

Who are “My People” “Called by My Name”?

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14 KJV 1900)

In the last Gleanings, I presented a summary lesson from this verse. Now let's focus our study on the two descriptive terms which appear in the verse, “my people” and “called by my name.”

My People

What causes a person to be so related to God that He would refer to that person as “My people”? Scripture abounds with references to this idea, and it consistently highlights the same truth.

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:20 KJV)

Who “bought” the Corinthians? You? How? What price? The Old Testament law of redemption enriches this teaching. When the people of Israel finally entered Canaan, God directed them to divide the land by tribes. Each tribe then subdivided their portion of the land by families. A family member might pledge the yield from his assigned land to pay a debt, but selling his “Real estate,” as we think of it, was not practiced. Bad money management and related problems is a timeless evidence of man's brokenness. Wise living dictates that we curb our “Wants” to match our ability to pay. When a man became indebted beyond his ability to pay, the Mosaic Law provided that he serve his creditor to pay that debt. However, all such indebtedness was cancelled on the Year of Jubilee, every fiftieth year. Imagine a man who found himself in this difficult situation.

But the Mosaic code also contained a relief provision. If this man had a “Near relative” who possessed the wealth to pay his debt, that relative was allowed to intervene and pay the debt, allowing the man to return to his land. This law of redemption was restrictive. Only a “Near relative” could intervene and pay the debt, “Redeem” his bankrupt relative from his legal debt.

Move forward to the New Testament. How do New Testament writers use this term, “Redeem” or “Redemption”?

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. (Ephesians 1:7 KJV)

Not only does the New Testament reveal the identity of our “Redeemer;” it also teaches our ethical obligation to Him because of His redemption. If we respect the Old Testament law of redemption, our “Redeemer” must be our “Near relative.” Long before our first salvation experience, new birth, God considered a special people to be members of His family. When we were in the debt of sin that we could not pay, Jesus, our “Near relative,” came and paid our debt. That Jesus chose “born again” as the symbol of this experience speaks to His family view of His people. Further, anticipating that Day of all days, the Second Coming, Jesus shall still hold every member of His “Family” in that same regard.

For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me. (Hebrews 2:11-13 KJV)

Three times in these verses Paul affirms that the saved, from our sanctification by the will of God (From the beginning, by the will of God, Hebrews 10:10), to that Day when we shall stand beside Jesus and before the Father, and Jesus confesses us as the “children which God hath given me,” we are His family. Scripture is too clear to misread or misapply this familial term. When Scripture refers to “my people,” it is referring to a specific people whom the Lord makes to be His spiritual family.

Our only sound Biblical concept of “My people” must refer to those people whom the Lord has so redeemed. There is no New Testament basis to refer to all the citizens of a given nation, any nation of saved and unsaved people, as “My people.” No earthly citizenship earns our salvation or creates our unique relationship to God as His people. We receive that identity by His “Purchase price” in His redemption from our sins.

Called by My Name

What can we learn from Scripture about this term, specifically how it or similar terms are used in Scripture? Let’s start with the first mention of a similar term in the Bible.

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. (Genesis 4:26 KJV)

What is the significance of this term, “call upon the name of the Lord”? Cambridge KJV Bibles with center column references footnote this term to show the translators’ alternate suggested reading, “to call themselves by the name of the Lord.” This footnote emphasizes that those who pray, who “call upon the name of the LORD,” also identify themselves in lifestyle as belonging to the Lord. They not only pray, “call upon the Lord,” but they also call themselves by the name of the Lord in conversation with others. They follow the lifestyle commanded by “the LORD.” The Geneva Bible (1599) footnote to this verse reads, “In those days God began to move the hearts of the godly to restore religion, which a long time by the wicked had been suppressed.”

Take special note of the precise wording in our study verse, “which are called by my name.” In this case, it is others who see and identify “My people” as the people of God. How can this be? It can only occur if those who profess God as their Savior also manifest Him, His lifestyle teaching, in their daily conduct.

Jesus used “Name” in a different sense.

Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. (John 10:25 KJV)

Occasionally you hear a person refer to the “Name” of God or Jesus as if merely pronouncing the name is a mantra of sorts. I recall talking with a man who believed that no prayer which did not close with “In Jesus’ name” could be a true prayer; it would not be answered. When Peter cried out to Jesus as he sank in the stormy waters, did he say, “In Jesus’ name”? But Jesus responded to his cry and delivered him safely into the ship. “In the name of” is not a mantra, a magical or mystical word that, if repeated, brings the desired outcome.

