

## Protecting the Family Name

Matthew 6:9b

An expecting mother was in a car accident and fell into a coma. She awakens weeks later to find that she is no longer pregnant and frantically asks the doctor about her baby.

"It's babies, ma'am, the doctor replied, "you had twins! A boy and a girl. Your brother came in and named them."

The woman said, "No, not my brother. I love him, but he's not very bright. What did he name the girl?"

"Denise."

Relieved, she said, "Wow, that's actually a pretty name. What did he name the boy?"

"Denephew."

To poke fun at a person's name is the cheapest way to get a laugh in grade school. A lot of fists flew over my being called "Captain Crunch." I thought I must have had the strangest name in the world until I figured out that some kids can find something cute to say about any name. A child cannot choose the moniker hung on him, but it is his own, so he'll fight to protect it. Of course, sometimes I have to ask, "What in the world was that poor kid's parents thinking? Two siblings at a VBS we hosted in Oklahoma were named Adam and Candy Apple. Linda once met a grown man named "Baby." He was from a large family, and the parents said they had run out of names they liked. It all reminds me of that old Johnny Cash ballad that laments, "Life ain't easy for a boy named 'Sue'".

Amazingly, Jesus has invited His disciples to address the awesome Creator *YAHWEH* as their "Father in heaven." Now, with that privilege, comes a responsibility for protecting the family's standing by living up to our calling as children of God. Through the ages, people have forged distorted images of the God Who revealed Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ, not because they knew Him, but because of the assorted misbehaviors on the part of those who profess to be His children. The conduct of Christians, whether good or bad, casts a reflection upon their Father, so when Jesus gives His disciples a model to guide their prayers, this is to be the very first matter they are to address:

"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name ..." - Matthew 6:9

As God's children, we have great impact on how this world views God. It almost seems unfair that He would put Himself through that, but it's a burden He chooses to bear. The Christians of the church of Jerusalem were highly regarded by the general population because of their mutual love and generosity. On the other hand, the Apostle Paul warned slaves as well as certain women in the early church that rebellious spirits on their part could result in the public maligning of God's Name:

All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. - 1 Timothy 6:1

<sup>3</sup>Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. <sup>4</sup>Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, <sup>5</sup>to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. - Titus 2:3-5

The structure of that word “hallowed” denotes a sense of urgency. If it is in our power to cast a good or a bad reflection upon our Father, then, whatever it means to “hallow” God’s Name, it must be a matter that every child of God needs to address with a certain degree of urgency. But, how is that possible when so many of us who have known this prayer from childhood have never really processed what it means to “hallow” something? If it’s an urgent thing to do, then it must be an urgent petition to understand. Let us pursue our understanding of hallowing God’s Name with three questions. First ...

## **I. What Does It Mean to Hallow Our Heavenly Father’s Name?**

### **A. To Hallow Anything Is to Esteem It as Holy**

The verb, *hagiazō*, means “I make holy” or “I sanctify”. The adjective form means “holy.” The noun means “holy one” or “saint.” I suppose none of that is too helpful if you don’t already have a general understanding of what the concept of holiness is all about. Obviously, these are pretty churchy terms.

The primary meaning behind “holiness” is that a thing is “different” from other things, and, because it is different, it is “separated” from that which is commonplace. The temple in Jerusalem was holy because it was different from every other building. Jesus drove moneychangers and merchandisers from the temple because they were using this place that was “set apart” for prayer and worship in a common and mercenary way. The altar was holy because it had a unique purpose. The priests were holy in that they were set apart by God to do a special work that no other men were allowed to do.

You are God’s “saints” or “holy ones,” not because of your own uniqueness, but because God has clothed you in the righteousness of Jesus and set you apart from the world to live holy lives.

### **B. So, What’s in a Name?**

Comedienne Rita Rudner suggests that the term “aerobics” originated when “gym instructors got together and said, ‘If we’re going to charge \$10 an hour, we can’t call it jumping up and down.’” Few labels in our modern world are as rich in meaning as names were in the world of Jesus.

