

“Hallowed Be Your Name” — Matthew 6:9

When a German manufacturer named Benz decided to name a car after his daughter, Mercedes, he made her name famous — a worldwide synonym for quality and excellence. In 1790 the United States Congress forever honored the name of the first President by naming the new capital “Washington”. Some of us are named after relatives, friends or heroes of our parents. They had such respect for Grandma Marie or Uncle Al that you got the name.

When Jesus taught his followers to pray, he taught them to honor God the Father by praying, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name.” Names had significance in ancient cultures. It was believed that a person was the same as the name and that the name described the person.

Naomi was an Old Testament character whose name meant “pleasant”. But she suffered famine, unemployment, widowhood and the death of both her sons. So, she changed her name to Mara meaning “bitter”. Jesus stopped calling his disciple Simon and started calling him Peter, meaning “rock”, and the descriptive name stuck.

In American when we first meet someone we tend to say, “What’s your name?” as if the person and the name are different from one another. In ancient days it would probably be more likely that the person would say, “Who are you?” as if the person and the name were the same.

Those of us who have uncommon names understand this concept a little more easily. If your name is Bob or Bill or Jane or Joan you probably don’t think of your name as exclusively yours. You grew up calling other people by your name. But those of us with unusual names like Leith tend to think of our names as private property. The chances are that I am the

only Leith you’ve ever heard of. No last name is needed for identification. Leith and I are the same. (I’ve only met one other Leith in my life . . . and I still haven’t forgiven that person’s parents for giving my name to . . . *her!*)

Since there is only one God, his name should never be shared. We don’t name our children “God”. We have never met a God Jones or a God Smith. Besides sounding sacrilegious, it’s just plain stupid. There is only one God! God and God’s name are the same. When we speak or think the name “God” we cannot distinguish from the person God.

Although the name is the same, the treatment is not always the same. People often treat God as if he were not God. Many say God’s name in a very ungodly fashion. The expression “Oh my God” has become a routine part of everyday speech. When someone wins the Publisher’s Clearinghouse Sweepstakes or scratches a bumper on the car or sees a friend they haven’t seen for awhile the common re-

sponse is, “Oh my God!” God has been trivialized. He has been ignored. He has been dishonored.

We have seen an astonishing change in America in less than a generation. Thirty years ago people

debated the existence of God. Rarely do I ever hear anyone claiming to be an atheist anymore. Rather, many just don’t talk or think about God at all. He is irrelevant — sort of like two dollar bills; we know they exist, but they don’t make any day-to-day difference in our lives.

How different from ancient Jews! They not only believed in God but God mattered to every detail of life. They considered God’s name so holy that they wouldn’t even say it. We think that the Old Testament name for God was Jehovah or Yahweh, but we really have no sure

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understanding of the pronunciation because God's name was considered too special to say.

Christians are those who claim the name of God. We pray to "Our Father in heaven" and say that we are his children. We care what people think about "Our Daddy in heaven". We care about how his name is used.

A group of teenage boys was hanging out one night and one of them suggested that they do something that was not only dangerous, it was illegal. All agreed to this criminal adventure except one who hesitated and then refused. "What's the matter? Are you afraid that your dad will hurt you?" he was taunted. "No," he said, "I'm afraid I'll hurt my dad."

As God's sons and daughters we care and we are careful because we don't want to hurt our Dad in heaven. We want to keep his name looking good.

"Hallowed" is not a word most of us use except on the last day of October every year. Even then, most of us probably have no idea what "Halloween" means. "Hallowed" means "holy". Halloween is the "holy/hallowed evening before All Hallows Day which is November 1. Hallows were holy people or "saints". November 1 on ancient calendars was All Saints Day. So, "hallowed be your name" means "holy be your name".

But what does "holy" mean? Holy means different, but it's a good kind of different. A holy place is a different kind of place — a good different kind of place. A holy person is a different kind of person — a good different kind of person. A holy day ("holiday") is a different kind of day — a good different kind of day. "Hallowed" means holy and that means different. God and God's name are to be hallowed — different — from anybody else's name, but a good kind different.

Maybe we would understand better if we used today's terms. Jesus is telling us to pray that God will be sacred and special to us, that God will be central to our lives.

Picture your life as a drawing on a piece of

paper. There are thousands of pieces. Some are relationships like parents, children, spouse or friends. Others are possessions like cars and houses and cameras. Then there are activities like sports or job or hobbies. There are bright spots and dark spots, whole pieces and broken jagged pieces. What's in the center?

Some people put their jobs in the middle and everything else revolves around work. Lots of others put money or drugs or sex or self in the center. Recently I heard someone described as having a black hole at the center of his life. This man is empty in the middle!

Those who pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name", are asking God to be in the middle of their lives. God and his name are to be central, holy, different, special and sacred so that all the rest of life completely revolves around God. God is Number 1!

But there is something very important to point out here. It is that we cannot put God in the center! Only God can do that. All we can do is ask. That's why "hallowed be your name" is the first petition of the Lord's Prayer. This prayer asks God to please be God in our lives.

Take the case of a couple that has split up but is still legally married. She left. He goes to see her and asks her to come home and be his wife. Legally, she is already his wife. But he's asking her to come home and function as a wife in his life.

Or, do you remember the story that Jesus used of the prodigal son who abandoned his father and his father's house? After a disastrous experience he went home and asked his father to be his father again. Legally he already was, but the son asked him to bring a father's relationship back into his life.

God is legally God. He and his name are the same. He is the Supreme Commander and owner of the universe. He is God. But, when we ask him to "hallow" his name in our lives we are asking him to be God to us. We are asking God to be God in our lives. We are asking him to be more than a spouse or a parent. "Our

Father in heaven, be God, be the Supreme Commander, be central in my life.”

Wills and trusts and powers of attorney represent a fascinating part of our American legal system. A trust is a legal entity into which you can put everything you own — your money, your house, your car and all other possessions.

Then you name a trustee who controls all you have. There are two kinds of trusts. With revocable trusts you can change your mind. An irrevocable trust means that once you have given control you can never take it back.

Power of attorney is a legal document allowing you to authorize another person to act on your behalf. That person can enter contracts and buy and sell property on your behalf.

A living will is another legal device whereby you sign over to someone else the decision to give or withhold medical care for you. It could literally be a matter of your life or death.

There are some obvious guidelines to such powerful legal actions. You want to think carefully before you decide. You want to choose someone you absolutely trust to spend your money, sign your name or determine your life or death. And, the person has to agree to be your trustee or attorney or guardian. The decision to take such a powerful role in your life is finally theirs and not yours.

God is legally God.

When we pray “hallowed be your name”, we are signing everything over to God. We are saying, “God, please be *God* in my life.” We are turning control of our money, job, relationships and everything else to him. It’s permanent. It is an irrevocable trust. We are empowering him to sign our names and even determine our life and death. We recognize that the final decision is his, not ours. We can ask him to “hallow” his name in our lives, but it’s up to him.

What do you think? Can you trust God that much? Are you ready to invite him to be the center of your life? If the answer is yes, then you can pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name . . . in me!”

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