

Sunday, January 7, 2024 am

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

Acts 2:21

Today, I want to address a phrase that is fundamental, filled with meaning, and misunderstood by many today: "Calling on the name of the Lord." It is found a handful of times in the New Testament, and it is based upon a text in the Old Testament. So let us open our Bibles and dig into this phrase and make some observations as to what it does and does not mean.

I. The Phrase Implies:

- a. **Authority** – the expression, "in the name of..." is associated with authority.
 - i. Older police shows used to have officers order, "stop, in the name of the law". That meant they had authority to order you to stop.
 - ii. In scripture this was understood – Acts 4:7-12. They understood that speaking "in the name of Jesus" meant that they acknowledged His authority.
 - iii. In Acts 25:11, we find Paul appeals to Caesar. While not using the exact expression, he was putting his destiny in the hands of the authority of Caesar.
 - iv. The expression, *the name of the Lord*, implies that we are appealing to His authority to do what He tells us. In this case, our concern is what we need to do to be saved.
- b. **The recognition of God**
 - i. If one willing to call "on the name of the Lord", he is acknowledging that there is a God. This is something that we have established in times past. Romans 1:20 declares that we can see God in creation (His invisible attributes). There are many natural laws that point to a creator, and MORE that establish the God of the Bible as our creator. Psalm 19:1 notes that the heavens declare the glory of God (they make it clear that He does exist).
 - ii. Genesis 4:26 is the first mention of our phrase in the Bible. After Seth is born, "then men began to call on the name of the LORD." (NOTE: In this text, the emphasis is YHWH). Abraham, everywhere he went, the first thing he would do is build an altar and "called on the name of the LORD" (Genesis 12:8, 13:4, 21:33, etc.) Genesis 26:25 – So did Isaac.
- c. **The recognition of Jesus**
 - i. It was in His name, that Peter and the others were preaching and teaching in the temple when they were taken before the council. It was in His name, they were ordered to stop (Acts 5:28, 40, etc.).
 - ii. This is something that is understood by most who use this expression in relation to salvation (cf. Acts 4:12).
 - iii. Romans 10:13, Acts 2:21 (Joel 2:32), 22:16 all use the expression with the understanding it is talking about Jesus. We will address these texts as this lesson further develops.
 - iv. Acts 10:43, *To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.* – spoken by Peter to Cornelius & his family.
- d. **The realization that we have a need**
 - i. Without Jesus, we are hopelessly lost. Romans 6:23, John 14:6, Acts 4:12.
 - ii. Anyone who understands the need of this expression is acknowledging they need to be saved AND that Jesus is the answer. Cf. John 6:66-69 – after many leave, Jesus asks the 12 if they wanted to leave to. Peter, with the others answer what they understood. "You have the words of eternal life."
 - iii. The theme of the Bible is about man's lost condition because of sin, and his redemption found in Jesus.

II. What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord?

a. *It is not a prayer*

- i. Many see in the expression simply praying to the Lord for salvation. This is part of the teaching of “faith only” (which in reality is MORE than just believing if you have to say a prayer).
- ii. The “sinner’s prayer” is found nowhere in the Bible. Though some will appeal to Acts 2:21 (Joel 2:32), Romans 10:13 & possibly Luke 18:13 (the tax collector who simply prayed, “God be merciful to me a sinner”). This could be taken back further to the examples of Abraham previously mentioned, or passages like Psalm 116:4 which formulates it into a prayer, *Then I called upon the name of the Lord: “O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!”* One source, cited Psalm 51, a penitent psalm of David, as an example.
- iii. But an examination of EACH of these contexts shows them NOT as a step in a process that leads to one’s initial salvation, but prayers of repentance for sins, or a general description of one who acknowledges that they need the Lord.
- iv. “Calling on the name of the Lord” is a summary term that means one is submitting to what the Lord demands to be saved (see above NT texts) OR to restore one’s favor with Him (David’s repentance, the repentant tax collector) OR simply as an ongoing acknowledgement of God being Lord in their life (Abraham, etc.).

