

**Russell Kelfer**

# **Of No Reputation**

**# 1302-B**

**Series: The Mind of Christ**

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# Of No Reputation

The story is told of a soldier in the army of Alexander the Great who was brought before the great world-conqueror to be court-martialed. When the emperor had listened to the charges and the evidence, he turned to the soldier facing condemnation and asked:

“What is your name?”

“*Alexander*”, was the reply.

Again, the emperor posed the question, “What is your name?”

Again came the reply, “*Alexander*”.

With a cry of rage, the emperor roared, “I say, what is your name?”

When the soldier answered for the third time, “*Alexander!*”, the great general angrily replied, “You say your name is Alexander? You are found guilty of your crime as charged, and now you must pay the penalty. *Either change your conduct or change your name, for no man can bear the name Alexander and do the things you’ve done.*”

All of us can think of both national and personal tragedies where a person who was held in high esteem and was the symbol of morality and spirituality fell; and where once his very name spoke of that which was noble, now his name is used in jest and derision. There is, in fact, a law in effect that the more esteemed a man’s name is, the more important it is that his reputation be kept intact. The scriptural principle, “*to whom much is given, much will be required,*” explains that fact. The more revered someone is, the more catastrophic it is when they lose their good name.

But there is really only one name worth having, only one name worth defending, only one reputation deserving of our respect—that is the name of God. His name is His very nature, and, as such, it is the cornerstone of our faith. And whenever

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that name is invoked, the power that accompanies that name is invoked as well. That is why we pray in Jesus' name. That is why we trust in the name of Jesus. That is why we approach spirit warfare "in the name of Jesus". It is the expression of that name that releases the power of God on our behalf.

And now that name *belongs to us*. By virtue of an incredible inheritance, you and I have been adopted into the family of God and now bear the very name of God. Every choice we make is a reflection of that name. Every word we speak, speaks volumes about that name. Every time we compromise, we bring disgrace to that name. People are looking at you and at me, trying to find a family resemblance to our Father. We bear His name. And if the knowledge of that awesome truth does not *humble us*, we do not understand what it means to be named after God.

We continue our look at the factors that make up the Mind of Christ. We have been journeying through the scrolls of Philippians, chapter two, where Paul took the Philippian church to task for not quite grasping what it meant to live the Christian life. He asserted that "for him to live *was* Christ". Then he focused in on the two big problems they had: they didn't understand the value of suffering and they didn't understand the necessity for humility. So Paul turned on the projector of eternity and began a slide show of the life of Christ. Seven scenes emerged, and as they did, the Philippians ought to have found themselves on their faces weeping before a Holy God.

We ought to be weeping, too, because Paul has painted a picture for us of the Living God *humbling Himself for us*. Then he took the camera of life and focused it on the church, and began to take snapshots of our self-centered lives, placing them up against the Master's life. Seeing what he called the "vain conceit" and "arrogance" of the average believer, he cried out for us to come to experience "The Mind of Christ".

To have God's mind, Paul said, you must be willing to die. We listened in to an imaginary conversation between the Father and the Son two lessons ago, and realized that He had to give up everything for those who deserved nothing, so we who deserve nothing could have everything at *His expense*. He chose to do that. In our last study, we looked at the relationship between humility and grace, and found that *the very power to live the Christian life is in direct proportion to the absence or presence of pride in our lives*.

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In this study, we go back to Philippians, chapter two, and look at the next step downward Jesus took for us. It says very simply, “*He made Himself of no reputation.*” It literally means, “He emptied Himself”. He emptied Himself of what made Him God so you and I could be filled with the very nature of God in His place. But the word “reputation” may be more fitting than we realize, for the thing Jesus gave up when He emptied Himself was, in reality, His name.

