

Introduction

I recently entered the words "**I am the greatest**" in *Yahoo Search* and this is what came up first, then this, then this and so on. It's obvious. Our culture equates those words primarily with Mohammed Ali. But it shouldn't. It should equate them with Yahweh, God, instead and that's what I'm going to preach about today. He is the greatest

God Is the Greatest

Leviticus 22:32 and Matthew 6:9 mention the "**name**" of God. In the Biblical world, names are never just names as they are in our world. They actually partake of the reality that they designate. They allude to the very nature or being of that reality. Consequently, when God refers to His "**name**," He's referring to Himself, to what He objectively is. So let's think about that – what He is, His nature in other words.

I'd draw your attention to the word "**LORD**" in Leviticus 22:33. The Hebrew word translated that is "**Yahweh**," which is God's personal name. "**Yahweh**" means "**I am who I am**" and expresses something about His nature. He's self-existent.

I've explained that in depth before. It means He has the power of being within Himself. Nothing else that exists in the material or spiritual world has that. God's existence depends on nothing. The existence of everything else depends on Him.

A thought dawned on me that illustrates what I mean. According to the Law of the Conservation of Matter, matter (atoms) can't be destroyed. But that isn't so. It can be destroyed, by the self-existent One who made it. God created the universe from nothing and could, if He chose to uncreate it. He willed it into existence. He could just as easily will it out of existence. There is nothing. God creates. Then there is something. Similarly, there is something. God uncreates. Then there is nothing. He has the ability to do that, which demonstrates a nuance of His self-existence. He can't cease to exist. Everything else can.

But He isn't just self-existent. He's perfect and infinite as well.

Perfect means that all of His attributes are absolutely flawless and complete. The word "**better**" never applies to any of them. They can't improve even slightly. He can never be more loving or holier than He is now, for instance, because He's totally loving and totally holy.

Infinite means all of His attributes are absolutely limitless. The word "**more**" never applies to any of them. They can't increase even slightly. He can never be more knowledgeable or powerful than He is now, for instance, because He's all-knowing and all-powerful.

Now let's bring God's self-existence, perfection, and infinity together and draw the logical conclusion to which they lead. He is an utterly separate (different in nature) and superior kind of reality in every possible respect. His knowledge and power, for instance, are further above those of Satan than Satan's are above those of a gnat. Simply put, He is the greatest and the best! He is the dominant of all realities.

Because He is, we had better have the right posture, not the wrong one, toward Him, which is where our texts come in. They identify what those postures are.

Profane God

Leviticus 22:32 identifies the wrong posture toward God. It's that people "**profane**" Him. They take Him to be less than He is. Profaning Him has two expressions.

One is atheism. Various polls show that 11% of Americans are atheists, agnostics, or have no religion at all, approximately 30 million people. One of those is Ryan Bell, a pastor turned atheist. A year after doing so, he summarized his posture this way: "**I think before, I wanted a closer relationship with God, and today I just want a closer relationship with reality.**" What he implies is clear. God isn't reality. Bell and all atheists live day-to-day life as if He doesn't exist. They don't take Him into account at all in their thinking, feeling, willing, and acting. They profane Him.

A second expression of profaning God is practical atheism. 89% of Americans say they believe in God. The majority of those believe that He's the Christian God, the God of the Bible. Yet most live day-to-day life, in practice, as if He doesn't exist. They rarely take Him into account in their thinking, feeling, willing, and acting.

Someone recently asked me how much money, in my opinion, was enough for retirement. Financial advisors, most of whom believe in God, say a million dollars. But I noticed something in all the articles I read about that. Not one of them mentioned God or relied on what He says about money and wealth in the Bible in determining that – nor do their clients. They're all practical atheists in that regard. They think about retirement itself and prepare for it as if He doesn't exist.

How many people who believe in God actually take Him into account in making medical decisions, buying homes and cars, playing sports, watching television, playing video games, eating, overcoming evil, deciding whom to marry, planning funeral services, and so on? The answer is **“very few.”**

We now know the wrong posture toward God. It's profaning Him. It's taking Him to be less than He is. It's living in practice as if He doesn't exist – taking Him into account in thinking, feeling, willing, and acting rarely if at all.

Hallow God

In contrast, our texts identify the right posture toward Him. Leviticus 22:32 uses the word **“sanctified”** and Matthew 6:9 the word **“hallowed,”** which mean the same thing. Both words connote locating something as a separate and superior kind of reality, which helps us understand what it means to hallow God. We do two things.

First, we *regard* Him as if He is utterly separate from and superior to every other reality. In practical terms, we adore Him. We esteem Him. We hold Him in the highest possible regard.

