

# What's In A Name?

## 1 Corinthians 3:1-11

Text: Col. 3:17

Introduction:

1. One of the pet statements bandied about by those who would defend denominationalism is, "There isn't anything in a name." The purpose of this sermon is to look at what *God has said* on the subject of the name; what *you or I may think* about it amounts to nothing if God has spoken.
2. It is my intention to be practical throughout this discussion; indeed I fear I may be too practical for some. I shall deal with actual conditions.
  - a. I will assume there are in this assembly people who have had some connection with or who are affiliated with denominational bodies, and are known as Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, etc.
  - b. It is not my intention to ridicule their faith. Whenever I shall use such terms as "the Lutheran Church," "the Methodist Church," etc., I shall do so, not in any spirit of ridicule, but to make myself clearly understood. I pray that you will listen to the Scriptures in the same spirit of sincerity.

BODY

### 1 Denominationalism defined.

1. In every community, there are different bodies of people, all professing to be Christians, all singing practically the same hymns, all praying to the same God in the name of the same Mediator, all fervent in spirit and earnest in zeal, and all animated by the same Christian ideas of life; yet worshipping in different chapels, and separated from one another by denominational walls of human origin.
2. This is not theory nor speculation, but an honest statement of the condition that actually exists. The condition itself may be termed *sectarianism*, or *denominationalism* or *denominational Christianity*.

### 2. The attitude of Jesus towards division.

The question now arises, Is this condition pleasing to the Lord? Has Jesus said anything on the subject? In the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's narrative of the gospel the real Lord's prayer is recorded, the one which He prayed Himself, not that which He taught His disciples to pray.

After praying for the sanctification of His apostles, He says: "***Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me,***" John 17:20-21. An analysis of this prayer reveals the following truths:

- (1) He prayed that all who believe on Him through the apostles' word *may be one*. This includes all believers in Christ in all ages, as we have no other evidence to convince us that He is the Christ except the apostles' testimony. John 20:30-31; Acts 2:42; Acts 16:31-33; rom. 10:14-17.

- (2) He prayed that this oneness might be of such a nature as that existed between the Father and Himself. This would be oneness of plan, purpose, effort and relationship. this would not be a unity arrived at by mutual compromise and concession, but a unity achieved by the complete surrender of individual will to the divine Will; in other words, a unity consummated by bringing all believers *into Christ* in the Scriptural way. Rom. 8:1; Gal. 3:27. Such a oneness would necessarily include unity of faith, practice and worship.
- (3) This prayer teaches that such a oneness can be attained when believers are brought into a relationship with God, through Christ, in the way taught in the Scriptures. Rom. 10:9-10; 2Cor. 7:10; Gal. 3:27; 2Cor. 5:17. "That they may be one in us" is the nature of the unity for which Jesus prayed. We can readily see that such a unity is not achieved by any "league of denominations;" it can be realized only in the unity of all disciples in the *faith and worship outlined in the New Testament*.
- (4) It is also quite evident that such a oneness must be *visible*. Someone may say, "But we are already one. We may have denominations on earth, but we are one in faith and shall be united in heaven." Jesus prayed that we may be one, however, that the world may believe. A unity that will convince the world must be a visible unity. If the *world* is won for Christ, denominationalism must go, and all disciples must become one in the faith and worship authorized by the New Testament.
- (5) The purpose of this oneness is "*that the world may believe*". Jesus knew quite well that a divided body would be ineffective in winning the world to His standard. Hence He has left this prayer on the divine record that His disciples may know His will in the matter. We must admit that Christianity has thus far failed to convert the world, and that the reason lies in its divisions and humanisms. John R. Mott has rightly said, "The price that has been paid for a divided Christendom is an unbelieving world."
- (6) Think what power would be exerted in the Rogersville community if there all believers were united in one faith and practice and worship. Imagine the effect on the Rogersville community if all the talents of all the men and women professing to be disciples of Jesus Christ were committed to using their talents and resources to teach the gospel, and demonstrate the way by our lives and our unity.
  - a. Someone may argue that I am picturing an impossibility; that men can never be brought to such genuine agreement. Do you think that Jesus was praying for an impossibility?
  - b. Moreover if the unity for which Jesus prayed is not attained, it will be so because men make it impossible by their prejudices and putting their will ahead of the will of our Lord.
  - c. Be that as it may, the fact remains that such an ideal of unity has been set before us by the Lord, and we cannot be loyal disciples of Him unless we earnestly strive to achieve the ideal.
- (7) It becomes quite plain, after analyzing this prayer, that any one who seeks to perpetuate denominationalism, or a divided Christianity, is acting in direct opposition to the will of Christ. The condition existing at the present time in the religious world is the direct antithesis of that for which Christ prayed. And I'm afraid that those who are responsible, therefore, for maintaining this division will be held accountable in the judgment.
- (8) Let me illustrate: The church is referred to as the body of Christ, in Eph. 1:23. Suppose someone should attack you, tear off an arm, break a bone, punch out an eye, or mangle a limb, would your body be as powerful in such a condition as it its present state of health? No. Neither can the body of Christ be powerful when torn apart by denominationalism.

