“Calling on the Name of the Lord”

Introduction. “Calling on the name of the Lord” first appears in Genesis 4:26, where the lineage of Seth is practicing true worship of God after righteous Cain was killed and wicked Abel was banished from the garden. Moving through the Old Testament, the expression occurs three times surrounding Abraham and his building of altars to worship God. The phrase notably occurs in places like 1 Kings 18:24 where Elijah asked for God’s help, and 2 Kings 5:11 where Naaman thought Elisha would call on the Lord and wave his hand for the cure to his leprosy.

The phrase occurs three times in the New Testament. Most people assume that “calling on the name of the Lord” means saying the “sinner’s prayer” while raising the hand like Naaman suggested. But the New Testament passages attach this action to our salvation. To be saved, you need to properly understand what it means to “call on the name of the Lord.” Let’s look into these three occurrences.

I. Calling on the Name of the Lord in Acts 2:21

A. Acts 2:21 is the first New Testament use of this phrase. The setting is the first Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The promised sign came upon the apostles with the noise of a mighty wind (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4). Many people were alarmed over it. To calm the crowd and teach them what this all meant, Peter stood and began to preach (Acts 2:14).

B. Peter used the prophecy of Joel to explain what was happening (Acts 2:16-21). The hope of salvation was proclaimed, within this prophecy, with the words, “And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” This prophecy had stood for around 800 years until this Pentecost, and now they were witnessing its promise being fulfilled. Peter continued to preach so that He might clarify the necessities of that prophecy, and we must follow the context to learn what was involved in this hope of salvation (2 Peter 1:15-21).

C. He taught that the Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:22-24). He taught that Jesus was raised to the right hand of God (Acts 2:32-35). He confronted them with their responsibility in the death of the Messiah (Acts 2:36).

D. When they understood what had happened, they desperately wanted to be saved from their sin of crucifying Him. This is where Peter explains the requirements of “calling on the name of the Lord:” repent and be baptized in “the name of Jesus Christ” for the remission (or forgiveness) of sins.

E. In Acts 2 we learn that to “call on the name of the Lord” is to follow His instructions to be saved. These instructions at v. 38 fit Peter’s reference from the prophet Joel (v. 21). To call on Jesus’ name is to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins “in the name of” or “by the authority” of Jesus.

II. Calling on the Name of the Lord in Acts 22:16

A. The church had been through some very difficult times, and much of the cause of this trouble was one notorious character named Saul of Tarsus (Acts 7:58; 8:1-3). Saul was determined to destroy the cause of Christ (Acts 22:4-5). While engaged in this pursuit, he was surrounded by a great light (Acts 22:6). He alone

heard and understood the voice of Jesus (Acts 22:7-9). He was told to go to Damascus and wait for instructions (Acts 22:10-11). As he waited for his instructions, Paul prayed and fasted (Acts 9:9, 11).

B. God sent Ananias to teach Paul how to be saved and to tell Paul what he was going to do for the Lord's cause (Acts 26:16-18). When Ananias arrived, he first healed Paul's eyes (Acts 22:13). Then he instructed Paul in the way of salvation and said, "Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." According to Acts 22:16, "calling on the name of the Lord" is following the instructions of Jesus.
   1. We can clearly see that Paul had repented; he ceased from his mission and submitted to the Lord.
   2. Ananias instructed him to be baptized for the purpose of removing his sins (cp. Revelation 1:5).
      a) Baptism has been fiercely debated for over 500 years. But we maintain and stand on the necessity of baptism for salvation.
      b) Baptism allows us to enter into the benefits of Jesus's death (Romans 6:3-4), and it allows us to "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). This is why Peter says that baptism saves us (1 Peter 3:21).
   3. Therefore, repenting and being baptized "in the name of" or "by the authority" of Jesus is "calling on the name of the Lord." Again, we're responding because we've heard and understood the authority of Christ.

III. Calling on the Name of the Lord in Romans 10:13

A. Paul was writing to the brethren in Rome about multiple subjects. Among his subjects is the hope of salvation. In chapter 10, Paul discusses his great desire for his fellow Jews to be saved. They haven't applied themselves to knowing God's will (vv. 1-3). He declared the hope of their salvation (vv. 4-8). He also mentioned the requirements to be met, one of which is our phrase, "calling on the name of the Lord" (v. 13).

B. Paul's instructions for being saved are clear:
   1. Listen to the Word of faith — the gospel (vv. 4-8; cp. 1:16).
   2. Confess Jesus as Lord (v. 9a) — this declares our faith (v. 10b).
   3. Believe that God raised Him from the dead (v. 9b) — this is tied to our willingness to seek God's instructions in righteousness (v. 10a, 11).

C. The instructions of God's Word provide our evidence for Jesus as the Son of God (John 20:30-31). The Word's our instruction in righteousness; we can't be righteous without following His instructions (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Romans 10:17 declares that the source of faith is the Word of God.

D. According to Romans 10:1-17, we learn even more about what it involves with the phrase, "call on the name of the Lord." Some have attempted to narrow the requirements of salvation down to the one action of "confessing" (which is acknowledged by the sinner in the "sinner's prayer"). That isn't what Paul does. The hope of salvation proclaimed in this chapter is no different than anywhere else in the Bible; it's based on active faith that's permanently attached to all the instructions of God's Word. Therefore, we learn that "calling on the name of the

Lord" isn't just a beckon or an invitation; it's a submission to all of His instructions and a yielding to His authority.

Conclusion. Many people falsely maintain a "hope of salvation." This isn't a judgmental statement. When we fail to do what God expects, we can't receive His hope of salvation. We have to abide in the Word to know the truth (John 8:31-32). We have to rightly divide the Word to know the truth (2 Timothy 2:15). We have to actively obey the Word to know God's rewards (Hebrews 10:35-39). It isn't unusual for individuals to try to find shortcuts, but there's no shortcut for salvation. Jesus has revealed the true plan of salvation for all of us to know and obey. Will you obey His plan even now, "calling" on His name?

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