

Teaching Sound Doctrine

Praying "In the Name of Christ"

Over the years I have seen articles in bulletins, periodicals, etc. setting forth the idea that it is not necessary to say "in the name of Christ", or a similar phrase, in one's prayers. The argument usually runs like this: "In the name of" means "by the authority of", and functions performed "in the name of Christ" involve something done, and not something said. Examples cited would be: preaching in the name of Christ and baptizing in the name of Christ do not require that the one doing the preaching or the one doing the baptizing say "in the name of Christ" I am preaching or baptizing.

I recognize that "in the name" of Christ means (Thayer,) "relying or resting on the name of Christ rooted (so to speak) in his name, i.e. mindful of Christ: Col. 3:17; Eph. 5:20; to ask a thing as prompted by the mind of Christ and in reliance on the word which invites us to him, Jno. 14:13". Or, as W. E. Vine states, the phrase stands "for all that a name implies, or authority, character, rank, majesty, power, excellence, etc., of everything that the name covers in recognition of authority" (Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words)

Recognizing this I do not believe there is a ceremony connected with anything that is to be done "in the name" of Christ, for the religion which Christ taught is not one of rituals and ceremonies. Though "whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." (Col. 3:17) A ceremony is "a set form of words, especially one which by much use has partly lost its meaning." I do not believe there is a ceremony for baptism, though the "Jesus Only" groups contend for such. I do not think there is a ceremony for prayer, and do not contend for such. One may say, "in the name of Christ", or "in the name of Thy Son", "in the name of the Lord", "in the name of our Savior", "in Jesus' name" or any other phrase which expresses the idea of praying to God through Christ.

In my judgment, praying "in the name of Christ" involves more than saying "in his name." It certainly involves praying according to the teaching of Jesus. I cannot see why any Christian would want to leave the name of Christ out of his prayers, nor can I understand why any Christian would want to be connected with any organization that would ask him not to use the name of Christ in his prayers.

What Jesus Taught

On the night before the crucifixion of Christ, he taught the disciples to ask in his name. In fact, at least four times that night he gave such instruction:

(1)"Verily, verily, I say unto you; He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do: because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." (John 14:12-13)

(2)"If you shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." (John 14:14)

(3)"That whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." (John 15:16)

(4)"And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." (John 16:23)

Before that night Jesus had not taught his disciples to ask "in my name." But on that night he said to the eleven, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." (John 16:24) The word "hitherto" means "up to this time, as yet, until now." (Webster's Dictionary) So Jesus is saying, up to this time you have asked nothing in my name. Yet three years before that time Jesus taught the disciples HOW to pray, saying, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name etc. (Matt. 6:9-13)

Question: From the time Jesus taught them how to pray unto the night of the betrayal of Jesus did those disciples pray as Jesus had taught them to pray? On that night before his death Jesus said, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name." Now, if the expression "in my name" means only "by the authority" of Jesus, as some contend, then we must conclude that those eleven had not prayed at all during the previous three years. So, Jesus taught them how to pray, but they did not pray as he had taught them. Who can believe it?

Why We Pray In The Name Of Christ

In the model prayer (Matt. 6:9-13) Christ did not teach men to pray "in my name", for at that time he had not become the mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2: 5); he had not yet ascended unto the Father, but soon would ascend. (John 20:17) Thus, not until the time for his death had come did he begin to teach men to pray in his name. He knew that in his death he would break down the middle wall of partition which separated the Jews from the Gentiles (Eph. 2:14-16); that he would take the old covenant out of the way "nailing it to the

cross" (Col. 2:14-16); that he would be raised from the dead and go into heaven to become the faithful and merciful high priest of the people of God. (Heb. 4:14-16) Thus, on the last night he was with his disciples he assured them that they would be able to do greater works than he had done, "Because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." (John 14:12-13) It was only when he told them, "I go unto my Father", that he taught them to pray "in my name." Before he ascended to the Father he was not the mediator between God and men. Up to this time they had asked nothing in his name, but from henceforth they are to ask in his name for he will soon take up the function of the mediator between God and men; He would soon occupy the office of the high priest. This is why we pray to God through him.

Things To Consider

I believe the expression "in the name of Christ", as it is related to prayer, means more than just "by the authority of Christ." It also signifies that Christ is our mediator. I ask you to consider these things:

1. Paul declared, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 2:5) (Note: The context is a discussion of prayer.) Does man need this one mediator"? Or, can he just as well make "supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks" without this "one mediator"? If man does not need this "one mediator" between himself and God, why is Christ in that position? Is he filling an unnecessary position?

The Hebrew writer said, "all things are naked unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Indeed, God knoweth the thoughts and intents of our hearts. How this ought to make us tremble before God. But the writer goes on to say, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is past into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be the feeling of our infirmities; tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:13-16). Can we "obtain mercy" from our high priest if we do not so much as acknowledge him? Can we "find grace from our high priest "to help in time of need" if we by-pass our high priest when we pray unto God. It seems to me that we should go to God through him because he knows the weakness of our flesh, having been tempted in all points like as we are, and thereby obtain mercy and find help.

3. Jesus told the eleven, "...In that day ye shall ask me nothing... Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you" (John 16:23). During the

personal ministry of Jesus those eleven men had asked the Lord many things, but he now says, "In that day ye shall ask me nothing, but whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Instead of asking me, now you must ask the Father in my name. Would it be just as well to ask the Father without the name of Christ?"

4. Jesus said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." (John 14:13) If we ask of the Father without so much as mentioning the name of Christ, how is the Father glorified in the Son?

5. Paul said, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." (Col. 3:17) We are to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, and as we do this we are to give thanks to God by him. The New American Standard Bible reads, "giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Must we give thanks to God "through him", or can we omit Him when we give thanks to God?

6. If the expression "in the name of" means only "by the authority" of Christ, then please explain the statement of Jesus, "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name." (John 16:24)

Conclusion

While I do not believe there is a ceremony connected with prayer, I do believe that in all of our prayers we should, in some way, make known the fact that we are praying through Jesus Christ the Son of God and our Savior. When we mention Christ in our prayers we glorify the Father in the Son, we profess unto men our faith in Christ, we acknowledge the position and function which the Lord now fills. Brethren, let's not leave Christ out of our prayers.