God’s “Name” is what is to be hallowed. To Jesus’ Jewish audience, a name was more than the label by which a person was identified. A man’s name became identified with his known personality and character. God’s Name describes those attributes of His Person that He revealed of Himself. When Moses received the Ten Commandments, God used that occasion to reveal some of these attributes”

<sup>4</sup>So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. <sup>5</sup>Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. <sup>6</sup>And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup>maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” – Exodus 34:4-7

David writes: “Some boast of chariots and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7). Clearly, David did not mean that when other kings attempted to intimidate Israel with their military toys, that he would respond, “Oh yeah, well I know what God’s Name is. It’s right there on the tip of my tongue. It’s ... *YAHWEH*.” David was talking about the love, strength, compassion, justice, gentleness, wrath, holy jealousy as well as all the other attributes of God that make Him absolutely trustworthy to any people into which He enters into a covenant.

The prayer “hallowed be your name,” is not a prayer for God’s Name to become holy, for He is already holy. It is a prayer that in every place and at every time, we get this holiness thing – our nearest and dearest get it, our church gets it, and eventually, the world gets it. “Hallowed be your name” means “May no one be honored above You, heavenly Father. May no thing be yearned after with more intensity. May no presence be more influential in our thinking and doing than Your presence.” To pray “hallowed be your name” is to bind myself to giving God the unique place in my life that His nature warrants. It is to pray, “You be God, and I’ll be whatever You require me to be.”

## **II. Why Do We Hallow Our Heavenly Father’s Name?**

### **A. Because to Hallow God’s Name Is to Confess to Him our Spiritual Neediness**

We pray “hallowed be your name” because in so many ways, we have not done so. By grace, we stand before God in the righteousness of Jesus that God bestowed on us when He placed our sin on Jesus. Though we are legally clean in God’s eyes we still struggle mightily to live cleanly. We dare not dismiss the fact that God is uniquely pure. To hallow His Name is to get straight who is who. He is Holy God. We are sinners who ought to feel utterly dumbstruck that this Holy Father chooses to look upon us as though we are not sinners at all. Martin Luther wrote: “I know of no other teaching in all of Scripture that so mightily diminishes and destroys our life as does this petition ...” In other words, this first petition of the *Model Prayer* puts all parties in their proper place.

Prayer is out of balance when it is all asking, asking, and more asking. God is our Provider, Protector, Giver of Direction and Forgiver. All of these dimensions of His character are reinforced in this *Model Prayer*. But, not one of these dimensions leads the way in prayer. Things are set in their proper place when we have firmly established in our thinking that He is holy, holy, holy and in that respect, nothing like us. In so many ways, we have not hallowed our Father’s Name. We have betrayed it hundreds of times. Nevertheless, He invites us to address Him as “our Father in heaven.”

### **B. Because to Hallow God’s Name Is to Pledge to Him our Undivided Loyalty**

God’s Name cannot be considered hallowed in any life that is governed primarily by self-interest. If I must ask that God’s Name be hallowed (and I must), am I not also confessing that such is not my normal state of mind. Am I not really praying, “Father, Your Name does not always play the part in my life that it should. The name of my boss, the name of today’s news-makers, the names of my family members, and especially, my own name – all of these all have kept me busier than has Your Name.”

If we give too little thought to winning God’s approval by hallowing His Name above all others, ultimately, our life pursuits will only frustrate us. We might pursue wealth, reputation, amusement, pleasure, religious stature or knowledge. Still, there will remain a nagging emptiness. Ultimately, it is only when we are certain that we are at peace with God that we will ever really be at peace with ourselves. Jesus teaches His disciples that it is only when they abandon themselves to God that that they will find what they inherently crave. He put this in terms of cross-bearing, self-denial and cost-counting. In *John 12*, Jesus drew a profoundly simple picture from agriculture:

... <sup>24</sup>I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. <sup>25</sup>The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. – *John 12:24, 25*

At some level, we all want to please God, but do we grasp what that demands. In so many ways, we have refused to be that kernel of wheat that dies so that we might bear the fruit of new life. To hallow God's Name is the one thing we resist most. We'd rather stay busy and hold onto our identity as well as any credit that comes with accomplishment. We'd rather try to make things happen in the church in our own strength. Invariably, we end up thrashing about in our own power, racking up a few short-lived accomplishments when instead, in His life and power, we could be bearing fruit that will last into eternity. Why? Because while we may be willing to surrender "this and that" in the pursuit of pleasing God, we are not willing to die to ourselves in our pursuit of God.