### 3. The question of name as related to division.

1. It is very clear that Jesus taught that the church is to be one body. Denominationalism then is not only a waste of time, talent and energy, but it is sinful itself being contrary to our Lord's will.
  - a. Let us now be practical. Suppose the different church bodies in this community should decide to unite. Suppose, again, that you were to be placed on a committee to formulate the plan of unity.
  - b. What would probably be the first question this committee would be compelled to consider? Strange to say it would not be any such question as, for instance, predestination, or the operation of the Holy Spirit, or even baptism.
  - c. It would be: *What shall be the name of this united church?*
  
2. At this point a clear-cut question comes to our mind! *Has God already provided a name for His church and His people?*
  - a. If so, is it not within the jurisdiction of any committee of men to change that name or to select another? Men have no authority in matters wherein God has spoken.
  - b. Or, *Has God left the matter of naming His church and His people to the people themselves?* If so, your committee would have a perfect right to select any name upon which all may agree.
  - c. To settle this issue an investigation into the Scriptures would be in order.
  
3. **Acts 15:18.** There is something in the Scriptures known as "the eternal purpose" of God. Eph. 1:4-12; Eph. 2:8-12; 1Pet. 1:10-12; Rev. 13:8.
  - a. This eternal purpose, or plan, was to send Jesus Christ "in the fulness of time," to establish the church, publish the gospel, and unite Jews and Gentiles in one body of Christ.
  - b. Knowing that God purposed from "the foundation of the world" to ultimately establish a church, with His Son as its divine Head, we inquire if *God has also preordained a name for His people who constitute this church.*
  - c. In other words, did God plan and establish a church, without naming His church and His people?
    - 1) We shall go to the Old Testament to see if He prophesied anything about a name for His people, and to the New Testament to see if He gave them that name.

### 4. The teaching of the Old Testament regarding the name.

Read Isa. 65:15; Isa. 56:5; Isa. 62:2, and Amos 9:11-12.

These prophetic statements reveal the following truths:

- (1) That God would cast off the Jews and call His people by a *new name*, and this name would be a curse unto His "chosen." Undoubtedly the name of Christ fulfills this prophecy.
- (2) That "the mouth of the Lord" should bestow this name, i.e. by *inspiration*.
- (3) That God would give a "place" and a "name" to all His saints in future ages. The "place" referred to is explained by 1Tim. 3:15; and Romans 16:16.
- (4) That this name would be better than the names of sons and daughters, i.e. better than all human

names, in the fact that it would be bestowed upon children of God, John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14-17.

- (5) That it would be an everlasting name that would not be cut off.
- (6) That it would be bestowed upon the Gentiles first, in the day in which God would raise up the tabernacle of David which had fallen into ruins.

