**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 20 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**DIVINE SELECTION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him.*

*Isaiah 52:11*

THE TRAINING OF THE APOSTLE PETER FOR THE FULFILMENT of his work in the world may be said to have consisted of a series of revelations of God in Christ, each successive one growing in value and in breadth. When our Lord first met him, he was apprehended by the Personality of Christ. Then, after a period of following Him as one of His disciples; listening to His teaching, watching His work, becoming more and more familiar with the marvel of His Personality; at Caesarea Philippi he made his great confession. Finally, by the way of the resurrection, he came to full apprehension of the truth concerning his Lord; as he himself said in one of his letters, he was born again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through that resurrection and all the glory that followed it, he discovered that Jesus was not only Messiah, according to his interpretation of that word, but that He was the Saviour of His people.

In the story which is told at length in the chapter from which our text is taken, we have the account of how he came to a still larger conception of God through the ministry of Jesus Christ. In the actual words of our text, we have his declaration: "l perceive that God is no respecter of persons."

His first meeting with Christ brought him no conscious vision of God. As he followed his Lord, heard His teaching, watched the wonder of His working, and at last saw that strange cross from which he had shrunk in dismay, transfigured by the glory and triumph of the resurrection, all the old, narrow prejudice concerning men vanished, by reason of the fact that he came to fuller, profounder understanding of the truth about God.

In the house of Cornelius he made still wider discovery, as his own words show. We need to study the declaration with solemnity, for while it breathes the very spirit of hope, it, nevertheless, utters a warning full of solemnity.

Let us hear the simple terms once more, "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." That is the first matter. The second is: "In every nation, he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him." The first declaration sweeps away prejudices and barriers; the second sets up the severest of all tests. "No respecter of persons"; Cornelius the Gentile is to be received; but a respecter of character for the Hebrew by blood and ceremonial who does not fear Him, and does not work righteousness, is not acceptable with Him. The text, then, has its negative and positive values.

If the text were all, it is not characterized by comfort. While it seems as though barriers which we have erected are being swept away by its great and gracious declarations, we suddenly find that it is erecting another barrier. While the standards by which men receive other men are set aside, a new standard is erected, the standard by which God receives men; and while our hearts may at first be filled with comfort as we remember that God is no respecter of persons, if we look carefully at the second part of the declaration, we shall need something else, or we shall go away without comfort and without help. Therefore, let me immediately draw attention to the fact that the text without the context is not the gospel, is not the evangel. There is no good news in it if we remove it from its context. If we follow on, remembering that this declaration of perception on the part of Peter prepared the way for his declaration of the evangel, then we shall see the final value of our text.

Let us first notice particularly what is here revealed concerning the principle of Divine selection; God is "No respecter of persons," but He is the accepter of a certain type of character. Let us secondly consider what this text reveals incidentally concerning human rejection, that where that type of character is lacking, because God is no respecter of persons, He rejects. Finally, let us hear what Peter called the gospel of peace.

We begin, then, with the declaration of the text concerning the principle of the Divine selection. All that is necessary in this connection is emphasis and illustration of the declaration which the apostle made. First: "God is no respecter of persons." Second: "In every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him."

"God is no respecter of persons." This we have heard affirmed over and over again. In some senses we believe it; yet it is indeed the most startling and most gracious assertion. God is not a capricious selecter of men upon the basis of anything accidental in their circumstances. Things which appeal to men, make no appeal to God, God is not interested in any man because of his wealth. It is equally true that the poverty of the poor man makes no appeal to Him. No man of wealth is loved by God on account of his wealth. No poor man is more welcome in the presence of God than is the rich man. The morality of the moral - using these words in their commonly accepted sense - makes no appeal to God. Morality in the estimate of heaven is the application of spiritual convictions to everyday life. A great deal of the morality in which men make their boast is simply that habit of life which makes it possible for them to escape the grasp of the policeman. That morality makes no appeal to God. Neither, on the other hand, does the sin of the sinful make appeal to Him. I think that also needs emphasis. I have sometimes felt as though, especially in evangelistic preaching, we are in danger of so preaching the gospel as to lead men to think that it is the man who is steeped in vulgar pollution that makes especial appeal to God. It is not so. The status of the privileged, the destitution of the despised, make no appeal to Him. He does not select persons on the basis of any of the things that are accidental. God has no favourites among men. Temperament, capacity, tendencies, temptations; none of these creates a claim upon the Divine attention. God does not select men of given capacities; poets, artists, students, workers. He knows all these things. He is profoundly interested in them; they are His own creations in the lives of men. God is interested in every man because he is a man. Perhaps here, as everywhere, we may be helped by thinking of our Lord because He revealed the Father. In a certain sense, He never saw the garments that men wore. He was not attracted to a man because upon his brow and around the borders of his garment there were phylacteries of breadth and bulk. He was not repelled by the rags of a beggar. He saw neither the phylacteries nor the rags. The clothing was nothing, the man wearing the clothing was everything.

