

Prayer in the Shorter Catechism (6)

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 6 and verse 9. This then is how you should pray, Jesus says. Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Hallowed be your name. This is the first of all put into our mouths because of all things it should lie nearest to our hearts.

Thus says one commentator concerning this first petition of the Lord's Prayer, hallowed be your name. This is the first of all put into our mouths because of all things it should lie nearest to our hearts.

Let me begin our study this evening with a question. What lies nearest your heart? What is most precious to you?

Is this not what you pray for the most? That which is most precious to you? Well, in the prayer he taught his disciples, Jesus invites us to place God's glory and the holiness of his name first in our prayers and nearest to our hearts.

[1 : 32] Our Westminster fathers asked the question, what do we pray for in the first petition? which they answered in their catechism, in the first petition, which is hallowed be your name, we pray that God would enable us and others to glorify him in everything by which he makes himself known and that he would make all things work out for his glory.

So our fathers in Westminster, including the Scottish delegates, Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie and others, place the glory of God and the holiness of name, holiness of his name, first in our prayers and in our hearts.

Now before we detail the ways in which this particular petition works, I want us to notice some very, very important words our fathers inserted into their answer. We pray that God would enable, that God would enable.

It is not natural for us as human beings to have the glory of God nearest to our hearts as most precious to us. It is natural for us rather to make other things more important.

Ourselves, our families, our reputations, our comforts, our health, to name but a few. It is only when God moves in our hearts by his spirit and changes our priorities that he becomes more precious to us than silver or gold, as the song goes.

[3 : 29] And it's only when God moves in our hearts by his spirit and fills us with his enabling strength that we shall be able to glorify him as we should.

In John 15, 5, Jesus says, apart from me, you can do nothing. No, nothing.

You cannot even bring any glory to my name apart from me. But in Mark 9, 23, Jesus says, everything is possible for him who believes.

Yes, even that we should bring glory to God. And so before we pray for anything else, we pray for what was once called God's enabling grace, God's strength for his name to be near our hearts and for us to glorify him.

Well, having made that clear, that even our desires and our abilities to glorify God's name comes from him, I want us to consider this first petition of the Lord's Prayer under three brief headings.

[4 : 44] Focus, fullness, and fame. And as we're going through this study this evening and then later as we turn to prayer, keep on asking yourself this question.

What lies nearest to my heart? What is most precious to me? And then pray, Lord, may it be your glory.

May it be your glory. First of all then, focus, focus. You will notice that the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, hallowed be your name, calls upon us to change our focus in prayer.

Now let's be honest, our prayers are dominated by requests both for ourselves and for other people. We have prayer diaries filled with personal requests or perhaps even requests for other

Christians.

That's the focus of our prayers, me and mine, them and theirs. That's not a criticism as much as it is a statement of fact. But the thing is that this first petition of the Lord's Prayer, that prayer Jesus taught us, contains no reference to us at all.

[6 : 05] It is entirely focused on God. Hallowed be your name. Not hallowed be my name or hallowed be their name, but hallowed be your name.

Jesus invites us to change our focus and to place the glory of God and the holiness of his name first. To be more passionate about his reputation than our reputation.

And if you think about it, there can be no higher honor or no greater prayer given that our greatest good is found in God's highest honor.

But it's God's glory that must come first. Yes, even before that which we may perceive as being our own good. Because God may be glorified more in our dying than in our living.

He may be more glorified in our realities than in our daydreams. Only he knows what is for our lasting good. And therefore, by praying for his name to be hallowed, we are surrendering our wills to his.

[7 : 24] In Philippians 1, verse 20, the apostle Paul prays for Christ to be exalted in his body, whether by life or by death. It's Christ's glory that comes first, not ours.

And it's in God's glory we find our highest joy. The change in focus is from putting our needs and the needs of others first and replacing it with the glory of God and the holiness of his name.

So let me ask you, are you getting bored in prayer at all? Bored of praying for the same old things in the same old way. Let me suggest that you begin praying for a change in focus.

And that as the Holy Spirit brings the hallowing of God's name more into your focus, you will move from boredom to joy, from monotony to music and prayer.

More important still, you'll give God glory by putting him first in your prayers and nearest to your heart. Focus. That's the first thing.

[8 : 43] Second, fullness. Fullness. Well, I guess for us a name isn't a big deal. It's not unimportant, but it doesn't, there's no meaning normally attached to our names.

But in the Middle Eastern settings, names were a very big deal indeed. Because they were filled with meaning. Someone's name was a summary of their character, personality, or deeds.

In my home village back up north, there were many men called Donald McDonald. So people distinguished these various Donald McDonald's by giving them nicknames.

These nicknames being something unique about that person. The kind of person they were. Something they had done. Something that they were joined with.

The name of God is his character in all his glorious attributes. It is the summary of who he has revealed himself to be to us.

[9 : 57] As one commentator writes, God's name is his nature as made known to a man. God's name is his nature as made known to a man.

That's why the Westminster Fathers talk about glorifying God in everything by which he makes himself known. Because God makes himself known in his love and his justice and his righteousness and his truth and his mercy and his majesty and his wisdom and his glory and his goodness and his compassion.

