

# Do Not Worship Me!

This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Aug. 13-14, 2011.

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EAGAN, Minn.—Have you ever suddenly realized you had been worshipping a human being instead of worshipping God? If so, I'm sure you were happy to come to your senses and realize that such behavior was disgusting.

Have you ever found yourself allowing other people to worship you instead of worshipping God? Unfortunately, this behavior is harder for many people to recognize or to correct. A person who would never consider worshipping another person sometimes finds himself tempted to allow others to worship him.

Some people overtly welcome the adulation. Other people subtly accept the adulation.

Congratulations to those of you who steadfastly resist such erroneous behavior. You are like people in the Bible who also resisted the same temptation.

## **Peter's response**

Cornelius was almost incredulous that the apostle Peter was actually coming to see him. Cornelius, a devout and God-fearing Italian centurion, was about to become an early gentile convert.

He was so excited that he had a small army of relatives and close friends assembled with him. When he saw Peter approaching, he ran to him, fell at his feet and began to worship him (Acts 10:25).

Now Peter, being a man of humility and sobriety, was greatly disturbed by this turn of events, as Luke recorded in verse 26.

Luke wrote: "Peter immediately lifted him up and said, 'Stand up; for I am a man just like you.' "

Cornelius, not having known better, quickly agreed. Then he and Peter went inside to meet all the guests.

## **Barnabas and Paul reacted**

When Paul and Barnabas had entered the city of Lystra, Paul observed a man crippled from his mother's womb listening intently to his passionate preaching (Acts 14:8-9).

So Paul cried out with a loud voice: "Stand up straight on your feet" (verse 10). And the man was immediately healed by God.

How did the witnesses of the miracle respond?

The people cried out with a loud voice, saying: "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men" (verse 11).

But the response of the people continued. They called Barnabas Zeus, and they called Paul Hermes, because he was the chief speaker (verse 12).

When the priest appointed to serve Zeus in the temple at the city gate saw what had happened, he brought oxen and intended to make a sacrifice to the apostles (verse 13).

But when Barnabas and Paul, humble servants of the Almighty God, heard this, they reacted correctly.

They tore off their clothes (which was a traditional act of repentance) and ran into the crowd to express their disapproval (verse 14).

The two apostles said: "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men like you, possessing the same nature as you. We preach that you should turn from these vain acts and turn to the living God" (verse 15).

### **An angel's response**

When the apostle John encountered an angel of God, he fell at the angel's feet to worship the angelic being (Revelation 19:10).

The angel responded (also in verse 10): "Don't do that. I am also a servant. Go and worship God."

If even the good angels of God refuse to be worshiped, how much more should we puny humans refuse to be worshiped?

The First Commandment tells us that only God should be worshiped. It is only arrogant, idolatrous men and women who wish to be worshiped.

### **Humility, repentance and apology**

In Matthew 20:25-28, Jesus instructed church leaders not to behave as the rulers of the gentiles, who loved to lord it over the people. This command from Jesus to all church leaders was in stark contrast to the religious leadership of His day, which had become corrupt, arrogant, abusive and self-serving.

Matthew 23 is basically dedicated to Jesus correcting these corrupt leaders.

In 1 Peter 5, Peter himself instructed the elders and pastors to avoid behaving as overlords (verse 3), but rather to serve the people of God while "clothed in humility" (verse 5).

An important part of true humility is realizing that we all have faults and commit sin. We all need the atoning blood of Jesus Christ on an ongoing basis.

It is also being able to repent to God and apologize to other people we have hurt. Apologizing is an important element of reconciliation. Trying to reconcile without apologizing simply doesn't work.

### **Wagging the finger**

We live in an age of corruption. We all know of egregious examples of corruption of national leaders in countries all around the world—including the United States.

Yet some church leaders have acted no better. Some will wag their finger at other churches for simply transferring leaders who has been abusive and/or sexually immoral. But they fail to point out that their own church has done the same thing.

Shamefully, this only results in more innocent victims.

### **Personal kingdoms**

Instead of serving the people of God as Jesus instructed them through Scripture, some pastors view the congregations they are supposed to serve as their own personal kingdoms.

Pastors and their families often act as though their families are royalty. They often suppose that the brethren are there simply to serve them, even though the Bible clearly warns against this.

But the problem is not just with the pastor and his family. Often, elders and their families view themselves as royalty and think their main job is to defend the pastor, even when the pastor is acting badly.

Much of this loyalty is influenced because people are often appointed to church positions for the wrong reasons. People are not recognized based upon their gifts (as Paul taught in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12), but rather based upon the personal likes and favoritism of the pastor.

As you know, loyalty should be directed toward God and toward His flock—not to some man or to some organization.

### **Change of heart**

The Bible gives us a wonderful example of a man who finally saw the way he was abusing people and who made changes in his life.

You are aware about how Saul of Tarsus was hurting the Church of God. (Consider reading Acts 8:1-3 and 9:1.)

You are also aware about how Jesus got Saul's attention on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-9).

Have you ever focused upon the changes that Saul made in his life following that confrontation with Christ?

After Saul of Tarsus became the apostle Paul, he took some steps to help make amends for the abusive things he had previously done.

- First of all, he quit being abusive.
- He then apologized to those still living whom he had hurt.
- He then changed from wanting to be served to serving others.

### **Living example**

I believe that Paul's road to redemption was meant to be an example for all who have failed to live up to the standards of church leadership set by Jesus Christ Himself.

I personally believe that reconciliation will someday come, but not before there has been some accountability and apologizing.

I would encourage current leaders to consider the example of the apostle Paul. The rest of us need to hold our leadership accountable to Scripture.

No one but God should be worshiped!