

WHAT DOES THE NAME MEAN? GREGORY OF NYSSA: Our good Master, Jesus Christ, bestowed on us a partnership in his revered name, so that we get our name from no other person connected with us, and if one happens to be rich and well-born or of lowly origin and poor, or if one has some distinction from his business or position, all such conditions are of no avail because the one authoritative name for those believing in him is that of Christian. Now, since this grace was ordained for us from above, it is necessary, first of all, for us to understand the greatness of the gift so that we can worthily thank the God who has given it to us. Then, it is necessary to show through our life that we ourselves are what the power of this great name requires us to be. The greatness of the gift of which we are deemed worthy through the partnership with the Master becomes clear to us if we recognize the true significance of the name of Christ, so that, when in our prayers we call upon the Lord of all by this name, we may comprehend the concept that we are taking into our soul.... Paul, most of all, knew what Christ is, and he indicated, by what he did, the kind of person named for him, imitating him so brilliantly that he revealed his own Master in himself, his own soul being transformed through his accurate imitation of his prototype, so that Paul no longer seemed to be living and speaking, but Christ himself seemed to be living in him. As this astute perceiver of particular goods says, “Do you seek a proof of the Christ who speaks in me?” and, “It is now no longer I that live but Christ lives in me.”

This man knew the significance of the name of Christ for us, saying that Christ is the “power of God and the wisdom of God.” And he called him “peace,” and “light inaccessible” in whom God dwells, and “sanctification and redemption,” and “great high priest,” and “passover,” and “a propitiation” of souls, “the brightness of glory and image of substance,” and “maker of the world,” and “spiritual food,” and “spiritual drink and spiritual rock,” “water,” “foundation” of faith, and “cornerstone,” and “image of the invisible God,” and “great God,” and “head of the body of the church,” and “the firstborn of every creature,” “first fruits of those who have fallen asleep,” “firstborn from the dead,” “firstborn among many brothers,” and “mediator between God and humanity,” and “only begotten Son,” and “crowned with glory and honor,” and “lord of glory” and “beginning” of being, speaking thus of him who is the beginning, “king of justice and king of peace,” and “ineffable king of all, having the

power of the kingdom,” and many other such things that are not easily enumerated. When all of these phrases are put next to each other, each one of the terms makes its own contribution to a revelation of what is signified by being named after Christ, and each provides for us a certain emphasis. To the extent that we take these concepts into our souls, they are all indications of the unspeakable greatness of the gift for us. However, since the rank of kingship underlies all worth and power and rule, by this title the royal power of Christ is authoritatively and primarily indicated (for the anointing of kingship, as we learn in the historical books, comes first), and all the force of the other titles depends on that of royalty. For this reason, the person who knows the separate elements included under it also knows the power encompassing these elements. But it is the kingship itself that declares what the title of Christ means.

Therefore, since, thanks to our good Master, we are sharers of the greatest and the most divine and the first of names, those honored by the name of Christ being called Christians, it is necessary that there be seen in us also all of the connotations of this name, so that the title be not a misnomer in our case but that our life be a testimony of it. Being something does not result from being called something. The underlying nature, whatever it happens to be, is discovered through the meaning attached to the name. **ON PERFECTION.**

