

Calling on the Name of the Lord

What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? There are several Bible verses which mention this, but they are not well understood. For instance, it is common for church leaders to quote verses like:

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13).

They interpret this as saying that anyone who calls out to Jesus is saved, from the moment they confess to being his followers.

Another type of ‘calling on the name of the Lord’ which is taught by some, is where people are told to accept Christ as ‘their personal saviour.’ This is done in response to a rousing sermon, after which members of the audience are invited to come forward and declare this to the congregation. If they do, they are said to be saved.

But if we want to be saved, we need to do more than just walk down the church. We will see this as we examine what the Bible teaches.

Worshipping God

In the Old Testament book of Genesis, we are told that Abram built an altar between Bethel and Ai where he “called on the name of the LORD” (Genesis 12:8).

When Abram returned from Egypt, he returned to that place and again, “Abram called on the name of the LORD” (13:4). It was the same with his son Isaac (Genesis 26:25).

Clearly this ‘calling’ is linked with worship, perhaps in the form of prayer

using God's name, which may well be how these early faithful believers worshipped Him.

For Everyone

In the writing of the prophet of Joel we find this verse:

It shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said (Joel 2:32).

Joel was a Jewish prophet but he spoke about Jews and Gentiles calling on God's name. When that very passage was cited by the apostle Peter, in Acts 2:21, it becomes clear that calling on God's name requires some particular action. Peter's audience responded by asking:

“Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:37-38).

The apostle Paul makes the same assessment of what is required. As a persecuting Pharisee, he had pursued all those who called on the name of the Lord (Acts 9:14), but when he encountered the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus he was told this:

Now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:15-16).

Belief and Baptism

When Paul wrote to the believers in Rome about calling on the name of the Lord, this is how he summarised the challenge to all who want to be saved:

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

He was thus reminding them of the teaching of Jesus:

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

We are saved by the grace of God, not because of the things that we do, as the apostle Paul says elsewhere:

Even when we were dead in trespasses, (He) made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Ephesians 2:5).

But we are expected to respond to the grace that God shows towards us.

Actions, Not Words

The Lord Jesus made this very clear:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21).

You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22).

So 'calling on the name of the Lord' is not just confessing belief; it means

something deeper. It involves being baptised into the name of Jesus, and then living a new life in him and keeping him always in mind.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-3).

This means NOT doing some things:

Put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry... But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth (v5-8).

And DOING some things: Seeking to reflect the character of God and taking the life of Jesus as our example:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection (v12-14).

Calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, is not just claiming to follow him. It means being baptised to show our obedience and allegiance to him. It means seeking to do his will, and following his example in our own lives.

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