

"GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS."

– ACTS 10:34-44. – *APRIL 20.* –

MANY SEEM totally to misunderstand the Apostle's statement that "God is no respecter of persons"; – they apply these words in a very different way from that in which the Apostle used them. The Apostle perceived that God is a respecter of character; but that he is not a respecter of outward appearances, conditions, color of skin, nationality, etc. That this is the Apostle's meaning is evidenced by his next statement, "But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him." It is a misapprehension, far too common, that anybody and everybody may come to the Lord upon terms of intimacy and familiarity. In consequence of such misapprehensions many approach the throne of heavenly grace without authority, without invitation, and without acceptance; – because (reversing the Apostle's words) they do not fear the Lord, are not workers of righteousness, and are not accepted with him. Lack of instruction, and misinstruction by Christians, are responsible for much of this wrong condition existing in nominal Christendom. Let us learn to follow carefully the Scriptural program and precedent; let us not give the misimpression that God is no respecter of character. Let us, on the contrary, as Peter did, point out that reverence for God is an essential; that an endeavor to live righteously is an essential, – a reformation of life, a turning from sin to righteousness; and that, even then, none can be acceptable to God except through the appointed way – faith in the atonement work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Cornelius, the centurion, whose acceptance with God is the subject of this lesson, was evidently converted to God and to righteousness years prior to this incident. This is the testimony; – he was a worshiper of God, a benevolent alms-giver, and his love of righteousness and his consistent life were recognized amongst those with whom he had to do; yet, nevertheless, something was necessary

before he [R2989 : page 107] could be accepted with God in the proper sense of that word. There is a lesson here for those who imagine that a reverence of God and morality are all that are necessary to divine acceptance. As Cornelius had these qualities in large measure for some time before his acceptance, the Lord's dealing with him may well be a guide for all others who desire to approach him in covenant relationship.

Altho devout, etc., as we have seen, Cornelius was not a Jew; and realized himself to be outside the pale of special divine favor. Still he prayed to God; – we are not told for what he prayed, but in harmony with the records, we may readily suppose that he prayed for enlightenment respecting the divine character and plan, and for a closer approach and a realization of divine favor and acceptance. Perhaps he had heard of Jesus and was perplexed on this very subject; perhaps this led him to the earnest prayers which the Lord saw fit to answer in a miraculous manner, sending an angel to him, assuring him that his prayers and his alms were appreciated of the Lord as memorials of his piety. (Verse 4.) The angel intimated that something further than prayers and good deeds was necessary; but the additional things the angel was not commissioned to tell. Cornelius needed to know of the Lord Jesus from the true standpoint; he must exercise faith in him as his Redeemer, before the memorials of his piety would count for anything with God, or bring him into the desired relationship and under the divine favor.

We know very well that the Lord could have promulgated the gospel through the instrumentality of angels; but here, as elsewhere, we see that this was not his purpose – that he was pleased to use consecrated human sons as his ambassadors, to proclaim the "good tidings of great joy – for all people." What a great honor God has thus done us who "were by nature children of wrath, even as others" of the race, but who, having accepted divine favor in Christ, are not only "accepted in the Beloved" but are made the channels of divine blessing and favor in the calling out of others. The divine course in this respect

has not only been an honor to his adopted children, but, additionally, it has been a blessing; – for what Christian does not know from experience that great blessing comes upon all who are faithful in serving the Word to others.

Cornelius was instructed to send for the Apostle Peter, and was informed in advance that certain *words* he would tell him were of importance; – essential to his further progress in knowledge and in faith, – and through these into divine favor. Cornelius' readiness of mind is shown by the promptness of his obedience. He not only prayed, but prepared to cooperate with God in the answering of his own prayer. The three persons sent (two of them household servants, and one of them a soldier, all devout persons, who feared God) give us good evidence that this Gentile who was feeling after God, and striving to the best of his ability to please and honor him, had not been keeping his light and his faith under a bushel. It had shone out before his family and servants, and before the soldiers under his control. This is the kind of man whom God delights to acknowledge, whatever may be his nationality or the color of his skin, and all such are recognized of the Lord, and favored above others with light and truth – ever since the close of typical Israel's special favor. There is a lesson here that some of the Lord's people need. It is that they should let the light of truth shine through them upon all with whom they come in contact, – that the spirit of devotion should pervade every family, every household, including the servants.

