



Thoughts from the Bible and Books Devotions from The Heidelberg Catechism

University Reformed Church

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122 Q. *What does the first request mean?*

A. *Hallowed be your name* means, to bless, worship, and praise you for all your works and for all that shines forth from them: your almighty power, wisdom, kindness, justice, mercy, and truth. And it means, help us to direct all our living—what we think, say, and do—so that your name will never be blasphemed because of us but always honored and praised.

The first thing to notice about the first request of the Lord's Prayer is that it is a request. We are not declaring "your name is hallowed." We are petitioning, "you're your name be hallowed!" In other words, Jesus teaches us that the first thing we ought to pray for, before we ask for anything else, is that God would be glorified and set apart as holy.

This doesn't mean we need a mechanical formula whereby every prayer starts with "Lord, be glorified" and then moves on to our real concerns. But surely the attitude which ought to be pervasive in all our prayers and the theme which ought to be stated implicitly and often explicitly as our first concern is this: "Father, make much of your own name."

Few of us have probably stopped to think what radical reorientation flows from this first petition. By putting "hallowed by your name" first, Jesus would have us understand that the point of prayer is God's glory. Yes, we may legitimately ask for other things, but our overriding concern is for the fame of God's name. It's as if we prayed, "Our Father in heaven, the concern nearest to my heart and the one that shapes all other requests is that your name would be regarded as holy, that your fame would be heralded in the earth, that you would be honored among the nations, that your glory would be magnified for all to see. O Lord, be pleased to cause men everywhere to take pleasure in you, that you might be praised now and forever."

I like the first line in Answer 122: "*Hallowed be your name* means, Help us to really know you..." I sometimes think conservative Christians apologize too much for learning. We are wary of being big-headed, small-hearted people, and that's a valid concern. It's good to make sure our knowledge is not puffing us up. But isn't knowing God the goal? Some sermons should end without three points of "practical" application, because simply knowing God better is the point. Of course, this knowledge is more than mere cognition. It entails understanding, affection, and delight in who God is. But if God is the point, as the first petition of the Lord's Prayer suggests, what could be more important than to grow in our knowledge of him? No apology is necessary for growing in our knowledge of God.

I need the Lord's Prayer because I need help hallowing God's name. I do not easily "bless, worship, and praise" God for all his works and all that shines forth from them. It's not that I'm not opposed to praise. But my mind is shallow, my discipline weak, and my affections cold. So I pray, "Come thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace." *Hallowed be your name* prepares our heartstrings to receive the bow of prayer and make a pleasant sound.

And, as the Catechism explains, the first petition also means, "Help us direct all our living—what we think, say, and do—so that your name will never be blasphemed because of us but always honored and

praised.” It’s a wonderful and scary thought: our lives can be the source of hallowing God’s name or besmirching it. The fact that we must pray “Hallowed be your name” means it doesn’t happen automatically. Too many of us live lives not befitting those who go by the name “Christian.” Too many of us flirt with sin instead of killing it. Too many of us are careless and casual toward temptation. We can easily see our need for food, health, and blessing. But what about our need for holiness? Before we ask for anything else, Jesus wants us to ask for the grace to give God glory.

When we pray in this way we not only understand our fallen nature, and our place in the world—God is the center and we are not—we also align ourselves with God’s ultimate purposes. To paraphrase Jonathan Edwards, the chief end for which God created the world is his own glory. In all things, the end design in God’s actions and plans is that his name would be glorified. What better way to pray than in alignment with God’s chief concern.

“But doesn’t this make God into the worst kind of egomaniac?” someone may object. “Isn’t this sort of deity just interested in flattery on a cosmic scale?” The answer, of course, is no. Let me give three reasons why.

(1) God’s passion for his glory is not that same as self-flattery because his desire to be glorified does not arise out of weakness or deficiency. Jesus said, “I do not receive glory from people” (John 5:41). Acts 17:24-25 reminds us that “the God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, *as though he needed anything*, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” When we hallow God’s name we are not adding to God’s intrinsic worth or cheering him up while others put him down. God doesn’t need us our praise as a flatterer needs to be stroked.

(2) Rather, we hallow God’s name because it deserves to be hallowed. Our objection to self-aggrandizement stems from the fact that extolling our own virtues strikes us as incongruous with our true merit. When we see preening politicians or ath-

letes who can’t see past their own supposed accomplishment, we are turned off because something inside us says, “Nobody is that important. You are not as wonderful as you’d like us to think you are.” But things are different with God. To recognize that God is the most glorious, most lovely, most powerful Being in the universe is to simply recognize him for who he is. To boast in Mt. Brighton as a lofty peak is ridiculous, but to hail Mt. Everest as the tallest mountain on the planet is justice.

(3) Hallowing God’s name is for our good. God’s glory and God’s love are not at odds. God’s desire to be glorified is not opposed to his desire for our joy. Parents want their kids to put their hopes in something solid. We don’t want them to think happiness comes ultimately from playing football or going to Harvard or getting hammered every weekend. We want their desires to terminate on something that will satisfy. God has the same desire for his children. He wants us to have lasting joy, which is why he directs our attention to his glory. As John Piper says, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Or to put it another way, our greatest good is to rejoice in God’s great glory. When we pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name” we are not only asking for God’s fame to spread among the nations and in our hearts, we are also asking, albeit implicitly, for our lasting joy. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but your name give glory” (Psalm 115:1) is the prayer of a wise and happy man.

~ written by Kevin DeYoung