

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue 36

Prayer Part 4: Hallowed Be Thy Name

Sermon on the Mount Series Mt 6:9

by Maurice Barratt

One of the most crucial sentences in the Lord's Prayer - and one of the most misunderstood - is "Hallowed be thy name" (Matthew 6:9). I would like to try and clarify the meaning of this phrase. We need to decide two simple things: firstly, what "hallowed" means, and secondly what God's name signifies. What we are to do should then be self-explanatory.

"Hallowed" is basically the same word as "holy". A dictionary-type definition of "hallow" might be something like "reverence with godly fear". "Holy" means separate or different. God is "different". "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). God is entirely different from the world, and as Christians, we cannot possibly be the same as the world if we are going to be like God. We also must be different.

In this prayer Jesus is quoting the law of Moses. Exodus 20:7 says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain"; and in Leviticus 22:32 God says, "Neither shall ye profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel". We see from this that the opposite of hallowing God's name is profaning or defiling it.

God's Name

Names in the bible denote character. Jacob, for example, means "supplanter" or "twister". A more apt name would be hard to find. But in the bible the name is always apt. When God changes a person's character, he also changes their name. Thus when Jacob's character changed, after he had wrestled with the angel, God also changed his name to Israel, which means "a prince with God". But the name change only means that the character has changed.

Name can also denote power or authority. "Stop in the name of the law" has the power and authority of the government behind it. Casting out devils in the name of Jesus also means in the power and authority of Jesus. But it is not a formula that can be used at will by anyone. Neither is "Stop in the name of the law". If a policeman says it to me, I'll do it; but I won't if my 4-year-old boy says it to me, because he doesn't have the power and authority of the law. He's using the name, but he doesn't have the character. Likewise, using the name of Jesus isn't a formula. It's having the character of Jesus, the character that the name denotes, that's the important thing. The sons of Sceva used the right name, the name of Jesus, but they didn't have the character of Jesus, the demon laughed at them (Acts 19:13-16).

So the phrase “Hallowed be thy name” means “May God’s character be revered, revered, respected, not profaned or defiled”.

Practical Issues

How, practically speaking, do we hallow God’s name? The conventional thing to say is that we should not use the name of God or Jesus as a swear word or oath, or use it lightly. But hallowing God’s name means far more than this. If we claim that we are Christians, that God is our Father, then we hallow his name by displaying his character in our lives. To show another character is to profane and defile God’s name and character. The character that I show is a reflection on God’s character, because the only people God has on earth who can show his character are Christians, you and me.

My father brought me up well, and the Barratt name has a good reputation because of him. But if I become a criminal, I bring that good family name into disrepute. It doesn’t only reflect on me - it reflects badly on my father and brings dishonour to him and his name. And it’s the same with God, my heavenly Father. We represent his name, and our actions can be an accurate reflection of his character, or a slur on his character. We either hallow or profane his name.

Scriptural Illustrations

It is sobering to realise how easily we can profane God’s name and defile his character. I want to bring 5 illustrations from scripture.

1. The first mention of “profaning God’s name” in the bible is in Leviticus 20:1-3. It is in reference to the death sentence meted out to people who sacrificed their children to Molech, “pass them through the fire”. God said that in doing this they “defile my sanctuary, and profane my holy name”. Of course, today we do not sacrifice our children in the fire. Or do we? What about abortion, where (if I may speak frankly) a baby is vacuum-suctioned out of the womb and put into an incinerator?

2. When Moses was leading the Israelites through the wilderness, they complained because of the lack of water. God told Moses to strike the rock, and water came out of the rock for the people to drink (Exodus 17:2-6). Later a similar incident occurred; the people complained again for lack of water. This time God told Moses to “speak to the rock” (Numbers 20:8). But Moses instead spoke angrily to the people: “Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch water out of this rock?” And he struck the rock twice with his rod. Water came out, sure enough. But Moses had misrepresented God. God wasn’t angry at the people, but Moses made it seem like God was angry. Moses didn’t hallow God’s name, and it was so serious an offence to God that he would not let Moses into the promised land because of it. Not that God was angry against Moses, for the people had provoked him. Psalm 106:32 says that “it went ill with Moses for their sakes; because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips”. For their sakes God had to be strong against Moses, because he could not allow his holy name to be misrepresented before the people.

