

Saying it, Meaning it, Showing it Matthew 22:34-40

I don't know about you, but I find that our culture as a whole is becoming ruder and cruder in its language. And using God's name loosely and without reverence is part of that trend even among church people. We ought to give that some thought. I mean, when God's name becomes simply a way of expressing our anger or frustration or surprise or disgust, what does that say about us?

One day a Pharisee, an expert in the law, tested Jesus with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

This is the very heart of the Judeo-Christian faith. Love God; love your neighbor. Jesus taught us that all the teachings in the Bible, both the Law and the prophets, hang on these two commandments.

We often talk in church and in society about loving our neighbors. That is because so much of what is wrong in society is due to our ignoring this second of the great commandments. But what about the first commandment? What about loving God? We probably do not give the great commandment enough attention.

And what does it mean "to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind"? **That means that at a minimum we should treat the things of God with respect.** Not only God's name, but everything associated with God ought to be treated with reverence.

The ancient Jews believed that God was not holy, but "holy, holy, holy." Even the name of God was so sacred that devout Jews wouldn't write God's name or speak it. They would substitute the names *Adonai* (Lord) or *Elohim* for God.

We should ask ourselves if we show reverence and love for God in our daily life, even by our speech? From a strictly logical standpoint it seems to me that if we say we love God, we'd treat the things of God with respect, including His name.

That also means that by saying we love God we would want to spend time with God. Isn't that what we do when we love someone? We want to spend time with that person. Remember when you first fell in love? How you wanted to spend hours if not days with your beloved. So it is with God. That's why saints through the ages have devoted so much of their life to prayer.

There's a science fiction writer named Robert Sawyer known for including spiritual insights in his novels, which is unique in and of itself. In one of his books, people from earth are having their first encounters with alien life from other planets.

One of the scientists from the planet earth is surprised to learn that the aliens not only believe in God, but also spend 8 hours a day in prayer. The scientist from earth asks, "What in the world are they asking for that it takes them 8 hours?" To this the alien is shocked and says, "What does prayer have to do with asking for things?"

A profound insight to say the least. I suspect many spend time in prayer making requests of God. And I suspect that that's so because of our self-centered nature and our confusion over who the servant is and who the master is.

Rather than spending time in prayer giving God His marching orders, shouldn't we spend time in prayer quietly listening to what God might like us to be doing? When we truly love someone we want to spend time with them.

The same is true with worship. Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard developed a theory about worship he termed the "theatre of worship." He pointed out that too many people attend worship services as if they were attending a play. They see the ministers, the organist, and choir as the actors. They see themselves as the audience.

Kierkegaard says that by looking at it in this way, they feel they can critique the service as to how it touched them or didn't touch them. They feel they have a right to say: "I just didn't get anything out of worship this morning . . . I didn't like the hymns, the choir didn't sound as good as they sometimes do. There were too many mistakes . . . the sermon just didn't speak to me. I just didn't get anything out of worship."

Kierkegaard admonished people to change their view of worship and see worship as a time when the congregation, as well as the minister, organist, and choir, is the actor, and God is the audience.

Our purpose in worship is to be in the presence of God. Period. If I'm boring or the choir's a little off, or there are technical challenges with "zoom" or there are bulbs that are out in the chandelier, big deal! That's peripheral. We gather to be in God's presence.

The most important way we show our love for God is by how we live our lives. When we leave this time of worship, our friends and family should know whether we've truly been in the presence of God by how we live.

It's doing more than checking off the appropriate box: went to Discipleship Class (check); went to "Zoom" worship (in my pj's, true, but I went – check); said "grace" before dinner last night (check).

It's saying it with our words, meaning it in our hearts, and showing it with our actions. After all, that's what God did for us when He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross."

How do we show our love for God? Let me count the ways. Treat with respect the things of God, including His name; spend time in His presence in prayer and worship; and live the way God wants us to live.

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