

Sermons on Matthew

The Lord's Prayer

Part Three
Our Father in Heaven
Matthew 6:9b

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
10/24/2004*

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In this __ manner, therefore, pray:

_ Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your _ name.

¹⁰□ Your kingdom come.

_ Your will be done

On earth __ as *it is* in heaven.

¹¹□ Give us this day our __ daily bread.

¹²□ And __ forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

¹³□ And do not lead us into temptation,

But __ deliver us from the evil one.

__ For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory
forever. Amen. -(Matthew 6:9-13)

Preface

Jesus was asked to give instruction on prayer. He responded by giving us the Lord's Prayer. We are now seeking to develop a more profound understanding of the words He has taught us to bring to God in prayer. This morning we will direct our attention to the invocation and first petition, "**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.**"

In these eight simple words there is a great deal which wars against our natures, especially in our present culture.

Our

The first word, "our", is itself counter-culture. We live in a very individualistic society. It is commonplace for Christians to reject, or at least resist, the notion that they are to think of themselves as part of a community.

This is not to say that we are not individuals. We have our own thoughts, our own ideas, and our own possessions, and there is certainly a personal and individual aspect of our relationship with God through Christ. But this individualism is not to be pursued at

the expense of our identity as part of a body, a temple, or branches which flow from the vine who is Christ.

At its heart, individualism is self-centered. It has self as its highest priority. Jesus spent a great deal of time by Himself. One might say He was the greatest individual who ever lived. Yet even Jesus viewed Himself as part of a community. His baptism marked Him out as part of that community. He was numbered with the transgressors (Mark 15:28). The author of Hebrews writes of Jesus:

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,⁻¹²⁻ saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You." (Hebrews 2:11, 12)

So in a certain sense, Jesus "in the midst of the assembly" is a member of the church. This very defined relationship — that of church membership (Hebrews 13:17) — is viewed as quite expendable in today's 'Jesus and I meet at the beach' mentality. If you're a Christian, you're needed in Christ's church. You have a role — a responsibility — which ought to be pursued and enjoyed.

Father

The second aspect of the invocation which wars against our present culture is that of fatherhood. Jesus teaches us to approach God as a Father. Let us appreciate the intimacy of these words. What loving familiarity we enjoy with God Almighty. God is not to be viewed as a cold impersonal force. He is to be viewed as a *daddy*. From our infancy, He loves, nurtures, instructs, provides for, and coddles His babies. This was not merely a New Testament concept.

***As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him.*¹⁴ For He *knows* our frame; He remembers that we *are* dust. (Psalm 103:13, 14)**

Will you not from this time cry to Me, My Father, You *are* the guide of my youth?... (Jeremiah 3:4)

Later in this very sermon, Jesus will build upon this concept by rhetorically asking,

**If you then, __being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!
(Matthew 7:11)**

Dumbbell Dads

Biblical concepts of fatherliness are on the verge of extinction in our present culture. Instead of fathers being those who love, nurture, instruct, provide for, and coddle their children, they are often—either in fact or fiction—absentees. Dads flee the scene, sometimes geographically, other times functionally.

Dumbbell dads are the rage. It has become ‘box-office’ for dads to be portrayed as gluttonous, adolescent morons, rather than nurturing and catechizing leaders and instructors. And it naturally follows that these dumbbell dads are expendable. It is no longer merely the radical feminist who seeks to raise a child in father-free environment. Major prime-time television shows are replete with leading ladies seeking to have or to adopt children without the necessity of a pesky dad.

Furthermore, the attack on fatherhood comes from the homosexual community. This would more accurately be considered an attack on biblical parenthood—mother and father alike. In God’s economy, the ideal paradigm is a mom and a dad. One must argue that this paradigm is the environment which produces the healthiest children — healthiest in terms of morals, security, productivity, spiritual and psychology development.

