

Praying in the name of Jesus

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Tags: Protestantism; Jesus prayer; Prayer

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A question was asked (in a prison visit) about “praying in the name of Jesus”, something that is very common among Protestants. It comes from a very literal, almost magical interpretation of a promise of Jesus in the Gospel: “Whatever you ask in My name I will do it”.

There are many verses in the Gospel that have this promise – that Jesus will respond to a prayer “in His name”. The Protestants, and unfortunately, others that do not understand the Patristic teaching and mind of the church take references like the following in a literal, mechanistic way:

“Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. (20) For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mat 18:19-20)

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:13-14)

“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. (24) Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:23-24)

The actual meaning of Jesus’ promise is that if we ask according to His will and are attempting to live according to His will, then He will help us. He was not directing us to add a suffix to some long extemporaneous prayer of: “in Jesus’ name we pray”.

Prayer is always connected with our faith, and our conduct which should be based upon our faith. If we have faith in God, that means that we wish to follow God’s commandments and we repent when we do not follow them. It means that we look at life in a spiritual way, and not a material way. All these things are necessary in order to pray in Jesus’ name. It is not a formula, it is a way of life. Nothing in life can be reduced to a formula.

There are other Scriptures that tell us that Jesus will do the things that we pray, but they are much different than the ones above. They do not lend themselves to a formula. For instance:

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” (John 15:7)

Note, above, the Lord promises us that He will do what we ask if we abide in Him. This is much more than just adding “in Jesus, name” to the end of a prayer

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (17) These things I command you, that ye love one another. (John 15:16-17)

Note, above, the Lord says that He will do what we ask in His name, **AND** He surrounds this promise with the expectation that we will bring forth fruit that is permanent and eternal, and also that we will love each other. The inference is that if we do not bring forth fruit, and we do not love, we can have no expectation that God will hear our prayers. Perhaps this sounds very harsh to you, because you feel that you’re not bringing forth fruit that is eternal. With God all things are possible.

Many times God somehow sees our desire and our effort as a result. Even though we are still sinners, if we are struggling to follow God's commandments, then God counts this effort as enough to hear at least some of our prayers.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. (6) But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. (7) For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.” (James 1:5-7)

St. James, the brother of our Lord, teaches that we must ask in faith in order to receive what we wish. This is not a popular view nowadays, when popular culture likes things reduced to slogans and formulas. Certainly, the Brother of the Lord would not be popular in today's popular culture because he tells us that we cannot expect to receive anything of God if we do not ask with faith. Of course, **faith is not just believing stuff – it is doing stuff based upon what we believe, it is ordering our life according to what we say we believe.**

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.” (1John 5:14)

This last reference from St. John teaches that we must pray according to God's will. Again, this command cannot be reduced to a formula that we add at the end of a prayer – it is an entire way of life.

Sometimes people are confused by this. They wonder how can we know God's will. If a person struggles to live according to God's will, eventually he will know God's will. Until we are perfected, or at least become more perfect, we must struggle in obedience and in submission and in repentance, and certainly all of these things are according to God's will. When we pray, if we are struggling, we can have some small confidence at least that God will hear our prayers.

I personally think that it is really not important whether or not we believe in a specific instance that God has heard our prayers. That is certainly not a monastic idea. The perfect monastic idea is that even if a person prays for something and it happens, he attributes this answer to the prayers of someone else, such as his spiritual father, or someone else he has not even heard of, and not because of his own prayers, because he is a sinner. We can pray with confidence, but not confidence in ourselves. We must have confidence in God and in His mercy. It really doesn't matter whether or not God listens directly to our prayer or to the prayer of someone else or our Guardian Angel or one of the saints. It only matters that we will be being taken care of by God because He loves us.

Of course, we do pray using Jesus name, and for everyone this should be a very common prayer. The Jesus prayer is: “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me”. We believe there is great power in this prayer – not because of just using the name Jesus but because we are praying to Jesus, and also struggling to live as Jesus taught us to live. Everyone should pray the Jesus prayer as much as possible.

This article is an excerpt from a longer “Prison Visit Report”, part of our prison ministry. We often write reports on the subjects talked about in prison ministry visits. The full report is at:

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(We visit 5 prisons regularly, and have monthly expenses exceeding one thousand dollars)