

What's in a Name?

The Attributes of God – Session Two

“Moreover God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.”’”
—Exodus 3:15 NKJV

I. Introduction

- a. “What’s in a name?”
- b. The Significance of Names in Scripture
 - i. “The name of God is the revelation to us of his being and nature. God’s name is God revealed.”¹
 - ii. “The use of the name God in a metaphorical sense does not mean that this name is used only to point to a certain dignity or power, but on the contrary, it speaks of the essence of God Himself.”²
 - iii. “The names that God gives us of himself are not mere marks of denotation; there is none other beside himself from whom he need be distinguished. The names of God reveal to us something of the nature or essence of God. They cannot reveal this nature fully, but they nevertheless are expressive of something of that nature.”³

II. A (Very Brief) Biblical Theology of Names

- a. God Naming the Creature
 - i. Inanimate Objects (Psalm 147:4-5)
 - ii. Man (Genesis 5:2)
- b. Man Naming the Creature (Genesis 2:19; 3:20)
- c. Man Naming God (Genesis 4:26; 16:13)
- d. God Naming Himself

III. A Few of God’s Names

- a. Distinctions
 - i. “Essential” Names: Those which have to do with *what* God is—his essence
 - ii. “Proper (Appellative)” Names: Those which have to do with *who* God is—but also his essence
- b. Essential Names
 - i. Spirit (Heb. רוּחַ, *ruach*; Gr. πνεῦμα, *pneuma*)—John 4:24

¹ Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, eBook, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), ch. 8.

² Gerrit Hendrik Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics: A Systematic Treatment of Reformed Doctrine*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing Committee, 1983), 1:43.

³ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1949), 200.

- ii. Love—1 John 4:14
 - iii. Light—1 John 4:5
 - iv. Life—John 5:26
- c. Proper (Appellative) Names
 - i. *Elohim* (Heb. אֱלֹהִים)
 - ii. *Adonai* (Heb. אֲדֹנָי)
 - iii. *El Shaddai* (Heb. אֱלֹהֵי שָׁדַי)
 - iv. *Yahweh/Jehovah* (Heb. יְהוָה)
 - v. *Yahweh Sabaoth* (Heb. יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת)
 - vi. Almighty (Gr. παντοκράτωρ, *pantakrator*)
 - vii. Master (Gr. δεσπότης, *despotēs*)
 - viii. Lord (Gr. κύριος, *kyrios*)

IV. Applications

- a. The Third Commandment (20:7)
 - i. WSC 54: “The third commandment requireth the holy and reverend use of God’s names, titles, attributes, ordinances, Word, and works.”
 - ii. WSC 55: “The third commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing of anything whereby God maketh himself known.”
- b. The Names of Christ
 - i. Lord (Gr. κύριος, *kyrios*)
 - ii. Master (Gr. δεσπότης, *despotēs*)—2 Peter 2:1
 - iii. The Word of God
 - iv. I AM—John 8:54-59