

PRAYING IN THE NAME OF JESUS

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Introduction

It is very common to hear someone to include “in the name of Jesus” when they pray. Many times we end our prayers with, “In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.” However, what does that mean? What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus or to ask something in the name of Jesus? I pondered this question because of my increased awareness of living by faith in God. I found myself saying many times within a single prayer, “In the name of Jesus.” Did I know what I was talking about? Were those vain repetitions that Jesus warned us not to say when we pray (See Matthew 6:7)?

I believe many people who pray and say “in the name of Jesus” really do not know what they are saying. To many I believe it is a religious practice to tack that statement to the end of a prayer or during the prayer. I would dare say that it is either done in ignorance or as a religious formula. I say this by my experience of how many people who attend church do not know what the bible teaches about basic Christian doctrine. If we are really going to come to the Father in the name of Jesus then I think it is necessary that we know what it means to pray in the name of Jesus.

Some Common Perceptions

There are several perceptions of praying in the name of Jesus that I would like to mention here. These come primarily from my experiences.

1. We are supposed to pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Some use the phrase, “In the name of Jesus” simply because they were taught to do so, they have heard others do so in churches, or they believe for one reason or another that they are supposed to pray in the name of.
2. You say “In the name of Jesus” because you come in the authority of Christ. Some believe that we say that phrase because we are supposed to pray in the authority of Jesus Christ. Therefore, to pray in the authority of Jesus Christ means that we should say, “In the name of Jesus” when we pray.

My suspicion that using the name of Jesus was not done properly developed as I became much more aware of living by faith in the Father. For example, someone could say to you to have faith in God, but what does that really mean? Faith in God comes from the heart not the head. For example, consider the following scripture passage.

Mark 11:22-24 (NASB95) {22} And Jesus answered saying to them, “Have faith in God. {23} “Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does

not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. {24} “Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.

Notice what Jesus said. He said, “...and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen...” My point here is that it is more than mentally agreeing with something and calling that faith. That process is many times called mental ascent. I can’t say that I believe something, but nothing I do demonstrates that belief (See James 2:14-23 for example).

Likewise, praying in the name of Jesus is not something that merely comes from your head. It first has to be something in your heart. It has to be real. Let me give you an illustration.

Suppose a uniformed police officer approaches someone and says, “I am arresting you in the name of the law.” More than likely the person would surrender to the police officer. Why? The person would surrender because the police officer has the authority to make such an arrest. Where does the authority of the police officer come from? It comes from the law and he therefore has a right (the authority) to make that arrest. Now if I tried to do the same thing then more than likely the person would not surrender to me. Why not? I would not be recognized as someone who has the authority to make such an arrest.

Therefore, the police officer actually has the authority to make an arrest and he can act in that context. However, I do not have the authority from the law to make such an arrest and merely making the statement “In the name of the law” does not give me that authority. Likewise, it appeared reasonable to me to suppose that merely saying “in the name of Jesus” does not necessarily make my actions or prayer in Jesus’ name.

Merely saying it does not make it so!

So our task in this study is to determine what it really means to pray in the name of Jesus (or do anything in the name of Jesus) and apply that properly to our lives.

The Name

I think the first thing that we should establish is the meaning of “name.” What does it mean when the bible uses the word “name?”

1. The Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (11th Ed.) defines name as a word or phrase that constitutes the distinctive designation of a person or thing; a word or symbol used in logic to designate an entity; by authority of.
2. The Harper’s Bible Dictionary defines the word name as nouns by which entities are identified.

Names are usually used to identify someone or something. We are very used to this usage of the word name. However, this does not fall into the context of this discussion because it would only show that the name “Jesus” identifies someone. However, the usage of the word “name” is used to identify someone at a much higher level.

We also saw that the word name may mean “by the authority of.” So someone could for example come in the name or authority of the King. Consider the following passages of scripture.

- *1 Samuel 17:45 (NASB95) {45} Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted.*
- *1 Samuel 25:9 (NASB95) {9} When David’s young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in David’s name; then they waited.*

The first scripture is when David was facing Goliath. David didn’t go to Goliath in his own authority. He went in the authority of the Lord of hosts. My sister-in-law, Nelissa Lockley, pointed out that the word “hosts” refers to an army (from the Hebrew word sa ba, which means army, military divisions). So the Lord of hosts denotes the head of an army or ruler of an army. This was appropriate being that David was going to battle. Again the point was that David was going against Goliath in the authority that he had in God.

The second scripture denotes how David’s servant went to Nabal as a direct representative of David. Nabal was expected to treat the servants in the same way he would have treated David if David was actually there.

Therefore, praying in the name of Jesus could mean that we are praying or asking something with the authority that we have in Christ or as Christ’s representative. Of course we have no authority because the bible says that Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). What we do in the name of Jesus is to act in the authority of Christ, which is not our own authority. We merely operate as Christ’s representatives so to speak with the authority that Jesus himself has.

