

GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF CORNELIUS.

– APRIL 11. – ACTS 10:30-34. –

"Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

– Acts 10:43.

CORNELIUS, noted as the first adopted son of God from amongst the Gentiles, was a Roman soldier, the captain of a company quartered in Caesarea for the better preservation of order and the enforcement of the will of the Roman government, which, at that time, controlled Palestine. It may be that he was the very same Centurion mentioned in Luke (7:2-10) as a worthy, noble and generous man, of whom Jesus said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel;" and whose servant was healed as a reward of this faith. True, that Centurion was stationed at Capernaum, while Cornelius we find in Caesarea; it is possible, however, that these bands of Roman soldiers were moved about from place to place as a better means of awing the people with a small number of soldiers. It would certainly be very remarkable to find two such Centurions of so remarkable a character residing so near together. And we are to remember that a period of about six years must have elapsed between the time of our Lord's healing the servant at Capernaum and the events we now consider.

The date of Cornelius' conversion cannot be positively determined from history, but from prophecy we may locate it with great positiveness in the year 36, A.D., because there the "seventy weeks" of Daniel's prophecy terminated. Our Lord was baptised at the beginning of the seventieth week (Oct., A.D. 29), was crucified "in the midst of the week" (April, A.D. 33). The seventy weeks ended the special favors of the Jewish nation (Oct., A.D. 36). That date, therefore, was the earliest at which it was possible for the gospel to be sent to the Gentiles.

It would appear that Cornelius had been in an acceptable attitude of heart before the Lord for some time. We may reasonably infer, therefore, that God delayed the sending of the gospel message to him for some particular reason. That particular reason, we see, was, that the full period of the "seventy weeks" (of years) must be confined to Israel, as it is written, "He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week," altho he was to "cut short the work in righteousness" (so far as the nation was concerned) "in the midst of the week." The "many," to whom the covenant was confirmed for the remainder (3½ years) of the seventieth week, consisted of those worthy Jews who, beginning at Pentecost, were specially taught, and thousands of them converted, during this remaining period of individual favor to the Jew. We may, therefore, presume that Cornelius, having been for some time in an acceptable condition of heart, the gospel went to him at the earliest possible moment – about Oct., A.D. 36.

We cannot properly speak of these experiences of Cornelius as a *conversion* or *turning* of his heart; for his heart was already in the right attitude, as was that of Saul of Tarsus. As the latter needed to have his knowledge *corrected*, so the former needed to have his knowledge *increased*; and then both needed to be accepted in the Beloved, – and to receive the spirit of *adoption* as "sons of God."

The testimony is that, at the time of receiving this great blessing of the truth, Cornelius was in the right attitude of heart to receive it: he was hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and was fasting and praying for it. What a suggestion is here! If all people could be gotten into a condition similar to this described of Cornelius, we might expect the conversion of the whole world speedily. The great difficulty in the presentation of the gospel is the unreadiness of the hearts [R2132 : page 106] of those who need it. This is true, whether of the savages of Africa or the philosophers of India and China, or the self-satisfied ones of so-called Christian lands. [R2133 : page 106] They do not know the truth, and they cannot receive it, because their hearts are not prepared for it. And if the truth be received into

any other than into a good and honest heart, it not only is not likely to bring forth a good harvest, but indeed may introduce a liberty (freedom from superstition, etc.) which may actually be unfavorable in its results. The constant effort of all, therefore, should be, not only to be in a proper attitude of heart themselves, but to see to it that those whom they approach with the truth are brought in contact not only with the knowledge and liberty which the truth carries, but also with its influence as a sanctifying and cleansing power.

In the vision granted to Cornelius the Lord commends (1) his prayerful attitude, which implied faith in God and a desire for harmony with him in righteousness; (2) his works of righteousness – his almsgiving, his endeavor to overcome selfishness and to copy divine benevolence. So we believe it is with all; whoever is in the right attitude of heart will be more and more moved to good works.

We have here also an illustration of divine methods; and we have every reason to believe that they are the same to-day. God did not miraculously fill the mind of Cornelius with a knowledge of the gospel and the details of the divine plan of salvation; – nor does he do this to-day, altho some of his children evidently so misunderstand his arrangement. On the contrary, the Lord made use of his servant Peter in communicating the truth, in teaching those who were ignorant of it. Men accordingly were sent a considerable journey to find Peter, and Peter journeyed with them the same distance in order to preach the gospel, rather than have any *miraculous* presentation of it.

The language of Cornelius, when Peter was come to his house, indicates an appreciation of the fact that the message was from God, and that Peter was merely the honored instrument. Cornelius, presenting himself and his household in the presence of Peter for instruction, said, "We are all here present *before God*, to hear all things that are commanded thee *of God*." Here was a proper respect for the servant of God as a servant of God and his Word; but also a full recognition that "every good and perfect gift cometh down from [our

Father] above," and that the gospel itself is "neither of man nor by man."

