**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 CORINTHIANS-001**. **CALLING ON THE NAME by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"All that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."*

*1 Corinthians 1:2*

There are some difficulties, with which I need not trouble you, about both the translation and the connection of these words. One thing is quite clear, that in them the Apostle associates the church at Corinth with the whole mass of Christian believers in the world. The question may arise whether he does so in the sense that he addresses his letter both to the church at Corinth and to the whole of the churches, and so makes it a catholic epistle. That is extremely unlikely, considering how all but entirely this letter is taken up with dealing with the especial conditions of the Corinthian church. Rather I should suppose that he is simply intending to remind the Church of God at Corinth ... sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, that they are in real, living union with the whole body of believers. Just as the water in a little land-locked bay, connected with the sea by some narrow strait like that at Corinth, is yet part of the whole ocean that rolls round the world, so that little community of Christians had its living bond of union with all the brethren in every place that called upon the name of Jesus Christ.

Whichever view on that detail of interpretation be taken, this phrase, as a designation of Christians, is worth considering. It is one of many expressions found in the New Testament as names for them, some of which have now dropped out of general use, while some are still retained. It is singular that the name of Christian, which has all but superseded all others, was originally invented as a jeer by sarcastic wits at Antioch, and never appears in the New Testament, as a name by which believers called themselves. Important lessons are taught by these names, such as disciples, believers, brethren, saints, those of the way, and so on, each of which embodies some characteristic of a follower of Jesus. So this appellation in the text, those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, may yield not unimportant lessons if it be carefully weighed, and to some of these I would ask your attention now.

**I. First, it gives us a glimpse into the worship of the primitive Church.**

To call on the name of the Lord is an expression that comes straight out of the Old Testament. It means there distinctly adoration and invocation, and it means precisely these things when it is referred to Jesus Christ.

We find in the Acts of the Apostles that the very first sermon that was preached at Pentecost by Peter all turns upon this phrase. He quotes the Old Testament saying, Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved, and then goes on to prove that the Lord, the calling on whose Name is salvation, is Jesus Christ; and winds up with Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Again we find that Ananias of Damascus, when Jesus Christ appeared to him and told him to go to Paul and lay his hands upon him, shrank from the perilous task because Paul had been sent to bind them that call upon the name of the Lord, and to persecute them. We find the same phrase recurring in other connections, so that, on the whole, we may take the expression as a recognised designation of Christians.

This was their characteristic, that they prayed to Jesus Christ. The very first word, so far as we know, that Paul ever heard from a Christian was, Lord Jesus! receive my spirit. He heard that cry of calm faith which, when he heard it, would sound to him as horrible blasphemy from Stephen's dying lips. How little he dreamed that he himself was soon to cry to the same Jesus, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? and was in after-days to beseech Him thrice for deliverance, and to be answered by sufficient grace. How little he dreamed that, when his own martyrdom was near, he too would look to Jesus as Lord and righteous Judge, from whose hands all who loved His appearing should receive their crown! Nor only Paul directs desires and adoration to Jesus as Lord; the last words of Scripture are a cry to Him as Lord to come quickly, and an invocation of His grace on all believing souls.

Prayer to Christ from the very beginning of the Christian Church was, then, the characteristic of believers, and He to whom they prayed, thus, from the beginning, was recognised by them as being a Divine Person, God manifest in the flesh.

The object of their worship, then, was known by the people among whom they lived. Singing hymns to Christus as a god is nearly all that the Roman proconsul in his well-known letter could find to tell his master of their worship. They were the worshippers--not merely the disciples--of one Christ. That was their peculiar distinction. Among the worshippers of the false gods they stood erect; before Him, and Him only, they bowed. In Corinth there was the polluted worship of Aphrodite and of Zeus. These men called not on the name of these lustful and stained deities, but on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And everybody knew whom they worshipped, and understood whose men they were. Is that true about us? Do we Christian men so habitually cultivate the remembrance of Jesus Christ, and are we so continually in the habit of invoking His aid, and of contemplating His blessed perfections and sufficiency, that every one who knew us would recognise us as meant by those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ?

