

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

Jon Macon

Psalm 116:13 says, “I will take the cup of salvation, and *call upon the name of the Lord,*” and verse 17 says, “I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will *call upon the name of the Lord.*” As the psalmist was calling upon the name of the Lord, we read about others in the Old Testament who did the same. In Genesis 4:25, Seth was born to Adam and Even, and verse 26 says, “And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: *then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.*” Later, Abraham also called upon the name of the Lord (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 21:33), as did his son Isaac (Gen 26:25). The prophet Joel foretold of the New Testament when both Gentiles and Jews would obtain deliverance by calling upon the name of the Lord: “*And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call*” (Joel 2:32). This prophecy was quoted by the apostles on Pentecost in Acts chapter two as it began to be fulfilled that day. Romans 10:13 also says, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” Since our eternal salvation is contingent upon our “calling upon the name of the Lord,” what does it mean to call on his name?

Not just words

Many people have the idea that calling on the name of the Lord is a single mental or verbal action that is taken at the point of conversion and requires no action. However, this understanding is not compatible with the teachings of the scriptures. Calling on the name of the Lord is not just words or something one does in their mind. Words without deeds are hypocrisy. The Lord said of the Pharisees, “*This people draws nigh unto me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips; but their heart is far from me*” (Matt 15:8). There are many others like the Pharisees: “*Them that are defiled and unbelieving*” (Titus 1:15) “*profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate*” (Titus 1:16). God will not accept words that are not backed up by sincere, obedient deeds. Many people “call on the Lord’s name” with their mouths and falsely claim to be working by his authority. Of these people, Jesus says, “*Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matt 7:21-23). Similarly, Jesus asks in Luke 6:46, “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*”

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

(continued)

The necessity of obedience

“Calling upon the name of the Lord” includes obedient actions along with the words. Romans 10:12-17 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? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” Calling on the name of the Lord requires faith, that faith comes by hearing God’s word, and that faith must then be translated into obedience. There are three separate occasions in which Abraham is described as calling upon the name of the Lord (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 21:33). The first time was after he journeyed from Haran to Canaan in response to God’s commandment, and then believed God’s promise to him. Genesis 12:7-8 says, “And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.” This example of Abraham’s obedience out of his faith in God is included in Hebrews 11:8-10. As Abraham’s faith in God was counted for righteousness multiple times (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3; Jas 2:21-23), so he called upon the name of the Lord over and over again. This did not just happen a handful of times. This was the life Abraham lived, listening to what God said, believing every word, and obeying every commandment. Using this example of Abraham, James 2:24 says, “*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*” Similarly, in Acts 22:16, Ananias said to Saul (Paul), “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Here, we have a *definition* of calling on the name of the Lord. It is defined by *obedience*, not mere words. Through obedience to the gospel, Saul called upon the name of the Lord. Joel’s prophecy was quoted by the apostle Peter on Pentecost in Acts 2:21 and the prophecy was fulfilled that day. On that day, about three thousand souls did exactly what the apostle Paul later did. They repented and were baptized into Christ (Acts 2:36-41). That is why the statements that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13), and “baptism doth also now save us” (1 Pet 3:21) fit perfectly together. Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus Christ “*became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*”