Evidently Cornelius was full of faith in the Lord. He did not wait to see if Peter would come; he knew that he would come; he had faith in the Lord's promises through the angel: accordingly he gathered together his friends and relatives and household – those upon whom he had been exercising an influence, and who, like himself, were pious and earnestly desirous of knowing all that they might learn concerning the way of life, – the way of reconciliation and harmony with God and all the principles of righteousness which he represents.

Meantime Peter, with all the prejudices belonging to the Jews for centuries, needed to be prepared to receive this first out-and-out Gentile brought into the Church. This was done by means of a vision, so that Peter, with six brethren from Joppa, came promptly [R2989 : page 108] to the centurion's home on the following day – "doubting nothing," because evidently the Lord was leading him in the matter. We see, too, that of all the disciples Peter was the best one to be chosen for this work, because of his impetuous disposition and zeal to follow the Lord's directions quickly and heartily; secondly, because being the oldest of the apostles, and in many respects the most influential one, his course would have the greater weight with the others. It is difficult for us to conceive the prejudice of centuries, in the minds of the Jews, against any thought of the Gentiles being fellow-heirs with them of the Abrahamic promises. They considered it a settled matter that God's favor had been set apart to their nation; and that it could not possibly go outside that nation to others, in the sense of making those others equally acceptable to God. These views were based, first, upon the promises of God to Abraham, "Thy seed," etc.; secondly, upon the fact that Israelites were not permitted to have general dealings with the Gentiles, nor to intermarry with them; thirdly, added to all this, the rulers of the Jews had even gone further, and exaggerated to some extent these differences.

But now a new dispensation had come; the "seventy weeks" of favor to Israel had expired; and the Lord began to extend his favor beyond the Jews – as we have already seen, to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch. We may readily suppose that those innovations, altho causing surprise to the apostles, would be much easier for them to grasp than the extension of favor to the Gentiles: they perhaps paved the way to the latter. When Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, and the latter saw him and recognized him as God's appointed servant for the bringing of this message to him, he prostrated himself at Peter's feet in worship. How different Cornelius was from the majority of Romans, – especially of Roman soldiers and officers! Instead of looking down upon the Jew, – instead of thinking of himself as a

representative of the greatest government in the world, at the time, Cornelius was filled with the spirit of humility, and the fact that his visitor represented the Lord called forth from him some of the same feelings that were filling his heart in respect to the Lord himself, – feelings of reverence.

But if the centurion was noble and humble, the Apostle Peter showed himself in response to be no less noble and loyal to God – for he at once began to lift up the centurion, saying, "Stand up; I myself also am a man." (Verse 26.) Peter commends himself to our hearts by this noble course – by this refusal to receive unauthorized homage; and he saved himself also from a great deal of trial by thus disowning supernatural honor and authority promptly, – by recognizing his true position, that he was only a broken and emptied vessel, valuable only because of the filling of the vessel with the Lord's spirit; – distinguished only because the Lord had been pleased to use him as a vessel of mercy and truth. Not many today are disposed to offer worship to fellow-creatures, and not many, except high dignitaries in the nominal churches, such as popes and prelates, consent to receive worship; but all such have a rebuke in the course of the Apostle Peter in this case. There is perhaps little danger in our day that any of the "brethren" would receive too much honor of men, because the spirit of our time is running in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, wherever a spirit of servility is manifest, it becomes the duty of the brother to whom it is offered to refuse it; and to point his fellow-servant to the Lord, as the real benefactor of us all, – from whom comes every good and perfect gift, by whatever channels he may be pleased to use.

"WORDS WHEREBY THOU SHALT BE SAVED."

Peter coming into the house, and finding a congregation of earnest God-fearing Gentiles assembled, asked the pointed question, "For what intent have ye sent for me?" (Verse 29.) Cornelius then related something of his past experience, his desire for fellowship with God, his endeavor to live in a manner pleasing to him, the vision that

he had received, and now Peter's arrival in response to that vision, and his expectancy that he was about to hear what had been promised him – "words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." (Acts 11:14.) He was not saved by his almsgiving, not saved by his prayers, nor yet by the message which Peter delivered; but Peter's message, "words," explaining matters, enabled Cornelius and his household to *grasp by faith* the great redemption which is in Christ Jesus, – and thus to be saved. Saved at once from alienation from God and from condemnation, as sinners; a foretaste of the complete salvation to be granted unto them at the second coming of the Lord.

