

Hallowed Be Thy Name

In my youth I considered the Lord's Prayer to be nothing more than ritual as I heard the prayer repeatedly recited. It seemed to be just words. But one day I realized that Jesus used the prayer to teach His disciples how to pray. So I started studying this prayer and I have continued to do so ever since. The prayer can be found in both Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. I will read from Matthew.

Pray, then, in this way:

"Our Father who is in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom

come.

Your will be

done,

On earth as it is
in heaven.

Give us this day
our daily bread.

And forgive us
our debts, as
we also have
forgiven our
debtors.

And do not
lead us into
temptation but
deliver us from
evil."

Matthew 6:9-13 (NASB)

ASK THAT THE FATHER MAKE HIMSELF HOLY. As I have studied this prayer, I learned that it is the Father who forgives our sins since Jesus tells us to ask the Father to forgive our sins. I have discovered it is the Father who supplies all my daily needs and He does it every day. But I struggled to understand the phrase "Hallowed be Your name" at the beginning

of the prayer. When I heard "hallowed ground" in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, I just thought "hallow" referred to something special. But then I looked up the meaning of the Greek word for "hallowed" and discovered it is *hagiazō*. It has the idea of "to make holy." The noun form of this Greek word is "saints," which means "holy ones." Jesus is telling us to ask the Father to make Himself holy.

WHY ASK THAT GOD BE MADE HOLY? That seemed to be an odd request. Why should we ask that God be made holy? Isn't God already holy? Yes, Psalm 99:1-5 exalts God with these words,



The LORD
reigns, let the
peoples tremble;
He is enthroned
above the cheru-
bim, let the earth
shake!
The LORD is
great in Zion,
And He is exalted
above all the
peoples.
Let them praise
Your great and
awesome name;
Holy is He.

The strength of the King loves justice;
You have established equity;
You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.
Exalt the LORD our God
And worship at His footstool;
Holy is He.
Psalm 99:1-5 (NASB)

The praise in this Psalm is incredible. The Lord is enthroned

above the cherubim. He is exalted, great, awesome, just, and righteous. But the only characteristic of God that is repeated twice is “holy.” Holy is He. God is holy!

In Isaiah 6:1-3 the prophet writes,

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said,

“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts,

The whole earth is full of His glory.” Isaiah 6:1-3 (NASB)

When the seraphim cried out, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” this was more than just a reference to the trinity. In both the Hebrew and Greek languages, when someone wanted to strongly emphasize a word, the word was repeated. So, the seraphim praised God with “holy” three times to make the point that God is not just holy but that He is the holiest of all. John Oswalt says, “This is the strongest superlative in Hebrew.”¹ God is holy, holy, holy.

Revelation 15:3-4 gives us a glimpse of heaven during the future tribulation when heaven will sing the song of Moses. They will sing,

Great and marvelous are Your works,

O Lord God, the Almighty;

Righteous and true are Your ways,

King of the nations!

Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?

For You alone are holy;

For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP

BEFORE YOU,

FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED.”

Revelation 15:3-4 (NASB)

The message of heaven is that ONLY God is holy! One of my favorite hymns is “Holy, Holy, Holy” because it exalts our God! The first stanza reads,

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;

Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, we are told that because God is holy, everything about and around Him is holy. His name is holy (Isaiah 57:15). His words are holy (Jeremiah 23:9). Heaven is holy (Psalm 20:6). His throne is holy (Psalm 47:8). The temple is holy (Psalm 11:4). The city of Jerusalem is holy (Nehemiah 11:1) and the mountain on which Jerusalem sits is holy (Psalm 2:6). The message of Scripture is that everything about our God is Holy, Holy, Holy.

HOW CAN WE MAKE GOD HOLY? So the question is, “Since God is already so beautifully holy, how do we make God holy?” Are we just supposed to repeat the word holy as the seraphim of heaven do? What are we supposed to do? Let me illustrate the answer from the life of Moses. Moses is probably my favorite saint. I will start with Exodus 3:1-5.