For us, a name means relatively nothing. But when it comes to the Lord's prayer, the name of God means everything. Now, when we begin to understand that this is what is meant by the name of God, that name which we pray to be hallowed, it's like a light switch goes off in our heads.

The focus of our prayers broadens and deepens. We go from seeing in one dimension to seeing in three, four, or even in ultra 4K HD.

Our range of vision as human beings, I believe David Lockington can correct me, is on average about 120 degrees. The simple goat has a range of vision which is on average 320 degrees.

[11 : 26] The Christian man or woman who understands that the name of God is not simply what he's called but who he is develops a richer, broader, deeper, deeper, and more joyful prayer life.

Now we could defend this truth in many different ways but let me take you back to the beginning of the Lord's prayer, the basics, the mechanics of the Christian prayer.

To whom are we praying? Yes, of course, to God but more particularly, Jesus tells us that we are to think of God as Father as we pray.

So we're his children and he's our Father. So whose name is this we are praying to be hallowed, it's the name of our Father. Whose attributes are we studying to know and understand those of our Father?

In one sense, all we are doing by praying for God's name to be hallowed is that we would get to know our loving Heavenly Father better about who he is, about what he's done.

[12:47] I clearly remember that after my father died, many people who knew him came up to me to tell me stories about the kind of man they knew him to be.

I'll never forget one person who said to me, your father was a real gentleman. He was a real gentleman. Now, I'd never thought of him in those terms before.

To me, he was simply dad. As well as being profoundly thankful and proud of my father at that point, I felt sad that it took until after his death for me to think of him in this way as a gentleman. That I didn't take every opportunity to know him as fully or as well as I might have done while he was still alive. The name of God is the fullness of who God is and praying his name is praying in the fullness of our father.

And the wonderful thing is that our heavenly father shall never die. There is always more to know about him. There are always more opportunities for us to know him better.

[14:09] Fullness. And then lastly and briefly, fame. Fame. Focus, fullness, fame. At the heart of this petition is the word hallowed.

Rather mysterious word, hallowed be your name. The word hallowed, according to the dictionary means to be greatly revered or honoured.

The Westminster Fathers, they talk about us and others glorifying God. Us and others glorifying God. Where glorifying God is simply another way of saying hallowing God.

And what at its root the fathers had in mind was the fame of God. the knowledge of his glory and his dignity and his majesty, that both we and others would know him in the fullness of who he is, in his love, in his compassion, his righteousness, and so on.

It isn't natural for us to have the fame of God nearest to our hearts as most precious to us. This is exactly what the Lord's trade is calling upon us to be and to do.

[15:32] To stand beside John the Baptist as he pointed to the Lord Jesus and said, he must increase and I must decrease. That any one of us on this Zoom call this evening should live entirely for the fame and the glory and the honor of God is the definition of a life well lived.

After all, man's chief end, our primary purpose, as defined by question one of the catechism, is to glorify God, to hallow God, and to enjoy him forever.

the first petition of the Lord's prayer, hallowed be your name, is our reason for living turned into prayer. We want the fame of our heavenly father in all his glorious attributes to be famous, not just by others, but perhaps more importantly in the first instance by us.

we want all the glorious features of who God is to be deeply imprinted in our minds and also in our hearts and our experiences, our words, our wills, and our works.

We want everything about us to ooze forth the flavor of godliness and Christlikeness. So let me conclude by urging us to pray for three things which in so doing we are praying for the hallowing of the name of God.

[17:12] First of all, pray for the worship of God's church. Pray for the worship of God's church. Pray that as we come together to worship God in song and praise that we would do so in spirit and truth.

That God would receive all the glory from the worship of his church. That is all the individuals who make up the fellowship of faith. It is for him we sing and it's him we praise.

I wonder if this is something you ever do. You ever pray for the worship services of our church?

Yes, even before you join them, that God's name would be hallowed.

God's God's God's God's God's God's church. Pray for the service of God's church. We express, we glorify God rather when we express the love of Christ in practical ways both to each other and to the communities in which we live.

People receiving the benefit of our service give glory to God even as Jesus said they would in Matthew 5 16 let your light shine before men so that they may see your good deeds and give thanks to your father who is in heaven.

[18:38] So let's get involved in and let's pray for our works of pastoral fellowship and mercy ministries knowing that ultimately the focus in them is the glory of God and not our own.

And then lastly and perhaps most importantly of all let's pray for the evangelism of God's church.
The evangelism of God's church.

The greatest glory we can bring to God is by bringing sinful men and women at present in rebellion against their God and maker back to him through the gospel.

God's name is hallowed as men and women from every part of the world and every people group in the world. They fall to their knees before him and declare Jesus Lord.

There is the vision of the mission of the church. That every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[19 : 50] the first and most important reason we tell other people about Jesus and his cross and his gospel is because of the glory of God and the holiness of his name because these things lie near our hearts.

If you ever wanted to proclaim your love for Jesus your desire to be more like him your passion to make him known it's here in this four word prayer hallowed be your name.

It's your declaration that Jesus and his glory are nearer to your heart than anything else in this world. In the gospel strength that Christ alone can give may this be true for us all.

Amen. Amen.