

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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**Series:** The Lord's Prayer  
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## The Lord's Prayer: The First Petition

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). The third commandment is to be taken with the sentence in the Lord's Prayer in which Jesus admonished His disciples to pray, “Hallowed be thy name” (Matthew 6:9). That petition adds a positive dimension to the negative cast of the Old Testament commandment. The name of God represents the nature of God. Consequently, to dishonor that name is to dishonor God, and the hallowing the name means honoring Him. Since the various names of God represent His many praiseworthy attributes, we hallow His name when we honor some aspect of His character. Calvin says, “We must, in my opinion, diligently observe the three following points: First, whatever our mind conceives of God, whatever our tongue utters, should savor of His excellence, match the loftiness of His sacred name, and lastly, serve to glorify His greatness. Secondly, we should not rashly or perversely abuse His Holy Word and worship mysteries either for the sake of our own ambition, or greed, or amusement; but, as they bear the dignity of His name imprinted upon them, they should ever be honored and prized among us. Finally, we should not defame or detract from His works, as miserable men are wont abusively to cry out against Him; but whatever we recognize as done by Him, we should speak of with praise of His wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. That is what it means to hallow God's name.”<sup>1</sup>

### I. WHAT DOES “HALLOW” MEAN?

In Greek, the word *hagiazein*, is derived from the word *hagios*, which is generally translated *holy*. *Hagiazein* is practically nonexistent in secular Greek, but in biblical Greek there is ample material to define its meaning. The word, Morris points out, “belongs almost exclusively to biblical Greek, or Greek influenced by the Bible. It occurs 3 times in Matthew, out of a New Testament total of 27 (6 times in Hebrews is the most in any one book). It is used of ‘sanctifying’ objects set apart for use in worship in the temple and the like, and when used of people, it signifies that they have been consecrated in some way to the service of God. Further, the logical subject of sanctifying is God alone and not man...God's name is as little hallowed by man as His kingdom comes or His will is done...When God's deity is revealed to man in the mystery of worship (cf. Isaiah 6:3), then God is sanctified to him.”<sup>2</sup> The word has two basic meanings. *First*, it means to make an ordinary secular thing holy, by certain rituals or by bringing it into contact with things that are holy. That is obviously not the meaning here. Nothing that man can do can make the name of God holy in that sense, for that would imply that, to start with, the name of God is *not* holy. But *second*, *hagiazein* means to treat as holy, that is, to *hold sacred*. To hallow a thing is to regard and to treat that thing as holy and sacred. But what does that mean? We can best come at this from remembering the meaning of *hagios*. *Hagios* is the adjective meaning holy; but the basic idea behind it is the idea of difference. That which is *hagios* is different from ordinary things; it belongs to a different sphere of quality and of being. That is why God is supremely The Holy One, for God supremely belongs to a different sphere of life and being. It may be well that of all the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, this prayer that God's name should be hallowed is the petition to which most people would find it more difficult to attach any definite and precise meaning, if they were asked what they meant when they were praying it. Let us begin by tracing the various

translations of this petition, which different translators have offered. These translations fall into four groups.

A. There are the translations which use the word *hallowed*. This is the oldest translation of all. It goes back to Alfred the Great: “*Sic gehalyed dhin noma*”: and to Wicliffe: “*Halewed be thy name*”. This word *hallowed* then came down to us via Tyndale, Coverdale, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, the KJV and the Revised Version. It is in the modern versions of Ronald A. Knox and of E.V. Rieu; and it is the word which is used in the New English Bible. From the first of the translations to the last, this word *hallowed* is used. It has a long and honorable lineage, and even the most modern translators have felt there was nothing better. The English Standard Version, the New International Version, the New Revised Version, as well as the American Standard Version and the New American Standard Version follow this tradition.

B. There are the translations which use the word *holy*. Typical of them is Weymouth: “May thy name be kept *holy*.” And in one form or another this is the translation of C. Kingsley Williams and of the Twentieth Century New Testament. It is the alternative translation of the Amplified New Testament: “Hallowed (kept *holy*) be your name.” As we shall see, this translation is indeed very close to the original. The Living Bible has “We honor your *holy* name,” And *The New Living Translation* (an updated edition of the Living Bible) has, “May your name be honored.”

C. There are the translations which use the word *sanctified*. Typical of this translation is the Douai-Rheims version, “Sanctified be thy name.” This is also the word used by Schonfield in the Authentic New Testament. This translation is not really different, for, in fact, all that it does is to use the latinised form of the word *to hallow*. *The Jewish New Testament* (translated by David H. Stern) follows this as well with the expression, “May your name be kept *holy*.” *The Jerusalem Bible* has, “May your name be held *holy*.”

D. There are the translations which go, as we might say, a little further afield to find a rendering. Moffatt and Goodspeed use the word *revered*: “Thy (your) name be *revered*.” Kenneth Wuest uses the word *venerated*: “Let your name be *venerated*.” J.B. Phillips uses the word *honoured*: “May your name be *honoured*.” Eugene Peterson *The Message: The New Testament in contemporary Language* has this rather strange offering, “Reveal who you are.” Heinz W. Cassirer is a very accomplished Jewish classicist and philosopher who taught for many years at Oxford, converted to Christianity, and then devoted himself to translating the New Testament renders the verse this way: “May your name be treated as *holy*.” See his *God’s New Covenant: A New Testament Translation*.