3. In Ezekiel 20:39 God says that idolatry pollutes his holy name. What is idolatry for us today? What about spiritual adultery - when we tell God how much we love him and him alone, and then prove by our actions and lifestyles how much we really love the world? If we are no different to the world, if we love the same things the world loves, we cannot hallow God's name, only profane it.

4. Sexual immorality and perversion profanes God's name. "A man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name" (Amos 2:7) Paul said that sexual immorality is a serious thing because it is the only sin which we commit against our own body - and our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit; therefore we defile that temple (see 1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

5. Rebellion at work and in the home is a serious matter, because it reverses God's order of authority and submission. Paul says that older women should teach the younger women to be "obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:3-5); and in 1 Timothy 6:1 he charges servants to be obedient to their masters "that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed". If we will not be obedient to authority and submit to the divinely ordained order, we are misrepresenting God. It may be a man who fails to take authority or a woman who refuses to come under it; it may be a worker who cheats his boss or a boss who exploits his workers. If they are Christians, they are all misrepresenting God, and dishonouring his name - blaspheming his name, as Paul so strongly puts it.

Conclusion

If we call God "Our Father", we must show his character in our lives, otherwise we bring his name, his character, into disrepute. So it's not a light thing to declare that we have a relationship with the most holy Being in the universe. It's a serious matter, with many consequences for us and for others who see and hear us.

The fear of God, which is "the beginning of wisdom", and which brings a sober reverence for God's name, is missing from many of our churches. But only this fear of God can produce the reverence which will cause our lives to submit in obedience to God's word, glorifying him and hallowing his name, displaying and reflecting his character in everything we say and do.

Experiences From Life

by Joanna Barratt

Made In God's Image - Don't Forget!

"I thought you said you were a Christian!" This was one phrase I was constantly hearing as a child. It used to frustrate and madden me so much, but try as I might I just couldn't help the fact that my conduct belied my words. It was the easiest thing in the world to talk about Jesus, my church and

my mothers' healing, and it didn't matter who I came into contact with - teacher or pupil - they all heard my witness, but my life just didn't match up and the teachers always brought my Christianity into question.

I must admit my standards were pretty poor. I knew for sure what was right. Sin was not just a word to me it was something I understood in depth and my little spirit yearned to be the most holy person that ever walked this earth. But for some reason I was perpetually lured into doing the most unholy things.

The Dare

There was one period in my childhood, I'd be around 13 years old, when my best friend from school and I used to go shopping on Saturdays. My friend was a Jewess who lived right opposite the local synagogue but never ventured in. She would show me at the end of a shopping expedition all the little knickknacks she had stolen from various stores and would dare me to do the same.

Unfortunately I was never one to shun a dare and even with heart pounding would commit the crimes not to lose face with her. But on one occasion God really pulled me up sharply.

I was perusing the make-up counter and eyed something which took my fancy. I put out my hand to slip it into my bag which was open in readiness when I spotted a mirror right in front of my offending hand. In an instant I knew that my deed could easily have been detected by anyone who was looking into the same mirror at that precise instant and my face began to burn. I suddenly felt a hand on my shoulder and knew that my fear was justified. I'd been caught by the store detective who had seen my action in that very minute and he asked me to accompany him to the office. I felt so ashamed. I can't express just how ashamed and embarrassed I felt at that moment. My heart pounded and my head exploded with the phrase, "... and you call yourself a Christian!" In the office I was asked to open my bag and sure enough the offending article was right there staring everyone in the face.

Scared

The store manager threatened to call the police so that he could press charges, but I pleaded and begged for him not to do so saying that I would never, ever do such a thing again. He could see that I wasn't a big time criminal and that this little incident had scared the living daylight out of me, so he decided to give me another chance promising that the next time I was caught stealing in his store he would call the police without hesitation. To receive this remission was wonderful for me as I'd had visions of being blazed all over the newspapers "... Born-again Christian steals from store!" for all the members of my church to see, but God had mercifully covered my sin.

The problem with being a Christian is that every time we make a wrong move, blame is shifted from us to our Christianity, as though God is to blame for our weakness instead of us. And the old nature seems bent on destroying Gods' reputation in whatever way it can.

