

# Praying in the Name of Christ

When hymn writer John Newton announces that the name of Jesus sounds “sweet . . . in a believer’s ear,” his observation is more than sentimental musing: It is a profound and precious truth. How much does the Christian owe to the One who bears this name! We cannot speak too highly of the scriptural significance of our Saviour’s name. We call upon His name for salvation (Romans 10:13; cf. Acts 4:12). We are justified, washed, and sanctified in His name (1 Corinthians 6:11). We are encouraged to meet in His name (Matthew 18:20). As Christians, we bear His name, and we will suffer for it (Matthew 24:9; 1 Peter 4:14, 16). Our service is to be rendered in His name (Mark 9:37–41; cf. Acts 3:6, 16; 4:7–10). Since we are directed to “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17), it can be no surprise that we are to pray in His name: “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:13–14). This is a wonderful promise—but what does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus Christ?

## Approach

First, to pray in the Saviour’s name is to pray acknowledging that He is the sole ground of our approach to, and our acceptance before, God in Heaven. We dare not think of entering into His presence depending upon our own merit. As Calvin put it, “It is impossible to think of the dread majesty of God without being filled with alarm; hence the sense of our own unworthiness must keep us far away, until Christ interposes and converts a throne of

dreadful glory into a throne of grace.” Believer, we can indeed draw near to God in prayer, and this blessed privilege is ours because we come clothed and covered in the righteousness of Christ our Redeemer (Romans 5:1–2; Hebrews 4:14–16). Christ is the “one mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5). It is not without significance that Paul makes this fundamental declaration in the context of exhorting Timothy and the church at Ephesus to pray (cf. vv. 1–2, 8). These words apply as much to the life of prayer as they do to the matter of our salvation. No less a prayer warrior than George Muller of Bristol declared that “a Christian must make his requests to God on the grounds of the



*Esther, though a queen, was unsure of her welcome by King Abashuerus. By contrast, believers have “boldness and access with confidence” (Ephesians 3:11) by faith in Christ, in whose name they are guaranteed a hearing at the throne of grace.*

merits and worthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.” In truth, there is no other way for us to come. Christ is our acceptance before the Father (Ephesians 1:6). We are able to come through Him and upon the ground of the perfect sacrifice He has made on our behalf (Hebrews 10:10–22). How foolish and unthankful we are then if we fail to be diligent in prayer and so despise the way that He has opened for us.

## Authority

When we speak of acting in the name of another, we have in mind the concept of acting as that person’s representative, acting upon his or her authority. Just as the believer who speaks to men for God is the representative of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19–20), so as he speaks to God for men does he act with the authority of the Redeemer. Were he to approach God in his own name and purely upon his own merit, he would have no right to anything. But to approach in the name of Christ—that is altogether different! To pray in the name of Christ is to pray with all the authority of the Son of God. Christ counsels us to go to His Father in His name and thus to draw upon His inexhaustible store of grace and favour. Remember what He said as He prepared to take leave of His disciples: “All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). How easily we forget the import of these thrilling words. Would we not be less a prey to discouragement if we were really living in the light of this timeless declaration?

Solomon reminds us that “where the word of a king is, there is power” (Ecclesiastes 8:4). How much more is this so with the word of the King of kings? What resources we have at our disposal when we come to the throne in the name of the great prince Himself! Calvin’s words are a sobering reflection on our failure to grasp the immense possibilities of praying in Christ’s name: “That we lie on earth poor

and famished and almost destitute of spiritual blessings while Christ sits in glory, at the right hand of the Father, clothed with the highest majesty of empire, must be imputed to *our slothfulness and the narrowness of our faith*” (emphasis mine).

## Acknowledgement

Prayer truly offered in the name of Christ will acknowledge His mind and purpose respecting the matters brought to God. It is evident by the large number of prayers that remain unanswered (though they were offered earnestly and repeatedly) that some try to use His name merely as a rubber stamp for their own desires. They make little or no attempt to ensure that what they ask for is in tune with the will of the One in whose name it is sought. No doubt we all have particular desires when we leave certain matters before the Lord. But how careful are we to determine that those desires conform to the will of Christ? Could it be that what we desire conflicts with His plan and purpose?

The suggestion that John 14:13–14 places no such restriction upon us will not stand, for if we really pray in Christ’s name, we will ask in accordance with His will. Can we seriously suppose that these words represent a blank cheque, an invitation to ask what we will, regardless of our motivation or adherence to the truth of Scripture? Such a notion flies in the face of clear, biblical teaching (1 John 5:14–15; cf. 3:22; James 1:5). The words of an unknown believer are apt: “When in prayer, we are moved by His compassions, motivated by His interests, weighted down by His burdens, reaching out towards His objectives, then we are praying in His name.”

## Afterwards

When we pray in Christ’s name, we must remember that should our request be granted, we are responsible for the right management of the blessing we have been

given. Scripture speaks of God withholding His blessing through answered prayer because He knows that the blessing would be misused (James 4:3). Christ’s promise to answer prayer offered in His name was to the end “that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13). Everything He did was to this end (John 17:4), and we must seek to emulate Him, not least in the requests we make of His Father and in the way we react when He is pleased to grant those requests. Let us never forget that we have nothing we did not receive (1 Corinthians 4:7) and that we are here to glorify the Father who has bestowed upon us “every good gift and every perfect gift” (James 1:17). ■



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