It is safe to say that Peter, as well as Cornelius, received a great lesson from the Lord in connection with this visit. He was learning that, altho the divine favor and privilege of the gospel had been granted "to the Jew first," according to divine promise, nevertheless only true Jews could be acceptable with God, while "in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is [now] accepted with him" – through the merit of the sacrifice given "once for all" by him who has since been highly exalted and made "Lord of all."

Peter presupposes on the part of Cornelius just such knowledge as we would expect of an educated and influential man at that time, particularly if he were the Centurion of Capernaum who had personal contact with our Lord. He says, You have heard about this preaching of Jesus all through your country here, the matter is public, no one could live in this vicinity without coming to a knowledge of these general facts. They may have heard the facts misstated to some extent and misrepresented, but in a general way all know that our preaching is concerning Jesus of Nazareth: that he was anointed of God, the Messiah; that he received the holy spirit and with it power; and that he used this power in doing good and healing all oppressed of the devil (through sickness, etc.), – all of which, either directly or indirectly, are traceable to sin and thus to the author of sin, Satan.

Having briefly rehearsed the matters which Cornelius already knew, the Apostle rehearsed some matters which were not so generally known, but denied as incredible; namely, that the death of Jesus was not like the death of others, but was a sacrifice; that this sacrifice was acceptable with God as the ransom-price for sinners; and that God had "given assurance unto all men" (that the sacrifice was satisfactory and had been accepted on behalf of all men) by raising Jesus from the dead on the third day. – Acts 17:31.

We have heretofore seen that our Lord Jesus was not raised from the dead a fleshly being, a human being, but a spirit being, and that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." We have seen that, accordingly, no one could see him as the resurrected spirit being, except a miracle were performed, either by granting special powers to see a spirit being, or by our Lord's appearing in a body of flesh on certain occasions (just as angels had done previously) for the purpose of the better impressing upon the disciples the two facts; (1) his resurrection, (2) his change of nature which prevented his being seen, except as he would specially "*appear*" or "*manifest*" himself. Thus, Peter here declares that the people in general did not see the Lord Jesus after his resurrection, but that God "*showed* him," unto "*witnesses* chosen before of God, even unto us."

Thus by these proofs of our Lord's resurrection God granted us the evidences of coming divine favor – proofs that Christ is empowered of the Father to be the Judge of all who are to be judged, the living (the angels who [R2133 : page 107] kept not their first estate and who are "reserved unto the judgment of the great day," and upon whom the death sentence has never yet been pronounced) and the dead (the world of mankind, "dead in trespasses and sins," and dead, in the sense that all are under the sentence of death).

The Apostle's discourse was orderly, and he next proceeded to show that all this was in harmony with what had been foretold respecting this long-promised Savior, Messiah. Then, completing his argument and bringing it down and making a personal application of it to his hearers, he showed that, the penalty of sin having been paid for all by the Lord Jesus, and all judgment of the sinners having been transferred to the hands of him who "bought us with his own precious blood," it followed that he had full power and authority to extend the terms and conditions of the New Covenant; namely, the remission of sins to all who believed in him as their Priest (Redeemer), their Prophet (Teacher) and their King (Ruler).

We are not surprised to find from the narrative that this man, whose heart was so ready for the truth, who was hungering and thirsting for it, fasting and praying to be in a condition for receiving it, was so ready that he appropriated the words of the Apostle as the bread from heaven and the water of life for which he had been hungering and thirsting. It does not surprise us, therefore, that God immediately, in view of his full consecration, accounted him worthy of "the spirit of adoption;" and not only so, but also gave him some of the outward manifestations or miraculous "gifts," similar to those granted to the believers on the day of Pentecost.

The Apostle Peter, as he subsequently testified to his fellow-disciples at Jerusalem, was astonished to see that God in every respect treated the converts from the Gentiles the same as the converts from the Jews; and dropping all prejudice Peter at once grasped the situation and did not hesitate to offer to Cornelius symbolic baptism as the evidence or pledge of his consecration to the Lord; assuredly gathering that whomsoever the Lord counted worthy of the holy spirit was worthy also of every other feature of the divine arrangement for the household of faith. With us also should it be the same: whoever we may find truly believing the gospel of redemption and forgiveness of sins through Christ, and consecrated to God's service in Him, – such, wherever found, are to be esteemed as brethren and fellowshipped to the full, whether or not they have seen every item of the truth now due. Further knowledge will come to the consecrated, and, as a fruit of it, obedience in every particular may reasonably be expected.