Moses Meets God on Holy Ground. Exodus 3:1-5 tells us that Moses encountered God out in the Midian desert. One day Moses was pasturing a flock and God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush that was not being consumed. That made Moses very curious. So he approached the bush to investigate, and God told him to remove his sandals because he was walking on holy ground. Now why was the ground with all the dirt, rocks and weeds holy? The answer is that God was present and since God is so holy, holy, holy, everything He touches is holy!

Moses is God’s Minister in the Desert. It was there in the Midian desert that God called Moses to become His minister. His ministry appeared to be straight forward. He was to take the nation of Israel from Egypt into the Promised Land. But initially, Moses objected and lost part of the ministry to his brother Aaron. The lesson for us is that we must be careful what we refuse to do for God. After Moses accepted God’s call, God began performing amazing miracles through Moses. I am sure that Moses was thrilled when the pharaoh of Egypt let the nation of Israel leave Egypt after the pharaoh’s firstborn son died. Then pharaoh changed his mind and sent the Egyptian army after them. But God rescued the nation using a pillar of

1. John Oswalt. The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Eerdmans Publishing. 1986. p. 181.

fire and a pillar of cloud to lead them and by parting the Red Sea. The Israelites escaped. God's miracles did not stop there. Then He miraculously provided everything they needed from food and water to the very soles of their shoes.

When they were about to enter the Promised Land, twelve spies were sent to spy-out the land. When they returned, ten of the twelve spies convinced the people that it was too dangerous to trust God and attempt to go into the Promised Land. As a result, God disciplined them because of their unbelief and most of them were not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Numbers 14:28-32 tells us that God said everyone who was twenty years of age and older would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land, except for Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua. So the nation of Israel wandered in the desert for forty years.

Waters of Meribah in the Wilderness of Zin. When the last year of their wanderings arrived, two tragic events occurred. First, Numbers 20:1 says that Moses' sister Miriam died. She died because she was one of the individuals who could not enter the Promised Land. I imagine that Moses grieved the loss of his sister and it may even have motivated the second tragic event which is described in Numbers 20:2-12. Here are verses 2-5.

There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron. The people thus contended [that is quarreled] with Moses and spoke, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! Why then have you brought the LORD'S assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink." Numbers 20:2-5 (NASB)

Even after forty years in the wilderness, this generation was still complaining. Now if I were Moses, and 1) my sister had just died, and 2) the congregation was quarreling with me, this would not be a good situation. Moses was probably very stressed.

Numbers 20:6-8 tells us what happened next. Notice that God told Moses and Aaron to do four things. The passage says,

Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them; and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink." Numbers 20:6-8 (NASB)

Then verses 9-11 tells us that Moses did five things and not four things.

So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. Numbers 20:9-11 (NASB)

What did Moses do? First, he was told to take the rod or staff and he did. Second, he was told to assemble the congregation and he did. Third, Moses did something that God did not tell him to do. He called the people rebels. Fourth, Moses asked a question, "Shall we bring forth water for you?" If we examine God's command to Moses, that is exactly what God told Moses he would be doing. Fifth God told him to speak to the rock, but he struck the rock twice. Here he clearly violated God's command. Yet, God seemingly blessed Moses' ministry anyway! Was he not God's minister in the desert? Most of us would have thought that if God allowed the water to flow, that would mean God was still blessing Moses' ministry in spite of his disobedience! Don't signs of success reveal God's approval?

But verses 12-13 reveal that this was not a sign of success in Moses' ministry. God had provided for the people. God planned to punish him and Aaron. Why? Listen!

But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." Numbers 20:12-13 (NASB)

Now what was their punishment? God would not let Moses and Aaron enter the Promised Land. Almost immediately Aaron died (Numbers 20:28). He did not enter the Promised Land. Soon Moses would no longer be God's minister in the desert either. The message is simply that they sinned. What was the sin? Moses and Aaron did not believe God so as "to treat God as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel."

WHAT WAS MOSES' SIN? Now we have arrived at a critical point in our study. What did God mean when He said, "You have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy"? Some think Moses sinned because He became angry. They refer to Psalm 106:32-33 which says Moses spoke rashly with his lips. That is, he became angry.

Some believe Moses displayed pride when he asked, "Shall we bring forth water?" But the major problem with this view is that no Scripture says Moses sinned by being proud. In fact, Numbers 12:3 says Moses was the humblest man on the earth. In fact, Moses just repeated what God said he would be doing.