Jesus never taught us to pray, "Help me get myself holy." We must acquiesce to the Father's holiness. Are we willing to honor God as unique in all of life? If the Holy Father is given supremacy over all that pertains to life, our personal holiness will follow. We will never achieve God-pleasing holiness unless we bask in His. We must hallow His Name, which means we must hallow Him. If you sense that you live with spiritual disorientation, don't cry out for holiness ... hallow God.

"One does not need to command a stone which is lying in the sun to become warm. It becomes warm because it is lying in the sun." - Martin Luther

It all sounds good in theory and looks good on paper, but what steps can help us to live that way?

### **III. How Do We Hallow Our Heavenly Father's Name?**

#### **A. By Practicing Willful Reverence for God**

Reverence is more than a conviction that God exists. The beings most convinced in all of creation as to the existence of God are also the most irreverent, the demons of hell. The Bible treats the existence of God as axiomatic, something so self-evident that no reasonable person would even question the notion. But, that alone does not render everyone reverent toward God. To revere God requires a deliberate forging of an attitude that is perpetually aware of His presence, His character and His demands. "Hallowed be your name." Such reverence is not confined to churches, religious memorials, or rugged and majestic mountain scenes. Reverence is living in a world filled with God.

#### **B. By Never Using God's Name in Vain**

Growing up, most of the emphasis I heard on the third commandment had to do with not using God's Name when cussing or swearing. Actually, the commandment had to do with not drawing God into an oath or promise so as to make the promise sound more compelling. We are on safe ground to expand the commandment to forbid any opportunistic use of God or Godly themes to convey anything about ourselves that is misleading. This would obviously include voicing commitments we do not keep. But, it must also include hiding a divisive or pharisaic nature behind allegedly biblical arguments. It ought to include all that plastic, phony-baloney "God-speak" people can engage in as a mechanism for masking from fellow-believers their struggles with doubts, fears and temptations. It should include the spiritual rhetoric that we might use to attempt to con others of a spiritual togetherness in us that just might not really be there. Any person who is determined to hallow God's Name will always be cautious about using talk of God or of godly themes to veil what is true.

### **C. By Never Treating God's Work as Common**

The Bible says that we each have a gift given to us by the God's Spirit for the common good of the community of God. Each has a task to fulfill in the Body of Christ. Some people struggle to know what their gift is. Far more have a good sense of what their gift is, but they can become complacent about how they administer it. To hallow God's Name is to reflect on the holiness of the task before us. The most irreverent thing I can do in the administration of my gift is to fail to ponder upon the fact that preaching is intended to be a divine transaction by which God teaches His people His Word through a man. If I fail to ask for that transaction to take place and simply put together whatever I can for your consumption, then, I have not hallowed God's Name. The most irreverent thing a Bible School teacher can do is forget that he is handling the very words of God. The most irreverent thing a choir or praise team can do is simply show up to sing. Hallowing God's Name demands more.

Of course, don't think that what I am saying applies only to "churchy tasks." We are a holy nation of priests, so in whatever vocation you are engaged, you represent your Father in the world. Doctor, lawyer, teacher, plumber, cab driver – it does not matter. Paul was addressing slaves when he wrote:

... <sup>23</sup>Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, <sup>24</sup>since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.  
– Colossians 3:23, 24

God is holy. To pray "hallowed be your name" can seem a bit like praying for a ball to be round. It is already the nature of the ball to be round just as it is already the nature of God to be holy. All the praying in the world from us will never make God any more holy than He already is. No, to pray that God's Name be hallowed is to pray that we, not Him, are the ones who will emerge from prayer changed, fully surrendered to the Father's holiness. It is to pray that our church family will step into a realm of ministry that is truly empowered by God because He has become the atmosphere in which we live and breathe. It is to pray that the world around us will likewise be drawn into the worship of our God.

Hallowing the Father's Name is more than just a poetic lyric in a prayer we recite by memory. It is to shackle ourselves to heaven's agenda. It is to come to grips with the very godhood of God.

© 2006 by R. Karl Crouch, 2183 Veumont Drive, Lancaster, PA 17601