### 5. The teaching of the New Testament regarding the name.

- (1) **Acts 11:26.** The gospel was preached only to Jews for several years following Pentecost. It required a special vision to convince Peter that the great commission included Gentiles as well as Jews. Acts 10 and Acts 11.
  - a. Cornelius and his household were the first Gentiles of the household of faith.
  - b. In Acts 15:14 we are told that God *first* visited the Gentiles “to take out of them a people for his name,” and the prophecy of Amos 9:11-12 is quoted verbatim immediately following this statement, showing that the rebuilding of the “tabernacle of David” was a prophetic reference to the establishment of the church.
  - c. Now if God visited the *Gentiles first* to take out of them a people for His name, when and where did this occur? *The church at Antioch was the first Gentile church, and it was at Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.”*
  - d. Moreover, the prophet stated that the “mouth of the Lord” should bestow this divine name; therefore it follows that the name was given through the inspired teaching and authority of Paul and Barnabas, which explodes the theory that it was bestowed in derision by the enemies of Christianity.
  - e. This Scripture harmony proves that the name “Christian” was prophesied and bestowed as the divine name for God’s people.
    - 1) The fact that the name was to be given to the Gentiles first also explains why it is that the name is not to be found in *Acts of Apostles* until we take up the history of the Antioch church.
    - 2) Note that the disciples were not called “Lutherans,” “Methodist,” etc. but “Christians” meaning “of Christ.”
- (2) **Acts 26:28.** Agrippa was almost persuaded to become, not a Presbyterian, nor a Methodist, nor a Baptist, nor anything of the kind. Such names were unknown at that time.
- (3) **2Peter 4:16.** If we suffer as Lutherans, whose name is glorified? The name of Martin Luther. If we suffer as Calvinists, then John Calvin gets the glory; if as Presbyterians, the *presbytery* is glorified; if as Baptists, the act of *baptism*; if as Episcopalians, the *episcopacy*. If we suffer as Christians, however, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is glorified.
- (4) **Col. 3:17.** the words of our text. Someone says, “Why all this argument? Are not Baptists, Methodists, etc. all Christians?”
  - a. Well, it is true that they profess to be, and no doubt one is a Christian if he has complied with the Scriptural terms of pardon and is leading a Christian life. But if he wishes to be known as a Christian, why doesn’t he not stop with that?
  - b. Why do some impose human names upon the divine name? Why do they inscribe names upon the corner-stones of their chapels such designations as “Methodist Church” “Baptist

Church.” “Presbyterian Church,” etc.?

- c. If the Lord were to walk the streets of the average city today would He be able to locate His own church by the designations to be found on church architecture?
  - d. Suppose the Masons were to dump a ton of coal into some poor widow's bin; who would receive the credit? The Masonic fraternity, of course. If the Lutheran Church were to do it whose name would be honored? The name of Luther. But suppose the church of Christ were to do it, whose name would be glorified? The name of Christ.
  - e. Denominationalism is absolutely blind to the admonition of our text.
- (5) **Philippians 2:9-11.** God has given His Son a name which is “above every name.” Did not the prophet state that this divine name would be better than the names of sons and daughters? Is it not, then, better than all human names; better than the name of Luther, Calvin, Wesley, or Campbell?
- (6) **2Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2.** Christ is the Bridegroom; the church is the Bride. What would people think of a bride who would insist upon wearing some other man's name in preference to that of her husband? Is it not dishonoring Christ when His bride, the church, voluntarily assumes and wears a human name instead of His own divine name?
- (7) **Gal. 4:26.** Christ is the Bridegroom and the church is the Bride. To this spiritual union we are born as babes in Christ, 1Peter 2:2.
- a. Naturally we would be little “Christ-ians.”
  - b. A congregation of such Christians constitutes a “church of Christ” Romans 16:16.
- (8) **Acts 4:12.** We should wear the name of Christ because there is salvation in no other name.
- (9) **Acts 15:17.** When a person is baptized according to the Scriptures, into whose name is one to be baptized? Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38. Why not wear that name then? Isn't that name sufficient?
- (10) **Rev. 2:13; Rev. 3:8.** Is there nothing in a name? Jesus spoke words of affection and commendation to the churches in Pergamum and Philadelphia because they kept His *name* and His *word*.
- a. What church body in this community wears the name of Christ exclusively, and keeps His word as a sufficient guide in religious faith and practice?
  - b. To ask this question is to answer it.

