

CALLING ON HIS NAME

Most of so-called Christendom is taught that since Romans 10:13, says, "**Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved,**" then *alien sinners* need to pray for salvation.

Probably a large number of those who claim to be "New Testament Christians" know there is *something* wrong with that doctrine, and may be able to quote John 9:31, "**For we know that God does not listen to sinners,**" or Matthew 7:21, "**Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven.**" But to many, this is too much like simply arraying one scripture against another, so you just take your choice of which one to believe, and overlook or reject the one that does not fit your preconceived notions. Of course, an honest Bible believer will take *all* the Bible says on any subject, and if one thing seems to conflict with another, will try to see wherein he can find harmony.

There needs to be an examination in more detail of what is involved in the expression, "**calling on the name of the Lord,**" and also its meaning when used in a

particular grammatical construction. Most of us surely know that words and phrases do not have absolute meanings apart from contexts and grammatical constructions.

It may be interesting and instructive to point out that even in our common English usage, "call on" means more than simply making a request for something. When a doctor calls on a patient, he does not merely drive by and say, "Hello in there! I wish you well!" He goes in and is involved with service. When I grew up, young men were said to "call on" young ladies. (I am not sure what they are said to do - or what they do - now.) But I was aware that to "call on" meant something different from merely to ask for some favour. But of course no Bible expression should be defined simply by an appeal to our common usage, though that may clarify or illustrate. Bible expressions should *always* be defined in terms of Bible usage. What do we find as we examine the sacred oracles?

WHAT IT MEANS

When we find the expression in Romans 10:13, we immediately find in the following verses that "calling on" must have some prerequisites. One should not "call on" God in the scriptural sense without hearing and believing.

Let us examine briefly some other passages. In Zephaniah 3:9, we find **"that all may call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him."** It appears that both in the Septuagint and in English, "to serve" (*tou douleuwein*) is in apposition to "call upon" (*tou epikaleisthai*). That is, "to call on" involves "serving him," not merely requesting something from him, or praying to him. You may note that this usage is very comparable to the illustration of the doctor calling on his patient - serving him - not merely asking him for payment of a bill.

Note again in Acts 9:14, Paul was reported to have asked for the authority to bind all who **"call upon the name of the Lord."** Paul was not persecuting those who simply *prayed*, but those who were *serving* the Lord.

In Acts 25:11, Paul uses the words, **"I appeal unto Caesar."** The words "appeal unto" are from *epikaloumai*, the same word translated "call upon." Paul did not simply say, "Caesar, save me!" He put his case into "Caesar's hands, submitting to Caesar's judgment and will." That, in a nutshell, is what "calling on the Lord" involves.

But let us probe a little deeper. In Acts 22:16, Saul was told to **"arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on His name."** Although this may be translated in some versions as if it were four imperatives: (1) Arise, (2) be baptized, (3) wash away thy sins, and (4) call on His name, they are not all imperatives in the original. "Arise" is a second aorist participle, which should be translated, "having arisen." "Be baptized" (*baptisai*) is a first aorist middle imperative as is "wash away" (*apolousai*). "Calling on" is not an imperative, but a present, passive participle (*epikaleasamenos*). Although I am neither a Greek nor English scholar, having forgotten much of what I thought I once knew, and do not even know a scholarly reference to uphold my conclusions, the best usage I remember is that the present participle, in both Greek and English, is generally used to modify the main verb, or show how the action is to be performed. In this case, it is a passive participle, and indicates how the two passive acts of submission to God which are mentioned are to be done.

(You may want to note here a sort of side issue which may be very enlightening. Some of our religious friends take the position that since we are saved by faith, baptism must be ruled out of our salvation since it is an act (work) which we perform. You may note that both verbs are *passive*. They do not relate to acts which we perform, but which are performed on or for us. Baptism is no more *our* work than washing away sins is our work. They both refer to things done for us.)

In the case before us, "**calling on his name**" is a present passive participle, and relates to how the submission to Christ was to be done. In other words, there could be no "**calling on the name of the Lord**" in the Bible sense without submitting to Christ - in this case by arising and being baptized and having sins washed away.

CONCLUSION

Although my study has not been exhaustive, I have been unable to find any exception to these general principles in the Bible. In the 33 times the word is used in the New Testament, not one of them seems to have any clear reference to "**praying to,**" but rather to such ideas as serving, submitting to, or by being surnamed, etc. It appears to be a general rule, also, that the active participle, when used with an imperative, always describes the manner in which the command was to be carried out. There may be some exceptions, but I am not aware of them.

It may also be interesting to note that this conclusion also fits very well with a logical or mathematical comparison. We learned in high school maths (or maybe earlier) that "things that are equal to the same things are equal to each other." Let us note how it works in this and other connections.

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 1:16).

"He that calleth on the name of the Lord shall be saved"(Rom. 10:13)

Therefore, he that believeth and is baptized, and he that calleth on the name of the Lord are the same. It not, why not?

Again, notice the following:

"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

"Except a man be born of water and the Spirit , he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven" (John 3:5).

Therefore, being converted and being born of water and the Spirit involve the same things.

Repent - and be baptized - for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38).

Repent - and be converted - sins blotted out (Acts 3:19).

Therefore, to be baptized and to be converted involve the same things.

So, both logic and scriptural usage compel us to conclude that "**calling on the name of the Lord**" is not just prayer, but submission to and service for God.