

In The Name Of The Lord: A Lesson from the Sevens Sons of Sceva

Daniel Bailey

In the religious world today, there is some confusion about the meaning of the Biblical phrase *in the name of the Lord*. For example, some claim that performing a task *in the name of the Lord* simply means that those words must actually be spoken before acting. From this viewpoint, for instance, baptizing someone in the name of Jesus Christ means actually speaking the words, “I baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ,” before immersing the person in water. Still others claim that acting *in the name of the Lord* simply means having the *intention* to please Christ in whatever it is you happen to be doing. A consideration of the story of the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19 helps to shed some light on what the Bible really means with this phrase.

In Acts 19, Paul is found preaching in Ephesus. He taught in the synagogue for three months, but because some of the Jews hardened their hearts and spoke slander against the gospel, he left with the disciples of Christ to teach in the school of Tyrannus for two years. During this time, God allowed many miracles to be performed at the hands of Paul – as Jesus promised, even demons were cast out in His name as a sign that the gospel is true and authoritative (cf. Mark 16:17). At that time, there were also some wandering Jewish exorcists, probably men who traveled from place to place performing false miracles to earn money, who decided that they should try to exorcise demons in the name of Jesus, like Paul did. (Note that the exorcists must have recognized the profound difference between the authenticity of Paul’s miracles and their own deceitful exorcisms). These men would approach demon-possessed persons and proclaim, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul

preaches, I command you to come out” (Acts 19:13 NIV).

There were seven sons of a Jewish chief priest, Sceva, who attempted to cast out a demon in this fashion. However, even though they *physically spoke* the name of Jesus over the man, it *did not* produce their desired effect: the demon replied, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” (Acts 19:15). The possessed man then attacked the seven sons of Sceva, giving them quite a beating. This story teaches that doing a deed in the name of the Lord means more than verbally pronouncing those words: **it means that the deed must be performed with authority given by God.** The seven sons of Sceva could have spoken the name of Jesus till they were blue in the face, but doing so would not and could not give them divine authority to cast out demons.

In Colossians 3:17, the apostle Paul tells the Christians in Colossae, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father through Him.” This command certainly does not mean that Christians can do anything they want in worship, or even in their own lives, as long as they say they’re doing so in the name of Jesus Christ. To the contrary, this verse restricts the actions and speech of the Christian to only things that Christ authorizes in His word. A sinful act, an act that God has not approved, cannot be done in the name of the Lord. A false doctrine that contradicts the word of God cannot be taught in the name of the Lord. Children of God must be steadfast in studying the scriptures to be sure that all they do, in word or deed, is done with the authority of God.