

“Hallowed be Thy Name”

a sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish
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Today we are considering the second phrase of the first sentence in the Lord’s Prayer, taken from Matthew 6:9 and also from Luke 11:2. At first, it may seem quite a narrow focus to build a whole talk around *half a sentence*, or *just four words*, but the concept is so significant that it demands our attention, and besides, it is essentially the same as the 2nd of the Ten Commandments, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain,” only stated in positive rather than negative terms, and so it is clearly one of the ten most important rules in our lives.

Curiously, the word for “hallowed be” is written originally in a Greek tense (called aorist) that doesn’t even exist in English. It doesn’t really express past, present or future but refers to a fact, or some action at a given point – like “Here I *stand*.” It is also in the imperative mood, which means it is something that must be done, but even so it is an *indirect* command, since it is in the passive voice – as in “this must be stood here” – so it has the tenor of an impartial requirement.

Grammar like this may not seem very important, but it *is* because it explains the character of the sentence. In effect the Lord is not telling us to pray in some wishful sense that His name *ought* to be kept holy, He is reminding us that it *must* be kept holy, and that it is our duty to make sure it is. But the question is why? – and how? – and what does this really mean?

To answer these questions we need to know what is really meant by hallowing, or keeping holy, and we also need to know what is meant by the name of God. Each one of these things can be understood on multiple levels, but let’s consider the name first.

The Literal or Natural Level

On the natural level, the names we have for the Lord are really titles, so these words are about using the Lord’s titles respectfully (TCR 297). For example, the name, Jesus, means Savior, and it is inappropriate to say this name (or even its derivative, “Jeeze,”) in a tone of disgust. It is equally inappropriate to say “God!” or “Oh, my God!” or even “OMG” to express shock, outrage, indignation or exasperation. These feelings generally arise from self-centered emotions and hardly ever have anything to do with any thoughtful respect for the Lord. Similarly, words of condemnation used as expletives ought to be shunned as sins against God since they imply – and often include – His name as well, and while it may be true that He would condemn something that disappoints us, we have no right to assume He would, just because it does.

That said, of course we need to be careful of judging others based on mere words. It is not the expressions themselves that make a person innocent or guilty but “the purpose, intention or end in view” (CL 527). So this rule of keeping the Lord’s name holy involves much more than just words. The thing is, we need to consider what lies behind the words in our own lives, and not just make excuses for our thoughtless outbursts or profanities.

So again, and still on the natural level, it is the same in cases of *apparent* respect for the Lord’s name when the respect is not real. Remember Jesus said,

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that

day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matt. 7:21-23).

The point is that the name of any person or thing, including God, really represents the whole quality of that person or thing. So, for example, Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). To gather “in His name” is to gather in the spirit of His life and teaching. This is easy to see if we think of it in terms of an ordinary person’s reputation, or even in terms of brand names, which are often protected by trademark copyrights *because they represent the whole quality of a given product or service*. So we speak of a person’s “good name” or we say that he has “a bad name,” not because there’s anything peculiar about the name itself, but because the person has *a good or bad reputation*.

We ministers also baptize in – or rather *into* – the name of the Lord *not because we do it on His behalf* but because we are representing the person’s introduction into the whole quality of the life and teaching represented by His name. And this, of course, is all recorded and explained in what we call “the Word.” So, perhaps surprisingly, in at least one passages of Scripture “His name” is actually said to be “The Word of God” (Rev. 19:13).

The Internal or Spiritual Level

All this takes us to the next level, as shown in *True Christian Religion*, where we read,

“In the *spiritual sense* the name of God means all those things which the church teaches from the Word, and by which the Lord is invoked and worshiped. All these things collectively are the name of God. Therefore to take the name of God in vain (which is not to keep it holy) means to use any of those things in idle talk, false assertions, lies, curses, sorcery and incantations; for this also is to revile and blaspheme God, and consequently His name” (#298).

In practical terms this means we ought to treat even the Word as a book with respect. We shouldn’t put other books or clutter on top of it and we shouldn’t leave it lying around to gather dust *or tuck it away behind knick-knacks on a shelf*. More importantly, we need to read it and pay reverent attention to what it says! To keep the book holy is *not to take it out of circulation but to use it*, just the same as you would not treat a friend with respect by ignoring or keeping him at a distance but by paying attention to him and listening to what he has to say. Likewise, we do not show respect for our friends by ridiculing them, and, as funny as they may be, it is inappropriate to listen to or pass on jokes made from the stories of the Word. Of course there ARE funny things in the Word, but there’s a big difference between seeing the humor in the story and making a mockery of it – as people sometimes do with the story of Noah’s ark, or with some of the Lord’s miracles, for example. We need to remember that within every literal story line there is a profound spiritual sense that offers very serious insight into our own lives and ultimately into the Lord’s life, too – not to mention that every word connects us with some society in heaven!