A better parallel to Jesus’ use of “Name” would be the traditional legal announcement of a policeman or other legal authority who directs someone to do something “In the name of the law” of the land. The idea obviously refers to the legal authority of the person who speaks. He does not direct you to do something by request or by his personal authority. He speaks the words as an authorized representative of the law of the land. The person referring to something he says or does “in the name of the law” announces his authority under the law of the land. When Scripture teaches us to pray “In Jesus’ name,” the idea is not that we utter the words as a magical code, but rather that we pray for Jesus to hear and answer our prayers by His “Authority,” not by our good works.

When Jesus referred to the works He did “in my Father’s name,” He referred to His relationship with God. He was God Incarnate, God come in human flesh. Everything He did was in full harmony with the Father.

If we apply this concept to our study verse, being “called by my name” means the people so called live their life, make their decisions, and invest their conduct in activities commanded by the “Authority” and direction of the “LORD”. We can’t chase our own windmills, do what we wish that contradicts or ignores Scripture, and claim our Lord’s “Name.”

When Scripture refers to the name of God, it refers to God as ruler, as the sovereign over His people. To be called by His name identifies a reputation for striving to live our lives according to the Lord’s commanded ways.

As God Incarnate, everything Jesus did was according to the will and therefore “Name” of the Father. When we conduct our lives according to Scripture rightly divided and applied to our life, we act “In the Father’s name.” When we choose our own ways, we reject the Father’s authority over our lives, and bring His chastening upon us, not His blessing.

The form of this term in our study verse suggests that others called the people of Israel by the name of God. If the people who know us best were asked to name the dominant qualities of our life, how would they respond? What qualities would they name? Our political preferences? Our devotion to a non-Biblical philosophy or world view? Our devotion to a lucrative career? Our hobbies, our “Toys” that we love and invest significant funds and time to support? Or would they name our faith in Jesus? Our knowledge of and our devoted effort to order our life according to Scripture? Our selfless giving of our life and resources to care for others?

Occasionally we read or hear about someone overhearing his friends talking about him, and what he hears is not at all what he expected. If we were to hear our friends sincerely describing their impression of us, would we be surprised? Or assured?

How can we improve our self-perception and use what we know of self to transform our lives to the model of Scripture? A mirror doesn’t lie. When you look in the mirror, you really see yourself. However, our vanity and pride may alter how we interpret what we see. If we are growing older and wrinkles are increasing, we may selectively ignore wrinkles and other flaws. If someone else refers to our wrinkles, we might become highly offended, “I have no wrinkles!” In this case, the mirror is not flawed. Our imagination of how we want to appear, overrides the actual image we see in the mirror.

I wonder. How many people in church on Sunday, pulpit and pew, spend the preaching hour seeing themselves in the mirror of the “perfect law of liberty,” (James 1:25 KJV) but they choose to “See” only what they want to see. Their imagination rigidly sees only their strengths. When the message shines the light of Scripture on their flaws, they either become offended at the messenger for the message, or they apply the words to “Them,” not to self. “That point doesn’t apply to me.” Paul was wisely directed by the Holy Spirit to describe the gospel’s function in this regard.

(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:4-6 KJV)

The gospel shines the spiritual light brightly on our personal flaws, our sins. The faithful believer takes that message of Scripture to heart and works to change, to live a “Transformed” life according to Scripture. If we are brave enough (Brave in faith) to look at our image in the gospel “Mirror,” we shall see our own imaginations and follow this passage. Cast them down and grow our “readiness to revenge” all our own disobedience rather than rationalize our sins as if they don’t exist. All of this lesson goes directly to each believer’s mind. Where do imaginations occur? In our mind. Where do thoughts occur? In our mind. Until we bring our minds, even our imaginations, “into captivity...to the obedience of Christ,” we live enslaved to our own imaginations.

If we grow so strong in our faith life that others describe us by the name and lifestyle of Jesus, “called by my name,” we shall realize those glorious blessings the Lord promised in His answer to Solomon’s prayer. He hears our prayers, He forgives our sins, and He heals our “land,” our personal life and labors for Him. At its heart, this verse speaks directly to believers, a message to each of us about our personal lifestyle. We daily live with a choice. Live with our imaginations or live under the “Name” of our God. Which shall we choose today? And tomorrow?

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