The second thing we do flows from the first. We *treat* Him as if He

is utterly separate from and superior to every other reality. In practical terms, we habitually take Him primarily into account in our thinking, feeling, willing, and acting. Dallas Willard fleshes out what doing so looks like in real life: **“Am I undertaking some task? Then I in faith do it with God, assuming and finding His power to be involved with me. Is there an emergency? I meet it with the knowledge that God is in the midst of it with me and will be calm in a center of intense prayer. Am I praised? My thoughts (and feelings) will move immediately to the goodness of God in my life. Am I condemned or reproached? I know that God is supporting me because He loves me and has a future for me. Am I disappointed and frustrated? I rest in the knowledge that God is over all and that He is working things out.”** Those samplings illustrate what we do. We think, feel, will, and act as if God is the dominant reality in whatever the circumstance is before us, good or bad.

Now, regarding and treating God as an utterly separate and superior reality is a radical posture to take. What it boils down to is this. He is the very foundation of our existence. He’s **“our world”** just as parents are the world of very small children. We hallow Him in other words.

But we don’t just hallow Him. We *jealously* hallow Him. That’s the essence of Matthew 6:9. This verse is part of what we call **“The Lord’s Prayer,”** the substance of which is five specific requests. Verse 9 records the very first of those. God is our world and we adore Him. It hurts us deeply, therefore, when others don’t. So we request of Him that they will. That is in fact our chief desire and concern, which is why it’s our first request. We have a prayer list of things we want God to give or do and that others hallow Him is at the very top of it.

In our presidential election year, for instance, I pray for our presumptive candidates. And the primary thrust of my prayer is this, **“My Father who is near us, I ask that Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton will come to hallow You.”** That’s what I want most for them and every other person for whom I pray.

So there you have it - the right posture toward God who is the greatest. We hallow Him and want everyone else to as well.

The Process of Hallowing God

Hallowing Him though is an indirect freedom. We can't just decide that and instantaneously do it. It's a posture that naturally and increasingly develops over time as we do something else instead.

Hallowing God begins with thinking steadily of Him. Thomas Watson expressed it so beautifully almost 400 years ago: **"The first fruit of love is *the musing of the mind upon God*. He who is in love, his thoughts are ever upon the object."** How right he was. Atheists and practical atheists crowd God out of their thoughts with other things. But we crowd others things out of our thoughts with God. Our thoughts, when our minds aren't necessarily occupied, are most upon Him. In the 50 minutes I'm mowing my yard, for instance, or in the 10 I'm standing in line at the checkout, most of my thoughts are about Him. You get the idea. We make Him the primary preoccupation of our thought life.

But thinking steadily of God isn't enough. We must think adequately of Him as well. It's here that many sincere Christians fall short. Arizona State University professor Jeffries McWhirter shares an off-putting insight in that regard: **"As we compare ourselves now with ourselves in third grade, we are different in most facets of our being. Too often this is not true of religious development. My concept of God worked quite well for me in the third grade. It does not work now as a middle-aged (or young-old) adult. And yet, my colleagues and graduate students describe their vision of God in what sounds like third-grade concepts."** That's an incisive observation. Most Christians' vision or perception of God hasn't grown much since their childhood. They think inadequately of Him as a result. They don't grasp His greatness, which in turn makes Him too small to them to hallow.

We must think adequately of Him. Doing so, we grasp His utter greatness, which in turn makes Him big enough to us to hallow.

We think adequately of Him by doing two things.

First, we learn as much of the truth that the Bible and creation reveal about Him as we can. To say it another way, we develop a thorough and comprehensive vision of Him. The *First Aim* study under the *Disciples 'R' Us* tab on our church's website helps us do that.

We think adequately of Him by doing a second thing. We experience Him through mutual engagement. We devote our minds and bodies to acting upon and interacting with Him. The *First Aim* study I just mentioned explains the practices by which we do that. Acting upon and interacting with Him enables Him to do the same with us. The result is experience with Him that's just as real as our experience with people. That experience in turn confirms the revealed truth we learned about Him through the Bible and creation.

Now let's pull all of what I've just said together and see what we have. It's this. *We think steadily of God on the basis of revealed truth about Him that's confirmed by our experience with Him.* Hear it again. *We think steadily of God on the basis of revealed truth about Him that's confirmed by our experience with Him.* I can't impress upon you enough how profoundly transforming doing that is. *The extent to which we do that determines the extent to which we hallow God! And the extent to which we hallow God determines the extent to which love, peace, and joy pervade our lives!*

Conclusion

I close with an instructive question. What is it about our culture that alarms you the most? What alarms me the most is our culture's lack of admiration and respect for God. That is, in my view, the single most observable and destructive of all its qualities. But the good news is we don't have to be like our culture. You and I can flourish in our lives on earth. And we will if . . . we hallow God, if we regard and treat Him for what He is, absolutely THE GREATEST!