

## CHAPTER THREE

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

William Shakespeare authored the tragic play Romeo and Juliet. In it he wrote, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would be as sweet.” At the cost of the lives of these two lovers, the Capulet’s and the Montague’s discover that names make a difference. In the Bible, names often carried a great deal of significance. Names (in English grammar we use the word nouns) are what we use to identify people, places and/or things. One of the first tasks given to Adam was to assign names to the things that God had created. Until recently, nearly every family in history derived its surname from the father. Paul taught that every family on earth derives its name from fatherhood. “*For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father (Pater), from whom every family (Patria) in heaven and on earth derives its name.*”<sup>1</sup> The original Greek may help us to have a better understanding of what Paul has written. The word for father in Greek is ‘Pater.’ The word for family or household in Greek is ‘Patria.’ Patria is taken from the Greek ‘Pater.’ In other words the root that gives us the word ‘family’ is derived from the word ‘father.’ A better translation for the word family used in this passage is ‘fatherhood.’

Often a person’s name gave us a clue to his identity. Historically, one’s name would refer to his ancestry, his geographic residence or his vocation. In other words, his name was not simply a noun; it was also somewhat of a verb or an adjective. Frequently, too, a male child’s surname simply meant the ‘son of his father.’ For instance, in the Old Covenant ‘ben’ means ‘son of.’ As Jacob’s wife Rachel lay dying she gave birth to a boy, whom she called Benoni “son of my sorrow”. However, Jacob renamed him Benjamin, which is ‘son of my right hand’. In the New Covenant, the word ‘bar’ before a name means ‘son of.’ Therefore, the name Bartimaeus would signify that he was the son of Timaeus (Timothy). Originally, Simon Peter’s name was Simon Bar-Jonas, Jonas meaning John. Therefore, he was called Simon, Son of John. In English, we would have called him Simon John’s son, or more likely Simon Johnson. In like manner, Jesus was called the Son of David. Perhaps, in English we would have shortened this from David’s son to Davidson. A more contemporary and personal example comes from my surname. The prefix ‘Mc’ is a Gaelic form of ‘son of.’ Therefore, the name McNally simply means the son of Nally. Unfortunately, for me, my first name James is the English derivative of Jacob. Jacob means cheater, liar or supplanter. Like you, I did not have the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 3:14-15

privilege of selecting my own name. Not being overly fond of the name James (Cheater), I have preferred that people call me Jim.

In times past, surnames could also derive from the father's vocation. Common names found among English speaking people would include Miller (one who ground grain), Carpenter (one who works with wood and Fisher (rather obvious). My wife Kathy's maiden name was Smith (one who works with metals.) Her mother had the maiden name Cooper (one who made barrels.)

Now let us imagine God, who is the creator and sustainer of the entire universe, selecting a name for Himself. His name would not just be a title and function, but it would be a depiction and representation of His own person. Consider the infinite number of possibilities available to him: Captain of Creation; Chairman of the Trinity; Supreme Exalted Ruler; Grand Imperial Majesty; or Chief Executive Officer of the Universe, just to propose a few. Apparently, none of these options struck God's fancy. He wanted a name that would best reflect not only His title, but also His function. At some instance in eternity, God said, "I think I'll call Myself Father." God chose to be called Father. From then and forever, that name would be "hallowed" (consecrated, set apart). Using the Law of First Mention, we find that the first word in the Hebrew dictionary is 'ab', which in English translates as father. It also can mean source, originator or generator. I doubt that this is a coincidence. The most significant revelation of the Bible is that God is a Father and He desires to reveal Himself as such to all humanity.

The Fatherhood of God is the central theme of the message of Jesus Christ. When teaching the disciples to pray, Jesus began with the words "*Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.*"<sup>2</sup> Although we know this passage as the Lord's Prayer, I think it would be more accurate to call it the Disciple's Prayer, since it was a response to their request, "*Lord teach us to pray.*"<sup>3</sup> Jesus told the disciples that when they prayed they were to address God as their Father. Remember that Old Covenant Jewish custom held that the name of God was so revered that the scribes refused to write it down. Even today, I know Messianic Jews who write the word God as 'G\_\_D' to avoid spelling it out. One of the Ten Commandments given to Moses was a caution against the careless use of the name of God.<sup>4</sup> God's name was not to be used in some casual or irreverent manner. The fact that Jesus spoke of God as His Father and encouraged his disciples to do the same so enraged the

