

What's in a Name?

What does it mean to act in Jesus' Name?

reliability
truth
reputation
integrity
honour
character

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What's in a Name?

Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV)

Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What's in a Name?

Names were important in Bible times, both in the Old Testament and New Testament times. A name told others something about who your parents thought you would (or should) be. A name was not just a word that meant *you*, that your parents used to get your attention or to call you for dinner; a name carried with it the idea of a persons' character and so also carried something of the idea of a person's reputation. Family reputation and honour were important in those days – it affected how you traded with people, and how people respected you. To an extent, it even determined what authority you had. This is also one reason why people were known by their father's name, to show what the family reputation and honour was. It was expected that a man's sons would learn from him, and largely imitate him in life.

What's in a Name?

The word “Name” in Hebrew is שֵׁם “*Shem*.” Strong’s Concordance explains that the word means “A mark or memorial of individuality; by implication, *honour, authority, character*.”

The Greek word, ὄνομα (“Onoma”) is very similar, carrying with it not only the idea of character, and authority, but also everything the person stands for, or as Thayer’s *Greek Definitions* puts it, “everything that the thought or feeling arouses in the mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering, the name, i.e., for one’s rank, authority, interests, pleasure, command, excellences, deeds etc.”

What's in a name?

We can see from this that the main ideas associated with a person's name were character, reputation, honour and authority

What's in a Name?

It is little surprise that God chose the Jewish people to bear His name, as they were descendants of Noah's first son, Shem. (Hence the word, "Semitic") Perhaps Noah hoped that the favour God had shown him would be continued to his descendants.

We can see an example of how the idea of a name standing for a reputation worked at the beginning of Genesis, at the tower of Babel.

Genesis 11:4 ESV

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

What's in a Name?

The importance of a person's name was often established before they were born. Hagar bore Abraham a son, and named him Ishmael, at the Angel's command (Gen 16). Abraham's son Isaac's name was given by God Himself (Gen 17). Several prophet's children were named by the Lord as living witnesses to what He had said (Isaiah, Hosea).

Perhaps more memorably in the New Testament, Zechariah, the temple priest was ordered to give his son the name, "John." John was to be the herald of the Messiah, whose name was given by an Angel to both Mary and Joseph. The name 'Jesus' was simply the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name, "Yeshua" (Or "Joshua" in the Old Testament.) which means, "God is Salvation."

What's in a Name?

The Bride of Christ

As an aside, we can see an echo of this today when a woman makes a covenant with a man, by marrying into his family; she takes on the family name as she is given all the rights and protections of her new family. This is something to bear in mind when we consider that the Church is referred to as "The Bride of Christ."

Because of the importance of names, several people in the Bible had their names changed. The most obvious is Abram and his wife Sarai. As a sign of His favour to Abram in the covenant He made, (Gen 17), God took part of the name He used to refer to Himself, ("Yahweh") and inserted it into theirs. The dominant syllable of His name, "Ah" was added to theirs changing Abram to Abraham, and Sarai to Sarah. Abram, ("Exalted Father") became Abraham ("Father of multitudes") while Sarai ("Princess") became Sarah ("Noble Woman").

What's in a Name?

Abraham's grandson Jacob experienced something similar. As a twin, he was born holding on to his older brother's heel, thus earning him the name "Jacob" meaning, "Supplanter," "Usurper" or "Twister."

Many years later, while fearing for his life after tricking his brother into selling his birthright, (the eldest's share and associated rights and responsibilities) Jacob found himself wrestling with a mysterious man. When he refused to let him go, the man said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven [fought] with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Gen 32)

The name "Israel" means, "God Prevails" or "God will rule." The word *rule* carried with it the idea of making straight. Thus we see that Jacob, (The Twister) became Israel (Made straight). His descendants still carry his name.

Now that we understand the idea behind names, we must look at how names were seen and understood.

God's Name: His Reputation and Character

In the Ten Commandments, God shows how important His name is by making it a command not to invoke it unnecessarily:

Exo 20:7 NASB

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

Taking His Name in vain

To take something in vain means to use without cause, to disrespect, or to treat lightly.

To take something in vain means to use without cause, to disrespect, or treat lightly. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, he started with the same idea held in Exodus passage:

What's in a Name?

Mat 6:9 NASB

Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name...

