

“Hallowed be your name”

When I was a child and heard the Lord’s Prayer being said, I wondered what this phrase meant. I guessed that “Hallowed” had something to do with Halloween, and I knew from experience that Halloween was connected with getting candy. But what connection could there possibly be between Halloween, candy, and the name of God?... It was all a mystery.

To unravel the meaning, we need to look at what “hallowed” and “name” mean.

“**Hallowed**” is an old word meaning “made holy.”

The word “holy” itself needs some explanation.

- The basic meaning of “holy” is “devoted to God,” i.e. something (temples, sacrifices, etc.) is **set apart as God’s own**.
 - It is **made by God to be his own and purified** and, in its current state, it is **pure because of God and therefore deserves honor and respect**.
 - (When used of a person, can also mean someone who is chaste, i.e. is made clean by God from the defilement of sexual immorality and has a new state of purity from God, being free from all past stain and guilt.)
 - “Holiness” combines two otherwise opposed ideas
 - purity in separateness with
 - God bringing unremarkable things into supernatural communion with himself.
 - “Christ is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and for this very reason He can save, He can succor the tempted, He can cleanse by his touch the leper, and give rest by His presence to the weary and heavy-laden” (Adolph Saphir, *Our Lord’s Pattern for Prayer* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984], 139).

“**Name**” refers to **the way a person is known, including the goodness and power that is specific to them** (their “fame” or “renown”).

A name

- stands for a **person** (with their full power and authority to save and to ward off evil)
 - Ps. 5:11b: “that those who love *your name* may exalt in *you*”
 - Ps. 9:10a: “Those who know *your name* put their trust in *you*”
 - Ps. 72:18-19: “Blessed be *the Lord*, the God of Israel...Blessed be *his glorious name* forever”
 - Dt. 28:58: “that you may fear *this glorious and awesome name*, the Lord *your God*”
- shows **that individual’s essential character and relationship to others**
 - Cf. Jacob in Gen. 32:29: “Tell me your name.”
 - “We realize by the name individual life and relationship. It brings with it love and trust. Without it we lose reality. Abstraction is but the shadow of death. As long as Israel knew God by name...they had life” (Saphir, 145)

When we read in the book of Acts about the Apostle Paul, every time his name “Paul” appears, we think of him and remember who he was—that one particular person who studied and strived to learn, whose zeal led him to desire the imprisonment and death of the Christians, who was uniquely met by God and ultimately became an apostle to the Gentiles, a colleague to Priscilla and Aquila, a spiritual father to

Timothy, and a dedicated pastor to the churches he visited. It is that one particular man we think of when we see the name “Paul” in the text.

Because a name stands for a person and reminds us of their personal character, God often makes a point of changing people’s names in the Bible when extends his promises to them and invites them into a different kind of relationship with himself. “Abram” becomes “Abraham,” the father of a great nation. Simon becomes “Peter,” the rock on which the Church is built. Saul becomes “Paul,” the apostle to the Gentiles.

God also promises a future new name and a new identity to all who trust him:

“To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it” (Rev. 2:17).

God’s name (his goodness, greatness and purity) is made known to us through his Son Jesus Christ:

- “I have come in the name of the Father” (Jn. 5:43)
- “Father, glorify your name” (Jn. 12:28)
- “I have made your name known to people” (Jn. 17:6; compare 2 Cor. 4:6)

To know God in this way is eternal life (Jn. 17:3).

But not all people have come to know and experience God through Jesus Christ, so for them God’s name remains something unknown. They do not know God’s personal character, the specific kind of goodness, greatness and purity that he shows us when he takes on a human life and lives and dies to forgive sins, overcome evil, and change his enemies for the better.

We want to see this made known to all people (people friendly to us and unfriendly to us, people who are seeking God and people who are opposing and resisting God), **so that they might know and confess God’s goodness and greatness and the purity of his love for us.**

- This fulfills the Jewish expectation, arising from Old Testament prophecy, that “Israel must give itself up to sanctify God’s name...And yet God’s name will not be fully sanctified until all the nations of the world acknowledge his Godhead and his Unity” (C.G. Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings* [New York: Ktav, 1970], 130).
 - Cf. also the third petition said on the first day of the Jewish year (Rosh Hashanah), called “the hallowing [=sanctification] of the Name” (Qedushat Ha-Shem):

“Wherefore we wait for you, O Lord our God, that we may soon behold the beauty of your strength; that you may cause the dung-gods [=false things worshiped by the nations] to pass from the earth, and that the idols may be utterly cut off; that you may order the world in the kingdom of the Almighty, and that all the sons of flesh may call upon your name; that all the wicked of the earth may turn to you; that all the inhabitants of the world may discern and know, that to you every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear before you, O Lord our God: let them bow and fall down, and give honor to your glorious name; let all of them receive the yoke of your kingdom; and speedily reign over them forever and ever” (Mishna, *Rosh Hashanah* 4.5; tr. of Thomas Robinson, *The Evangelists and the Mishna* [London: James Nisbet, 1859], 45, slightly adapted)
- Because this knowledge and God’s renewal of all things have not yet been achieved, the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are future-oriented and ask for something more—for God to renew the world: “Let your name be set apart as holy, let your kingdom come, let your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

When come to know and experience God in this way, we will have received what we prayed for:

God's name (his person, his character) will be set apart by people from every nation as something which merits honor and respect because of God's unique personal character, which was revealed when he acted to save.¹

