

Pray like God is Holy
Ryan Beardsley
Summit Christian Fellowship
August 7th 2011

Matthew 6:9-13

Pray then like this:

**“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.**

¹⁰Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹Give us this day our daily bread,
¹²and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. ¹

This morning we get to look at the first part of what has been called “The Lord’s Prayer.” This prayer is recorded in both the gospel of Matthew and Luke. Jesus gives his disciples this prayer not for them to mindlessly repeat over and over again. In v. 9 Jesus says, “Pray like this.” Professor Grant Osborne at Trinity comments on this verse pointing out the significance of the phrase, “like this.” He writes that using this phrase “shows it provides the manner of praying more than the content of the prayer.”² Jesus doesn’t say, “repeat these words over and over.” Rather, he tells his followers that their prayers should be shaped like this prayer; they should be weighted with the same values found in this prayer. He teaches them this prayer to help them order their priorities in prayer. Prayer defined, then, is nothing more than petitions rooted in specific values or priorities. What are your priorities in prayer? What do you pray for the most?

My hope for this morning is that I could help to lay a foundation for all your praying. Whether it is corporately on Tuesday nights or Sunday morning, or during your ‘ceaseless’ prayers throughout the day, or during your disciplined private times of prayer (e.g., devo’s, prayer lists, quiet times).

We are going to see this morning that recognizing the holiness of God is essential for prayer. Praying like God is holy results in two outcomes: one has to do with the way

¹ *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Mt 6:9–13). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 227.

you see yourself and the other has to do with the way you see others.

That seeing the holiness of God is essential for prayer is clear from the context of Matthew 7. Jesus is teaching here that prayer, giving our money, and fasting must not be done to be “seen by others” or “praised by others” (v. 2). Rather praying, giving and fasting must be done knowing that, v. 4, 6, 18, “your Father, who is in secret, sees you.” Prayer, first and foremost, should be done *Corum Deo*, before the face of God.

“It is always a wretched bastardization of our goals when we want to win glory for ourselves instead of for him. When we arrange flowers in the church, or serve as an usher, or preach a sermon; when we visit the sick, or run a youth group, or attend prayer meeting—when we do any of these things, and more, with the secret desire that we might be praised for our godliness and service, we have corrupted the salvation we enjoy. Its purpose is to reconcile us to God, for God must be the center of our lives, the ground and the goal of our existence.”³

God is holy. Let’s talk about what it means to believe that God is holy, then let’s talk about the two effects this will have on you.

First, what does it mean to pray like God is holy? The first petition Jesus prays is in v. 9, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name.” Both halves of this verse point to the otherness and transcendence of God almighty. First, the Father we pray to is the one seated in ‘heaven’. Second, to pray that the name of God be ‘hallowed’ is to plead that others recognize that God’s name and character and person is replete with holiness.

R.C. Sproul writes, “I am convinced that . . . [the holiness of God] . . . is one of the most important ideas that a Christian can ever grapple with. It is basic to our whole understanding of God and of Christianity.”⁴

God is holy.

What makes God holy? One way to talk about the holiness of God is by listing what theologians have labeled God’s ‘incommunicable attributes’. That is, we could run through all the aspects of God’s character that we humans, though we are made in God’s image, do not and will not ever share with God. These include words like God’s simplicity—God is not part love and part mercy and part wrath and part wisdom, he is infinitely wise, loving, wrathful and merciful all at the same time. We could talk of God’s Aseity—God is dependent on nothing outside of himself. He exists and acts in pure freedom. We could speak of God’s Immutability—God is not

³ D. A. Carson, *Call to Spiritual Reformation, A: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 603 of 2732.

⁴ R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, 2nd ed. (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2000), 15.

growing or becoming or developing but is and always will be perfectly constant, three in one. We could speak of the Impassibility of God—nothing you or I ever do could change the character and purposes of God. He not only does not develop actively, but he does not change passively. Finally, we could speak of God's eternity—the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit always have and always will exist in inexplicably love and purity. But rather than telling you that God is holy and giving you these systematic definitions of this holiness, I want to, by God's help, show you the holiness of God.