This meaning becomes even clearer when we examine the word in use. The commandment is to remember the Sabbath day to keep it *holy* (Exodus 20:8). That is to say, the Sabbath day is to be regarded and to be kept as different from other days. The instruction is *to consecrate* the priest (Leviticus 21:8). This also is the word *hagiazein*, and clearly the meaning is to set the priest apart so that he is different from other and from ordinary men, so that, we might now say, he is different from *laymen*. When we arrive at this stage, we can see that the meaning of the word *hagiazein* is beginning to acquire the meaning of reverence, for reverence is the characteristic attitude to that which is different, that which belongs to a sphere of being other than our own. There is an Old Testament passage (Numbers 20:1-11; cp. Deuteronomy 32:51), which well illustrates the meaning of this word. The story is that the children of Israel in their journeying in the wilderness were near to perishing of thirst, and were full of bitter complaints. God instructed Moses to take his rod and to speak to the rock and to tell the rock to give forth water. But Moses, instead of only speaking to the rock, in his anger and irritation, struck the rock. Then there comes the statement: “Because you did not believe in me to *sanctify* me in the eyes of the people of Israel, you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.” The verb *to*

*sanctify* is *hagiazen*. Moffatt translated it, “because you did not vindicate my honour,” and the Smith-Goodspeed translation is, “because you did not pay me my due honour.” Basically, the idea is that the action of Moses was an action of irreverence in that it implied disobedience to God and distrust of God; by, as it were, taking the law into his own hands, Moses had been guilty of irreverence towards God. To hallow is to hold in reverence. If we then pray, “Hallowed be thy name,” the prayer means “May you be given that unique reverence which your character and nature and personality, as you have revealed them to us, demand.” The prayer is that God may be given that reverence which His divine being demands and necessitates, and which, through His self-revelation, we well know to be due to Him. We get exactly the same idea in regard to Jesus in I Peter 3:15 where Peter bids his people: “Reverence (*hagiazein*) Christ as Lord.” To Jesus there must be given the reverence which his Lordship demands.<sup>3</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** Abraham Kuyper, that great Dutch theologian and statesman, declared that, “God’s name must be *hallowed*. And all indifference to the Name of the Lord is irreconcilably opposed to this hallowing of the Name of our God.”<sup>4</sup> In none of His works has God more eminently displayed the hallowing of His name than in the work of redemption. This brightest exhibition of God’s perfection, argues Herman Witsius, is displayed in the Gospel, “There, His love toward the human race, His wisdom, kindness, power, truth, justice and particularly the attribute of which we are now speaking, holiness, shine with surpassing brightness. His holiness appears in making provision for restoring to sinful man that image of Himself which had been shamefully effaced. His holiness appears in refusing to do this until he had expressed His abhorrence of sin, not only by the plainest language, but by deeds, by *exemplary punishment*. His holiness appears in requiring that, in order to the sanctification of His elect, the punishment should be endured by His own most holy Son, who freely offered Himself for that purpose, and in so impressive a manner, that the display of the strictest justice and purest holiness filled heaven and earth with amazement. His holiness appears in raising His Son, after the completion of His sufferings, from the dead, and *crowning Him with glory and honour*, by which it was made evident that the holy sacrifice of His Son was pleasing in his sight. [Finally], His holiness appears in transforming those who had been redeemed by the blood of his Son to His glorious image, *that He might be the first-born among many brethren*. These and similar views, there is reason to believe, were present to the mind of Christ when, immediately before proceeding to give full satisfaction to Divine justice, He broke out into these words: *Now is my soul troubled* by the contemplation of those dreadful sufferings which await me. *And what shall I say?* I should wish my feelings to be universally known, but it is difficult to find words to express them. *Father – save me from this hour*. If it be possible, let my sorrow pass away from me. *But for this cause came I unto this hour*. I know that these sufferings must be steadfastly endured. My office as Mediator was undertaken on the express condition of paying that price, to satisfy thy justice, and redeem my elect. And I retract not the condition. Therefore, *Father glorify thy name*. Display thy holiness and justice in the sufferings which I now cheerfully present myself to endure. But display those attributes likewise in setting me free, and in justifying my people, when satisfaction shall have been offered. *Then came there a voice from heaven saying, I have both glorified it*, by many evidences of my perfections in the government of the universe, and, latest of all, by giving thee to the world by the preaching of the gospel, and by the performance of those astonishing works by which the truth of the gospel has been confirmed. *And will glorify it again*, by accepting thy satisfaction, and by bestowing on thee and on thy people its righteous fruits. The amount of the whole is, that in the work of our redemption, the name of God is hallowed or sanctified in a remarkable manner. In this manner God sanctifies Himself.”<sup>5</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> As cited in J.M. Boice, *God the Redeemer: Foundations of the Christian Faith II* (IVP, 1978) p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1992), p. 145

<sup>3</sup> This section has been adapted with modifications from Wm. Barclay, *The Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer for Everyman* (Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 174-176.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *To Be Near Unto God* (rpt. P&R, 1979), p. 285.

<sup>5</sup> H. Witsius, *The Lord’s Prayer* (rpt. P&R, 1994), p. 191.