A name, remember, denotes the character and authority of the one bearing that name. In the case of Jesus, His name represented all that He was, and He, the Master, the King, the great I AM decided to *change names with us*. He laid aside all of the titles that accompanied His Kingship and became identified with sinners, that sinners might be identified as children of the King. That identification gave us a *new name, a new identity, a new character*, and with it there *simply has to be behavior commensurate with the name we now bear*. Alexander the great had a great point. Either behave like an Alexander, or don't pretend to be one.

But being an Alexander is nothing compared to being a Christian. As God's adopted children, we have been lifted from the garbage heaps of moral decay and placed in the palace of imputed holiness. We have been eternally bathed in the very blood of God's Son, and now we are clean, pure, holy, and whole in His sight. We have been re-named, re-christened and re-commissioned. Oh, Beloved, *He gave up His name in order to give it to us*. He made Himself of no reputation. He humbled Himself. How dare we strut around this earth as though we deserved that name? How dare we, indeed.

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Have you ever stopped to consider how crucial names are? They speak of identification. They speak of authority. They speak of provision. They speak of reputation. When God uses a name, all of those aspects of life are wrapped up in a few simple letters, woven together by a unique God who calls each of His children by their name. And as we appropriate the power of our *new name*, all of those facets come together to make us new, as well. We have a new identification, a new authority, new provision, and a new reputation.

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### Identification

First of all, a name speaks of identification. What we are can best be determined by what we are called. It all started quite early in history.

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. (Genesis 2:19,20 NIV)

If someone were to tell you there was a tiger in your back yard, you might become a bit apprehensive, but if they were to say “there’s a squirrel in your back yard”, it would evoke an entirely different response. Why? Because they aren’t anything alike. That’s why Adam called them by different names. He identified them. He separated them, one from the other by means of a name.

A whale and a dog are not the same. A canary and a polar bear are not the same. They aren’t even similar. So each species had to be identified by *name*. But more than that, God then decided to identify *people by name, as well*. When God created woman, Adam’s first response was:

And Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” (Genesis 2:23 NKJV)

Her name indicated something about who she was; how she was made; *why* she was made. There was deep significance in the name “woman”. Today, that significance is being challenged. Pity. Its strength lies in its difference.

God even changed names on occasions to denote a change of identity. He did that with Abram in Genesis 17. It reads:

No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. (Genesis 17:5 NIV)

Abe had his name changed because his purpose for living had changed. He had a new identity, as the spiritual father of God’s family. So God changed his name. In like fashion, the Father changed the name of His only begotten Son. He who was

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“Alpha and Omega”, “the great I AM”, “Wonderful, Counselor, Prince of peace” was re-named for you and for me. We read of it in Matthew 1:21:

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.  
(Matthew 1:21 NIV)

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, *sweetest name I know*. Why? Because He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death. He gave up His name for a new identification. He was identified with sinners, therefore He was identified with sin. Now you and I are sinners though we are identified with Him. So we can *represent* Him, by coming in His name.

And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.  
(Matthew 18:5 NIV)

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.  
(Matthew 18:20 NIV)

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest!”  
(Matthew 21:9 NIV)

What do those three diverse verses have in common? They all exhibit ways we identify with Jesus. When we reach out in His name, when we come together in His name, when we minister in His name, we are saying that it is not us, but Christ doing the reaching, the fellowshiping, the ministering. We are humbling ourselves and admitting that we have nothing to offer, but He has everything to offer.

Identification. It is the cornerstone of a name. Every football team has a name. They aren't 22 guys out there playing a game. They are the Cowboys and the Redskins, or the Longhorns or the Razorbacks. Why the names? So you can identify with them. You can wear funny hats or crazy t-shirts or make silly noises, but whatever you do, you do it to identify yourself with that team. You are called by their name.

Nations have names. God gave Israel a name. I am an American. I am proud of that. I am a Texan. I love to admit that. But, Beloved, whether or not I am an American, or a Longhorn, or a Texan, amounts to absolutely nothing, eternally. And yet, for some reason, I am much bolder in my expression of identity with those things, than with the one thing that matters. I am a

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Christian. God has given me His name.