The Inmost or Celestial Level

This now takes us to a third and even deeper level of meaning within the prayer about the name of God, and that is what is called *the celestial sense*, dealing specifically with the Lord’s Divine

Humanity. This also is explained in the *True Christian Religion* #299, where we are plainly told that the name of Jehovah, the Father, the God of the Old Testament, is *the Lord Jesus Christ*, and as such it refers to His Divine Humanity. Remember, Isaiah particularly stresses the point that there is no God and no Savior other than Jehovah (Isa. 43:10-11, 44:6, etc.). But of course He appears in the New Testament as the Lord Jesus Christ.

So at the highest level, we have the hallowing of the Divine name as the recognition of the Infinite love and wisdom of God *in the Lord, Jesus Christ*. In other words, we have the responsibility to honor and respect Him as the personification of the otherwise invisible Divine Energy.

To summarize, we have three levels of understanding God’s name: first, it is a literal representative of His Divine qualities and so should be treated with respect just as we would treat any good person’s name with respect. Second, since it represents His love and wisdom, which are described and explained in the Word, it also represents the Word, which we must therefore also treat with great respect. And finally, since all His attributes or qualities are made visible in the Human form as He is revealed in the Gospels, His name represents HIM, and so respect for it implies respect for HIM.

Specifics on Hallowing His Name

But now we need to consider with greater care just what it means to hallow something, or to make it holy. We’ve been thinking along the lines of respect, but it’s more than that, isn’t it? In the dictionary to hallow is to consecrate, and to consecrate is to dedicate formally to a religious or Divine purpose. It is to purify something from any false or evil element, or, thinking of it positively, to use something in a way that expresses Divine love and wisdom. Another word for holiness is sanctity, and to sanctify something is to set it apart for religious service.

Of course the Lord’s name is already holy in itself, so there’s nothing we can do, really, to make it more so. But we can “hallow” or consecrate or sanctify it *for ourselves* in at least three ways.

First, we can remove the Lord’s literal name, His Word and any thoughts of Him from any angry, abusive or self-centered context, making sure we take none of this lightly, but in ways that reflects His goodness and truth. In fact, there are MANY names used for God, and each one expresses something specific about His love, His wisdom or His power. For example, “Jehovah,” which in Hebrew is a word composed entirely of light breathing sounds (consonants really but open like vowels), refers to His *creative* love, and “Jesus,” which in Greek means Savior, refers to His *redeeming* love. “God,” which in Hebrew is usually a plural noun, is a title that refers to His formative Divine Truth, which in turn has many aspects. And “Christ,” which means the Anointed, also refers to truth, but truth used in the administration of order.

So we can “hallow” or keep our heavenly Father’s literal names holy by remembering what they mean and using them only with integrity to express the things they really represent.

Second, knowing that in the spiritual sense the Lord’s name refers to His whole Word, we can hallow or sanctify it in our lives *by doing what it teaches!* This involves two steps, which of course unfold into 4 or more steps, depending on how you count. The first in broad terms is to shun the evils that we discover in ourselves as sins against the Lord, and the second is to do what is good. Drilling down to more detail, shunning evils begins with self-examination in the light of the Word, recognizing the evils that we discover, taking responsibility for them and then praying

to the Lord for help in overcoming them. Doing good also involves continuing reference to the Word as we learn more and more about what truly serves for eternal life, and what does not. But the point is, hallowing the Lord’s name at this level means bringing the Word into our lives with integrity, from our motive and purpose right through to our actual deeds. Otherwise it is NOT hallowed or sanctified in our lives but instead it is corrupted.

Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15), and again, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” (John 15:10).

Finally, and in the highest sense, we can “hallow” the Lord’s name by dedicating our lives to HIM – not just because He tells us to, and not just because we respect His Word and see that it is the right thing to do, but because we love HIM and can’t stand the thought of hurting or disappointing HIM! This is the ideal, for at this level of care and concern we are fully aware that the Lord’s Infinite wisdom so far exceeds our own that it would be ridiculous for us to think we could do or have anything better than to live with Him, as He teaches.

And so we will come in a few minutes to the commemoration of the Lord’s Last Supper. For those who are able, and who wish to confirm a commitment to these things, and to be nourished by the love and wisdom represented in it, this is an opportunity to do so. It is not essential for spiritual life but it can be a powerful reminder of this commitment and a way of experiencing the Lord’s goodness and truth entering into us and strengthening us.

Meanwhile remember, the phrase, “Hallowed be Thy name” is neither past nor present nor future. *It is simply a fact.* But it is a fact that begs our attention and requires our cooperation if we are to acknowledge it sincerely. So *whenever* we use these words we may take them as prescribed reminders of our need and our responsibility to consecrate the things represented by the Lord’s name, and put them to work in our lives. When we do that, or to the degree we do it, the Lord can provide all the blessings that follow, and we are assured not only that He will, but even more, that He *does every day*, from day to day, sufficient for the day, a fact that we recognize further on in the Lord’s Prayer.

Amen.

Lessons:

Exodus 20: 7 and Matthew 6:5-9 only
Children’s talk on not taking the Lord’s name in vain

Psalms 135:1-14 (emphasis on praising the *name* of the Lord)
True Christian Religion #300