I suppose that you can see by now that praying or doing something in the name of Jesus is quite serious and not a mere statement we say when we pray. First we have to actually be operating in the authority of Christ and we have to actually be representing Christ (that character issue we discussed previously comes into play here as well).

Acting in Jesus’ name is to represent Jesus as we operating in Christ’s authority

Let’s look at another aspect of “name” as it is used in the bible.

- *Proverbs 22:1 (NASB95) {1} A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold.*
- *Ecclesiastes 7:1 (NASB95) {1} A good name is better than a good ointment, And the day of one’s death is better than the day of one’s birth.*

Both of these passages uses the Hebrew word *šēm*, which means *the proper designation of a person, place, or thing (Gen 2:11); renown, fame, known, reputation, i.e., information that one knows about*

another, implied to give high status to the one of the renown. We could say that the name referred to in the previous passages refer to one's reputation.

So a name could refer to one's reputation and not just as an identifier. Someone could therefore say, "he has a good name" and not just, "his name is John Doe." Do you see the difference? Both identify the person, but the former deals more with his character while the latter is just an identifier.

Can we apply this to our statement, "In the name of Jesus?" Yes we can. If you are identified with Christ then you should have a character that is Christ-like. If you do something in the name of Jesus then is that something that Jesus would actually do at least in principle? If not then you are merely reciting vain repetitions. Do you have a Christ-like character? Can you therefore identify with the name (reputation, character, person) of Christ?

Consider more scripture passages.

- *Psalm 8:1 (NASB95) {1} For the choir director; on the Gittith. A Psalm of David. O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!*
- *Psalm 103:1 (NASB95) {1} A Psalm of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name.*
- *Psalm 113:1-3 (NASB95) {1} Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, Praise the name of the LORD. {2} Blessed be the name of the LORD From this time forth and forever. {3} From the rising of the sun to its setting The name of the LORD is to be praised.*
- *Matthew 6:9 (NASB95) {9} "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.*
- *Philippians 2:9 (NASB95) {9} For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,*

You will notice in the above passages that merely thinking of "name" as reputation doesn't fit. Remember that a name identifies a person, which may be beyond the proper name for someone. Saying that Jesus has the name that is above every name means that Jesus is above everyone. Do you see that? The same applies to the Father. When David says how majestic the name of the Lord is, he is expressing how majestic the Lord is. So the name of the Lord refers to the Lord himself. Likewise, the name of Jesus refers to Jesus.

In the Name of Jesus

So what does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus since we now have a better grasp of what is mean when the word "name" is used in the bible? Remember that we said the name identifies a person or refers to the character of the person. Let's apply this to "in the name of Jesus."

“I come to you Father in the character of Jesus.” That doesn’t sound right does it? Either you have the character of Christ or you don’t. That is the point I made earlier about merely saying something or that something being a reality. If you are identified with Christ with regards to character then you can go before the Father with the character of Christ. However, what is the point of saying that in your prayers or at the end of the prayer besides the fact that some think it is a special formula for God to hear you or grant your wish? There has to be more to this than coming to the Father having the character of Christ.

Belonging to Christ

I’d like to go back to a point I made earlier about merely making a statement and something being real. It is easy to say, “In the name of Jesus,” but are we really operating in Jesus’ name? Having a Christ-like character could be mimicked by anyone in the same way people attempt to be “good” without Christ. Consider the following scripture passages.

- *Matthew 7:22 (NASB95) {22} “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’*
- *Matthew 9:38 (NASB95) {38} “Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”*
- *Acts 19:13 (NASB95) {13} But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, “I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.”*
- *Acts 16:16-18 (NASB95) {16} It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. {17} Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, “These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.” {18} She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!” And it came out at that very moment.*

These versus of scripture reveal a very important point about identifying with the name of Jesus. In reality operating in the name of Jesus Christ means that the operator must belong to Christ. In Matthew 7:22 above the people said they did things in the name of Jesus, but in reality they did not. They could not have operated in the authority of Christ or as Christ’s representatives because Jesus went on to say that he never knew them. There was no relationship between Jesus and those claiming to do things in his name. Whenever I used to read that passage of scripture I assumed that the people actually did things in the name of Jesus, but Jesus rejected them for some reason. That is not the case at all nor could it be. They only claimed to minister in the name of Jesus, but in actuality they were not doing so. They were only claiming to minister in the name of Jesus.

We must belong to Christ if we are to operate in the name of Jesus. If we do not belong to Christ then praying in Jesus' name is a mere religious exercise. This makes sense if you think about it. How can I do anything in the name of Christ if I have not truly identified with him? This means that there must be a relationship between us and Christ if we are to do anything in his name. We have to know him and he has to know us. Without this relationship there can be no praying or operating in his name. Praying in the name of Jesus implies a relationship between yourself and Christ.

