**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 14 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE SINNER by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

GOD's DIFFICULTY - GOD'S SOLUTION

*... that He might Himself be just, and the Justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.*

*Romans 3:26*

THE MEASURE IN WHICH WE APPREHEND THE MEANING OF THE words of the text is the measure in which they challenge our belief. In the earlier part of the letter we find the teaching of the writer as to the attitude of God towards human sin. I content myself with one quotation; "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness." The terrible conclusion of the writer as to the condition of the human race, a conclusion which he declared by quotation from one of the ancient psalms, is found in such words as these:

There is none righteous, no, not one;

There is none that understandeth,

There is none that seeketh after God;

They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable;

There is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one:

Their throat is an open sepulchre;

With their tongue they have used deceit:

The poison of asps is under their lips:

Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

Their feet are swift to shed blood;

Destruction and misery are in their ways;

And the way of peace have they not known:

There is no fear of God before their eyes.

By this writer, who first makes clear the attitude of God towards sin and then concludes the whole race as under sin, we are told that this God can be true to Himself in character and yet clear the members of this race from the guilt and penalty of sin.

If we take the declaration without due consideration of the conditions, we shall deny its accuracy. We shall declare that it is impossible for God to be just, that is, true to Himself in nature and character, and justify the ungodly, that is, liberate them from the responsibility or penalty and guilt of sin and treat them as just men. In our courts of law, justice and mercy can never act together. I am not arguing that there never should be clemency in the courts of law. I am not arguing that it may not be well in certain circumstances to extend mercy toward guilty people. I do declare, however, that in the exercise of mercy, there is the violation of justice. It may be that some man arraigned in an earthly court committed an act of wrong under extenuating circumstances that call for clemency and the court so acts towards him. That is not a violation of justice, for it is just that he should be pardoned, as when some man steals a loaf of bread for starving wife and children.

In the Hebrew economy, in the instructions to judges, this matter was most carefully stated, "If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, and the judges judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked." How then can God justify the wicked? How can God be just to Himself, and the Justifier of sinning men? The wonder is great, but the fact is gracious.

Let us consider this matter not theoretically merely, but in order to apply the truth to our own souls' need. Let us try to understand God's difficulty, and then let us consider so far as we may, knowing ere we begin that the light may be too bright for the feebleness of a sinner's sight, and that such a profound matter can be perfectly apprehended - God's solution of His own difficulty.

God's difficulty; to be Just and the Justifier of the sinner. God's solution of his own difficulty; God may "… be just and the Justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus."

We commence by reminding ourselves of the separation between man and God. We recognize at once the intimate relationship between man and God; that all men are offspring of God; that the deepest thing in human nature is not the fresh-life of which we have had our fathers after the flesh, but the spirit-life in which every man is offspring of Deity. In this recognition we are coming face to face with the nature of the separation of which we are to speak.

Passing quickly over the solemn ground, we remind ourselves of two things; the holiness of God and the depravity of man. The holiness of God is the supreme revelation of the biblical writings. It is, moreover, to all those who have eyes to see intelligently, the supreme revelation of creation. This is the apostolic argument in the earlier part of the letter. Paul declared that the Gentiles, the men without the particular revelation which had been granted to the Hebrew people, were nevertheless not without revelation for in nature the wisdom and power of God are clearly revealed. In those things also, we have a revelation of the holiness of God. Let us disabuse our minds of any preconceived notion of what holiness may be: not that our interpretations have been at fault, but that sometimes they have been altogether too partial. The holiness of God is demonstrated by all His works. In the Book of Psalms it will be found that those singers of the ancient times - wonderful singers expressing all the emotions of the human soul in the presence of God - constantly celebrated "… the wondrous works of God." The phrase runs through the psalter. The perfection of God is manifested in creation, is seen in form and color, is heard in sound, is detected by all the senses of men. The perfection of God is revealed in all the processes of creation: in those crises and upheavals which fill the soul of man again and again with fear and dread but which in the last result are ever seen to move on toward something yet grander and more beautiful. No man has thought carefully in the presence of the wonderful evolutionary method of God in the created order - which, by the way, is only one method and does not account for everything - without having been impressed by the wonder of it all; the slow-moving processes ever onward and ever perfect in themselves and yet ever growing into more wondrous perfection, and then the clash, the upheaval and the new glory. God's creation uttereth forth His praise. "The whole earth is filled with the glory of God"; and perfection is holiness demonstrated through creation.