- Ezek. 36:23: "And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations...And the nations will know that I am the Lord...when through you I vindicate my holiness in their eyes."
 - Compare Ez. 20:41-42; 38:23.
 - Cf. also Is. 59:19: "From the west, men will fear the name of the Lord, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory."
- Is. 43:1: "But now thus says the Lord...Fear not I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."
- "They shall all be taught of God; my people shall know my name."
- Ps. 33:4: "Let us exalt his name together";
- Ps. 44:18: "They shall remember your name in every generation and forever."
- Lk. 1:49: "For he that is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name"
 - "Here speaks one whose prayer of repentance, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner,' has been answered; he is no longer in the far country, but in the Father's house; he is no longer a sheep gone astray, but in the fold of peace; he is no longer crying 'out of the depths,' but he is in Christ; and having received the Spirit of sonship, he says 'Abba.' How natural it is for us to exclaim, 'Hallowed by thy name,'" when we know what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; when we contemplate the glory manifested in our redemption and adoption in Christ Jesus, and rejoice in the lively hope of His inheritance! We cannot say 'Father' without immediately, in the spirit of filial reverence and gratitude, giving Him His honour" (Saphir, 140-141)
 - "Nothing fair on earth I see
But straightway think on Thee;
Thou art fairest in my eyes,
Source in whom all beauty lies"
(Angelus Silesius, quoted in Saphir, 143 n.)
- Tertullian, writing in North Africa around 200 A.D. put it this way:
"...when we say: 'Let your name be hallowed,'
we ask that it be hallowed among us who are in him
and, at the same time,
in others whom the grace of God still awaits,
so that we should be obedient to the command to pray for all,
even for our enemies [Mt. 5:44].
Consequently, as a result of this terse expression,
we do not say 'Let it be hallowed in us'
but manage to say: 'in all people.'"
--Tertullian *On Prayer* 3 (tr. A Stewart-Sykes, *Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen.*
On the Lord's Prayer [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004], 44)

¹ Cf. Augustine *Enarr. in Ps. ciii,1*: Quid ergo rogamus? Ut illis hominibus, qui per infidelitatem nondum habent, nomen Dei sanctum sit, quibus nondum est ille sanctus, qui per se et in se et in sanctis suis sanctus est. Rogamus pro genere humano, rogamus pro orbe terrarum, pro omnibus gentibus, quotidie sedentibus et disputantibus, quia non est rectus Deus, et non recte judicat Deus; ut aliquando ipsi se corrigant, et rectum cor ad illius rectitudinem ducant; et adhaerentes ei, directi ad rectum, non jam vituperent, sed placeat rectis rectus.

For us who have believed and been baptized, “the hallowing of God’s name” in us also means that **we daily ask (and depend on) Christ for**

- **the forgiveness of our sins** and
- that we might be **strengthened by the Holy Spirit and made faithful to Jesus Christ.**
 - Cf. 1 Pet. 3:15: “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy”
 - “To hallow the name of God is to look unto Christ” (Saphir, 156)
- Cyprian, writing in North Africa about 250 A.D., develops this thought:
“We ask and beseech that we who are made holy in baptism
should have the ability to persist in the way we have begun.

And we request this every day.

Our need is of daily sanctification, so that we who daily fail
should have our sins purged by continual hallowing.

The apostle states the nature of the *hallowing* which is conveyed to us from the grace of God, when he says:

‘Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor sodomizers, nor, nor thieves, nor cheats, nor drunkards, nor wizards, nor the rapacious
shall attain to the Kingdom of God.

Indeed you were all of these,
but you have been washed,
you have been made just,
you have been *hallowed*
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
and in the Spirit of our God.’ [1 Cor. 6:9]

He says that we have been hallowed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
and in the Spirit of our God

and we in turn, because our master and judge warns
the one who has been healed and revived by him
to sin no more ,
lest something worse should befall him [Jn. 5:14],

pray that this hallowing should remain within us.

We make this plea in continuous prayer;

we ask day and night that the hallowing and revival
which has been received from the grace of God
should be preserved by his protecting care.

--Cyprian *On the Lord’s Prayer* 12 (tr. Stewart-Sykes, 73; italics mine)

- Cyprian (*On the Lord’s Prayer* 11) also points his hearers to 1 Cor. 6:20: “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. *Honor and carry God in your body.*” This accurately summarizes what hallowing or making holy means for us in our own lives—that Christ’s righteousness and holiness might be revealed there (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30).

- Origen (*On Prayer* 24.4), in explaining “Hallowed be your name,” similarly comments, “A person exalts God when he has dedicated to him a dwelling place within himself.”
 - Time permitting, develop this point with reference to Renato Corti, *Il miracolo sarebbe la santità. Meditazioni sul ministero sacerdotale* (Piemme, 1992), 82; Stephen J. Rossetti, *The Joy of Priesthood* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 2005, 37-39; Gertrude Ressaygue, *The First Love: About Joy in the Priesthood* (Petersham, Mass.: St. Bede’s, 1998), 34-36.
- In worshiping God, we “hallow his name” by joining together with the angels in saying, “Holy, holy, holy [is the Lord]” [Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8] (Chrysostom). This is the only prayer which we will continue praying for all eternity, since our need for bread, forgiveness and help in temptation will be past and the Kingdom will already have come and made all things new and the victory of God will be complete (Thomas Watson).

Among those who approach me, I will show myself holy
 --Lev. 10:3a

...That they may know that you alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most
 High over all the earth.

--Ps. 83:18

There is no one holy like the Lord
 --1 Sam. 2:2a

Holy and awesome is his name
 --Ps. 111:9b