

Jesus died on the cross, Matthew 27:51 says, "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. . . ." Thus, as Hebrews 4:15 says, in Jesus the way was opened for every man to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Therefore, as the eunuch no longer needed Philip, so when you accept Jesus you no longer need the ministry of any other man to come to the throne of grace. You can pray directly to God in Christ. You can confess your sins directly to God in Christ. You can find "grace to help in time of need."

No wonder that the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing!" He was free from the

fears of paganism. He was free from the frustrations of ritualism. The Son of God had made him free, and he was free indeed (Jn. 8:36). He went on his way rejoicing, because he did not travel alone. In the mystical presence of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was with him always—even as he carried the Gospel to the people of his own land.

Would you know that experience for yourself? Then believe in Jesus as your Substitute and Saviour. Obey Him not only in baptism, the symbol of your faith, but in the daily walk and work of your life. In Jesus realize your ready access to God for grace to help in time of need. Then you, too, will go on your way—rejoicing!

THE UNIVERSAL NECESSITY

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Scripture: Acts 10:34-43

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons"—Acts 10:34.

When in the house of a Gentile Peter declared "God is no respecter of persons," he uttered a truth of world-shaking proportions. The words "no respecter of persons" translate one Greek word meaning "accepter-of-face." Thus Peter said, "God is no Acceptor-of-face," meaning that "God does not judge a man by his face." Apart from color, racial characteristics appear in the face. The truth herein declared is that God neither accepts nor rejects a man on the basis of race. Thus we are introduced to the universal necessity, that which is required of all men, and that which is offered to all men. This we shall see as we consider, first, Cornelius the Gentile; second, Peter the Hebrew-Christian; third, the necessity resting upon both.

First, note Cornelius the Gentile. He was a Roman centurion, or commander of

one hundred soldiers. Though he had been reared in a pagan environment, he was a devout man. He and all his household were God-fearers. They sought to worship the one true God. In seeking a better life they had turned to a study of Judaism, even attended the synagogue, but had not yet become Jewish proselytes by submitting to certain rites required by the law of Moses. As an expression of his religious zeal he "gave much alms to all the people, and prayed to God always." To summarize: he was a man of devotion, faith, benevolence, and prayer. In his search for salvation he had gone as far as his moral and devotional life could carry him. But he was not a Christian.

This is an apt description of many to whom I speak. You may be a devout person who maintains a respectable family life. You believe in God. You contribute money to the church and to charity. You have the practice of daily prayer and regular church attendance. In your own efforts to achieve salvation, you have gone as far as you can go. But still it is not

enough. As to the rich young ruler in Mark 10:21, Jesus says to you, "One thing thou lackest." Herein is suggested the message of the Gospel. The word "Gospel" means *good news*. When you have gone as far as you can in striving for salvation, only to fail, there remains the good news of what God has done for you whereby you may be saved. In this light we may understand the angel's words to Cornelius, "And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter" (v.5).

Second, consider Peter the Hebrew-Christian. Peter had been born in the Hebrew line with all the prejudices associated with first-century Judaism. Subsequently he had been born-again into the Christian faith, but still retained many of his Jewish prejudices. That he had overcome some of them is evident by his presence at Joppa in the house of Simon the tanner. Tanners among the Jews were held in such contempt that if a girl unknowingly became betrothed to one, the betrothal was void. A tanner was required to build his house fifty cubits outside the city. However, Simon the tanner was a Jew. It appears, then, that Peter had conquered his prejudice within his own race. But Gentiles were something else.

So when the messengers from Cornelius arrived, Peter was hesitant to go with them. Notice the contrast between these two men. Cornelius, the lost man, so hungry, so eager for the Gospel! Peter, the Christian, so prejudiced, so hesitant to give it to him! It took a direct vision from God to show Peter that all men are precious in God's sight.

You cannot fail to recognize the modern picture in this incident. A lost world, even lost people all about us, searching for the way of salvation. A Christian body, even individual Christians, smugly complacent and hesitant to share the light of the gospel with those who grope in darkness. Which suggests

Third, the necessity resting upon both the Christian and upon the lost man.

The Christian is commanded to take the Gospel to the lost man. Obedience to this command was not easy for Peter. In Acts 10:28 he declared, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." The word "unlawful" translates a Greek word meaning *to break a taboo*. Although the Old Testament did not forbid Jews to have social contact with Gentiles, the Rabbis has so interpreted it. There is nothing more binding on the average person than social custom.

It was in such an atmosphere that Peter made his world-shaking declaration, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons . . ." The word "perceive" translates a Greek word meaning to lay hold with the mind. Peter literally said, "I am catching on to the fact that God does not judge a man by his face."

The prevailing idea among the Jews was that to be saved a Gentile must first become a Jew in his religion. To this some early Christians added faith in Jesus Christ. Now Peter says, "I am catching on to the truth that a Gentile must be saved the same way as a Jew, by faith in Jesus." Thus he proceeded to preach the Gospel to Cornelius (Acts 10:36-43). The last words of his recorded sermon are ". . . that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (v.43).

