

“Calling On The Name Of The Lord”

The expression “calling on the name of the Lord” occurs 13 times in various forms in the Bible (Genesis 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 26:25; 1 Kings 18:24; 2 Kings 5:11; Psalm 116:13, 17; Joel 2:32; Zephaniah 3:9; Acts 2:21; 22:16; Romans 10:13). “Call” means “to appeal, to ask for help.” We need to know what it means to call on the name of the Lord because our salvation depends on this calling, as seen in Acts 2:21: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Without a careful study of this statement, some may conclude that salvation is obtained through a verbal appeal, such as, “Lord Jesus, come into my heart and save my soul!” Jesus actually taught the exact opposite in Matthew 7:21 when He said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” Heaven is not promised to those who merely make a verbal acknowledgment of the Lord.

This can be further seen in Romans 10:12-14 which says, “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” Please notice that there is a difference in belief and calling on the name of the Lord. As Paul just said, no one can call on the name of the Lord unless they first believe. But you can also see that calling on the name of the Lord involves more than belief. There is a clear sequence according to Paul: a preacher is sent, he preaches the word, the sinner hears the word, the sinner believes the word, and the sinner calls on the name of the Lord.

To reinforce this, the Bible contains two specific accounts of individuals calling on the name of the Lord. The first is in Acts 2:37. When these Jews heard the gospel, and believed that they had crucified the Lord, they asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (v. 37). Peter had told them that those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. He then told them in v. 38 that they must be baptized, thus connecting repentance and baptism with calling on the name of the Lord. The second example occurs in Acts 22:16, which describes the conversion of Saul. Ananias came to Saul and said, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Submitting to water baptism was the means of calling on the name of the Lord.

To use the phrase “call on the name of the Lord” as a means of denying the necessity of baptism for salvation is a terrible misuse of scripture. The good news of the gospel is that salvation is available to everyone that calls on the name of the Lord. This does not mean everyone who calls Jesus “Lord,” but everyone who submits to the conditions He taught in His word, which follows the thoughts in Hebrews 5:9: “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him ...”

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