That ought to humble me. It ought to cause me to bow my head in absolute awe at the very mention of that name. My name is Russell Kelfer Christian. Your name may be Mary Smith, but once Christ came into your life and identified with your sinful nature and saved you, He re-named you. You are now Mary Smith Christian. You have been adopted into the family of God, and as His called one, you now have been given His name. It is His way of identifying with you, and identifying you as His.

Can you imagine what the phone book will be like in heaven? Everyone will have the same last name. There will be no section that begins with “A” or “B” or “D” or “E”. But oh, Beloved, when you come to the name “Christian”, the pages will go on and on. We will all be identified with the Savior. It happened, because one day in eternity past, He chose to make Himself of no reputation. He decided to change names with you.

That ought to humble you. That ought to cause you to bow in absolute awe every time the word “Christian” is used. That’s your new name! You don’t deserve to be called “Christian”. It was not “by works of righteousness which you have done, but according to His mercy that He saved us.” God has identified Himself with you and with me. Unashamedly. What a pity that we are not as clearly identified with Him. The story is told of a pious, self-righteous deacon who used to revel in his position in the church, though his reputation in the community was far from godly. He was proud of his religiosity. One day, he was asked to speak to a children’s Sunday school class on what it means to be a Christian. He began by asking a question: “And children,” he began, “why do people call me a Christian?” There was silence. Finally, a little boy whose family knew the man quite well, held up his hand. Smugly, he called on the lad. “Jeff, why do they call me a Christian?” The little boy hung his head and answered, “Is it because they don’t really know you?” Oh, the importance of our identity with Christ. He has said of us... “You are called by my name, you are mine.”

### Authority

But not only does a name represent identity; it represents authority. When an IRS agent appears at your door, you let him in. Why? He comes in the name of the government he represents. The elders come in the name of the church. Your boss comes in



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the name of the firm. When you rebuke your children, you say as parents, “We must do this”. You come in the name (or authority) of the position you hold. When a judge sentences you, he does so in the name of the law. You respect that. Why? Because that name has authority connected with it.

That’s why we pray, “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name,” We are bowing before the authority of His name. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
(Matthew 28:19 NIV)

“Using the authority that comes with my name, you can identify them with me,” Jesus said. John 1:12 adds:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—  
(John 1:12 NIV)

Whoever was willing to identify with the name of Jesus by conversion was empowered by Jesus to become God’s child. Conversely, John 3:18 adds:

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.  
(John 3:18 NIV)

So the power to become children of God comes from the act of receiving His name. When your name was changed, you inherited the authority that goes with your new name. As a child of the King, you now have the power the King has imputed to you. You can pray in Jesus’ name, and as you do, you have the same potential to reach the Father’s ears as the Son. That’s what He meant in John 14:14, where He said:

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.  
(John 14:14 NIV)

Oh, the power that accompanies that name. The demonic host trembles at the mention of that name. The angelic host bows in adoration at the mention of that name. Seas part at the mention of that name. Winds cease at the mention of that name. Sin is exposed at the mention of that name. That is why every time you hear the word “Christian” you ought to be in awe at the power that is yours in Christ. Because of that name, you need only to call on the Father, and He hears you. Because of that

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name, you can confess your sins, and He who is faithful and just forgives you your sins and cleanses you of all unrighteousness.

### Provision

Thirdly, a name speaks of provision.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. (Psalm 20:7 NIV)

The Psalmist cried out:

Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might. (Psalm 54:1 NIV)

God's provisions are available to those who bear God's name. For unbelievers to pray to God and seek His provision or His power is futile. And yet, even as Christians, we tend to teach the unbelieving world that the power and provisions of God are available to all who want them. They are available only to those who bear His name, and thus can come in His name.