Against the background of the mandate of God for the Christian to preach the Gospel to lost people, let us notice the requirement of God with regard to the lost man. Many would imply that God is unjust in his requirement for salvation. Often you hear the question, "Will the heathen be lost if we do not tell him of Jesus?" The answer of the Bible is "Yes." "But," you ask, "if the heathen does the best that he knows how, will he be saved?" Again, the answer of the Bible is "Yes." Not the best that he *can do*, but the best that he *knows*. The trouble is

that, because of his sinful nature, no man, whether he be a savage or a philosopher, does the best that he knows. Let us examine this matter further.

In Romans 1-3 Paul discusses this very problem. In Chapter 1 he points out that God has revealed Himself to every man. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in (to) them . . . so that they are without excuse" (vv.19-20). In verses 21-32 he points out that all men rejected the revelations of God in their hearts. Like the clap of doom three times Paul says, "God gave them up" to lust, vile affections, and a reprobate mind.

Beginning in Chapter 2 the apostle shows that both Jew and Gentile, or heathen, are lost. This he climaxes in verse 11 by saying, "For there is no respect of persons with God," using the same root word for "respect of persons" as found in Peter's declaration. In verses 12-13 he adds, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law. For not the hearers of the law are just (justified) before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." To clarify the matter of the Gentile he continues in verses 14-15, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile (or between themselves) accusing or else excusing one another." In Chapter 2:17-3:9 Paul points out that the Jews having the law of Moses has failed to keep it. He then concludes in Chapter 3:9-18 that "both Jews and Gentiles . . . are all under sin" (v.9).

To summarize: all men in the beginning rejected the revelation of God in their hearts. In His redemptive purpose, therefore, God, continues to manifest Himself in the hearts of the Gentiles, who in turn reject that revelation. He also gave a written law to the Hebrews, saying in

Deuteronomy 30:15-16, "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live . . ."

In Luke 18 a certain young man asked Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v.18). Replying Jesus quoted to him the Ten Commandments. Proudly the young man claimed to have kept them from his youth. Kindly Jesus showed him that he was guilty of breaking even the first commandment in making his possessions his god. He was morally clean, but his relation to God was wrong. James 2:10 says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

The sum-total of the matter in Romans 1-3 is that both Jew and Gentile fail to live up to the light which they have. Therefore, Paul concludes in Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Why is it that you cannot be saved simply by doing the best that you can? Recall the question of a lawyer to Jesus as to the great commandment? Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40 replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." One of these two commandments concerns our relation to God, while the other deals with our relations to man. Your good deeds largely involve the latter. Thus in your self-righteousness, whether by keeping the law of Moses or the law of conscience you still are estranged from God.

Thus Paul in Romans 3:21-22 says, "But now the righteousness of God without (apart from) the law is manifested . . . even the righteousness of God which is by faith of (in) Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." He then

concludes this entire discussion by showing that God must be both "just" and the "justifier" of those who believe (v.26). A *just* God must condemn sin. A *merciful* God would forgive sin. He condemned sin in His Son who kept perfectly the law thus justifying God's requirement. Then in justice He made Jesus to become sin to die on the cross and be raised from the dead. In His Son, therefore, He became the "justifier" of all who would believe in Jesus as their Saviour. This He did, not on the basis of your good works, but as an act of His grace (v.24).

In this light you can understand Peter's sermon to Cornelius wherein he traced the life of Jesus from His baptism to His resurrection (Acts 10:36-41), and even beyond to the day of judgment (v.42).

As Peter uttered the words "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins," his sermon was interrupted by the coming of the Holy Spirit falling "on all them which heard the word" (v.44). The word "heard" means to hear and heed.

Thus Cornelius and his household *believed* the Gospel. The Holy Spirit came upon them, before baptism, as a sign that God had saved them (vv.45-48) as Gentiles—by grace through faith.

In conclusion we summarize our theme: God is no respecter of persons. All of you outside of Christ are lost, either because you reject God's law written in the Bible or written within your heart. God does not save some men by one way and others by another. He has one plan of salvation. It is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ whose saving death and resurrection are available to every one of you. "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

I beg of you to turn from your efforts to establish your own righteousness by deeds of the law. Accept the righteousness of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Whatever your race or moral condition you must be "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). For God does not judge you by your face but by your heart!

JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

May 24, 1959

Scripture: Acts 13:14-43

"And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses"—Acts 13:39

While the apostle Paul had preached many times before this, we have here the first of his sermons recorded in full outline. For that reason we note several of its characteristics. It was preached on the Sabbath day in the Jewish synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia. In Acts when Christians met as Christians it was always on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. But when Paul sought an audience of Jews he always went to their synagogue on their day of worship, the Sabbath, or seventh day of the week. This was probably the first sermon ever preached to a

mixed congregation of Jews and Gentiles. In Acts 13:16 and 43 we learn that there were present Jews; proselytes, or Gentiles who had become Jews in their religion; and God-fearers, Gentiles who were students of Judaism.

Note further that the sermon was preached in a Jewish synagogue located in a Greek city that was under Roman rule. The preacher was a Hebrew, reared in Tarsus, a city of Greek culture, and who was a Roman citizen. Thus in this mixed congregation the three great cultures of the day, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, united in the proclamation of the Christian Gospel.

Analyzing Paul's sermon you discover that it follows the theme of Stephen's sermon. Apparently Paul never got away