

God Is More Than ‘God’ Why He Loves to Be Called Father

- Scott Hubbard (Editor, desiringGod.org) -

Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:6)

In conversation, prayer, and even evangelism, many of us default to using two titles to refer to our Creator and Redeemer: *God* and *Lord*. We are not wrong to use these titles, of course — Scripture does so over and over again. But we might go astray if we slowly allow them to eclipse the names that God has so graciously revealed to us.

We may even go so far as to say that a vocabulary where *God* and *Lord* predominate is slightly sub-Christian. For, as Paul reminds us, among pagans “there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’” (1 Corinthians 8:5). But Christians are not interested in adding simply one more God and Lord to the world’s pantheon. Rather,

For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Corinthians 8:6)

When we say *God*, we mean *Father*; when we say *Lord*, we mean *Jesus*. The wonders of our salvation and glory are hidden in these two names. But to feel the weight of them, we first need to recall the name that came before either of them: *Yahweh*.

The God Who *Is*

There at the burning bush, as Moses trembled with bare feet on holy ground, God spoke: “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:15). Hidden beneath the word *Lord* (rendered in small capital letters in most English translations) is the name we know as *Yahweh*, which is related to the verb mentioned in the previous verse: “I am” (Exodus 3:14). The God of Israel is the God who *is*.

The claim contained in this name could not be more sweeping. He is *Yahweh*, the one who always and forever was, and who always and forever will be. He is *Yahweh*, Maker of all matter, Sustainer of every cell. He is *Yahweh*, the Lord whom no one can manipulate or control. He is *Yahweh*, God over the so-called “gods” of Egypt and the idols of every other nation.

Most wonderful of all, he is *Yahweh* “your God” (Exodus 6:7). In revealing himself to Israel as the great “I am,” *Yahweh* wanted his people to know that they rested in his everlasting arms (Deuteronomy 33:27). And for more than a millennium afterward, this was the name by which Israel knew their God. Until *Yahweh* took on flesh.

The God Who Saves

When an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, he told him what the Messiah's name would be: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus, built from the Hebrew name *Joshua*, means, "Yahweh saves." When the "I am" became man, it was to save his people from their sins. "Therefore," the angel said, "call him Jesus."

God cares so deeply about our rescue from sin, and he wants us to remember it so regularly, that he wrapped salvation into our Savior's very name. When we say *Jesus*, we proclaim him who fulfilled Sinai's holy law, who healed the sick and raised the dead, and who set his face toward the cross, refusing to save himself. The name *Jesus* bids us to recall the whip that lashed his back, the nails that scarred his hands and feet, the spear that pierced his side, the tomb that held his body, and the stone that could not stand before his resurrection.

Our God is not only *Yahweh*, but *Jesus*: not only the God who *is*, but the God who saves. And because he saves, we get to know him by another name, one that may be the sweetest of all.

The Christian Name for God

"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son," the apostle Paul writes. Yahweh put on flesh; Jesus our Savior was born. And why? "So that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:4–6). When the Lord Jesus saves us from the far country of our sin, he brings us home to a *Father*.

The significance of the name *Father* is perhaps best described by J.I. Packer:

You sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. . . . "Father" is the Christian name for God. (*Knowing God*, 201)

Therefore, when the Spirit rises within us, we find ourselves crying more than, "God!" or "Lord!" He compels us, by virtue of his unsearchable love, to talk as children would: "Abba! Father!" For the God whom we worship is no vague deity, but the one who once revealed himself as Yahweh, and now as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we love to say his name.

(<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-is-more-than-god>)

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