We forget that “Hallowed” means more than “respected,” but “*Holy*,” which itself means, “pure” or “set apart.” The verses before this tell us that we are not to make idols or images to worship, for God is a jealous God. Worshipping anything made to represent the Infinite God could only misrepresent Him and dishonour his reputation. Worshipping anything else would be a lie.

This is why He specially commanded Aaron and the priests,

Lev 22:2, 32 NIV

Tell Aaron and his sons to treat with respect the sacred offerings the Israelites consecrate to me, so they will not profane my holy name. I am the LORD.

Do not profane my holy name. I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites. I am the LORD, who makes you holy

What's in a Name?

The sacrifices and offerings brought to God by the people were to be treated with respect by the priests. Sacrifices and offerings had to be done with honour and respect for both the person bringing the offering, and *especially* for God to whom the sacrifices were made. Failure to do so would dishonour God in the eyes of the people, and force God to confirm that He did care about His own reputation. This is why Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu were killed by God when they offered unsanctified ("Strange"-KJV) fire, because they disrespected and dishonoured God by cutting corners and attempted to do things their way. (Leviticus 10:1)

Honour and Representation

There was also something else to bear in mind. Invoking the name of a Deity to stand witness to the truth of something is almost as common today as it was in Biblical times (“I swear to God”), but back then it was meant in every sense. The Jewish people understood that they were God’s People, and therefore were to represent Him in their interactions with the other nations around them. (Deuteronomy 4:6-9)

Deu 10:20 ESV

20) You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.

What's in a Name?

A standard oath in the Old Testament was, “As surely as the Lord lives....” which to them was a certainty, but also if they were to swear to the truth of something, they were to swear in His name: backing up their words with the honour and reputation of the God they served. To abuse this honour, or do so in bad faith was to disrespect or denigrate God’s honour, character and reputation.

Blasphemy

*To blasphememeant to slander or injure
God's reputation, or to act or speak
impiously*

This is one reason why God was particularly hard on anyone who would dishonour or call into question His reputation.

What's in a Name?

Deu 18:20-22 ESV

20) But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.'

21) And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'—

22) when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

Misrepresenting God is a sin God takes very seriously, now just as much as then. Causing other people to compromise, doubt or lose faith in Him was so serious that it called for the death penalty. The yardstick was simple: The Truth.

What's in a Name?

If something was prophesied and did not take place, it was not from God. There was no compromise (Deut 18:20-22). The result for those who knew God's Name (ie his reputation, honour and character) according to David, was a firm trust and reliance in the Lord at all times. (Psalm 9:10) This is the essence of what it means to have a reputation in the Biblical context.

Reputation means Trust

Those who know God's Name (ie his reputation, honour and character) are drawn into a firm trust and reliance in the Lord based on what they have seen. This is the essence of what it means to have a reputation.

What does it mean to be called by His Name?

As we have seen, to be called by a particular name had significance. Someone's name was their reputation, therefore those who rely on Him honour Him by investing their trust in Him. Those who know Him can say with David,

Psa 9:9-10 ESV

- 9) The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.
- 10) And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.

God's ability to save was a part of His reputation. The Apostle John referred to that in the prologue of his Gospel: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..."

What's in a Name?

We are told in Acts 11 that Paul and Barnabas spent a year in Antioch, where those who believed in Jesus were first called “Christians.” Originally a derogatory term, it meant a Christ-follower, but it was a term embraced by His early followers for the implication that they were identified with Jesus. In other words, they were happy to be known by His name.

In a way, it is a New Testament echo of the honour God gave Abram by giving him part of His name and turning Abram into Abraham. But those who are called by His name need to bear in mind that with that honour comes an implicit responsibility, to maintain the honour, reputation and character of the name we bear.

At this point we need to look at the role of a Herald in ancient times. A herald (*Kerux* in Greek) was an official messenger given special authority to gather people together to make official announcements.

What's in a Name?

John the Baptist acted as a herald, announcing the coming of the Messiah. Paul describes himself as *kerux* in both his letters to Timothy, where it is usually translated as “preacher.” Peter described Noah as a *kerux* in 2 Peter 2:5: A herald of righteousness in an ungodly world.

It is important to note that the *kerux*, that is, the herald or messenger could only operate within the limits of his authority. To overstep his authority or mandate was to discredit his superior. But as long as he was acting within the bounds of his authority, he could be sure that his purpose and message were backed by the full authority of his superior.

