

WHAT'S IN A NAME? (part 2)

In the first part of this study, we looked at given names. Those given to us at birth, the labels we all wear due to our relationships and the names people call us due to their perception of us. Solomon wrote:

“a good name is better than fine perfume.” (Eccl. 7:1)

Ever had anyone walk past you with a good perfume/aftershave on? What about the smell of food on a BBQ? It makes you breathe deeply and want to follow your nose. You will immediately think favourably of the person, or be attracted to the smell. Compare this to being in close quarters with someone with bad body odour, or breath. Usually we are repulsed, or at the very least want to get to a safe distance from the person.

So it is with those with a good name, or a bad name. If Gary Webb has come to be known as a cheating, lying thief, who is only friendly with those that he can use, the name will stink in the nostrils of everyone, and they will keep their distance. But if my name is trustworthy, honest, reliable, generous and helpful, then people will want to be around me. Such is the attraction of a good name. And like perfume in biblical times, it is something precious, to be cared for!

This brings me to the next part of our study. The name or label we all adopt once we accept Jesus as Lord, ‘*Christian*’. In life, we are all given labels that identify what we do. It might be student, football player, (fruit) doctor, chef, worship leader, cleaner, or printer. These names tell more about what activities we undertake than who we are. They may allude to our level of schooling or gifts given to us by God, but they are general terms, more interested in how we spend our time, as opposed to revealing our deepest selves.

‘Christian’ on the other hand should not be treated in the same way. This is far more than a general title describing what we do. It is a declaration of who we are, and what we hope to become. The name was first used at Antioch, and comes from a common Latin origin. Often, the troops who represented or fought for a certain leader were called by that leader’s name, with the addition of *iani* at the end. Eg. Herod’s troops were called *Herodiani*. Therefore, Christian (from Christiani) suggests that we are not mere followers, but are bound to Christ and His cause, as a soldier to his leader, and we are in a battle in Christ’s name.

In fact Paul takes this a step further when he writes that we are “...Christ’s ambassadors, as if God were making His appeal through us.” (2Cor 5:20) He also calls himself an ambassador in chains (for Christ see Eph 6:20). In first century

politics, an ambassador was far more than just a spokesperson or mere representative. An ambassador spoke with the authority of the one in whose name he came. He was to be treated in the same manner as if one was speaking to the king or dignitary himself and his decrees were to be taken as if coming from the lips of whom he served. However, the ambassador had no authority to negotiate or make proclamations on his own. He was to deliver the message of his master and fulfil all that was asked of him. No more, no less.

In the last study, we saw that God views us as his sons & daughters and wants us to see Him as our Father. This is also relevant from the perspective of us as ambassadors. You see, when a message was of utmost importance, the king would usually send his highest official and this most often was his own flesh and blood, his sons and daughters! What more important message can there be than to tell of God’s only son, coming to die in our place? The message of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life! Therefore God adopts us into His family and sets us the task as His ambassadors into the world, in his name.

Jesus came as God’s only son and was a perfect ambassador. He only did what He saw his Father doing, and said what he heard His Father saying (see John 5:19-30). So too, our own role as Christians (or ambassadors) compels us to only say what Jesus says and do what Jesus does. It is the basis of the “WWJD (what would Jesus do)” slogan. As Christ’s ambassadors we are to deliver the message and fulfil the task set for us – no more, no less. Too often however, the ‘Christiani’ wear the name like a badge of honour, without the realisation that it is not a name badge, it is a declaration of whom it is that we represent, and hope one day to be like! Rather than coming in His good name, declaring His Good News, we instead give Christ a bad name and confuse the message we are called to deliver by our words and actions.

When we declare our allegiance to Christ (call ourselves Christians), especially to the unsaved, we are saying that we are representatives of Jesus on earth, and as such speak and act for Him, in His name. We are most people’s first contact with Christ. Most are at least curious to hear what it is He has to say through us. Yet sometimes we are less than ‘Christlike’ in our words and deed. One example that always makes me cringe, are those that place Christian stickers prominently on their cars. How often I have seen and heard of these same people cutting off drivers, yelling abuse at other motorists, or making obscene gestures at other road users.

Likewise, it is too often Christians that are dragging each other before the courts, who are caught in illicit activity, prone to gossip and slander and the church now has the highest rate of divorce of any group in society. Add to this the very

public accounts of adultery and sex abuse within the church as a whole, and we have to wonder if it is 'in Christ's name' we come. Are we ambassadors for Jesus, or pawns in someone else's army? Of course, none of us are the perfect ambassadors for God as Jesus was, but we should be aware of the battle we enter into when we put on the mantle of Christian. And we should realise that 'Christian' is not a badge we display lightly. We come in the name of the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords! We represent this high and exalted one's name.

This is the name "...by which we must be saved." (**Acts 4:12**) Upon which, "Everyone who calls...will be saved." (**Rom. 10:13**) Which "...is above every name." And at which "...every knee should bow." (**Phil. 2:9 & 10**) As for those of us who endure 'to the end', God has a new name prepared for us. In the book of Revelation, God will give to us a stone with a new name written on it, which will be known only to Him and us. (See Rev 2:17) This name He will never "blot out...from the book of life." (**Rev 3:5**)

Names are important! Not so much the name given at birth, but the names people come to associate with us. It is these thoughts about us that are then reflected upon the name of Jesus when we announce to the world we call ourselves Christian. No wonder a good name for God's people is, as Solomon wrote elsewhere, "... more desirable than great riches." (**Prov. 22:1**) But of the utmost importance is what God calls *you*. The name He calls you by now, and the name He will give us on a stone. We can only hope it reads, "good and faithful servant!"

Study 2 – questions

1. Read **Proverbs 22:1**. What does this mean to you? What sort of name do you think you have?

2. Read **Acts 2:42-47 & 11:25-26**. What characteristics do you think people at this time thought about when they heard the word Christians?

3. Early Christian believers were clearly different to others around them. Do you think we appear very different to those around us?

4. How should being an 'ambassador' of Christ change the way in which we act?

5. Read **1Chronicles 4:9 & 10**. What characteristic did Jabez have that assisted him despite his name? What does this say about our ability to change our name?

6. Read **Isaiah 56:3-7**. About whom do you think this Old Testament prophet is speaking? What name could be better than sons & daughters?

7. Think about the way the world might perceive Christians. How do you think they describe Christ's representatives? What are some good and bad news stories people might think of when they hear the word Christian?

8. Read **Acts 1:8**. A witness is someone who tells the truth, of what they have seen and heard. How does this relate to Jesus' words in **John 5:19-30**? Putting the two Scriptures together, what responsibility does this now place on us as witnesses?

9. Read **Revelation 2:17**. What name(s) do you hope will be written on your stone?

10. What has God revealed to you through this study?