

Matthew 28:19

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. (NIV)

1. Eusebius (c. 260—c. 340) was the Bishop of Caesarea and is known as “the Father of Church History.” Although he wrote prolifically, his most celebrated work is his *Ecclesiastical History*, a history of the Church from the Apostolic period until his own time. Today it is still the principal work on the history of the Church at that time. Eusebius quotes many verses in his writings, and Matthew 28:19 is one of them. He never quotes it as it appears today in modern Bibles, but always finishes the verse with the words “in my name.” For example, in Book III of his *History*, Chapter 5, Section 2, which is about the Jewish persecution of early Christians, we read:

But the rest of the apostles, who had been incessantly plotted against with a view to their destruction, and had been driven out of the land of Judea, went unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of Christ, who had said to them, “Go ye and make disciples of all the nations **in my name.**”

Again, in his *Oration in Praise of Emperor Constantine*, Chapter 16, Section 8, we read,

What king or prince in any age of the world, what philosopher, legislator or prophet, in civilized or barbarous lands, has attained so great a height of excellence, I say not after death, but while living still, and full of mighty power, as to fill the ears and tongues of all mankind with the praises of his name? Surely none save our only Savior has done this, when, after his victory over death, he spoke the word to his followers, and fulfilled it by the event, saying to them, “Go ye and make disciples of all nations **in my name.**”

Eusebius was present at the council of Nicaea and was involved in the debates about Arian teaching and whether Christ was God or a creation of God. We feel confident that if the manuscripts he had in front of him read “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” he would never have quoted it as “in my name.” Thus, we believe that the earliest manuscripts read “in my name,” and that the phrase was enlarged to reflect the orthodox position as Trinitarian influence spread.

2. If Matthew 28:19 is accurate as it stands in modern versions, then there is no explanation for the apparent disobedience of the apostles, since there is not a single occurrence of them baptizing anyone according to that formula. All the records in the New Testament show that people were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus, just as the text Eusebius was quoting said to do. In other words, the “name of Jesus Christ,” *i.e.*, all that he represents, is the element, or substance, into which people were figuratively “baptized.” “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the **name** of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins’” (Acts 2:38). “They had simply been baptized into the **name** of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16). “So he ordered that they be baptized in the **name** of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48). “On hearing this, they were baptized into the **name** of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). We cannot imagine any reason for the

Apostles and others in Acts to disobey a command of the risen Christ. To us, it seems clear that Christ said to baptize in his name, and that was what the early Church did.

3. Even if the Father, Son and holy spirit are mentioned in the original text of this verse, that does not prove the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity states that the Father, Son and “Holy Spirit” together make “one God.” This verse refers to three, but never says they are “one.” The three things this verse refers to are: God the Father, the Lord Jesus and the power of holy spirit (We say “holy spirit” instead of “Holy Spirit” because we believe that this verse is referring to God’s gift of holy spirit that is born inside each believer. It is lower case because it refers to the gift of God and not God. The original Greek texts were all written in what scholars call “uncial script,” which uses all capital letters. Thus, although we today make a distinction between “Spirit” and “spirit,” in the originals every use was just “SPIRIT.” Whether or not it should be capitalized is a translator’s decision, based on the context of the verse. For more on the form of the early texts, see the note on Heb. 1:8).

It should be clear that three separate things do not make “one God.” Morgridge writes:

No passage of Scripture asserts that God is three. If it be asked what I intend to qualify by the numeral three, I answer, anything which the reader pleases. There is no Scripture which asserts that God is three persons, three agents, three beings, three Gods, three spirits, three substances, three modes, three offices, three attributes, three divinities, three infinite minds, three somewhats, three opposites, or three in any sense whatever. The truth of this has been admitted by every Trinitarian who ever wrote or preached on the subject.”

4. It is sometimes stated that in order to be baptized into something, that something has to be God, but that reasoning is false, because Scripture states that the Israelites were “baptized into Moses” (1 Cor. 10:2).

5. It is sometimes stated that the Father, Son and spirit have one “name,” so they must be one. It is a basic tenet of Trinitarian doctrine not to “confound the persons” (Athanasian Creed), and it does indeed confound the persons to call all three of them by one “name,” especially since no such “name” is ever given in Scripture (“God” is not a name). If the verse were teaching Trinitarian doctrine and mentioned the three “persons,” then it should use the word “names.” There is a much better explanation for why “name” is used in the singular.

A study of the culture and language shows that the word “name” stood for “authority.” Examples are very numerous, but space allows only a small selection. Deuteronomy 18:5 and 7 speak of serving in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. Deuteronomy 18:22 speaks of prophesying in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 17:45, David attacked Goliath in the “name” (authority) of the Lord, and he blessed the people in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. In 2 Kings 2:24, Elisha cursed troublemakers in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. These scriptures are only a small sample, but they are very clear. If the modern versions of Matthew 28:19 are correct (which we doubt, see above), then

we would still not see this verse as proving the Trinity. Rather, they would be showing the importance of the three: the Father who is God, the Son (who was given authority by God [Matt. 28:18]) and the holy spirit, which is the gift of God.

6. In reading the book of Matthew, we note that there is no presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Some prominent Trinitarians doubt that the apostles were even introduced to the doctrine until after they received holy spirit. It would be strange indeed for Christ to introduce the doctrine of the Trinity here in the next-to-last verse in the book without it being mentioned earlier.

Morgridge, pp. 13-15, 28, 98-101

Norton, pp. 215-218

Racovian Catechism, pp. 36-39

Snedeker, pp. 109-115

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