When Peter healed the lame man at the entrance to the temple “In the Name of Jesus,” (Acts 3) he firmly proclaimed that it was faith in Jesus and His name that had accomplished the miracle. In other words, the miracle could not be attributed to Peter himself, but rather to Jesus’ goodness, mercy and kindness – in other words, His character, honour, reputation.

What's in a Name?

As far as Peter was concerned, it was something Jesus would do, and so he did the act on Jesus' behalf, under His authority.

When the rulers gathered together to examine Peter and John regarding the miracle, they asked, "By what power or by what name did you do this in?" In other words, they wanted to know under whose authority Peter and John were acting under. When ordered not to speak any more in Jesus name, they refused, recognising God's authority as greater than the chief priests.

Their mandate, their orders so to speak, had been given to them directly by Jesus Himself on the Mount, in the passage in Mathew's gospel usually referred to as "The Great Commission (Matthew 28).

What's in a Name?

Mat 28:18-20 ESV

18) And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus' character shows

His character can naturally be seen as He promises the Holy Spirit will be with them in carrying out this duty.

What's in a Name?

It is clear here that they were to be acting under Jesus' authority and command in order to make disciples of all nations. His character is evident as He promised to be with them as they carried out commands, and this was confirmed in John 14, and again in chapter 16, where He promised the Holy Spirit. Although Jesus still has to be preached, it is the Spirit that does the real work (John 16:8-11).

What does it look like?

We need therefore to understand what acting under His authority means, and what it looks like. This is perhaps most famously demonstrated by the Roman centurion who simply asked Jesus to exercise His authority because he knew what authority looked like: "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (Matt 8)

What's in a Name?

The centurion was commended for his faith. But note that he recognized that his authority was delegated; it was not his own. He issued orders on behalf of the Roman army, which acted on behalf of the Roman Empire.

A soldier refusing an order would not just incur the centurion's wrath, but that of the entire Roman establishment for defying its authority structure. The centurion had to operate within the bounds set by the Roman army in order to exercise his authority, and the same is true for us who are called by His name.

A Centurion's faith

The centurion had to operate within the bounds set by the Roman army in order to exercise his authority. It is the same for us who are part of God's army.

What's in a Name?

Just as Deuteronomy 18 instructs that one who presumes to speak in God's name something He had not commanded should be put to death, even today those claiming to speak for Him need to recognize that they are under authority, and cannot operate outside what God has spoken.

God had nothing good to say about those who claimed to speak for Him who abused their own authority, and He promised retribution on them in Jeremiah 23, 27 and 29.

For His own integrity, and for the sake of His people, God continues to take His reputation very seriously. Even Moses was not above being disciplined by God for misrepresenting Him before God's people at the Waters of Meribah. (Numbers 20:10-13)

We can see a demonstration of the highest authorities operating under authority in Jude. Speaking of false teachers who reject authority, he wrote,

What's in a Name?

Jud 1:8-9 ESV

8) Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones. [Angels]

9) But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous [slandorous] judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

As C.S. Lewis once pointed out in his book *The Screwtape Letters*, Satan is not the opposite and equal of God. God simply has no equal. But as a created being, Satan is the equal of Michael, the Archangel. Yet even Michael rebuked Satan in the Lord's name- in other words, he was acting under The Lord's authority.

What's in a Name?

This has implications for any of us today who try to operate under our own authority in the spiritual. In short, we should like the Roman centurion, recognise that we are under authority and act within that authority. *We act for Caesar. We are not Caesar!* When he said, “I do not deserve to have you come under the roof of my house—Just say the word and it will be done” the Centurion recognised that Jesus spoke for God and honoured Him as one who held God’s authority.

Even as God’s children, having all the rights of entry to the throne-room of God, we need to recognise that we are to honour Him. We cannot rejoice in our own position without acknowledging who, and at what price that right was bought. The reality is that we do have the right to act in His name, but this when understood, implies acting as He would, and doing all for His glory and honour.

What's in a Name?

Joh 14:12-14 ESV

12) “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

13) Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14) If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Those that believe in Him are called to do the works He did. Therefore, Jesus taught, whatever you ask in His name, He would do. But please note that it is implied that the requests made are to do the work Jesus did. In other words, requests were to be made in keeping with Jesus’ character. This is why the requests were made in His name.

