

Exegesis of the Gospel of Matthew

Dr. Bruce Beck, Spring 2019

Mako Nagasawa, Assignment 4, February 14, 2019

Matthew 6:9, “Hallowed be Thy name”

Text:

The Greek text of Matthew 6:9c reads:

Ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου
Hallowed be the name of you (Matthew 6:9c)

Ἀγιασθήτω is a Verb: Aorist, iMperative, Passive – 3rd person Singular

Key Question:

One question I seek to answer in relation to Matthew 6:9c is: How do we, or how does God, make God’s name holy? Theologically, isn’t the name of God the Father already holy and sanctified? Is there something we do to make his name more holy by asking?

Greek-English Lexicons:

Danker-Bauer

The root word, *agiazō*, means “make holy; consecrate; sanctify... of things: set them aside or make them suitable for ritual purposes.” Indeed, the LXX uses the word *agiazō* in the context of setting apart, making special:

ἀγιάσον μοι πᾶν πρωτότοκον
sanctify to me every first-born (Ex.13:2)

αὐτοῖς ἀγιάσαι αὐτούς
you will sanctify them (Ex.29:1; cf.29:27, 33, 36, 37, 44)

φύλαξαι τὴν ἡμέραν τῶν σαββάτων ἀγιάζειν αὐτήν
Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it (Dt.5:12)

Κύριον αὐτὸν ἀγιάσατε
Sanctify the lord (Isa.8:13)

Thayer

Thayer, however, suggests that there is a perceptual difference, an increase of esteem for the object in question without an actual (ontological?) increase. Thayer says of *agiazō*, “to make agion, render or declare sacred or holy, consecrate... to render or *acknowledge to be venerable*, to hallow.” (italics mine)

Thayer might answer the theological question posed by the Lord’s prayer by responding that Jesus is encouraging us to pray that people would *acknowledge*, or *perceive*, God’s name differently? But is this the way Matthew uses *agiazō*?

Thayer has a slight advantage over Danker-Bauer because Thayer took seriously that the LXX was the Bible of the early church. Danker-Bauer knew that, but did not include references to the LXX in their lexicon. And that is unfortunate, because the LXX was useful to the apostolic writers. We need to read the Greek OT, not just the Hebrew OT. Most Protestant concordances are working only from the Hebrew words.

Concordance to Find Other Biblical Usage:

Gospel of Matthew: Matthew uses the word in two other places:

- ὁ ναὸς ὁ ἀγιάσας τὸν χρυσόν
the temple that sanctified the gold? (Mt.23:17)
- τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ ἀγιάζον τὸ δῶρον

the altar that sanctifies the offering? (Mt.23:19)

Matthew's usage here is helpful. There is a proximate source or immediate cause of sanctifying a second thing that is placed in contact with it. In Mt.23:17, the temple is the proximate source or immediate cause for sanctifying the gold, and in Mt.23:19, the altar for the offering. In Mt.6:9c, therefore, we can consider the possibility that the Father is the proximate source or immediate cause of sanctifying his name. But does this make sense?

Old Testament:

Narrowing our search to God's name, in particular, being made holy, we find passages stressing the acknowledgement of God's name (as in Thayer):

- "But when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, they will sanctify *My name*; Indeed, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel." (Jer.29:33)
- "As a soothing aroma I will accept you when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and *I will prove Myself holy among you* in the sight of the nations." (Ezk.20:41)
- "When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned *My holy name*, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord; yet they have come out of His land.' But I had concern for *My holy name*, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for *My holy name*, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of *My great name* which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when *I prove Myself holy* among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land." (Ezk.36:22 – 24) God sent Israel into exile. The nations mocked Israel and God. God says that He will return Israel to their land, for the sake of His name. This is about honor, reputation.
- "I will magnify Myself, *sanctify Myself*, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the Lord" (Ezk.38:23)

Matthew 6:9 in the Context of Matthew 6:9 – 13

In the context of Jesus' ministry, especially the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does seem to relate the expansion of "the kingdom of heaven" to a perceptual change among human beings, who start to acknowledge the name of God. Jesus speaks of people "glorifying" the Father (5:16) on account of the disciples' being "salt and light." The growth of Jesus' followers in character (5:21 - 48) would seem to constitute an increase in holiness on our part, leading to the name of God being made more holy. And Jesus also instructs us to pray that God's kingdom and will would be made more apparent "on earth as in heaven" (6:10). This lends weight to Thayer's openness to *agiazao* meaning not an ontological increase of the holiness of an object (in this case God's name), but an increase in acknowledgement or perception among human beings that God's name is holy.

Matthew 6:9 in the Context of Matthew's Gospel as a Whole

However, one of Matthew's notable themes is the "name" of God. By the end of his narrative, Matthew notes that the baptism of Jesus' followers is to be accompanied by the name (singular) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (28:20). The use of the singular noun "name" to designate "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is certainly grammatically challenging. Is this not three names, instead of one? Matthew apparently does not think so.

Matthew builds through his narrative the significance of Jesus' name and its meaning. Matthew opens his narrative with the angel's explicit instruction to Joseph to "call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (1:21). An echo of the victorious Joshua, who led his people to claim their inheritance, is sounded. Jesus is another Joshua, another successor of Moses who is in fact greater than Moses and Joshua. Furthermore, the significance of Jesus' identity is designated by the "name" Immanuel: "they shall call his name Immanuel, meaning God with us" (1:23). The symmetry between Matthew 1 and 28 is important, especially with regards to Jesus in his Great Commission telling his disciples, "I will be with you, even until the end of the age" (28:20). Jesus therefore pronounces the meaning of Immanuel, and Matthew portrays Jesus filling to the full not only the role of Joshua, but the role of God leading the Israelites into the promised land. Jesus is both God and man claiming his true inheritance: the nations.

All this points now in the direction of the increase in holiness of God's name not simply as an increase in perceptual acknowledgement among human beings. For the name of God is not simply referring to God the Father. The one name of God now encompasses "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." There is a categorical expansion of the "name" of God and its meaning. At the very least, the name of God is irrevocably tied and inclusive of the Son who was made known in human nature, who occupied the Israelite and Davidic role originally meant by "Son of God" but with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The name of God is also inclusive of the Son who, with the Spirit, rendered to the Father faithfulness and partnership-obedience in his human life. The name of God also includes the Son who, with the Spirit, fulfilled the promises God made to Israel and to the world to reveal Himself in Zion and "save them from their sins." The Son, by the Spirit, located and expressed the kingdom - the reign of God - in his own life. Implied is his invitation to us to participate by his Spirit in his very life. And thus, praying for the increase in the holiness of God's name has in view the increase of God's holiness in and through the human life of Jesus: that the fullness of God's holiness is now stamped in Jesus' human life so much so that the one "name" of God is revealed as Trinitarian, but also grounded permanently in the covenantal categories of Israel's story