The holiness of God is demonstrated also in the perfection of His government; His government of the world in wisdom, in truth, in justice, and in power. These things are not always seen at near range. In many an hour of darkness and conflict we tremble and are afraid. Therein we foolishly judge Him by the limitation of our vision. If we wait but for a generation, and then look back to things that puzzled us, we always see that God has been over-ruling, out of all the chaos creating cosmos, out of disorder establishing order, in the graphic language of the ancient psalm, making "… the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder girding upon His thigh as a sword" - thus holding it in reserve. All this is but demonstration of the holiness of God.

To state the whole fact, again quoting from the ancient psalms, "As for God, His way is perfect. …" Nothing imperfect is tolerated by Him. The autumnal fires destroy the effete beneficently to make way for new life and new beauty. These autumnal fires in nature are but the sacramental symbol of the fact of the Divine presence in which the whole creation ever exists. Scientists have described these fires by the technical term "eremacausis," which means quietly burning. These slowly-burning fires are ever purging nature's floor, and they constitute a fitting symbol of that presence of God everywhere that became clear to the vision of the ancient prophet when he said, "… who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" All those who have looked upon human life clearly, carefully, and intelligently, and with spiritual perception, have seen that all our cities, all our nations, all our empires, are within His fire, which surely, ultimately destroys the effete, purifies the strong, and leads forward toward the ultimate consummation of absolute perfection. God's holiness is attested everywhere.

It is supremely declared in the biblical revelation. In the divers portions of the past, the supreme message is that of the holiness of God. In all the songs Divinely inspired, in all the prophecies Divinely taught, in the whole system of the law, the one monotonous message is this, "I, the Lord Thy God, am holy." All these divers portions of the past, however, are as nothing when put into comparison with the simple and yet sublimely complete message that He gave to men in the Person of His Son.

If there be one truth supremely manifest in nature, supremely declared in revelation, it is that of the holiness of God; that holiness that has no place for ultimate imperfection, that holiness that can only be satisfied with perfection in any and every realm, material, mental and moral. The unveiling of God in the Word, in nature, and in all history, is the revelation of supreme holiness.

We turn from that thought, and we think of man. I will not again read the indictment of the apostle in this context. I only ask you to have it in mind. If inclined to challenge it at any point, I pray you before you pass your verdict, consider it with great care. Having myself done so, I declare that I am convinced that the picture is a true one.

Think of the depravity of human nature as it is revealed in unexpected ways. Man's depravity as revealed in the imperfection of his works even at their highest and their best. There is no true artist but will tell you that the finest creation of his mind and genius is failure. In the realm of art, we are in the realm of creation more peculiarly than in any other realm; yet art has always failed, and in its passionate desire for perfection it sometimes becomes grotesque and foolish. We smile today at some of the manifestations, but they are tragic manifestations of human failure. Futurism is a very modern revelation of man's failure, as well as of man's inherent capacity for creation and passionate desire for expression.

Man's failure is revealed also in his government. That I am not proposing to argue at any length. I take the widest outlook, I survey the centuries and declare that man has never yet governed perfectly. We have made our boast in our ability to govern, and at this moment are faced with a tragic situation in which the supreme, appalling revelation is incapacity for government so that lawlessness is permitted unchecked.

Humanity's failure is revealed as surely in the imperfection of its words and these again at the highest and best. Humanity's attempts at interpretation of the poets and the philosophers all fail, so that each succeeding generation comes up with a sigh and finds disappointment in the things that have been said and attempts interpretation once more and again fails.

Take the narrower outlook, Humanity spoils everything it touches of its own life. Business at this hour is full of things of defilement. I am not saying that no man in business is upright. I am not foolish enough to say such a thing; but I am saying that he finds it extremely difficult to be prosperous and upright at the same time. Commercial life is permeated with things of iniquity and evil.

Man spoils his own pleasures with evil. Things perfectly innocent and proper are defiled as man touches them. Tell me what there can be of evil in the racing of two horses mounted by men who almost seem part of them so perfect is their understanding of them? Yet, no reputable man cares to have his name associated with the turf! What can there be inherently evil in cards with pictures of kings and queens and knaves on them? They were invented to amuse a mad king! Yet they have been polluted and fair lives are being damned and ruined by gambling with them. These are rough and ready illustrations, but they are illustrations. Man touches religion itself, and it is degraded and so spoiled and made the means for the manifestation of an evil spirit in protested defense of itself. There is nothing more terrible than that in the whole history of religion that men defend the truth of God in a temper that is born in the pit.

