

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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Colossians 3:17

Understanding “In the Name of the Lord Jesus”

By Brian R. Kenyon

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, KJV)

The proper application of this verse is what distinguishes the faithful churches of Christ from denominationalism. When all our beliefs and practices are “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” we will attain the unity for which Jesus prayed (Jn. 17:20-21) and Paul pled (1 Cor. 1:10). Let us examine Colossians 3:17, especially the meaning of “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” in order to better appreciate the distinction the Lord desires for His church.

Holistically Applicable

That this verse includes *every* aspect of our lives is evident by the vocabulary used. First, note the clause, “whatsoever ye do in word or deed.” A literal rendering of this would read, “Everything, which [is] something you may do.” The phrase “in word or deed” refers to every word spoken and action done, which would imply even the thoughts behind every spoken word and deed done (cf. Pr. 23:7; Mt. 12:35-36). “Word and deed” is a common way of referring to the “totality of one’s interaction with the world” (cf. Lk. 24:19; Acts 7:22; Rom. 15:18; 2 Thes. 2:17)—everything (Moo 291)! Second, the “all” in “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” further emphasizes the Lord’s expectation that *everything* in our whole, entire lives be done in His name!

Frequency

“In the name of...” or similar phrases appear thirty-seven times in the New Testament. The phrase is used in reference to humans: (1) “in the name of a prophet” (Mt. 10:41); (2) “in the name of a disciple” (Mt. 10:42); and (3) “in the name of Paul” (1 Cor. 1:13). It is used in reference to all three members of the Godhead—“in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mt. 28:19). It is used in reference to the Father—“in thy [Father’s] name” (Jn. 17:12). It is mostly used in reference to Jesus Christ: (1) “in thy [Jesus’] name” (Mt. 7:22; Mk. 9:38; Lk. 9:49); (2) “in his [Jesus’] name” (Mt. 12:21; Lk. 24:47; Jn. 2:23; Acts 3:16); (3) “in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18; 5:40; 9:27); (4) “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38; 3:6; 16:18); (5) “in the name of the Lord” (Mt. 21:9; 23:39; Mk. 11:9-10; Lk. 13:35; 19:38; Jn. 12:13; Acts 10:48; Jas. 5:10, 14); (6) “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16; 9:29; 19:5; 1 Cor. 6:11; Col. 3:17); (7) “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 5:4; Eph. 5:20; 2 Thes. 3:6); and (8) “in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (Jn. 3:18). Before further analysis of this phrase in Colossians 3:17, let us note what it does not mean.

Looking for More Men to Prepare!

Preachers are not born as preachers. They must be sought and taught. Help us find faithful men willing to “stand in the gap.” The Gospel is still God’s power to save the lost!

Common Misconception

“In the name of the Lord” does not simply mean to *dedicate* whatever we do to the Lord as if He would accept it because we are “sincere.” Some will reason, “Because God has given me this tremendous talent to play drums, I will dedicate my drum playing to God in worship, and He will be pleased because I use this talent *in the name of the Lord.*” Perhaps the best illustration of this misconceived line of reasoning is found in Matthew 7:21-23, where Jesus said,

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

“Not every one” implies that some will have been deceived into thinking that profession can replace practice (Mt. 7:21a cf. Lk. 6:46). Although “Lord” (κύριος) can be a polite form of address (cf. Mt. 13:27; 21:30; 25:20), here it is a deliberate recognition of Jesus’ divine authority—they think “Lord, Lord” is some kind of “magical formula.” *Doing* God’s will is what matters, not merely “saying” it (Mt. 7:21b cf. Heb. 5:9). In fact, “doing” is the major theme in this part of the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt. 7:15-20, 24-27). Mere “religion” is not to be done, but God’s will is to be done (cf. Mt. 6:1-18; Isa. 1:11-15). Jesus here

uses “My Father” for the first time in the Gospels. By this designation, Jesus is claiming divinity for Himself (cf. Mt. 16:16; Jn. 5:18; 19:7). Jesus enjoys a relationship to the Father that is unique to Him alone (cf. “only begotten” [*μονογενής*], Jn. 3:16). Through Jesus, we can enjoy a relation-

ship to the Father that is unique to Christians alone (“Abba, Father,” Mk. 14:36 cf. Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:6).

On the last day, many will appeal to the “good” they have done (Mt. 7:22a). “Many” shows the popular extent to which people are deceived into thinking that their “good” works will relieve them from obeying God (cf. Mt. 7:13, 15). “In that day” is a reference to the Day of Judgement (cf. Mt. 24:36; Lk. 10:12). All will stand before Christ in judgement (Jn. 5:22-29; Rom. 14:10). All will confess “Lord, Lord,” but for some it will be too late (cf. Phil. 2:9-11).

Their “good” deeds are seemingly commendable (Mt. 7:22b). “Lord, Lord” is a recognition of the divine authority of Christ (cf. Mt. 7:21). By their words, they claim allegiance to Him. “In [by ASV] thy name,” they claim they are doing so with His authority (cf. Col. 3:17). In the Greek text, “in thy name” appears first in each clause for the sake of emphasis. To *claim* that one works “in the name of the Lord” is not the same as actually *doing* “in the name of the Lord” (cf. Lk. 6:46). The only way to work “in His name” is to be in harmony with His will, both in relation to self and to others (cf. Mt. 28:18; Jn. 14:23; 1 Tim. 4:16).