**Closing illustrations:**

1. “If the church is the bride of Christ, the bride must have been the same name as the bridegroom. If the church is the body of Christ, she must have the same name as her head. It would be strange if my body and my head should bear different names. In some comments on the passage, ‘The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch,’ it is held that this name was given in derision. I think not. If you study the use of the Greek word, ‘called’, you will conclude that they were divinely called Christians. God gave them that name. Jesus speaks about rich men blaspheming that ‘beautiful name by which you are called.’”  
 (A. J. Gordon, Baptist, in Selected Northfield Sermons.”

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“I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living. I hope they will soon be gone. I hope the Baptist name will soon perish; but let Christ's name last forever.”

(Spurgeon memorial Library, Vol. 1., p. 168.)

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“I pray you to leave my name alone, and call not yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for any one. St Paul (1Cor. 1:13) would not that any should call themselves of Paul, nor of Peter, but of Christ. How, then, does it befit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the children of Christ? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with them all; and let us call ourselves only Christians after Him from whom our doctrine comes.”

(Stork, *Life of Luther*, p. 289.)

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“Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgot; that we might all agree to sit down together as humble, loving disciples at the feet of the common Master, to hear His word, to imbibe His spirit, and to transcribe His life into our own.”  
John Wesley - (Methodist)

“But, alas, the enemies have blasphemed the blessed gospel by pasting our sinful names upon it to bring it into disrepute.”  
– Alexander Campbell

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2. “A preacher one time, in a revival, clapped his hands and shouted, ‘Thank God, there is nothing in a name! nothing in a name!’ When an old woman in that audience, who had been Scripturally taught, jumped to her feet, clapped her hands and shouted, ‘Glory to Beelzebub, the prince of devils,’ the preacher and the congregation were shocked, and he immediately rebuked her for giving glory to Beelzebub. But she said, ‘you say there is nothing in a name. Glory to Beelzebub, the prince of devils.’ The preacher’s mouth was closed”

– Book, *Tabernacle Sermons*, Vol. II, p. 14.

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3. “It is told of Sister Taubman, who was a member of the church in Augusta, Ga., that a minister of a sectarian church came to her soliciting help to liquidate a debt against their building. She told him she could not contribute money to the spread of sectarianism, but he answered; ‘There is noting in a name; we are all striving for the same end.’ She then wrote out her check for a thousand dollars and handed it to the preacher, and with a heart full of joy he quickly make his way to the back for the money. The cashier refused to accept the check. ‘Why,’ said he, ‘this was given to me by Mrs. Taubman and her credit is good.’ The cashier replied, ‘Her name is not signed to the check.’ The preacher examined it and found that she has signed the name of her servant. He went back to Sister Taubman, told her of her mistake, but she replied, ‘There is nothing in a name, so you say, and that check ought to be just as good with the name of my servant on it as my own.’ The preacher had a practical demonstration of the inconsistency of his argument.”

– *Tabernacle Sermons*, Vol. II, p. 14.

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If we are eternally saved, we shall be save in the name of Christ. His is the only name which has any credit at the Bank of Heaven. So, in that divine name, let us turn to God for mercy.

Sources: J. Roy Wright, C. C. Crawford, Windell Gann

The Powerpoint slides (about 3.8 meg) can be downloaded at:

[http://home.hiwaay.net/~wgann/powerpoint/What's\\_In\\_A\\_Name.ppt](http://home.hiwaay.net/~wgann/powerpoint/What's_In_A_Name.ppt)