God is holy. With the word of his mouth, the heavens and the earth came into being. God is holy. When Adam and Eve disobey God's command they are expelled from God's fellowship and presence. God is holy. In cursing the serpent, God promises that our salvation will come through the seed of the woman. God is holy. In order that all the earth would know that there is no one like the Lord he delivers his people out of Egypt by parting the Red sea only to let the waters collapse back on their enemies in terrible judgment. God is holy. God is holy. And because he is he speaks to Job out of the whirlwind saying, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" God is holy. By the word of God's son, the world is sustained and continues to be. God is holy. And when his son speaks, demons shriek, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Do not torment me!" (Mk 5:7). God is holy. When the 'burning ones' who circle his throne in heaven cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" the foundations of the heavenly thresholds shake at their voice." God is holy.

To pray, "our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name", is to recognize the blazing holiness of God. Does this note set the tone for all of your praying? This recognition does not come without leaving a twofold mark on your soul. First, it changes the way you view yourself. Second, it changes the way you view others. It changes the way you look inward and outward.

Praying like God is holy changes the way you view yourself. It humbles you and makes you aware of your great need for a mediator between heaven and earth. Where do we see this in the Lord's prayer? Here it is helpful to remember that Jesus is not teaching this prayer to those of other religions, he is teaching this to those who are following him. When Luke records this prayer in his gospel he notes the disciples question, "Lord, teach us to pray" (11:1). He teaches them to pray, "Our *FATHER* in heaven."

Now, scripture teaches that God is not the father of mankind in general. God is not everyone's father. This is actually a teaching of the liberal church from the early part of the 20th century. To say that God is the father of all mankind is to deny the relational rupture that exists between sinful humanity and the God of heavenly holiness. God is not the Father of all mankind. He is the creator of mankind. He is the God of all mankind. He is the Judge of all mankind. But he is not the Father of mankind. This is a familial term. The only settings in which God is referred to as Father in the Bible is when there is a special, saving, covenantal relationship

between God and a people—initiated by God’s electing love and kindness. For instance, in Psalm 68:5, David prays “Father of the fatherless. . . is God in his holy habitation.” Translation: God is a Father to his covenant people in Israel.

The first thing the LORD commands Moses to tell to the hard-hearted Pharaoh before the Exodus is “Thus says the LORD, ‘Israel is my firstborn son,’ and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve me’” (Exod 4:22-23).

Israel is God’s firstborn son! But God’s son as the people of Israel were not faithful to God. They rebelled against him in the wilderness. There they were judged for forty years, Moses and that entire generation. But God brought his people into the promised land. There he scattered their enemies and gave them a land and dwelled among them. But the people rejected God as Father and wanted to have a king like all the other nations. But in God’s mercy he raised up a King after his own heart to lead his people. Consecrating David as King he says to him, “You are my son, today I have begotten you” (Psalm 2). But as great as David was as the leader of God’s people, he also disobeyed the Lord. Knowing this, God promised that he would raise up David’s seed to rule on the throne as King forever. This either meant that there would be an endless succession of Davidic kings or that one day there would be one Son of David who would be God’s royal son, forever! But we have not seen a son of David take a physical throne, no less God’s royal throne in the land of Israel? Instead, we read about a carpenter out of Nazareth who is heralded King, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!” Only to be crucified in the heart of Zion! God, rightly, is the Father of Jesus.

Jesus is God’s son. No one knows the Father as Father except for the son. Which creates the question, how can you and I ever call this God Father, “Our Father”?

“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11-13).

By being joined together to God’s true son by a living bond of faith, receiving him, believing in his name, you and I are made sons and daughters of the living God. Paul writes, “. . . when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-5). This is the glorious doctrine of adoption!

Consider the sentence, “Our Father in Heaven” in light of a comment by John Calvin,

“Who would break forth into such rashness as to claim for himself the honor of a son of God unless we had been adopted as children of grace in Christ? He, while he is the true Son, has of himself been given us as a brother that what he has of his own by

nature may become ours by benefit of adoption if we embrace this great blessing with sure faith . . . Therefore, God both calls himself our Father and would have us so address him” (Institutes).

In other words, prayer has no power without the adopting work of God in Christ Jesus. Prayer does not work! Prayer, apart from a faith-filled union to God’s son, can have no efficacy before God. Prayer before heaven’s holiness in and of itself, is not holy, but must be sanctified with everything else defiled by the fall.

