, you have made my days as an handbreadth and my age is as nothing before You. Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more" (Psa. 39:4-5, 13).

In the midst of his excruciating misery, Job once cried: "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and is cut down; he flees also as a shadow and continues not" (Job 14:1-2).

Remember, if Almighty God portrays Himself as the potter at the wheel (Isa. 64:8), what then does that make us? Flesh and blood is but mere clay, made from the mire of the ground. "Remember, I beseech you," said Job, "that you have made me as the clay; and will you bring me into dust again?" (Job 10:9).

Coming to see ourselves as we truly are is a milestone in human life. From this point, and it is often a very low point, the beginning of a right and sound relationship with God can be established.

SUBMIT TO GOD: Paul taught us that we should:

"Neither yield you your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead...know you not that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:13, 16).

God often compares adult human beings to little children. Indeed, Christ told his disciples that unless they became humble in their attitudes, just like a child, they would not enter into the Kingdom (Matt. 18:3-4). So yielding or submitting our own self-will to that of God is of paramount importance.

During Hezekiah's period of reformation in Judah, he commanded the people, saying:

"You children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God...and be not like your fathers and like your brethren, which trespassed against the Lord God...**YIELD YOURSELVES** unto the Lord...and serve the Lord your God" (II Chron. 30:6-8).

It is interesting to note that the phrase rendered "yield yourselves" actually means in the Hebrew, "give the hand to." In other words, Hezekiah was saying, "Don't be stubborn, hard-headed and self-willed, but be like a little child and give your hand to God that He might lead you to serve and please him."

When God implants His Holy Spirit in our minds, it is like a little child being conceived. This entire calling which we have received is actually a process of spiritual begetting, followed by growth and development, and finally birth into the Family of God. Eternal life is truly a gift, in the same way that physical life is a gift to a little baby. But like the developing child, we must also be prepared to receive it. And that preparation begins when we come to see ourselves as we really are, then repent and start submitting ourselves into the capable hands of our God and Father. Again the apostle James gives us the perfect formula:

"God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hearts, you double-minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness. HUMBLE YOURSELVES in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up" (James 4:6-10).

Submitting our own wills to God is not easy nor is it always pleasant. Quite often, in fact, it is the most difficult and painful part of growing spiritually. James admonishes us to approach it seriously, even gravely, because through this process of humbling oneself, God is able to do something absolutely miraculous!

CHRIST IN YOU: Now we reach the real heart of the matter. In order for any human being to truly honor and glorify God, the living Christ must accomplish it through that person. There is simply no other way. Paul called this marvelous reality a **MYSTERY**. Breaking into the middle of his discourse to the Colossians, we read:

"Even the mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints; to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; WHICH IS CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26-27).

Again Paul said: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but **CHRIST LIVES IN ME**" (Gal. 2:20). Paul understood that once we are begotten of the Holy Spirit and yield ourselves to God, we begin to have built or forged within us the very mind of the Messiah. This spiritual power is what enables the likes of little, insignificant pieces of clay to even have a relationship with the great Creator of heaven and earth! Paul said: "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus (Yahshua)" (Phil. 2:5).

When our Saviour walked this earth, we know that he was a physical, flesh-and-blood human being. Astonishing as it might seem, he freely confessed: "I can of my own self **DO NOTHING**" (John 5:30). The secret of Christ's power lay not in himself, but in God the Father. Notice this further proof: "Believe you not that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that **DWELLS IN ME**, He does the works" (John 14:10).

Recognizing that it was by the indwelling power of God that he was able to truly live his life, Jesus Christ sought to glorify his Father. He said: "But I honor my Father, you dishonor me. And I seek not my own glory...for if I honor myself, my honor is NOTHING" (John 8:49-50, 54). The Messiah's life is a pattern. He lived as a human being by the power of God in him. In like manner we, once converted, must then live by the power of Christ in us. Peter wrote: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God gives; that God in all things may be GLORIFIED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever" (I Pet. 4:11).

The Scriptures clearly indicate that God is simply not interested or impressed with man's ability, man's puny efforts to do good, man's insignificant accomplishments. He counts all human righteousness as a pile of filthy, bloody rags, fit only to be burned in the fire (Isa. 64:6)! We are not called to work up or establish our own goodness, neither are we here just to do the best we can. We have been called and chosen by the great God of heaven and earth so that the risen Saviour might live in us and through us. It is the ONLY WAY we can ever hope to honor and glorify our Father!

PUT GOD FIRST: Quite frankly, this means that we must begin to re-prioritize our lives, putting God's commandments, God's wishes, God's opinions and approaches ahead of our own. Indeed we must come to the point where we honestly account our ways, thoughts, understanding, abilities and accomplishments AS NOTHING!!!