Others suggest Moses sinned when he hit the rock twice. Yes, that was a clear violation of God's command. Moses had already hit the rock once before in the Wilderness of Sin during the first year of their wanderings in the wilderness according to Exodus 16:1-7. This event occurred in the Wilderness of Zin in the last year. Yes, 1 Corinthians 10:4 does tell us the rock was a type of Christ. Some think Moses in effect, figuratively crucified Christ twice.

But I believe the answer is missed because we miss two very important facts. The first fact is that in Leviticus 10:3 God had already warned Moses and Aaron to treat Him as holy before all the people. God said,

*By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy,
And before all the people I will be honored. Leviticus 10:3
(NASB)*

Of all the things that God could have asked Moses and Aaron to do, God asked these two men to "treat Him as holy." Unfortunately, for years I had read this passage as a fact and did not realize it revealed one of the ways of God. Then one day I realized that God did not ask Moses and Aaron to treat Him as

loving, forgiving, caring, eternal, all-knowing, or almighty! Instead, God chose "holy." Now I am not wise enough to say holiness is God's most important attribute, but it is clear that holiness is the attribute that most often describes God. It is the attribute that God wants us to see. So, when God said that Moses did not believe Him, God was referring to this command in Leviticus 10:3. That is the first fact.

The second fact is that Moses' failure to make God holy was the root issue! Moses failed to make God holy to the people, or we could say Moses did not hallow or honor God's name! His anger did not make God look holy and the people saw it. Hitting the rock did not make God look holy, and all the angelic hosts and God saw it. I said the angelic hosts saw it because in Job 1 it is clear that Satan accused Job of not being a righteous man. Consequently, a contest followed between God and Satan as they watched Job's behavior, and God won! But here Moses failed to "make God holy" to both the visible and invisible creation.

Deuteronomy 3:23-28 is another important passage. Here Moses begs God to let him enter the Promised Land. Moses tells the people,

I also pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying, "O LORD GOD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand; for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as Yours? Let me, I pray, cross over and see the fair land that is beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon." But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me; and the LORD said to me, "Enough! Speak to Me no more of this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes to the west and north and south and east, and see it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. But charge Joshua and encourage him and strengthen him, for he shall go across at the head of this people, and he will give them as an inheritance the land which you will see." Deuteronomy 3:23-28 (NASB)

Once again, notice God's concern for the people! Verse 28 says Joshua would take the people into the Promised Land, but not Moses! That is, Moses was no longer God's minister in the desert because he failed to make God holy before the people.

PRINCIPLE #1: GOD WANTS HIS LEADERS TO MAKE HIM HOLY. Deuteronomy 34:5-7 describes Moses' death. We are told . . .

So, Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day. Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated. Deuteronomy 34:5-7 (NASB)

Notice Moses had good vision even at the age of 120 years, and He had great energy. Physically, Moses did not need to die! Numbers 20:13 makes a curious statement. It says God proved Himself holy among the people. How did God do that? First, He provided water for the people. Second, He told Moses and Aaron they could not enter the Promised Land because they had failed to make God holy. God's holiness was more important than the life of His minister in the desert. You see, ultimately, God did not need Moses and He does need us to serve Him. He can always use someone else. God's work will still be accomplished. Moses lost the joy of what God had planned for him because he failed to make God holy.

In the New Testament, God clearly teaches us that He wants the spiritual leaders of the church to be holy too! He has established very high qualifications for spiritual leaders in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9. Why did He do this? He wants His ministers to be holy so that the people know how to be holy. These qualifications are more than just about character, they are minimal standards of holiness. Will God be seen as holy in their lives to the congregation?

For example, Hebrews 13:7 tells the congregation to imitate their leaders. But the passage does not tell us to just imitate all of them. The verse gives us three qualifications to consider in deciding who we are to imitate: 1) they are to be a leader in the church, 2) they must have taught the Word of God, and 3) their lives must be godly—followable. That is, they are to be examples of God's holiness. Also, in 1 Peter 5:3, the apostle Peter tells the elders that they are to be examples to the flock. Repeatedly in Paul's epistles, he urged believers to imitate him, as he followed Christ. In 1 Timothy 5:19-21, God has given us

standards for removing sinning leaders when they fail to make God holy to the people.