Obligation

I was never ashamed of my faith in God and wanted to let everyone know about it. Indeed I often felt that it was my obligation to share my faith with anyone I came into contact with. I never had difficulty finding work because I was willing to do whatever the boss required. My difficulty was complying with the supervisor, who for one reason or another, didn't usually like me and would try to make me do something which wasn't necessarily in my contract. It was then that the skirmishes occurred, and in most cases, very soon after I'd been first hired. I was sacked from the first 5 or 6 jobs I had until out of desperation I worked for an agency who hired out temporary staff. At least I could move on of my own volition if the management and I didn't see eye to eye.

I hated the fact that my lifestyle perpetually contradicted my verbal testimony. I prayed earnestly that God would change me because I knew for a fact that every time I made a slip, lost my temper, or did anything out of order, it always reflected badly on God. I found that worldly people set a very high standard for those who profess to be Christians. They can tell you better than the Christians what we are and what we are not supposed to be and do. And when we fail their expectation we just become frauds in their eyes. They are continually looking for something real and if we don't come up with the goods, we are misrepresenting the very God we preach and yearn to share with them. Thank God, my disappointment in myself drove me to prayer. I desperately wanted change. I couldn't bear the thought that I would remain the same forever. And thank God, He has worked wonders in my life and brought me through many tests and trials which have all helped to knock me into the shape He purposed for me to be in. I've still a long way to go, but I can see tremendous progress has already taken place in me.

Blind

In fact, we can make such good progress that we can actually get to the place where we just don't know what else needs improving. Sounds ridiculous, I know, but I have met people who can quote the scripture "all have sinned" accepting that they are included in the "all", but for the life of them they cannot find any fault in their own life which they can pinpoint. Everyone around them can see their failures, but they are blinded to themselves and it doesn't even occur to them that they should pray about their shortcomings.

Some years ago I was shopping with a good friend of mine who was also a Christian. We came to a shelf where all the baking goods were stocked and one of the bags of raisins had broken open exposing some of the raisins. She put her hand out, grabbed a handful, and then laughingly tossed them into her mouth a few at a time. At first I had been quite stunned that she had done this in front of me because to my mind that was stealing. But because I didn't contest what she did, I found that the offence became less serious, and indeed became so unimportant that on future expeditions to the store I began to do the same, sometimes with raisins but more often with bags of sweets that had been ripped or burst. And it wasn't long before I began to specifically search out these broken bags in order to have a little "snack" during my shopping. I was so complacent about this that I even did it in front of my little children and passed them a sweet or two.

God Speaks

It seems unbelievable that stealing can be watered down to such an acceptable habit, but that's what happened and God began to speak to me about it. I only realised what a grip it had on me when I tried to break the habit and found that I couldn't. Sometimes I would pick up a sweet from an opened bag and my face would burn as though I'd committed a terrible crime, but I still carried on. I prayed about it because now I realised I couldn't stop doing it I realised how serious the situation was. I didn't want another showdown in the managers' office like I'd experienced as a child, but even that fear couldn't break this hideous habit.

Showdown

Alex, our dear friend and co-worker, thought he would give me a break one day and asked if he could take my 2 boys shopping with him. I was glad for him to take them but little did I know that this was the day for the showdown. Alex came home and very sternly said that Izaac had something to confess to his mummy and told him to tell me. Izaac looked very sheepish but didn't utter a word so Alex told me of his misdemeanour. Apparently Izaac had seen a bag of sweets opened on the shelf and had popped one into his mouth ... "don't you know that's stealing? If you continue doing things like that, one day the police will catch you and you'll end up in prison. Christians don't steal!"

Alex had been reprimanding Izaac in my earshot, but I felt it go right into my spirit - not for myself, but for my children. Had I been so thoughtless that my conduct was not only spoiling my Christianity, but also the lives of my children. I was lowering God's standard in my children's eyes and I felt bitterly humbled, but grateful that God was prepared to not only show me my fault, but also deal it the death blow that it needed in such a considerate way.

"Hallowed be Thy Name" is not only for us, but for those nearest and dearest who we care about, whose future development depends upon our testimony and witness, whether it be our children or our congregation. Remember, people set their standards by what we, personally, do. People don't judge Christianity - Christianity judges people!