As one of the King's Kids, you can enter His storehouse and withdraw from its inventory. But unless you bear His name, your key won't fit the lock. And we do our unbelieving friends a grave disservice by teaching or even implying that they can pray for deliverance or healing or answers to their needs unless they first come humbly confessing their sins and ask God to give them His name. Until the name is theirs, the provisions are sealed in a vault marked, "Family only...no one else can enter."

### Reputation

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, your name and your reputation are synonymous. That's why Alexander the great was so incensed when one wanted to use his name without adhering to his character. So when we ask God to deliver us or enable us or empower us, we often invoke the character of His name as our reason for praying. Listen:

For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great. (Psalm 25:11 NIV)

Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. (Psalm 31:3 NIV)

Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. (Psalm 79:9 NIV)

Names are the key to everything. They carry with them

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identification. We know who you are by your name. We know what you do by your name. If you are a doctor, it is added to your name. If you are a pastor, it is added to your name. You may be a plumber, and your calling card will say, "Fred Jones, plumber." Your identification is encased in your name. Even if we have never seen you, we know if you are a man or woman by your name.

Names also carry with them authority. If you are a president or a congressman, it is added to your name. If you are a judge, it is added to your name. The authority you possess is part and parcel of your name.

Provision is wrapped up in your name. Fathers provide for their children because they are fathers. Employers provide for their employees because of their position, their names. A scientist provides information about science. A teacher provides education, a butcher provides meat, a baker provides bread. It is all a part of the name we bear.

Finally, reputation is a part of your name. When you do something that stains your reputation, your good name is ruined. The letters that spell your name are the same, but the integrity behind it is gone, because you trampled underfoot that name.

### WHAT'S IN HIS NAME?

So can you imagine what it cost Jesus Christ, God Himself, to trade names with you? When He emptied Himself, He took your name and added it to His own dear name. All your reputations, your sins, your inconsistencies, were imputed to His account. Though He had never sinned, He took on the name, Jesus Christ, sinner. He tasted of your reputation. He gave up His own.

He identified with you. Then He offered, in exchange for taking your name, to give you His. He offered to adopt you into His family, to add you to His inheritance, to make you the recipient of all the benefits of belonging to the Royal Household. He gave you the key to His Father's heart. He gave you the combination to the lock on the storehouse of His Father's provisions. And He offered you authority over the enemy that only belongs to the children of the Most High. You are called by His name. You are His.

That can affect us in one of two ways. Satan wants us to use it presumptuously. He tried it with Eve. "Eve, if you're one

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of God's chosen ones, surely He won't keep anything from you. See that tree; demand it. Tell God He owes it to you to let you make your own decisions, to determine His will and demand it because He made you. Tell Him, Eve, it's your right."

He tried it with Jesus in the wilderness. "Jesus, you have the power that goes with your Father's name. Use it for yourself, not for His glory. Here are some rocks. Make a sandwich. Show the Father what you can do apart from Him. And look, Jesus, see that temple? Jump off, and demand that your Father deliver you. You deserve it; you're His son. In fact, Jesus, you can have everything I have, all the goodies of this world. You deserve it, Jesus. Just bow down and worship me."

So Satan wants us to use that name as a hammer to bludgeon God into submission. He wants us to exalt ourselves because we have that name, and using the name wrongfully, demand the rights of royalty. So much "religion" uses God's power that way.

But no, not Jesus. When asked to demonstrate for us just how to use that precious, priceless name, He gave it up. He made Himself of no reputation. He emptied Himself of the rights that name gave Him, and instead, He identified with each and every person who has ever lived who needed what that name had to offer. He traded His name for ours, so we could trade ours for His. What a God.

And all He asks of us is that we humble ourselves and do the same. Except for His marvelous mercy, we would still be unforgiven. Except for His matchless grace, we would still be lost. So that name did not come cheap. It cost God everything. We now bear the name "Christian". We love the authority and the provisions that name affords. But, oh, how we forget the reputation that name implies.