What's in a Name?

It will also be noted that the Apostles, those known for the miracles in Acts, were much more concerned with spreading the news of who Jesus was than performing miracles. Those miracles confirmed God's words or opened the way for the Gospel to be spread; they were not 'performed' on demand. The Apostles simply would not allow them to be a distraction. In other words, their focus was on who Jesus was and the message of the Gospel, rather than the things that confirmed the message

Their ability to perform the miracles was not intrinsic, that is, found with themselves, but carried out by Jesus Himself, to bring glory and praise to God the Father. Again, this implies that the things we ask should be for His sake, not our own- His honour, not ours. When acting in that way, we can then have full confidence that God will agree to our requests. As Lawrence Richards says, "... When we make Christ's goals our own, He will make all the resources of Heaven available to achieve them." (The Victor Bible Background Commentary) Philippians 4:19 alludes to this.

What's in a Name?

It has often been pointed out that the Greek word "*Apostolos*" (Or "Apostle") means "One who is sent." Like a kerux, or herald, it means one who is sent for a specific purpose; as we would say, "a man on a mission."

But while a kerux had a single task or message to give, an Apostle was one who could speak on behalf of his ruler while operating under his authority. In other words, he was an official representative of his country and king- an ambassador. His task was to represent his country in the best light and operate with the authority and character of the ruler in official affairs.

This is the thought that Paul uses when describing himself.

Romans 1:1. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...

Rom 1:5. ...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

What's in a Name?

Paul saw his role as bringing people to obedience that comes through faith for the sake of God's honour and reputation. He did this by preaching and teaching and correcting theology or beliefs that would lead away from the centrality of Christ and His work.

For the sake of people's salvation and the honour and reputation of God's character, he could not tolerate any corruption of the veracity and holiness of God. *"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed,"* he wrote in Galatians 1:8. The idea of God's sovereign ability to save completely being repudiated or perverted was enough to send him into a fury, as is evident from reading the chapter.

Paul in a Rage!

The idea of God's sovereign ability to save completely being repudiated or perverted was enough to send him into a fury.

What's in a Name?

It was Charles Spurgeon who said, "The more we know him, the more we love him." The Apostle Paul said something similar to the Romans: "Faith comes through hearing, and hearing comes through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17) Reading His word results in understanding how He works and operates. This strengthens our confidence and trust in Him. In other words, our faith grows as we see God's character in the way He dealt with others, and what went into building His reputation. It also deepens our understanding of how we are to live in the world around us.

Part of the process of making disciples is meeting together to strengthen, encourage and support each other just as Christ did with His own disciples. Wherever Christ's followers meet, there is a common purpose to help bring others to maturity in the Christian Faith by reading scripture, discussing content, intent and application-seeking the mind of Christ. This helps to bring clarity and direction.

What's in a Name?

Believers gathering together for this purpose are a living demonstration of what Jesus said in Matthew 18:20, "Wherever two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst of them." Similarly, believers purposely demonstrating His love in a practical way are said to be acting in His name and on His behalf. There is a sure reward for those who honour their Lord by glorifying His reputation. As Jesus Himself said in Mark 9:37, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me"

As we begin to understand that the things that we do are *all* in His Name, that is, we do them on His behalf, for His honour and glory, we realise that we are ambassadors acting for Him at all times.

The things we do are not to demonstrate our abilities or authority, but for and on behalf of Him. This should humble us, as we see that any authority that we do have is delegated from Him and is used on His behalf.

What's in a Name?

Acting on His behalf, any command we make in His Name (cf Acts 16:18) should be in the spirit and character of Jesus for *His* purposes- His honour and glory, not for our own.

Let us therefore treat the name we as Christians bear with the deepest of respect for the one who gave it to us. Let us treat it with dignity and respect, and above all, the honour He deserves, as we remember that the name represents His reputation, honour, character and authority.

Let us close by looking at the scripture we began with from Kenneth Wuest's expanded translation:

Philippians 2:9-11 (Wuest)

Because of which voluntary act of supreme self-renunciation God also supereminently exalted Him to the highest rank and power, and graciously bestowed upon Him the Name, the name which is above every name, in order that in recognition of the Name which Jesus possesses, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, of things on earth, and of things under the earth, and in order that every tongue should plainly and openly agree to the fact that Jesus Christ is Lord, resulting in the glory of God the Father.