No man is acceptable to God by reason of any accidental thing. Some of you were born into such circumstances that it has been possible for you to become educated men and women. Some never had that opportunity. God is not attracted by the culture of the educated man. He is not attracted by the ignorance of the ignorant man. He is interested in the man.

He is no respecter of persons. He has no one nation that He loves more than the rest. That was the thing Peter had to learn. It was a surprising thing to Peter. Peter had believed that God loved Israel and no other nation. Upon the rock of that false conception, Israel went to pieces. Today, we often subconsciously imagine that God loves an Englishman better than any other man. Of course we know that it is not true. When the preacher refers to it we smile at it. Then let us remember it. God profoundly loves man because he is man. He is interested in man as man. Incidentals are not noticed. The essential is not only noticed, it is known, watched, dealt with. He is no respecter of persons.

Why all this emphasis? Because we err perpetually, both in thinking of other men and in thinking of ourselves, through interpreting the attitude of God toward humanity by our own attitude toward our fellow men. If you see coming into your assembly, said the practical and ethical writer of the New Testament, a man wearing goodly apparel, and shall hasten to find him the chief seat, you are violating the Christian principle. We still respect persons. If I may say this without being misunderstood, all the method by which the Church is specializing in its work in the homeland is illustration. Special missions for special kinds of men. I will not criticize you if you feel led that way, but I have very little use for the method. Find me a man, apart from the incidentals, of temperament, or birth, or calling in life, or capacity, and I will preach to him, I care not whether he be rich or poor, high or low, learned or illiterate, moral or debased. "God is no respecter of persons." He is interested in man as man; for He sees in every man, despite the purple or the rags, notwithstanding the culture or the vulgarity, His own image, His own likeness. He sees in every human life possibilities which if set in right relation to Himself will be for His glory. He knows that in the life of the man whom we hold in supreme contempt there are vast forces, which if they are rescued, redeemed, remade, will make heaven richer and all the ages more glorious.

Now let us take the second part of this declaration. If we left it there we might be inclined to imagine that the apostle meant that God receives men into fellowship with Himself, in spite of what they are in themselves. It might seem as though God looks at human life in all its incidentals as though the incidentals did not exist, dealing with humanity ideally, and not actually and practically. But that is not the declaration of my text. He selects. I am quite willing to use the other word; He elects. He does accept some, and reject others. There is a condition of life which He respects though He respects no person. There is a condition of life for which He has no respect.

What, then, is the condition that He respects, selects, elects? The apostle tells us. "He that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him." Simple words, but as I bring my soul to their test, as I compel my spirit to their measurement, I am appalled. "He that feareth Him." Let me take you back to definitions found in the Old Testament of what that means: "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil." "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." The fear of the Lord is a condition of the inward life, producing conduct in the outward life. The condition of the inward life is that of hating evil. The condition of the outward life is that of departing from evil. To fear the Lord is to be pure in heart. To fear the Lord is to be pure in conduct. If a man shall declare that he fear the Lord and love sin, he lies and the truth is not in him. If a man shall declare that he fear the Lord and shall continue in sin, persistently walking in the ways of evil, he is deceiving himself; he never deceives God. "He that feareth the Lord" is he upon whose spirit there forever rests the consciousness of God, in holiness, in truth, in absolute rectitude; a man in whose spirit there is perfect harmony with God. He loves the pure, the noble, the holy, and because of these things, hates the evil. As a result of this inward purity of heart, he departs from evil. Immediately, the second part of the definition follows, he that "worketh righteousness." The man who hates wrong departs from wrong, and does right.