If this be the proper designation of Christian people, alas! alas! for so many of the professing Christians of this day, whom neither bystanders nor themselves would think of as included in such a name!

Further, the connection here shows that the divine worship of Christ was universal among the churches. There was no place where it was not practised, no community calling itself a church to whom He was not the Lord to be invoked and adored. This witness to the early and universal recognition in the Christian communities of the divinity of our Lord is borne by an undisputedly genuine epistle of Paul's. It is one of the four which the most thorough-going destructive criticism accepts as genuine. It was written before the Gospels, and is a voice from the earlier period of Paul's apostleship. Hence the importance of its attestation to this fact that all Christians everywhere, both Jewish, who had been trained in strict monotheism, and Gentile, who had burned incense at many a foul shrine, were perfectly joined together in this, that in all their need they called on the name of Jesus Christ as Lord and brought to Him, as divine, adoration not to be rendered to any creatures. From the day of Pentecost onwards, a Christian was not merely a disciple, a follower, or an admirer, but a worshipper of Christ, the Lord.

**II. We may see here an unfolding of the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ.**

Note that solemn accumulation, in the language of my text, of all the designations by which He is called, sometimes separately and sometimes unitedly, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We never find that full title given to Him in Scripture except when the writer's mind is labouring to express the manifoldness and completeness of our Lord's relations to men, and the largeness and sufficiency of the blessings which He brings. In this context I find in the first nine or ten verses of this chapter, so full is the Apostle of the thoughts of the greatness and wonderfulness of his dear Lord on whose name he calls, that six or seven times he employs this solemn, full designation.

Now, if we look at the various elements of this great name we shall get various aspects of the way in which calling on Christ is the strength of our souls.

Call on the name of--the Lord. That is the Old Testament Jehovah. There is no mistaking nor denying, if we candidly consider the evidence of the New Testament writings, that, when we read of Jesus Christ as Lord, in the vast majority of cases, the title is not a mere designation of human authority, but is an attribution to Him of divine nature and dignity. We have, then, to ascribe to Him, and to call on Him as possessing, all which that great and incommunicable Name certified and sealed to the Jewish Church as their possession in their God. The Jehovah of the Old Testament is our Lord of the New. He whose being is eternal, underived, self-sufficing, self-determining, knowing no variation, no diminution, no age, He who is because He is and that He is, dwells in His fulness in our Saviour. To worship Him is not to divert worship from the one God, nor is it to have other gods besides Him. Christianity is as much monotheistic as Judaism was, and the law of its worship is the old law--Him only shalt thou serve. It is the divine will that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.

But what is it to call on the name of Jesus? That name implies all the sweetness of His manhood. He is our Brother. The name Jesus is one that many a Jewish boy bore in our Lord's own time and before it; though, afterwards, of course, abhorrence on the part of the Jew and reverence on the part of the Christian caused it almost entirely to disappear. But at the time when He bore it it was as undistinguished a name as Simeon, or Judas, or any other of His followers names. To call upon the name of Jesus means to realise and bring near to ourselves, for our consolation and encouragement, for our strength and peace, the blessed thought of His manhood, so really and closely knit to ours; to grasp the blessedness of the thought that He knows our frame because He Himself has worn it, and understands and pities our weakness, being Himself a man. To Him whom we adore as Lord we draw near in tenderer, but not less humble and prostrate, adoration as our brother when we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, and thus embrace as harmonious, and not contradictory, both the divinity of the Lord and the humanity of Jesus.

To call on the name of Christ is to embrace in our faith and to beseech the exercise on our behalf of all which Jesus is as the Messiah, anointed by God with the fulness of the Spirit. As such He is the climax, and therefore the close of all revelation, who is the long-expected fruition of the desire of weary hearts, the fulfilment, and therefore the abolition, of sacrifice and temple and priesthood and prophecy and all that witnessed for Him ere He came. We further call on the name of Christ the Anointed, on whom the whole fulness of the Divine Spirit dwelt in order that, calling upon Him, that fulness may in its measure be granted to us.