It means that everyone we meet is determining the value of our family name by how we behave. It means that every time we speak, the reputation of our Father is on the line. It means that every time we take His grace for granted, we are shouting to God "I do not appreciate your name."

The great travesty in Christianity in our generation is the loss of sensitivity to sin. People trample God's name underfoot and then lightly toss I John 1:9 into the air like a football, and expect God to be impressed that they said the words. We are so wrapped up in ourselves that we go to counselors to find

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out how to deal with how our sin has affected us, and never bother to inquire how it affected God or God's dear name. We come waltzing back from the pig sties of life, stained with the world's garbage, expecting God to have the shower waiting for us. It never dawns on us that he might be crying that one of His children has so defiled His name.

In Luke, chapter 15, Jesus addresses the problem. He tells a story (He loved to do that) of two sons. One was a good guy who seemed to have it all together. The other was a rebel. He wanted the rights of His inheritance in advance so He could enjoy them here and now. He didn't want to wait for the day when the Father chose to give it to him. So he insisted, and the Father relented and let him go. Far, far away he went. Into the cesspools of this world he went. Until one day he awakened to the reality that he no longer had any of the benefits of being his father's child. He was hungry, but there was no food. He was cold, but there were no clothes. So he humbled himself and returned to His father's house. The father ran to meet him. Listen to what the son now expected as his rights:

I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father,  
I have sinned against heaven and before you,

and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me  
like one of your hired servants." (Luke 15:18,19 NKJV)

Do you see what he said? He offered to give up the family name. He wasn't worthy to be called a child of his father anymore. So he humbled himself and asked his father if he could just be a servant from now on; no family privileges, no keys to the kingdom, no inheritances. He had wasted that right.

No longer was he demanding anything. Now he was on his knees acknowledging that apart from his father's mercy, he had no hope. And that, Beloved, according to Jesus, is what the father had been waiting for. The father killed the fatted calf, brought robes of royalty once again and placed them on his back and sent out messengers far and wide inviting those he loved to come to the celebration. His long-lost son had humbled himself at last.

I wonder what it will take for some of us to do the same? We sin and we crash our way back into the Father's throne room and demand forgiveness because we are His child. We lightly testify of His goodness, all the while crucifying Him afresh with

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our lives and our life-styles. Pure, unadulterated holiness that cleaves to His every word in obedience no longer appeals to us. Cheap forgiveness has replaced deep repentance as a way of life.

And because our hearts did not break in two when we sinned, we do not have the restraints of repeating that heartbreak to keep us from breaking His heart again. We have trampled underfoot what we know He wants of us, and often have done so with a mere shrug of the shoulders.

What will it take? Must we fall into the pits of hell before we see how much sin breaks the heart of God? And can we not right now, this moment, fall on our faces before Him and recognize that we do not deserve that Holy name? What we deserved was to be sentenced to the pig pens of life forever, never to be welcomed home. But the Father, the moment he heard we were coming home, rushed out to meet us, swept us into His arms, and saved us and gave us...His name.

Dear God, we are not worthy of that name. We do not demand the rights of a son. Let us become servants, instead. And dear Father, sensitize our hearts from this day forward, to what a privilege it is to bear that name. May we never again take it for granted. You humbled yourself to make it possible. Dear God, may we do the same.

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He made Himself of no reputation  
He gave up the rights to His name,  
He humbled Himself and became a slave  
So we could do the same.

He gave it all up for worthless fools  
Who wandered to fields of sin,  
Then weeping in love with outstretched arms  
He welcomed us home again.

The fatted calf, the welcome,  
The priceless robes of a king,  
They're ours but, Beloved, do not forget  
We do not deserve a thing.

So as you sin and treat His love  
Like some religious game,  
Remember, Beloved, remember,  
You do not deserve that name.

Humble yourself, fall on your face,  
Confess what you've done is grave,  
And meekly tell God, "From this point on,  
I just want to be Your slave."

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