How many of us are acceptable with God on the basis of that conception? All barriers of nationality, position, colour, sex, capacity, are swept away, but this is erected. Character is supreme, character according to pattern; and the pattern is that of heart purity expressing itself in the life that departs from evil and does right. God is no respecter of persons, and no accident of birth or environment or temperament can exclude us from His attention, or prevent us from being received. Of whatever nation or people, or tongue or position in society - using the word in our degraded sense of it - we may come to Him; and as we come, the barriers men erect are gone; but a flaming sword is before us, we are halted; only those are acceptable who fear God, and do right. How many of us dare go on?

That leads me immediately to the second thought. In the light of the text, I am brought face to face with the appalling fact of human unfitness and consequent rejection. These are hard and fast lines of Divine requirement. No pity can overlook them. We cannot plead our weakness and folly, or our foolhardiness in the past, as excuse for the things which unfit us for the company and fellowship of God. I would put this case as superlatively as I can, and declare that if God can receive into fellowship with Himself, and hold in respect the impure, the vulgar, the demoralized, then He must be the Author of eternal disorder. It is because He is love, and His love is holiness and rectitude; and because His love is set upon the establishment of high and abiding conditions of life that this standard must be maintained. He cannot admit into His heaven the man in whose heart sin reigns supreme. Where is His heaven? Where He is. In London for the men and women who know Him and live in fellowship with Him. He cannot admit you thereto while evil reigns in your heart and sin is permitted, condoned, excused, persisted in. God help us not to hear this as a theory. It is a flaming fire. The thing in your life, in my life, permitted to remain, which we know is sinful; the evil that we do not hate, but love; the impure thing that we will not depart from, but give room to within the chambers of our personality; these are the things that shut us out from God. I affirm, therefore, that there is no comfort in this text if there be no more than the text.

That once again prompts me to go forward. This is not all that Peter said in the house of Cornelius. The background brings into living relief the gospel message. The sweeping simoom is followed by the gentle wind of God with healing in its every breath. If you think my language is overdrawn, or that there is over-emphasis in it, when I speak of the sweeping simoon, I can only say that that is how I feel. I speak with you more than to you. I will speak alone if you so will. In the sight of heaven I say if that text is all, then I am undone; I am excluded from the company and fellowship of God. I thought I was coming nearer when the Gentile might come as well as the Jew, I thought perchance there was an opportunity for me when I discovered that neither wealth nor poverty make appeal to Him. I was rejoiced to think that perchance I might be admitted to His fellowship when I discovered that it was not the man of special capacity whom He receives; and as I was coming, the light shone, and the word said, "He that feareth Him and worketh right." I am a sinning man, I have done the wrong, I will not waste your time or my own discussing and blaming my environment. I have done the wrong when I need not have done it. I have loved the evil and refused to depart from it. The stain and scar and paralysis of it are with me still. How am I to come? To me the declaration is a sweeping simoon, no song in it, no deliverance in it. It is awful with the awfulness of unsullied holiness, and unbending righteousness; and all I can do is put my hand upon my lip and cry unclean, unclean. I am a sinning man.

Let us hear the apostle finish. What is the next thing that he says? "The Word which He sent unto the children of Israel, preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ"; and then the parenthesis which was necessary, because the word was said to Israel, and he was speaking in the house of Cornelius, "He is Lord of all"; no respecter of persons, rich or poor, bond or free, high or low. He is Lord of all, "That saying ye yourselves know, which was published throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; even Jesus of Nazareth." Why the introduction of that word "even"? Because Jesus of Nazareth is the Word of the gospel.

The declaration already made revealed distance and the necessity for reconciliation between God and man. Peter knew full well that such a declaration would halt the soul, and create a sense of conflict, distance, difficulty, estrangement, and therefore he went on: "the Word which He sent." I wonder sometimes why they have not capitalized that initial letter all through the Acts of the Apostles, "the Word which He sent." What is that? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God … and the Word became flesh." The Word that was sent.

Let us group the things he said about the Word. He was perfect Man. He was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, and went about doing good. He was crucified. He was raised from the dead. He is appointed to judge. The perfect One, Who died, rose, and is Judge. And all this for what purpose? To grant unto men remission of sins. That is the gospel.