It means that we must become like Peter when he confessed: "Lo, we have left ALL and followed you" (Luke 18:28). Or the apostle Paul when he said: "But what things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ...for whom I have suffered the loss of ALL THINGS, and do count them but DUNG, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:7-8). There is absolutely nothing that is of the flesh that is worth setting our hearts on or greedily holding on to.

The things of this present physical life, the desires, the possessions, the accomplishments, the accolades, even the hopes and dreams cannot and will not enable us to inherit the Kingdom of God. They stand in opposition to the ways of God, for we are called to become new creatures in Christ, as though risen from the dead. Indeed, the flesh must be put to death! We have been chosen so that the thoughts, words and actions of the living Christ might be made manifest in our lives. Therefore it is absolutely incumbent upon us that we PUT GOD FIRST!

Remember that when the Law was given to Moses at Mt. Sinai, it began with the command to have no other gods before Yahweh. God shouts from one end of the universe to the other, I AM FIRST!! Brethren, I urge all of us to examine ourselves carefully before God, coming clean with him on all matters and seriously determine whether or not we are really putting God first. The offense is so crucial that if we do not give God and His ways the true primary position in our lives, we will be cast out of the Kingdom!!

GIVE GOD ALL THE CREDIT: As God begins to work in our lives, as He intervenes, as He blesses us, as He gives us knowledge and understanding, growth and opportunity for service - in all things, let us take NO CREDIT FOR OURSELVES! The psalmist once said: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto your name GIVE GLORY, for your mercy and for your truth's sake" (Psa. 115:1).

As Christ begins to live in us more fully (and it is definitely a process of growth and development), we must rid ourselves of the "I, ME, MY" syndrome. If we listen carefully, we will discover that virtually every conversation is literally peppered with personal pronouns and

adjectives. We are all so utterly full of ourselves, of what WE have done, where WE have been, who WE know and what WE know - it must turn God's stomach!

Christ said: "He that speaks of himself seeks his own glory: but he that seeks the glory of God, the same is true and no unrighteousness is in him" (John 7:18). And God sternly warned ancient Israel that when they came into the land of promise and were blessed, not to forget their Creator and Provider. That they be very careful not to say, "My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:6-16).

Nebuchadnezzar had to learn this lesson the hard way. Daniel warned him to repent of his pride and give the honor to God, but the king said:

"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom is departed from you. And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling place shall be with the beasts of the field" (Dan. 4:25-27).

It is interesting and beneficial to know that Nebuchadnezzar indeed learned a profound lesson from his excruciating experience. He lifted up his eyes to heaven and "blessed the Most High, and I praise and honor Him that lives forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion...and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as NOTHING" (Dan. 4:34-35).

PRAISE THE LORD: Finally, having established the right foundation, we can and should from the heart verbally acknowledge God, praising Him in our prayers, our songs, our conversation. If we are certain that the first five of these principles are in force in our lives, we will no longer be paying mere lip service to our God.

David said: "Let my mouth be filled with your praise and with your honor all the day...My tongue also shall talk of your righteousness all the day long" (Psa. 71:8, 24). And his son, Solomon, expressed it this way: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways, ACKNOWLEDGE HIM, and He will direct your paths" (Pro. 3:5-6).

A classic passage from the prophet Isaiah magnificently sums up this final principle. He wrote:

"O Lord, You are my God; I will exalt You, I will praise Your name; for You have done wonderful things...therefore shall the strong people glorify You...And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is Yahweh; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isa. 25:1, 3, 9).

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

When the armies of Midian and Amalek covered the valley of Jezreel like grasshoppers, remember what God did? He reduced the army of Israel from 32,000 down to only 300 men! Why? "The Lord said unto Gideon: The people that are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying MY OWN HAND has saved me" (Judges 7:2).

In God's great scheme of things, He has arranged it so that He gets the honor and glory. Paul reminds us, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). He further illustrates this point by saying:

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen (human) vessels, that the excellency of the power may be OF GOD AND NOT OF US" (II Cor. 4:6-7).

Brethren, let us now take the time to consider the mighty, powerful and loving God who has indeed caused that light to shine out of darkness in our own little lives - who has surely reached out and touched us forever. The One who has measured the waters in His hand and meted out the heavens with a span and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance! The Mighty One before whom all the nations are but a drop in a bucket, as the small dust of the balance! The great God to whom NO ONE OR NO THING can be compared (Isa. 40)! This is the God we worship and serve, the Sovereign of the universe, who alone is worthy of all praise, all honor and all glory.

Perhaps it was Paul who said it best when he wrote the Corinthians:

"For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and the base things which are despised has God chosen, yea, and the things which are not to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence...that according as it is written, He that glories, LET HIM GLORY IN THE LORD" (I Cor. 1:26-31).