God finds no pleasure in prayer that does not recognize and cherish the mediator we have in Christ, the Son of God. This is why we pray in the name of Jesus Christ! For the sake of Jesus Christ!

Just as the parable of the tenants teaches in Matthew 21, to reject the master’s Son, is to reject the kindness of the master and to incite his wrath.

Prayer that recognizes the holiness of God is humble and lowly and embraces God’s kind provision of a Savior, our elder brother, Jesus Christ. Prayer changes the way we see ourselves, in other words. But praying like God is holy also changes the way we look outward at others, the way we see the world.

Where do we see this in the first line of the Lord’s prayer? “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name!” Listen to R.C. Sproul comment on this verse, “We often confuse the words ‘hallowed be your name’ with part of the address, as if the words were ‘hallowed *is* your name.’ In that case the words would merely be an ascription of praise to God. But that is not how Jesus said it. He uttered it as a petition, as the first petition. We should be praying that God’s name be hallowed, that God would be regarded as holy.”⁵

Being able to address the God of heaven as Father through Jesus Christ necessary leads to an all-encompassing passion to see the fame of God’s holy name spread over the earth as the waters cover the seas.

The late professor Ed Clowney wrote that, “No prayer demands more meditation than the prayer Jesus gave his disciples: ‘Hallowed by thy name’ (Matt. 6:9).”⁶

Before further explanation, however, we need to address the question, “What does it mean to see the Father’s name hallowed?” As Sproul suggests, to plead that God’s name be hallowed or sanctified is to pray that God, in a way that only almighty God can, would cause people like you and me to regard his name as uncommon and holy. That is, for people to regard, from the heart, God’s name as it is.

⁵ Ibid., 15-16.

⁶ Edmund P. Clowney, *Christian Meditation* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1979), 81.

What is God's name?

In Biblical times, names, rather than just sounding sweet or managing to match the last name of parents, were given because of the meaning that accompanied them. Your name was supposed to say something about who you were as a person.

When God reveals his name to his covenant people we shouldn't be surprised that God's very character was being revealed. In declaring his name to Moses and the people of Israel he was, in effect, making *himself* known.

In Exodus 34, after the people of Israel sin by worshipping a golden calf at the bottom of Mt. Sinai, God encounters Moses and commands him to present himself before the Lord at the top of the mount. He says to Moses, "No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain." Obeying God, Moses ascended the mountain. V. 5 reads, "the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and **proclaimed the name of the LORD**. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty. . ."

The revelation of God's name is the revelation of God himself. Fast forward with me. When Paul writes in Philippians 2 that God has super-exalted Jesus to the right hand of the Father and has given him the name that is above every name, what does this mean for us as we pray, "Father in heaven, hallowed be your name"? It means, at least, that to pray such a thing is to pray for the advance of the gospel, the news about God's crucified and resurrected son, who is the revelation of the name of God. For whoever confesses Jesus as LORD—Yahweh, God's covenant name—will be saved.

To summarize, how does praying like God is holy, that is—praying the first line of the Lord's prayer, change the way we view others? The answer, it orients all of our prayers to plead for the advance of the name of God's holy name: Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, pray like God is holy! When you pray, do you recognize the blazing holiness of God? You do and you will if your prayer is characterized by a humble recognition of your adoption into the family of God through Jesus. You do and will if your prayer is characterized by a demand that the name of God bestowed on the person of Jesus Christ be regarded as wholly other until all creation cries, "There is no one like the LORD."

Discussion Questions:

1. What clues from chapter 6 show us that recognizing God's holy presence in worshipful activities like prayer, fasting and giving is utterly essential?

2. How does believing in the power of prayer in and of itself possibly overlook the holiness of God?
3. How, according to the sermon, does prayer depend on the doctrine of adoption? Where is the doctrine of adoption in Christ found in the first line of the Lord's prayer? If the doctrine of adoption is true, how does God view those who believe in Jesus?
4. How could it possibly be loving for you to have the most fundamental request in every one of your prayers to be that God's name would be hallowed in others' lives? Is loving someone and praying that God's name be hallowed in their life at odds with each other?
5. God's name gets at the very character of God. It discloses who God is in himself. What light does this shed on everything that Jesus did and taught in "the name of the Father"? See . . .
6. How should praying like God is holy practically change the way you pray on a daily basis?