

“Bowling” as we find it in the Bible

Introduction: *The bible clearly condemns bowing to worship anyone or anything except for God Himself (Exodus 20:4, 5; Revelation 19:10). However, there is a type of bowing which is not condemned in the Bible. This is the bow of great respect to another person of authority. It is an act of humble submission to them and of deference to their authority. It demonstrates loyalty and even thankfulness to a certain person or people. Obviously, if you do not want to show respect or deference to a certain person then you should not bow to them. There are some cases where certain cultural bowing may be expected, but you ought not to bow or show respect against your conscience or insincerely. So, how exactly do we find bowing pictured in the Bible anyway?*

The **Second Commandment** says, “You shall not make unto you any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God...” (Exodus 20:4, 5). *This clearly condemns any type of bowing to pictures, dead ancestors, or statues which cannot see, hear, talk, or recognize your bow. That is an act of false worship! The Bible says, “The dead know nothing!” (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6), but God sees everything (Hebrews 4:13). You cannot make a false god, a statue, or anything to bow before, reverence, or worship—this would only be disloyalty to God.*

It was such an act of disloyal bowing that was enforced onto the people on the **plain of Dura** in ancient Babylon. There was an act of false religion that people were being asked to submit to. It was clearly a sin. On Dura everyone was asked to “fall down” and “worship” the golden image which the king had set up (Daniel 3:6). This was clearly a sinful violation of God’s commandments and the three Hebrew boys who were faithful in this story refused to do it (v.12, 18). If they had bowed, saying in their heads, “Oh we won’t really be worshipping it, but merely doing an outward ordinance,” they would have been sinning. Their example of unfaithfulness would have led multitudes of others to bow and do the same evil sin. It was very well understood by everyone on Dura that this bow was an act of worship. Not only that, but, it was a piece of stone they would have been bowing to. That is clearly not an innocent bow of respect to another person—it is blatant worship of a dumb piece of stone and of Satan himself who inspired such an evil gathering.

This type of bowing is the same sin the Devil himself tried to tempt Jesus to do. The Devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and he promised them all to Jesus if he would only “fall down and worship” him (Matthew 4:9). This would have been an act of bowing to “worship” another person. The intent of this act would clearly be satanic. Jesus quoted God’s commandment in Deuteronomy 5, “It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve” (Matthew 5:10).

There is another reference of bowing down to “worship” a person, which can be found in the Scriptures. It is in Revelation 19:10. The Apostle John was greatly taken with the beauty and the glory of the Lord’s angel who stood before him. John says, “I fell at his feet to *worship* him.” And the angel said to him, “See that you do it not, for I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus: worship God” (v.10). John was bowing right at the feet of this dazzling angel with the intention of *worshipping him*. The angel clearly spoke out against it. We should never ever be bowing to *worship* people (whether for fame, riches, talents, or otherwise). We are to worship God only and never should we bow before another person with the intent of worship. If you, they, or the witnesses around understand your action to be that of worship (for their talents, proclaimed divinity, or whatever else), then you should never bow before them. We ourselves should never

accept a bow of worship if others try to do so to us either. This is what happened to Paul and Barnabas in the time of the early church. Some proclaimed, “The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11). When they tried to worship the apostles by giving such attention and making such a proclamation, Paul and Barnabas said, “Why do you do these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach that you should turn from these vanities unto the Living God...” “With these words they hardly restrained the people from offering sacrifices unto them” (Acts 14:15, 18). All of these were acts with the clear intention of reverencing or worshipping another human being or angel as God. This is sinful!

So, is there some bowing before other people in the Bible that is not condemned as sinful? Yes! Notice these examples and discern for yourself how they are clearly different from the actions described above.

The first is found in Genesis 42:6. When Joseph was in Egypt serving as a governor, his brothers came to him and “bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.” This was not condemned as a sinful action. And keep in mind that Joseph was a very righteous man who did not follow the pagan customs of Egypt but who always stood up for what was right before God. God had even told Joseph in a dream many years before that this would happen. Joseph had a “sheaf” of grain that stood straight up in the field. All of his brother’s sheaves stood “round about” and “made obeisance” to Joseph’s sheaf (Genesis 37:7).

The second account is found in 2 Samuel 14:33. Absalom, the son of king David, came and “bowed himself on his face to the ground: and the king kissed Absalom.” Clearly this action was not condemned by the King nor did it alarm or upset him. The king received this act of respect from his son with a kiss. And David throughout the course of his life was “a man after God’s own heart.” “He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from his commandments... all his life...except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Samuel 13:14; 1 Kings 15:5).

The third account given clearly in the inspired record also involves King David. A man named, Araunah (a citizen of the kingdom of Israel) saw David coming to visit his home. The man “bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground” (2 Samuel 24:20). Again, David made no denunciation of this action. And of course, David was on his way to repent before God from a sin he had committed. He was going to make a sacrifice. Also, the man Araunah was a fellow worshipper of God who did not find anything wrong with this—In fact, God had sent David specifically to this man, Araunah, to get the items David needed for the sacrifice. It seems that God considered Araunah a faithful man (2 Samuel 24:18).

The fourth and final example that we will look at is found in 2 Kings 2:15. This is just after Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. The “sons of the prophets” all came to see Elisha. And they “bowed themselves to the ground before him.” Elisha, filled with God’s spirit, made no objection whatsoever to this act of great respect. He was the chosen servant of God and this act of respect, demonstrated through bowing, was not wrong in the slightest. Also, the “sons of the prophets” obviously saw no wrong in it.

In concluding our thoughts we see that bowing to “worship” a person is sinful. Bowing to a picture, stone, dead ancestor, or any other image would be entirely wrong. Bowing at any time to anyone with the intent of worshiping them is completely wrong. However, bowing down—even with your face to the ground, as a sign of great respect, and humble admiration, or thankfulness to a deserving person is not condemned as wrong in the Bible or in God’s eyes.