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:9

<sup>3</sup> Luke 11:1

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 20:7

religious leaders of His day that they plotted to kill Him for doing so.<sup>5</sup> In light of this, we can only imagine the shock and horror of the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus, if they had heard Him pray in the garden of Gethsemane. It was there that He addressed God not in the formal way as “Father,” but rather in the familiar manner in which a child might speak; Jesus calls Him “Abba.” The name Abba can be loosely translated as “Daddy” or “Papa.”<sup>6</sup> The apostle Paul, as well, would seem to trample upon this sacred ground.<sup>7</sup> He suggests that even you and I might address God in a more intimate and personal way, as Abba (Daddy). Certainly, to the religious leaders of the day, this would have been considered outright blasphemy. I can remember myself cringing the first time I heard someone refer to our heavenly Father as “Daddy God.” An interesting point to mention here is that slaves were forbidden to use the name Abba when speaking to or referring to their masters.

When I refer to the “Lord’s Prayer,” I prefer to reference the seventeenth chapter of John. Of particular interest to us is the emphasis that Jesus puts upon the word name. He mentions the word name four times. Perhaps the most significant verse for our purposes reads, “*I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world.*”<sup>8</sup> Several things stand out to me in this passage of Scripture. First, I suppose it would be beneficial for us to understand what Jesus meant when He said, “*I have glorified you on the earth.*” God’s glory is the manifestation or materialization of His divine attributes and perfections. God’s glory relates to his holiness. It is His holiness coming into a visible expression. The primary concern of Jesus was not His own glory. Jesus sought to glorify His Father on the earth. Maybe I can express it better in this way. God chose the name Father, and desired to be known as such. That name, through casual, slipshod or even vile use, has been tarnished and stained on the earth. God’s glory relates to His reputation. Jesus viewed glorifying His Father as His highest accomplishment. The manner in which Jesus glorified His Father was by manifesting His name to the men that God gave Him. Therefore, we were to pray, “*Hallowed (sacred, sanctified, consecrated, or holy) be your name.*”<sup>9</sup> The name Father was the name that Jesus manifested and glorified. His disciples would be the men God gave Him out of the world.

Prior to the beginning, before God was a creator, He was a father. God is not just a father; He is *the Father*. Since God chose the name Father not only to be His title but also his function, we can

---

<sup>5</sup> John 5:18; John 10:36-39

<sup>6</sup> Mark 14:36

<sup>7</sup> Roman 8:15; Galatians 4:6-7

<sup>8</sup> John 17:4 & 6

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 6:9

conclude that there is no higher title, calling or function for men on earth than to be a father. Derek Prince often taught, “**Success in politics, business, athletics or arts will never make up for failure as a father.**” Failure as a father is failure at the highest level. So let us look at some of some possible roles and responsibilities of a father.

Fatherhood is more than a title or an office; it is also a function. The purpose of a father was to represent God to his family. In fact, a father’s authority is ultimately derived from and limited to his representation of God the Father. The manner in which we as fathers are to represent God’s Fatherhood is to serve as the priest, the prophet and the king (or ruler) of our home. As a priest of our home, a father is to represent his family before God. The event of the Passover will serve as an illustration for this. The fathers held the exclusive responsibility to select a lamb for each house, to kill the lamb, and to spread the blood on the doorposts of the house.<sup>10</sup> In this example, the father as the priest held the power of saving his family from the destroying angel. He could not delegate this responsibility to another member of the family. As a prophet, the father was to represent God to his family. As mentioned many times in this book, the father in the home is the representative of God. He is to set an example for his children through his words, attitude and conduct.<sup>11</sup> Finally, as the king of his home, the father is to rule by leading his family. Reiterating upon our theme that the pathway to fatherhood is by modeling sonship, his leadership is by way of example. Thus, a father serves by leading and he leads by serving.

Before we continue, I must mention a vital quality that every genuine father possesses. Every father should desire that his children be more successful than he is. Any man who does not desire that his children surpass him should not bear the name “father”. As it is true in every situation, Jesus and His Father set the example for us. Along this line Jesus said, “*For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and greater works than these will He show Him, that you may marvel.*”<sup>12</sup> Later Jesus said to His disciples, “*Truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father.*”<sup>13</sup> Simply analyzing these two passages makes it clear that the Father wanted Jesus to do “great works.” In like manner, Jesus desired for us to excel and do even “greater works than these.”

---

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 12:3-7

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-9

<sup>12</sup> John 5:20

<sup>13</sup> John 4:12