

Humble presence of the Lord

SELF-IMPORTANCE

James 4:10

IN A RELATIVELY SHORT SPAN OF TIME our society has devolved from a high regard for others, to a high regard for self. Sacrifice for the sake of others has been replaced by a demand for the sacrifice of others for *our* sake.

Take, for example, the person in a store chatting away so loudly on his cell phone that his side of the conversation can be heard two aisles over. What is that behavior really broadcasting to other shoppers in his vicinity? It is saying, *Your unease, your space, your comfort level is subservient to mine. I can do as I wish without being concerned about you, because I consider myself more important than you.*



Similar to the movement of society in general, our worship—especially our Sunday morning corporate worship—has devolved from God-importance to *self*-importance.

*When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You,
"Your face, O Lord, I shall seek."*

Psalms 27:8

The *New Dictionary of Theology* defines blasphemy as

a word or deed that directs insolence to the character of God, Christian truth or sacred things. In its purest form blasphemy is "a deliberate and direct attack upon the honor of God with intent to insult Him." Blasphemy robs God of His majesty and holiness and thus is regarded by Scripture as a heinous sin.

When we behave in the worship setting as has become commonplace in society, it is not just distracting to those around us, it is not just being rude to fellow parishioners, it is a form of blasphemy.

There is to be one object of focus in worship—and it is not us.

When the congregation has already begun worship—singing a song of praise, adoration, or thanksgiving—and we arrive late, taking our seat noisily, conversing loudly with those around us, we show "insolence to the character of God."

When we chat with our neighbor or fiddle with our iPhone during the reading of Scripture, we dishonor His holy word. Compare the behavior of many in our midst to that of the return-

ing Jews, just back from decades of exile where they had been without—most even forgotten about—God's written word.

And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law... Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with *their* faces to the ground.

Nehemiah 8:1-3,5-6

First, they *requested* it be read. Second, they were *attentive*—they respectfully listened and paid attention. Third, they showed *respect* by standing for the reading. Because of this, they were convicted by the word; hearing the word of God after so many decades away, they were struck through, and they worshiped.

When we repeatedly arrive late, talk through the offertory, browse through the church newsletter during Communion, we are not just being insensitive and rude, we are telling God that we are more important than He.

Our modern habits—tolerated, perhaps even customary out in the world—have no place in the sanctuary of God. They heap disrespect upon One who is our sovereign Lord, and broadcast not just to Him, but to everyone else in the room, that we consider ourselves—our person, our words, our thoughts, our time—more important than God Himself.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name;
Bring an offering, and come before Him;
Worship the Lord in holy array.
Tremble before Him, all the earth;

1 Chronicles 16:28-30a