Let us see what it means in the light of the declaration of our text. God is no respecter of persons, but He does accept the man who fears Him and works righteousness. Now behold the Man. Here is the Type, the Pattern, the Revelation. This Man went about doing good. He feared God and hated evil; He departed from evil, and wrought righteousness. Mark, I pray you first of all, this great fact, that in the Person of Jesus presented by Peter upon this occasion you have the fulfilment of the ideal suggested in our text. He feared God and wrought righteousness. Do I need to stay to prove it? Surely not! I need hardly stay to illustrate it. Think of the life of Christ and see how true it is. He feared God and hated evil. He was "tempted in all points like as we are, sin apart." "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" Such was the negative challenge which His purity made. Here is its positive challenge. "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him," He "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil." Doing good, when? Always. That means He wrought miracles? Oh no, that is specifically stated afterwards. He went about doing good, all the time, everywhere, and in the records I challenge you to find me a single picture of Him when He was not doing good. Look through the window that Mark has opened for us, and see Him during the long years in Nazareth making yokes and ploughs and building houses, for the carpenter in Nazareth was the builder also; He was doing good as surely there, as when presently in the midst of the crowds He spoke and devils fled; He touched, and diseases vanished; He whispered, and the dead woke; doing good, doing right. A human life in the midst of my circumstances, in the midst of my temptations; but adjusted to the measurements of eternity, taking into account the infinite and eternal. That is the Pattern, and if that is all, I am more than ever filled with fear. The abstract terminology of my text appalls me. The living revelation of that ideal paralyzes me with panic. I cannot so live. Oh my masters, you who tell me in this day that all I need to do is to preach Christ as an Example, you have never seen Him. I say that without any apology or reserve. The man who tells me that all I have to do is to follow Him, imitate Him, has never seen His glory. The perfection of the Son of God captures my mind, compels my admiration, and paralyzes my hope!

Is there anything else? Yes, there is another thing. They slew Him. But, there is still something more. God raised Him. The light of the resurrection flashes back upon the cross. I do not understand it. There is an awful, appalling mystery in the cross. I see more and more of its shame. I feel more and more the profundity of its agony. But there are depths I cannot fathom, heights I cannot reach, mysteries that overwhelm me. God raised Him. The light of resurrection is flashed upon the cross, the cruel, rugged, bloody cross has become beautiful with the promise of new life. I, rejected by the severity of God's holiness, see myself in the mystery of that dying; but I see my salvation in the triumph of that rising.

Preaching peace, this is the great evangel. Peace by the way of the cross. That risen One is demonstration of the fact that the cross is infinitely more than we can encompass by human measurement. It is a transaction with God, and of God; and God's final act is the resurrection, and in the words of Peter, the risen One is made "Judge of the quick and dead."

Oh trembling heart, affrighted by the severity of God's holiness, behold your Judge! He is wounded in hands and feet and side. I come to Him and look into His face, the face awful with the awfulness of holiness, and that shames me; yet I look at Him again and say, "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me"; and I am loosed from my sins through the mystery of what He is, and what He has done.

At that point I may begin my new life, Now I dare go back to my text. That is the character, and God has not abandoned it; He is still seeking it, but He has provided the force that will realize it in men who lack it. Would God that the truth might take possession of your heart. You listen to me patiently, reverently, and say, I am with the preacher, I also have sinned. Then hear the preacher to the end, as he declares the whole message of the text. You can be all God demands through Jesus Christ the Lord. He will give you first of all in the deepest of your life the fear of God which will make you hate evil. Is it not so? Are there not hundreds of men and women who hate evil? The struggle is not over; the conflict is going forward; the battle is often fierce against the allurements and temptations of the world; but in the deepest of them there is the master- principle of the hatred of evil. Already they are beginning to depart from it. The principle of goodness is there, because Christ is there. Let Him have possession and He will never end until He lead you, and lead me, hopeless, helpless people; and present us in the unsullied and awful light of the holiness of God, without spot or blemish.

Let us submit to His measurement, and we shall be ashamed and condemned. Let us yield to Him, and we shall be remade and shall triumph.