There must be a relationship between you and Christ in order to pray in Jesus' name

Through Christ

When we stand before God in the name of Jesus then it is as if Jesus is actually standing there instead of us. I believe that is an important concept to realize in this discussion. Therefore, when we pray in the name of Jesus then it is as if Jesus is doing it (remember that we represent Jesus when operating in his name). We need to realize that the power of Christ works through us to accomplish the desired task (what we are praying for). Consider the following passages of scripture.

- *Acts 3:6 (NASB95) {6} But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!"*
- *Acts 3:16 (NASB95) {16} "And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all."*
- *Acts 4:7-10 (NASB95) {7} When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" {8} Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, {9} if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, {10} let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health."*

When we pray in the name of Jesus we recognize the fact that the power of God flows through Christ through us as his vessels. Peter was able to heal the sick man not because of anything he had, but because of Jesus. Peter said in the name of Jesus get up and walk! That means, "By the power of Jesus Christ working through me, get up and walk!" Peter knew that the power of God worked through him to effect change wherever he went. Peter therefore had faith in the name of Jesus that Jesus would work through him to heal the man. We have to have that same realization regarding the name of Jesus. Is God working through you when you declare, "In the name of Jesus" or are you merely reciting religious clichés?

Consider the following passages of scripture as well.

- *John 14:13-14 (NASB95) {13} “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. {14} “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.*

Notice that Jesus will do the work. If we ask the Father anything in his name then Jesus will do it. If this meant merely tacking “In Jesus name” at the end of a prayer then this would be like God giving us a blank check. We would be able to do whatever WE wanted. However, as we pointed out earlier, praying or asking in Jesus name means that we are identifying with Christ and all that that involves. However, the main point I want to make here is that Jesus does the work. If we pray for someone to be healed in the name of Jesus then Jesus is doing the healing not us.

- *Titus 3:4-6 (NASB95) {4} But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, {5} He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, {6} whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*

God’s salvation is given to us through Jesus Christ. This is very important because it highlights the importance and necessity of grace over and above works. We have salvation because of the grace of God not because we somehow earned it.

- *Romans 7:24-25 (NASB95) {24} Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? {25} Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.*

We see here an illustration from the Apostle Paul how through Jesus Christ he was saved. It is through Jesus Christ that he was freed from death.

- *1 Corinthians 15:57 (NASB95) {57} but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Our victory comes through Jesus Christ and not by anything we have done.

- *Hebrews 13:20-21 (NASB95) {20} Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, {21} equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

God works his will in us through Jesus Christ. Again it is not our great strength or anything that that we have done that God uses us. We do the works of God only through Jesus Christ.

- *Philippians 4:13 (NASB95) {13} I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*

Again we see that we can do all things THROUGH CHRIST. Jesus even told his disciples that they couldn't do anything without him (John 15:5).

- *John 16:23 (NASB95) {23} "In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you.*

Here we see that if we ask the Father anything in Jesus' name then the Father will do it. The fact that the Father works through Christ means that we can say that Christ does it as well. We also have to consider the unity of the Father and the Son (John 14:7-13).

What we do in the name of Jesus is actually Jesus doing the work. Therefore, I could say that doing something or praying in the name of Jesus simply means to yield ourselves to God to do his work through us as He works through Christ in us. God works through us through Jesus to accomplish his will. I say through us since we are the actual vessels on the earth through which Christ works. We surely need to keep this in mind when we say we are praying in the name of Jesus. Either we are actually praying in Jesus' name or we are just repeating religious clichés.

Conclusion

Praying or operating in the name of Jesus is serious. It is not merely something we tack onto a prayer when we finish praying. Many people end their prayers by saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ, amen!" Praying in the name of Jesus Christ is as if Jesus was saying it and doing it. We represent Jesus Christ when we operate or pray in his name. We identify ourselves with Christ as far as character and the fact that we belong to him. We also recognize that the power of God flows through Christ whose spirit is in us. I think that the most important thing is that we have to have a **relationship with Christ**. If we have a relationship with Christ then we won't declare that we have ministered in his name, but rather we will actually minister in his name as his representative as the Father does the work through Christ using us.

Those who have a real relationship with Christ can pray in his name. Those who belong to Christ can ask the Father anything in the name of Jesus and expect Jesus to do the work. With that relationship we can have the confidence that what we pray for will happen or be accomplished. Consider the provisions that God has promised you. If you go to the Father in the name of Jesus (as if Jesus was before the Father) then we can expect the Father to meet our needs. We can expect the Father to provide for us. This again requires that we belong to Christ. This means that those who operate or pray in the name of Jesus Christ are truly saved and not just church folk.

Church folk have no authority to operate in the name of Jesus Christ. Church folk are the part of the group of people in Matthew 7 who declared that they ministered in the name of Jesus, but Jesus said that he never knew them, i.e., there was never a relationship between the two. Living according to God's kingdom transcends church activities, which are primarily religious in nature.

So from now on don't blindly repeat that phrase, "In the name of Jesus." First know that you mean it and then operate in his name.

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