b. *It is more than acknowledging Jesus as Lord*

- i. Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus PLAINLY declared it is not enough to call Him Lord. And that is in a context where one acknowledges what it means to be lord (a master).
- ii. Luke 6:46, “Why do you call Me, “Lord, Lord” and not do the things which I say.”
- iii. Romans 10:9-10 notes that in addition to believing in the resurrected Lord, you must confess Him – an action that is provoked by one’s faith. Confession is made “unto salvation”. The word “unto” is the Greek, εἰς (eis), the same word as “for” in Acts 2:38. It is pointing into the direction of salvation.

c. *It involves Hearing the word*

- i. Before one can “call on the name of the Lord”, he must first hear the word of God AND believe in Jesus.
- ii. Consider the context of Romans 10:8-17. We learn a great deal about this expression from this context.
- iii. Paul has talked about believing and confessing as just noted in Romans 10:9-10.
- iv. Vs. 11-12 puts this in context (as does 10:1-3). It is about salvation being available to EVERYONE! Paul’s point is that it does not matter whether you are a Jew or Gentile, we all need Jesus to save us.
- v. Vs. 13, “For *‘Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’*”.
 1. Here Paul is quoting from Joel 2:32, the same text Peter quoted in Acts 2:21.
 2. Let us NOTICE that prophecy in Joel 2:28-32. Joel’s prophecy is unnamed as to its timing, but it is a call to repentance and a promise that a time was coming when God would pour out His Spirit on ALL flesh (not just the Jews), but it was to be a time of salvation made available to ALL mankind. That was the point of the prophecy.
 3. That is Paul’s point in Romans 10 AND Peter’s point in Acts 2.
 4. The expression, in ALL 3 of these texts is NOT a formula, but a summary description of surrendering to God and the Lord.
- vi. Vs. 14-15 – CONTINUE reading! BEFORE one can call on the name of the Lord, they must first HEAR the word (it is preached to them – Acts 2:14 – Peter began preaching; Mark 16:15 – the “great commission” – “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature...” Vs. 15 notes that men are sent to preach the gospel of peace...

- vii. Vs. 16 – *“But they have not all obeyed the gospel.”* Paul’s emphasis here is that some had rejected the Lord. They had not “called on the name of the Lord” OR “obeyed the gospel.” Which brings me to my next point.

d. Obeying the gospel

- i. Calling on the name of the Lord involves obeying the gospel. You CANNOT separate these.
- ii. In context, he reports their rejection.
- iii. Acts 2:36-41 – as Peter finished preaching, they were cut to the heart and asked, “What shall we do?” Peter told them, “Repent and let every one of you be baptized, ***in the name of Jesus Christ*** for the remission of sin...”
- iv. Acts 22:16, as Paul recalls his conversion, Ananias was sent to him and told him, *And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.* Paul is TYING “calling on the name of the Lord” to his being baptized.
- v. And this accords with so many other passages of scripture – Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21, etc.
- vi. **NOTE:** Someone might ask, why didn’t Paul mention baptism in the Romans 10 context if it is necessary? The answer is, it was not part of the point he was making. AND, he had already addressed the importance of baptism in Romans 6:3-6ff, noting that in baptism we come in contact with the blood of Jesus by being “buried with Him”.

e. It involves faithful living –

- i. When one obeys the gospel, they have only begun their life of service to Him. They live the rest of their lives for Him.
- ii. That is really what most of the New Testament is about. Romans 12:1-2 – we present ourselves as living sacrifices to Him. Revelation 2:10, we are called upon to be “faithful until death” to receive our reward, etc.
- iii. 2 Timothy 2:22, *Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.* The expression “call on the Lord” is a present tense verb indicating ongoing action.
- iv. As long as we are living on this earth, it is our responsibility to faithfully serve our Lord and our God.

And thus we can see the importance of calling on the name of the Lord. It summarizes what salvation is about, both in being saved and staying saved. What about you? Have you called on His name? Philippians 2:9-11 notes that God has exalted Jesus so that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. You ARE going to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. The only question is, WHEN???? Can on His name before it is too late! Think about it!