

Praise Gets In The Way

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Many theists believe that there is nothing more important than praising God. In their estimation, praising God is more important than helping your fellow human beings, saving the environment, getting to work or school on time, etc. They certainly believe that it is far more important to praise God than it is to praise deserving human beings.

This insanity is never more obvious than when theists thank and praise God after *human beings* have performed such heroic actions as life-saving medical operations, rescuing people from fires, saving people from drowning, etc.

However, it is less apparent, but for me, even more annoying and unjust, when theists waste a lot of time praising God at funerals. When I go to a funeral, especially one at which I know little or nothing about the deceased, I want to find out who and what that person was. I want to know about that person's contributions to family, community, society and the world. I want to know what that person accomplished, what goals he or she strived for and attained, etc. I want to know some fascinating details about that person's life that few people knew or appreciated.

Yet much of this important information is lost to many, because some rambling preacher and others are incessantly talking about the supposed glory of God. Do we not already know about how great this God is supposed to be? How much theistic butt-kissing is necessary before God becomes pleased with his mindlessly obedient sycophants? Obviously there is no limit to how much praise theists must shower upon God.

This is incredibly unfair - at least to those people that do not believe it is necessary to bestow so much praise upon a possibly existent Being. The best way to assure that your loved ones are remembered is to focus upon *them* - not a narcissistic God that always demands to be the center of attention.

Whenever I speak at a religious funeral or secular memorial service, I *never* mention any God. I focus on the deceased. When my grandmother died, I spoke at her funeral (held in a church) in completely secular language. Many of the people in attendance told me afterward that they loved what I had to say. Some of them even asked me for a copy of my presentation.

I have spoken at secular memorial services for such freethinkers and humanists as Gordon Stein and Paul Kurtz. I wrote an excellent obituary for my late brother, Jay Allen, when he died a few years ago. It is clear to me that one does not need God language to wax eloquently about the deceased. On the other hand, referring to God when we should be focused on the deceased strikes me as being not only irrational, but disrespectful of those that do not believe in this kind of excessive praise.

If God exists, would he really be so obsessed with his own greatness that he could not share his glory with human beings - even after they have died? People have lived their lives, and after they have died, they should at least be accorded the bulk of the attention at their funerals.

Many theists are so busy praising God that they do not even take enough time to praise their own children. Sadly, they believe that it is more important to praise a God that *might* exist than it is to give positive reinforcement to children that *obviously* exist. How ridiculous!

Praise is not only important for children, however, It is important for friends, lovers, family members, teammates, students, teachers, etc. It is even important for pets. Just think about how much better the world would be if, rather than praising God, we praised our neighbors and other deserving people. If everyone made it a point to praise at least one person every day, that could only have a positive impact upon the world. (Moreover, would it not please God?)

On the other hand, what has praise of God done for the human race? Praising God has never liberated a single slave, freed a single woman from the tyranny of sexism, diverted one natural disaster (or “act of God”), stopped a single war, etc. Praising God is a waste of words. Praising our fellow human beings is what is of primary importance.

After I die, let it be known that I want no one at any funeral service that might be held for me to waste any time praising any God. However, feel free to praise those human beings that helped me along the way, and who helped to make me a better person. In other words, thank those that were clearly responsible for making me the person that I came to be.