If these are the general facts of the separation between God and man, think within a narrower circle of man's fear of God, man's dread of God, and man's dislike of God. Has man a dread, a fear, a dislike of God? There are thousands of homes characterized by all that is refined in the more modern sense of the word where the very name of God and religion are taboo. Men do not want to talk about God. I protest that it ought to be the most joyous thing in all the world to talk about God, that men should find their chief delight in talking together about Him. Those who really know our God delight to speak of Him, and there is nothing narrow in the speech and nothing mean in the conversation. It is broad with the breadth of His own beneficence and beauty and glory and glad with the happiness of the happy God. Yet men are afraid and will not talk of God but turn their back upon God because of an underlying consciousness of wrong and distance from Him. The reason of man's fear of God is not in God, it is in man. The men who have known God best have had the least slavish fear of Him and have exulted in their conversation concerning Him and their relation to Him. In the light of the Divine requirements as they have been revealed in the Scriptures of Truth - "And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" - what is there that makes men anxious not to have dealings with Him? Nothing other than that they have not done justly, have not loved mercy, and have not walked humbly with Him.

That God can justify sinning men and still be just Himself seems to us impossible. Let us remember that on the Divine side the difficulty is created by the desire of God. If God were other than He is, were God other than Love, His passion for perfection might be vindicated by my destruction. He might blot out the evil thing, sweep away the failing race. But listen to one or two very old and very familiar words, perhaps with a slightly altered emphasis; "… Adam …Where are thou? Do you read that as though God were occupied in the work of a policeman? Then you blaspheme. That is not the cry of a policeman; it is the wail of a father. He did not want information as to the geographical location of a man who was hiding; that idea is absurd! The cry was the revelation of the spiritual agony of God in the presence of human sin. Listen to another of these words. It is the language of the broken-hearted prophet Hosea who learned God's pain by the tragedy in his own home, and it expresses that pain of God in presence of Israel's sin; "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" In the New Testament the whole truth is declared; "God so loved the world …"! That is the supreme fact; love craving for fellowship; God desiring the fellowship of His children; God wounded in His own heart, in His own being, and suffering in the presence of human sin.

Out of that love arises the difficulty of God, His desire is to justify the sinner, to make a way for His banished ones to return, to find a way back for Adam, to restore Ephraim to His original intention, to bring the world to Himself in spite of sin and wandering. That is the Divine desire, the Divine passion. How can He do it? God cannot exercise one attribute at the expense of another. He cannot deny justice when He acts in mercy. He cannot forget the requirements of law when love would operate.

Yet the difficulty is not merely in that God must vindicate law. The difficulty is deeper. He must vindicate law because of the nature of the law that He must vindicate. His law for man was love-inspired and so absolutely perfect that, being broken, results follow which are destructive of such as break it. Punishment is not additional to sin, it is inherent in sin. What a man soweth that he reaps. The harvest of broken law is not the harvest of anger, it is a harvest that grows out of man's own sinning.

Speaking within the limitation of the human outlook, therein is the supreme difficulty. The principle of law can be vindicated by the annihilation of the sinning man; but because law is inspired by love, and love is set upon the perfection of that man, and because the thing the man has done has within itself the elements of man's destruction, the love that inspires law must insist upon the law, while yet it feels out after the man. How can that law be met which has sprung from love, and how can that man be restored? How can this God of perfection be true to Himself and take sinning men back to Himself on the level of the righteous?

There is only one way. He must make them righteous. He must put righteousness at their disposal by some process so that it really becomes theirs, mastering them and dealing with all that which has resulted from their sin, restoring them to His holiness, upon the basis of some power that overcomes sin. Nothing short of that can satisfy the requirement of this God Whose desire is that of the restoration of man.

Again I ask, "How can this be done?" Nicodemus was not so great a fool as some people seem to think. I am weary of hearing men talk about him as though he were a flippant fool, an intellectual idiot! Nicodemus was a tremendous man, and our Lord dealt with him so. When he said, "… How can a man be born when he is old?" he was not trifling, but asking the most agonizing question a human soul can ever ask. When I have arrived at manhood, how am I to undo the past years and their influences. I am molded, fashioned; how am I to escape from myself? How can I begin again. It is one of the most terrific questions that was ever addressed to God in Christ. "… How can a man be born when he is old?" How can he have that justification that takes hold of the inner fact of his failing manhood and deals with it? That is the question.

