

“When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name....” Luke 11:2

When we begin to dig into the sayings of Jesus we find that they are loaded with meanings at deeper and deeper levels. We don't always appreciate that because we are separated by time and culture. This quote above is like this. It uses a word we don't often use in our language and another word that had multiple meanings in Jesus language. The phrase “hallowed be your name” is very rich in its cultural context, and has an important lesson for us to learn as Christians.

In ancient thinking, a person's name was connected with his authority and reputation. One wouldn't think God's reputation could be an issue. However, a central theme of the bible is that His reputation should be growing greater and greater throughout the world. God began by teaching the nation of Israel, teaching them to be teachers throughout the world. He told them to be a "kingdom of priests" and a "light to the nations" so that the world may know about the only true God (Ex. 19:6).

When Jesus came, God made His identity clearer, and sent His followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). God's intent was that His reputation would spread over the entire earth and all people would come to know Him for who He is. God's reputation (name) is of critical importance for His plan to redeem the entire world. People can't know and follow God's *name* unless someone who knows and upholds His ideals tells them and displays it for them.

The rabbis of Jesus' time closely studied the scriptures and observed that out of all of the Ten Commandments, only one carried with it an ominous threat of punishment. "*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.*" (Ex. 20:7 NASB)

The rabbis pointed out that the command literally says, "You shall not lift up the name (reputation) of the Lord for an 'empty thing'". They interpreted that to mean, doing something evil in the name of God, which would give God a bad reputation. In Lev. 19:12, this is called "*profaning the name of God*", and is referred to as *Hillul HaShem* in Hebrew. It means to do something evil and associate the name of God with it, which is a sin against God himself who suffers from having His reputation defamed. This is why "profaning the name of God" is considered an extremely serious sin.

When a terrorist shouts out "*Allah Akbar*" (God is great) before carrying out acts of murder, the response of the world is to say, "What a wicked God you serve who commands you do such terrible things?"

This occurs in all religions, including Christianity as well. When fraud or immorality is discovered in ministries or televangelists, it hardens many people's understanding of the message Jesus brought. Even though the Crusades happened almost a thousand years ago, they are still remembered with hatred because Christians murdered Jews and Muslims in the name of Christ. God's reputation in the world is slandered, by this type of event and evangelism is seriously hindered because of the evil actions of those who falsely bear His name (reputation).

This can even happen in the lives of average people. There are thousands of stories about people who were treated unfairly by church members, and have never returned to the church; saying "I don't want anything to do with you or your God." Evil actions can damage the reputation of God in the world, but good actions can bring Him honor. This is called "sanctifying God's name" (*Kiddush HaShem*). This means to live in such a way as to bring God glory, like when Jesus said, "*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*" (Mat 5:16) We think of spreading the gospel through information, but the point is that the world is watching how we live our lives. Each of us is easily capable of profaning God's name, a very serious sin indeed.

The ultimate example of sanctifying God's name is Jesus himself. As God incarnate, his death on the cross has proclaimed to the entire world that God is a merciful, self-sacrificial God. No one who believes that Jesus is God himself can claim that God is cruel or uncaring because Jesus has proven otherwise through his own actions. Because of his great sacrifice, God's reputation has expanded to the ends of the world.

As Jesus' followers, we are required to be like Him. *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* (1 Peter 2:9) We need to be always aware that the world is watching, so that our actions always reflect the holiness and love of the God that we serve. We are under constant scrutiny whether we are aware of it or not; so let us always try to be a favorable witness to the Holy Name whose image we bear. It is paramount that we “walk softly” on the hearts of those we encounter each day.