We note with keen interest the Apostle's preaching, that we may clearly discern the life-giving message which he brought, from which Cornelius and his associates derived their saving faith. We find that Peter's discourse was the same gospel message which he had delivered repeatedly before. It was Jesus – the good, the obedient – and the sacrifice for sins which he accomplished when he died on the cross. It was the message of the hope of a resurrection from the dead through him, as attested by his resurrection by the mighty power of God. It was the message that a ransom for sinners having been paid to Justice the Lord is now pleased to accept sinners on conditions of faith, reverence and obedience to righteousness according to ability. Peter's discourse was "the old, old story" which to many has become tedious and distasteful; but which to every soul, in the right attitude, is the Father's message of forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation, through the death of his Son. This is the same message which God is still sending by all who are his true ambassadors. There is no other gospel, and those who present another message are not, in their service, ambassadors for God, messengers and mouthpieces of his spirit.

The Apostle Paul tells us that "It pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them which believe" – that is, it pleased God to adopt this method of declaring the truth respecting his redemptive plan, and to accept and justify those who would believe and accept this testimony. The testimony may reach people today

through letters or tracts or books, or through oral preaching; it matters not in what manner; it merely matters that the true message shall be delivered, and received; but the message [R2990 : page 109] goes, invariably, through the human channel, and not through angels, nor by the holy spirit's power or operation aside from human agents. We are to bear in mind these lessons of God's methods, and to apply them appropriately in connection with the affairs of life. We are not to expect the Lord to move upon or instruct our friends or kindred or neighbors; but are to remember that this honor he has conferred upon his "royal priesthood;" and accordingly we are to be "not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;" – serving the truth in any and every manner open to us.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE QUICK AND DEAD.

After telling the message itself, Peter explained to Cornelius that Jesus commanded the apostles to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and the dead. (Verse 42.) The coming judgment, or trial, of the world, is an important part of the gospel message; and is not to be neglected in the preaching of the gospel.

What advantage could accrue to the world through the death of Christ if there were no future judgment or trial for them? All were judged once in the person of Adam; and his condemnation passed upon all. The world needs no further judgment along the lines of the Adamic transgression and its weaknesses. The sentence for that transgression was complete, and leaves nothing that could be added; – the Judge was Jehovah himself, and the sentence was death. And now the good tidings includes the fact that Christ is to be the Judge of the world – which signifies that a new trial for life is to be accorded to Adam and his race. This of itself implies a release from the original death sentence; it implies a redemption from Adam's sentence, and an individual trial to determine which members of the redeemed and to-be-tried race will be accounted worthy of everlasting life. Yes, this is

"good tidings of great joy" for the world; – even tho the great Adversary has deluded the vast majority, even of Christians, into thinking to the contrary – that no new trial such as Adam had at first is to be granted to the whole world, bought with the precious blood of Christ.

All are witnesses that this trial could not have begun before Jesus became the Judge – hence that none of those who had died in the four thousand years preceding could have been judged by him; – none of them could have been on trial for eternal life. All should likewise be aware of the fact that the world in general has not been on trial since our Redeemer was appointed the Judge, and that it is not on trial today; – that, on the contrary, the great mass of the world neither knows the Judge nor understands the law, nor has any conception of the conditions and requirements necessary to life everlasting. This agrees exactly with the statement of Peter, under consideration; and it agrees also with the statement of the Apostle Paul, "God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." (Acts 17:31.) The appointed day, as the Apostle indicates, was still future in his day, and is still future in our day. That day, as we see from other Scriptures, is the Millennial day, "a day with the Lord, a thousand years." (2 Pet. 3:8.) The only judgment – trial – since our Lord's resurrection, which has resulted to any, determining the question of life or death eternal, has been to the Church. The Church, as spiritual Israel, has had much advantage every way over the remainder of mankind; because, during this Gospel age, it is being "called of God according to his purpose," – that the overcomers may be joint-heirs with Jesus in his coming work of judging the world. "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" – I Cor. 6:2.