So the name of the Lord Jesus Christ brings to view the divine, the human, the Messiah, the anointed Lord of the Spirit, and Giver of the divine life. To call on His name is to be blessed, to be made pure and strong, joyous and immortal. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe. Call on His name in the day of trouble and ye shall be heard and helped.

**III. Lastly, this text suggests what a Christian life should be.**

We have already remarked that to call on the name of Jesus was the distinctive peculiarity of the early believers, which marked them off as a people by themselves. Would it be a true designation of the bulk of so-called Christians now? You do not object to profess yourself a Christian, or, perhaps, even to say that you are a disciple of Christ, or even to go the length of calling yourself a follower and imitator. But are you a worshipper of Him? In your life have you the habit of meditating on Him as Lord, as Jesus, as Christ, and of refreshing and gladdening dusty days and fainting strength by the living water, drawn from the one unfailing stream from these triple fountains? Is the invocation of His aid habitual with you?

There needs no long elaborate supplication to secure His aid. How much has been done in the Church's history by short bursts of prayer, as Lord, help me! spoken or unspoken in the moment of extremity! They cried unto God in the battle. They would not have time for very lengthy petitions then, would they? They would not give much heed to elegant arrangement of them or suiting them to the canons of human eloquence. They cried unto God in the battle; whilst the enemy's swords were flashing and the arrows whistling about their ears. These were circumstances to make a prayer a cry; no composed and stately utterance of an elegantly modulated voice, nor a languid utterance without earnestness, but a short, sharp, loud call, such as danger presses from panting lungs and parched throats. Therefore the cry was answered, and He was entreated of them. Lord, save us, we perish! was a very brief prayer, but it brought its answer. And so we, in like manner, may go through our warfare and work, and day by day as we encounter sudden bursts of temptation may meet them with sudden jets of petition, and thus put out their fires. And the same help avails for long-continuing as for sudden needs. Some of us may have to carry lifelong burdens and to fight in a battle ever renewed. It may seem as if our cry was not heard, since the enemy's assault is not weakened, nor our power to beat it back perceptibly increased. But the appeal is not in vain, and when the fight is over, if not before, we shall know what reinforcements of strength to our weakness were due to our poor cry entering into the ears of our Lord and Brother. No other name is permissible as our plea or as recipient of our prayer. In and on the name of the Lord we must call, and if we do, anything is possible rather than that the promise which was claimed for the Church and referred to Jesus, in the very first Christian preaching on Pentecost, should not be fulfilled--Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

In every place. We may venture to subject the words of my text to a little gentle pressure here. The Apostle only meant to express the universal characteristics of Christians everywhere. But we may venture to give a different turn to the words, and learn from them the duty of devout communion with Christ as a duty for each of us wherever we are. If a place is not fit to pray in it is not fit to be in. We may carry praying hearts, remembrances of the Lord, sweet, though they may be swift and short, contemplations of His grace, His love, His power, His sufficiency, His nearness, His punctual help, like a hidden light in our hearts, into all the dusty ways of life, and in every place call on His name. There is no place so dismal but that thoughts of Him will make sunshine in it; no work so hard, so commonplace, so prosaic, so uninteresting, but that it will become the opposite of all these if whatever we do is done in remembrance of our Lord. Nothing will be too hard for us to do, and nothing too bitter for us to swallow, and nothing too sad for us to bear, if only over all that befalls us and all that we undertake and endeavour we make the sign of the Cross and call upon the name of the Lord. If in every place we have Him as the object of our faith and desire, and as the Hearer of our petition, in every place we shall have Him for our help, and all will be full of His bright presence; and though we have to journey through the wilderness we shall ever drink of that spiritual rock that will follow us, and that Rock is Christ. In every place call upon His name, and every place will be a house of God, and a gate of heaven to our waiting souls.