The gospel we preach is not simple; it is profound. We do not ask you to receive the pity of God as though He would excuse you and admit you presently to heaven in spite of what you are. God cannot deal with men like that; has not done so and will not do so! He must justify and still be just! He cannot justify, unless He remains just. There is the problem and the difficulty.

Hear then God's solution of the problem; "… He might be just and the Justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." At this point I call a halt of most serious importance and significance apart from which we shall be all astray within five minutes. We must first note Who this Jesus is, to Whom reference is made. Because I am dealing with Paul's teaching and argument, I go back to Paul's definition. His letter opens with it. He was filled with the consciousness of this supreme fact of the Person Who in Himself is of the very essence of the gospel.

"Paul, a bond servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, which He promised afore by His prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead; even Jesus Christ our Lord."

It is necessary that we go back to that passage to know Who this Person is. There is a racial aspect of humanity from which no individual escapes. This Person, born into this flesh, Who identified Himself with the race, was in essential spirit the Son of God. He came to dwell in flesh that had been the very instrument of sin. The Person toward Whom our faith is directed is not mere man of our humanity. He is Man of our humanity, but He is also One Whom we cannot dismiss by calling Him Jesus of Nazareth; we must also name Him Son of the Highest. We cannot account for Him wholly within the terms of our humanity; we must include within our thinking His relationship to Deity. That relationship is essential so that when we look at the Son we see, to borrow a phrase from another of the letters of the New Testament, "…God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. …" Therefore, upon all He said I must place the measurement of the Divine wisdom; upon all He did I must place the measurement of the Divine power. From the narrowed focus of His human life, I must look out into all the immensity of the Divine, When I see Him at work and listen to His speech, I know I am observing God and listening to God. His tears are the tears of God. His sighs are the sighs of God. His pain is the pain of God. This One Who was contracted to a span for human observation, brought down into human limitation for human outlook, is One in Whom all the fulness of the godhead dwelleth bodily. We shall never understand our redemption until we get this out- look upon the Redeemer. If you tell me Jesus was a Man Who persuaded God to love me, you are uttering that which is almost blasphemy. Jesus is God persuading me back to the love of God and enabling me to answer the persuading. Jesus is the name employed in the text; the sweetest, simplest, human name; employed in order that my frail finite mind may fasten and fix itself upon Someone Whom in measure I can understand, and having done so may find that I have been admitted into the spaciousness of all the eternal Deity.

Paul says that in Him "… a righteousness of God hath been manifested, …" which means infinitely more than that God's righteousness is revealed in Him. The manifestation of righteousness in Jesus is the putting of righteousness at my disposal, not clothing me in it, but communicating it to me so that it becomes the inspiration of my life. This is done "… through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. …" The exposition of that term "redemption" is found in the words "a propitiation … by His blood." The word "propitiation" suggests something that covers the guilty person so that the results of sin do not fall upon the guilty head. "By His blood" brings us back to the tragic, awful symbol of the very pain and passion of God. Here is the Cross. Therein I learn what I cannot explain, that He bare my sins in His own body on the tree. How, I cannot tell! I could have explained it had it been the activity of man for I also am a man. When I discover that behind the revelation of the Man there is the activity of the God who out of love enunciated law and now out of love doth suffer the consequent penalty of broken law, then I feel that the Rock to which I come will hide me, for God will not violate His own holiness, and even though I cannot explain the method by which He justifies me, I know that seeing He has taken my burden, I may take from Him with humility the gift of pardon which His grace extends.

The way of appropriation is that of faith. The only unpardonable sin is to reject the offer of His grace. The only sin that hath no forgiveness is the rejection of the operation of the Spirit Whose office it is to reveal the things of Christ and place at our disposal all the grace He came to bring me. That unpardonable sin cannot be committed in an hour or a moment. It is not one act. It is persistent, definite, final refusal of Christ. There is no other sin that hath no forgiveness.

The Sabbath day is nearly done. We have been trying to face supreme things. The supreme things of life are those of relation to God. Does that need any arguing? I think not. In view of His holiness then let us ask, "Where do we stand?" To those who are conscious of wrong, of sin, of failure, and consequent lack of fellowship with Him, we bring now the message of the gospel. It is that God places at our disposal righteousness through Christ His own Son, places at our disposal righteousness which is the outcome of the redemption provided through propitiation. He has taken our place as to all the result of our sin and gives us His place as the result of that very suffering.

What shall we do? Shall we not trust Him? Shall we now come to Him saying:

Nothing in our hands we bring,

Simply to thy cross we cling.

In such trust we shall have that justification which He bestows while still just to Himself, and enter into the eternal peace.