Certainly we must recognize there are certain variables, beyond the control of the family, which result in the absence of a mom or a dad. But the notion of a father who leads, instructs, and provides, and of a mother who nurtures and stabilizes the household is the model that produces a godly, fruitful, and dynamic society. This is all under attack. And perhaps the greatest damage is how this perverts our perceptions of our Father in heaven.

Contemporary God

There is another aspect of the Father that comes to mind when Jesus pronounces the invocation: the Father in *heaven*. This statement borders on being oxymoronic. If 'father' gives us an image of closeness and intimacy, 'heaven' should give us an image of distance and authority.

Heaven in the strictest sense is not to be thought of as the place where the Father lives "**since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him**" (2 Chronicles 2:6). We are rather to think of heaven as a place from which He reigns, for he says, "' *Heaven* **is My throne, And earth is My footstool.**" (Acts 7:49)

So the phrase "**Father in heaven**" gives us a sense of His *immanence* (that He dwells in and amongst us) and His *transcendence* (beyond the normal range of perception). So He is the God who *is here* and He is the God *out there*.

In light of this immanence, Solomon gives us instructions in prayer.

Do not be __rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God *is* in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words __be few. (Ecclesiastes 5:2)

Today's church, with its desire to be psychologically and culturally significant, often borders dangerously close to blasphemy when it comes to omitting this transcendent and austere aspect of God's character. Let us be reminded that God is immutable (He does not change) as we look at but one passage regarding how He is to be (or not to be) approached.

Then Nadab __and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, __each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered __profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. ⁻²⁻ So _fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. ⁻³⁻ And Moses said to Aaron, " _This is what the LORD spoke, saying: ' _By those _who come near Me I must be regarded as holy... ' (Leviticus 10:1-3a)

This is the same God who we approach today as we stroll in late to church with coffee in our hands.

Crossing a Line

Jesus has granted us access, and we have developed a cavalier disposition. We are to mature past this childish outlook. Occasionally, we read of accounts where God's holiness is ignored, and the consequences can be dire. Bill Parkinson recounts a story of watching a friend's temperamental dog. After a few days the dog began to feel comfortable with Bill. He let Bill pet him. They even played a bit. But the tenuous nature of his relationship with the dog became evident when Bill decided to pick him up—Bill almost lost a limb. There was a line that was not to be crossed, and Bill found it. I fear that we, as a church, have crossed a line concerning God's transcendence that has made the church the impotent mass that it currently is.

Hallowed Be Your Name

In light of the above, it is quite easy to see how this leads to the first petition—“**Hallowed be your Name.**” That we have to pray this should indicate to us that it is not something that automatically happens. A similar thought applies to the Third Commandment. God's name is synonymous with God Himself. To call upon the name of the Lord is to call upon the Lord. Is it not interesting how this petition is at the top of the list?

It makes me wonder how far back God in heaven has pulled His bow of judgment against today's church with its tricky slogans and gimmicks. *Try God* and *What Would Jesus Drink, or Drive, or Eat*, are man's feeble effort at making God culturally significant? Sadly, the God presented in much of modern western evangelicalism has become benign. The name of God is described as his 'holy Name' more often than all other adjectives combined. But because we present and seek a God whose chief design is to be the answer to our social, psychological, and political problems — over and above the God who is holy — He has become none of the above.

Let it be our prayer that God hallow His Name! And may He grant us the wisdom to discern those things in our culture and in our own natures which would seek to detract from that which should hold the highest place in our hearts and minds—the Holy Name of God.

Questions for Study

1. What person is the Lord's Prayer given? Why do you suppose this is (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is contained in the notion of thinking of God as a Father (pages 3, 4)?
3. How is the concept of fatherhood under attack (page 4)?
4. Contrast the idea of Father and heaven (page 5).
5. What does it mean that the Father is in heaven (page 5)?

6. What is God's transcendence and how is it compromised in our current contemporary church culture (pages 5, 6)?
7. What does "God's Name" mean (page 6)?
8. What does it mean for God's Name to be hallowed (page 6)?
9. What are some examples in today's Christian culture where the holiness of God's name is compromised (pages 7, 8)?