“Prophesied” means to speak by God’s authority. “Cast out devils [demons ASV, NKJ]” is the expelling of wicked spiritual beings. “Demons” are spiritual beings who are linked with the power of Satan (cf. Acts 16:16-18; 1 Tim. 4:1; Jas. 2:19; Rev. 9:20). Casting out demons could only be done miraculously, thus it always required God’s miraculous power (cf. Mt. 10:8; Mk. 1:34; 9:38). Demon possession has served its purpose in providing opportunity to clearly declare the power of God; thus, demons are not given the power to bodily indwell people as they once did (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-13). “Many wonderful [mighty ASV] works [wonders NKJ]” likely refers to performing miracles. The term “wonderful works” primarily refers to “power, might, strength, force” (Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16; 9:17), but can also refer to “the outward expression of power: deed of power, miracle, wonder” (Mt. 7:22; 11:20-23; 13:54-58) (Bauer 208).

Did these self-proclaimed followers of Christ actually do miraculous works? Consider the following options. First, they may have been tricksters who deceived others into thinking that they did miracles (cf. Ex. 8:18-19 [cf. Ex. 7:11-12; 22; 8:7]; Acts 19:13-16; 2 Thes. 2:9-10). Second, they may have actually done these things in the past as faithful disciples, but since have become unfaithful (cf. the aorist tense verbs Mt. 7:22); however, Jesus’ statement, “I never knew you” (Mt. 7:23) dispels this option. Third, they may

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have been deceived into thinking that they truly exercised such power (cf. Mt. 24:24; 2 Tim. 3:13; Tit. 3:3). Fourth, they may have been associated with true miracle working disciples in the past, and thus thought that this miracle working power was just as much theirs as it was the true miracle workers.

This writer believes that they did not actually do miraculous works, but that they were deceived into thinking that doing “good” could replace the difficult way of obedience to God (cf. Mt. 7:13-14). This deception may have come from the “tricks” of others or by formal associations with true disciples, but they obviously did not love the truth (cf. 2 Thes. 2:10). Some may object by calling attention to the fact that Christ did not verbally deny their claims. However, some words are not worthy of attention (cf. Mt. 7:6; Acts 1:6-8). The response Jesus makes is the right response. The main lesson here is that nothing can make an adequate substitute for obedience to God (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22)!

No matter how “good” one is, God will not approve without obedience, or truly doing everything “in the name of the Lord” (Mt. 7:23a). “Then” introduces Jesus’ verdict—“I never knew you”! The word translated “knew” here refers to approval or acknowledgment (cf. Jn. 10:14; 1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19). “I never knew you” is a strong statement indicating that Jesus was never acquainted with them (cf. Mt. 25:41). Since they were never known by Christ, they never did His will!

The result of their failure to obey God is total rejection from Him (Mt. 7:23b). Eternal departure from the presence of God is the worst of all punishments (cf. Mt. 25:46; Lk. 13:27-28; 2 Thes. 1:9). Workers of “iniquity” cannot be with God (cf. Mt. 25:41-46; Rev. 21:8). “Iniquity [lawlessness, NKJ]”

refers to “lawless,” or being “outside the law” (Newman 16). Anyone who rejects God’s law by not doing everything in His name is “outside the law”! Thus, doing something “in the name of the Lord Jesus” is not merely *dedicating* something to Him!

True Meaning

To the contrary, “in the name of the Lord Jesus” means that everything we do must be in complete harmony with God’s will and authority. Note the following commentators’ remarks:

To do a thing in the name of the Lord Jesus is to do it for him and as he directs. Do it by his authority; do it as his servant, for his honor and glory. (Lipscomb)

To do all things “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” then, does not mean simply to utter Jesus’ name but to act always in concert with the nature and character of our Lord. (Moo 291)

The “name” was one of the chief ways in the ancient world by which a person could be known, by which her or his character could be disclosed, by which one could (as we might say) “get a handle” on another. (Dunn 240-241)

Living in accord with his name means “in harmony with his revealed will, in subjection to his authority, in dependence on his power.” (Melick 307)

Jesus is the only mediator between God and man (Heb. 2:5). Do we think for a moment that we could be pleasing to the Father without following the will of His Son? Let us heed the words of Jesus, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Lk. 6:46)!

Colossians 3:17 concludes, “Giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” We are to thank the Father through His Son (Rom. 1:8; 7:25). Jesus is the one by whom we have access to the Father (Eph. 2:18; 3:12;

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Heb. 10:19-22). Jesus is the one through whom we receive the blessings of salvation (Col. 1:14; Eph. 2:5-10; 3:3; Rom. 3:24-26; Tit. 3:4-7), including the avenue of prayer (cf. Jn. 14:13-14; 16:23-24; Rom. 8:34).

Paul made explicit in this epistle the fact that God comes to the world through Jesus and the world comes to God through him as well. The believers had access to God because of the work of the Son of God. Their thanks was to rise to the ears of God through his Son. (Melick 307)

Conclusion

Colossians 3:17 distinguishes the faithful church of Christ from all other religions! Only when we do and speak everything “in the name of the Lord Jesus” can we have the distinction God wants us to have in order to be pleasing in His sight (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31)!

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