

A Letter to My Son!

It is not my custom to share personal correspondence in such a public forum as this Pastor's Word. With my son, Jonathan's permission I give you the letter I wrote to him after he called letting me hear the cries of his son within fifteen minutes of his birth.

My Dear Son, my firstborn that bears the name of our ancestors...Jonathan Paul Pope,

In Act II, Scene II of the most famous love story in the English language, Shakespeare writes the balcony dialogue between Romeo and Juliet. In this conversation Juliet is disturbed by the dilemma their names bring to the budding horizon of their newfound love. In her innocence she longs to take away what, to her, seems the only prohibition of their possible shared affection, his name. Notice what she says, "*O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name.*" Further along in the conversation she says, "*'Tis but thy name that is my enemy; Thou art thyself, though not a Montague. What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot, Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part Belonging to a man. O, be some other name! What's in a name? that which we call a rose By any other name would smell as sweet; So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd, Retain that dear perfection which he owes Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name, And for that name which is no part of thee Take all myself.*"

Juliet is basically asking, "why?" It is as if she is saying, "Why must the prospects of being wed to you and taking your name cause offense to my kinsmen? So, away with your name and take me." In real life and more importantly from the Christian worldview, there is more to a name than meets the eye or trips the tongue. To deny the name is more than a betrayal of the father, it is a mutiny of one's very own and unique identification.

Where did we get the custom of taking the name of the male and when did this practice come into being? In the first book of the Bible we read: "*This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.*" (Genesis 5:1,2). So, we see that God Himself instituted this very important practice.

It is ancient tradition that, through the surname, land is inherited, the exception being when there was no male available to procure the investiture. It is through the surname that families maintain their place in the earth.

Today, you hold in your hands Miles Julian Pope, the heir of our name. "*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold*" (Proverbs 22:1).

As the years pass, I am aware my time to give you counsel shall come to an end sooner than I wish. But today on this glorious day of your son's birth, I am honored beyond words that God has given me breath to experience the joy together with you. What's in a name, fair Juliet ponders? If I may tread where even angels may dread, allow me to answer this rhetorical question of what's in a name:

(1) Honor is in your name.

Our ancestor (Sir Thomas Wyatt) lifted his sword into battle leading the charge to restore Lady Jane to the throne of England. He was captured and received beheading rather than crawl for mercy to Bloody Mary. Death before dishonor! In the blood-line of marriage his name merged into ours and through his progeny, his honor. Your name has been represented from The War Between the States through World War II. It has been a name of valor and honor. From his mother Lauren's blood-line, high honor has been inherited as well. I received a letter from Brother Roloff, after his decease, dictated to me before he entered the plane in which he crashed. His secretary sent me the letter. Although he was not able to sign it personally, he left the deep impression that honor is worth fighting for. These were his last words to me: "*But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and*

the LORD wrought a great victory" (II Samuel 23:12). When others fled the fight, it was said of Shammah that he held ground in the face of adversity. A man of honor continues bravely no matter who quits. *"A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee"* (Psalm 91:7). *"If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small"* (Proverbs 24:10).

(2) Diligence is in your name.

Your fore-fathers were hard-working men. From your mom's side of the family and my mom's and dad's side, hard work was part and parcel of their existence. If something is worth having it is not only worth fighting for, it is worth working for. Whether it was rock-farming, crane operating or building a sermon and visiting, you have inherited a name from men who had a constitution who diligently labored and did not shy away from life's tasks because the efforts were considered by some to be difficult. *"Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you"* (II Thessalonians 3:8). *"The sleep of a labouring man is sweet"* (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

(3) Love is in your name.

Pope men love their ladies and their children. We love not with our own love, but with God's great love. To God be the glory, the worlds in which you, your mom, your wife, and I were reared were Christian worlds. We don't know what it is to lay our head down at night in the home of the unregenerate. We do not boast, but rather we are humbled that God in His mercy has placed us into this environment.

What we have in our love relationship is Divine. As I advance in age, the bonds of love are strong and growing stronger. I have not yet held Miles in my hands yet I feel and sense a strong love for the lad. Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, name of my name. I look forward to telling him what Julian means. It is a name that means so much more than "The Just One." I want to tell him of the godliest man I knew that bore that same name. I would like to tell him that I think Miles is a great name, a testament of the unconditional, never failing love of his dad and mom. I would like to tell him that his parents were entrusted with true love. The one and only kind. I would like to tell him that his surname Pope means Father. I would like to tell him that one day he will live up to his name in the same fashion like you are doing today, my son. We Popes are born to be fathers. I cherish and honor the title Pastor and Preacher. But the two titles I am most at home with are Husband and Dad. *"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love"* (I John 4:7, 8). Not to love is to deny your name. God, who is love, will give you the power to answer every situation with love.

Jonathan, your mom and I love you very much. I am blessed beyond blessing to share this name with you and my precious grandson, Miles Julian Pope.

Your Dad and Forever Friend,

Jonathan Franklin Pope

- Pastor Pope -

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