

Thoughts on the Lord's Prayer

3. "Hallowed be Thy name"

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THERE ARE several points which come out of a consideration of this phrase. Firstly, let us consider the Name of God. Spoken from God's perspective, as in Exodus 3:14, it is 'I am', or, more correctly, 'I will be'. Spoken from our perspective, which is more usual, it is YHWH (commonly rendered Yahweh), 'He Who will be'. The Name is expressive of the character and purpose of God. Hence the Name of God is inseparable from Himself. Instead of considering just the Name of God, we are drawn to think of God as a whole. It is neither necessary nor useful in this context to elaborate further on the Name of God; what we do need to do is to contemplate our relationship with God.

Why should we desire God's Name to be hallowed? What does hallowed mean? In the New Testament the word is translated as 'hallowed' only twice, both occurrences being in the two records of the Lord's Prayer. Elsewhere it is rendered as 'sanctify'. The basic meaning is 'to make holy'. We ask, Is not God, and therefore His Name, intrinsically holy? Is there a sense in which God is unholy? Of course not! One of many appropriate quotes in the Old Testament will suffice to prove the point beyond any doubt: "And one [seraph] cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:3).

Certainly God is absolutely and fundamentally pure and holy. The question is, does the earth reflect His holiness? The holiness of God was to be seen in the lives of His people: "Neither shall ye profane My holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the LORD Which hallow you" (Lev. 22:32); and again: "Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy" (19:2).

It is, then, the responsibility of the people of God to show to those about them the holiness of God. Sadly, Israel's history records the very opposite: "And when they [Israel] entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned My holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of His land. But I had pity for Mine holy name,

which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for Mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went" (Ezek. 36:20-22). But there is a time coming when Israel will honour and reverence the Name of God: "Therefore thus saith the LORD, Who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of Mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify My name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel" (Isa. 29:22,23).

When we pray for God's Name to be hallowed, we are in effect asking for two things: firstly, for the community of believers to be holy and thus represent God to the unbelievers; and, secondly, for the time when God's holiness will cover the earth. These are words that we may not say with any degree of genuineness if we are not trying to be holy now, or are not looking for the time of holiness in the future. Whilst God is holy Himself, He can only be hallowed in the lives of men and women who seek to be holy because He is. Each time we fail to be holy it reflects badly on the holy Name of God, Whose ambassadors we are, and God is belittled in the eyes of unbelieving observers, who may say, "If that's what your God is like I'm not interested!". How dreadful that our unholy actions might result in some other person refusing to honour God in their life, and so, in a very real way, God's Name is profaned!

There is an evident degree of self-purity required before we can contribute to the hallowing of God's Name. God's Name is holy and inspires awe. What a great privilege, what an honour, and what a great responsibility it is, that we might be name-bearers for God! Consider the ultimate name-bearer for a moment. He carries the title of 'the Holy One'. When the people of Jesus' day heard him speak, witnessed his compassion and saw his marvellous works, the common response was to glorify God. Would that we might by our words and deeds bring honour to God's Name.