Peter, in discoursing on the matter, evidently had his mind more widely opened than ever before to a realization of what our Lord meant in giving the general commission to preach the Gospel, not merely to the Jews, but to whoever would have an ear to hear. Peter was not

expecting "ears" amongst the Gentiles; but now he perceived that God was not a respecter of nations and features, etc., but that the message was open for all, and he did his best to present it. He proceeded to show that Jesus, as the Messiah, was not evidenced merely by the things connected with his ministry, and the ministry of his followers; but that all these things were foreknown to God, and planned, and foretold through the holy prophets of Israel, and that only in and through the name and merit of Jesus, – only to those exercising faith in him, was God pleased to show a reconciled face, and from such only was he willing to take away all sin and shame, and to adopt them into his family.

Cornelius and his devout household and friends had been waiting for just such a message of divine grace; and as the words fell from Peter's lips they were quickly and gladly appropriated in the hearts of his hearers, who were by this time accepting Jesus with the same fullness and appreciation as Peter himself. Their hearts being thus in the right condition before God, it would have been appropriate for Peter to have said to them, Now brethren, your proper course will be to be baptized into Jesus by a water baptism, – symbolizing your faith in him and your full consecration to be dead with him, as his faithful followers. But Peter was not ready to take such a step, we may be sure. He was surprised that God was willing that the Gentiles should even know about the wonderful provisions of salvation in Jesus; which of itself would have been a blessing. But he was not yet prepared to expect that the Gentiles would be received of the Lord on practically the same terms, and with exactly the same manifestations of divine favor as were the Jews. To make good Peter's insufficiency of knowledge to baptize them, and to lay his hands upon them that they might receive the gifts of the spirit, – and as a lesson to Peter also, – the holy spirit was given to Cornelius and his companions without the laying on of hands – in the same manner that it was bestowed upon the assembly at Pentecost.

Peter quickly learned the lesson, and undoubtedly his readiness to learn it was in large measure due to his humility and sincerity of heart, the fulness of his consecration to the Lord, and his desire that the divine will should be done in every particular. Peter and his companions from Joppa, "they of the circumcision," were astonished at God's favor upon the Gentiles, yet they were not envious. They were [R2990 : page 110] glad to welcome as cleansed, as brothers, all whom the Lord indicated that he had received into his fellowship. The result of this outpouring of the spirit was a grand testimony meeting. The record is that they "magnified God," praising him, rejoicing in their acceptance, etc. Then Peter drew their attention to the symbolical baptism and the propriety of observing it. We are not given his arguments on the subject; possibly he explained that in thus publicly symbolizing their consecration to the Lord they would be strengthening their own faith; buttressing their own determination to live and die the Lord's; possibly, too, he showed them how beautiful is the significance of the water immersion as a symbol of death and burial with Christ; as a symbol also of a resurrection to newness of life in the present time, and to a newness of life in perfect bodies at the second advent of the Lord. Or possibly he merely contented himself with explaining to them that it was the Lord's own method of doing, and that he commanded that all of his followers should similarly be immersed.

Having called for an expression from those present – especially from the brethren who accompanied him from Joppa – to know if any objection could be thought of why these dear brethren, who had believed in the Lord, who had given evidence of their consecration and good works, even before they knew of the Lord and his glorious plan, and who now had been accepted of God, and his acceptance manifested – why these should not be admitted to every blessing and arrangement which God had provided for his faithful ones – irrespective of their being Gentiles by birth. No objection being offered Peter commanded [directed] them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. He had been sent to teach them, and he delivered his

message with no uncertain sound. Similarly the Lord directs all of his people, all who have an ear to listen and to hear his message, through the Apostle Peter, in this lesson. We command no one, for we have no authority; we are not apostles. We can merely point out the command of the apostle; the example of all the apostles; the example of our Lord, etc., and leave the matter with the "ear" and conscience of each. Indeed, where we recognize that the true immersion of the will, into the will of Christ, has been accomplished, we may properly recognize the brother or sister in full fellowship, even tho he or she has not performed the outward symbolic immersion in water; because we are living in a time when great confusion on this subject prevails, and when it would be improper that we should cast off, reject, or even temporarily disfellowship any brother or sister who gives evidence of having had the real antitypical baptism into Christ. For a general examination of the question of Baptism, see our issue of June 15, 1893. A copy supplied free on application.

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