

John 14:11-17; 16:24
(Genesis 3:10-15; Colossians 3:1-4, 15-17)
“In Jesus’ Name”

Introduction

Few biblical texts seem at once to offer us as much in prayer, and yet – frankly – to be as easy to disprove, as these verses where we hear Jesus say the words, “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (12;13). We need once again to approach this text remembering Prof Jaroslav Pelikan’s warning that most of our problems in theology stem from the fact that the Bible was written by Jews and interpreted by Gentiles. A Gentile reading of these words has led to at least two common misunderstandings in the church, one of which relates to prayer in general, and other to petitionary prayer in particular.

Seldom will you hear a Christian pray without ending his prayer with the words, “in Jesus’ name, amen.” It is our traditional way of trying to honor this text and to approach God always in Jesus’ name. His name is, and should be, precious to us, just as we revere the name of anyone dearly loved and would never want to hear the name mocked or misused. And praying in this way reminds us that we have no natural right to ask anything of God and are utterly dependent upon God’s grace, supremely demonstrated in Jesus Christ. We even tend to question the Christian faith of one who does not end his prayer with the familiar formula “in Jesus’ name, amen.” And yet, when we turn to the prayers of the New Testament, while they are clearly offered out of a profound faith in Christ, and often refer to him and what he has done for us, they simply do not follow this formula, and end neatly with the words “in Jesus’ name.” That should be our first clue that perhaps we have misunderstood what Jesus is saying here.

More specifically, the idea that Jesus is simply telling us to end our prayers by saying his name has led to something quite pernicious and has caused serious confusion for many Christians. Reading this in a Gentile context, it sounds as though the words “in Jesus’ name” give me a genie’s power to ask for whatever I want and Jesus is obliged to grant my wish. Thus, many approach God in great hope and even try to say the name Jesus with special passion as though it was a magic formula and saying it just right yielded powerful results. Yet, how many have left the bed of a sick child, the wreckage of a marriage or the death of a dream in doubt and confusion because it seemed that Jesus did not keep his promise to them.

So, it is crucial for any of us who are trusting in Christ alone to understand what he has promised us, and then to seek it with all our strength. To that end, I simply want to ask two questions of the text and seek clarity from the larger context of Scripture: What does it mean to pray in Jesus’ name? And what happens when we do?

Body

1. What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?

It is the Spirit of Christ in you praying in perfect accord with the will of God. This is the greatest and yet most neglected meaning of our salvation in Christ: *our union with him*, through the Spirit, in God (14:16,17).

2. What happens when we truly pray in Jesus' name?

First, and most importantly, *God gets glory* (14:13)

Secondly, because we were created to give God glory, and because the things that bring him glory are the believer's greatest desire, when we truly pray in Jesus' name, *we get joy* (16:24).

Conclusion

There is no greater privilege given us in our daily living than this offer of unbroken companionship with the living God through the Spirit of Christ living in us. True prayer, prayer that is in Jesus' name, arises from this relationship, from our union with Christ, from the truth of the apostle Paul's words, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who live in me" (Galatians 2:20). Here is the secret of praying in Jesus' name: it is the Spirit of Christ praying God's will through me. It is my glad submission to the one who loved me and gave himself for me. It brings God glory and brings me joy, and is the way of life for those whose lives have been taken up into the life of him who is "the way, the truth and the life."

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