It has been very disappointing when men in very public positions of spiritual leadership in Christian ministries have failed to make God holy. On one occasion I had to vote to revoke the ordination of a pastor who was caught having an affair with his church secretary. He was a personal friend. I have known other men who have failed to make God holy. Each time failure has occurred, the name of Christ has been blasphemed. You see, God wants church leaders who are holy; as a result they make God holy to the people. They are His examples. This gives us our first principle, God wants church leaders 1) to be holy so that the congregation sees God as holy and 2) are examples of holiness that the congregation can follow.

PRINCIPLE #2: GOD WANTS BELIEVERS TO MAKE HIM HOLY. God wants every believer to be holy! But we must want to be holy for the right reason. Let me give you four examples. First, sometimes we want to be holy because we have been publicly embarrassed over some sin. When this occurs, we actually are guilty of the sin of pride in addition. So that is not a good reason. A second reason why we may want to be holy is that we regret the consequences of our sin. So, we try even harder to not sin. Now Scripture does encourage us to do that. A third reason why we may want to be holy is that we want our prayers answered. James 5:16 says that the effective prayers of a righteous man accomplishes much. A fourth reason why we may seek to be holy is that Matthew 5:6 urges us to hunger and thirst for righteousness so that we will be satisfied. So, it is biblical to want to be holy. That last verse reveals there is a benefit to being holy! There is a direct benefit to us in being holy. God is pointing the way to the abundant life in that verse. But a better reason to want to be holy is because our God is holy. 1 Peter 1:16 says,

... "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." 1 Peter 1:16 (NASB)

Here God urges us to be holy in our hearts. Jesus said our hearts—our very character—determines what we say and do.

But when we combine 1 Peter 1:16 with "Hallowed be Your name" in the Lord's Prayer, we discover the ultimate goal is not

that we become holy, but that God is made holy! D. A. Carson says it correctly with this comment in his book “Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount,”

The highest goal is not that we be made holy; the highest goal is rather that God’s name be hallowed.²

The example of Moses shows us how to make God holy. Our holiness reflects God’s holiness. The application for spiritual leaders and the congregation is that when we strive together to be holy like God, we help others see that God is holy. Our God wants us to defend His character. Satan is working to slander Him. But the ultimate reason for us to be holy is to achieve the ultimate goal of making God holy! Our deepest heart’s desire should be that God is seen as holy. That is the essence of “Hallowed be Your name” in the Lord’s Prayer.

That gives us our second principle, God wants all believers to be holy so that the world around us will see God as holy!

PRINCIPLES #3: GOD WANTS HIS HOLY CHARACTER TO BE REVEALED TO ALL HIS CREATION. The third principle is that God wants us to want Him to be seen as holy. This is a glimpse into the heart of God. The awesome beauty of the prayer request “Hallowed be Your name” is that Jesus gives us a glimpse into the Father’s heart. He wants us to want Him to be seen as holy. Of all the characteristics for which we could pray, Jesus urges us to pray that the Father is made holy to others!

James Montgomery Boice once spoke to a discipleship group on the attributes of God. He began by asking them to list God’s qualities in order of importance. They put love first, followed by wisdom, power, mercy, omniscience, and truth. At the end of the list, they put holiness.

“That did surprise me,” Boice later wrote, “because the Bible refers to God’s holiness more than any other attribute:

The Bible doesn’t generally refer to God as Loving, Loving, Loving! Or Wise, Wise, Wise! Or Omniscient, Omniscient, Omniscient! But over and over we read the cry of the angels, Holy,

Holy, Holy!³

Here is a precious insight into the Holy One. This is treasure better than gold. So, we have the joy and the privilege to . . .

Pray, then, in this way:

“Our Father who is in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.”

You see, “Hallowed be Your name” gives us insight into the heart of God. This is what He wants you to want for Him! Therefore, let us pray, Father may your will be accomplished in our lives so that we will make You holy! For You are worthy! You are Holy, Holy, Holy!

2. D. A. Carson. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Baker Books. 1987. P. 701.

3. James Montgomery Boice. “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Moody Press. January 1985. P. 14.