

The Message of Romans

by G. Campbell Morgan

The letter to the Romans presents the central teaching of the awful helplessness of the sinful race and the absolute perfection of the Divine salvation, and calls men to faith and dedication.

Topics: "Human Helplessness", "Divine Salvation"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan expounds on the profound teachings of Romans, emphasizing the helplessness of humanity in sin and the perfection of divine salvation through Christ. He highlights that both Gentiles and Jews are equally guilty before God, yet salvation is available through faith in Jesus, who embodies God's love and justice. Morgan stresses the importance of understanding our responsibility to share this message and live in a way that reflects our faith, ultimately pointing to the glory of God as the ultimate purpose of salvation. He calls believers to recognize their duty to communicate the gospel and to live out their faith in character and conduct.

Transcript

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

I. The Central Teaching

i. The awful Helplessness of the sinful Race.

a. The Light of Nature. Failure.

b. The Light of Revelation. Failure.

ii. The absolute Perfection of the Divine Salvation.

a. The Provision in Christ, the Son of God.

1. Manifestation.

2. Propitiation.

b. The Relation to God.

1. The Activity of His Love in Holiness.

2. The Vindication of His Holiness by Love.

c. The Provision for Man.

1. Justification.

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d. The Relation to Creation.

1. The Restoration of its King.

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II. The Abiding Appeal

i. The Revelation of the true Sanctions and final Standards of Life.

The Divine Throne and Government.

ii. The Call to Faith as the Faculty to apprehend the Unseen.

The Divine Provision for Sight. "The Son of God . . ."

The Call for Faith in all that which the Manifestation declares

ii. The Call to Dedication, the Attitude which is the only Evidence of Faith.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. To the Church

i. The ultimate Value, the Glory of God.

ii. The supreme Responsibility, communication to others.

iii. The personal Necessity, full Realization in Character and Conduct.

II. To the World

i. "All have sinned." iii. 23

ii. God "the Justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." iii. 26.

In this letter we are dealing with one of the greatest writings of the New Testament; greatest, that is, in its setting forth of the foundation facts of our most holy faith. It was Martin Luther who said of it, "It is the chief part of the New Testament and the perfect gospel" ; Coleridge the poet declared it to be "the most profound work in existence" ; and Godet described it as " the cathedral of the Christian faith."

In order to a clear and sharp apprehension of the message of this letter, we need to recognize the assumptions of the writer, for these constitute the sanctions of his teaching. In the background of this letter

there is evident a definite cosmology; and an equally definite conception of history.

The cosmology and history are those of the Old Testament. If we have lost the book of Genesis, and the history of the Old Testament, this is a foolish and meaningless document.

First, there is on the part of the writer a very clear recognition of the one God. He never attempts to demonstrate the existence of God; nor does he argue for the unity of Deity; he takes these things for granted; and in many references we find evidences of this fact.

Moreover he assumes that this God is in character holy and just. Again he never argues for either of these things; but takes them both for granted. He argues of other matters, assuming this twofold fact of the holiness and justice of God. If this man, living in the midst of sin, iniquity, and difficulty is conscious of the problem of human redemption, that problem is as to how God can be just and the Justifier.

It is further taken for granted that this one God, Who is holy and just, is the Creator, Sustainer, and Governor of the universe. He never admits for a single moment in the process of his argument concerning human salvation, that any part of the universe has escaped or can escape the government of God. He never admits that man can escape from the government of God. He does admit that man may give himself up to material wrong-doing, mental depravity, and spiritual death ; but he affirms that if man does give himself up to these things, then God gives him up to the issues of them; and thus he reveals the supreme fact, that even a sinning man is still held in the grip of the Divine government; and shows that if a man will not submit to the infinite love and mercy of God by falling into line with the provision of His grace, that man must endure the unutterable penalty of his sin.

Man by nature, by first creation, by Divine intention, by the possibilities and potentialities of his own being, stands in the universe, subject to the throne of God, and reigning over all the creation beneath him.

Creation then, according to the cosmology of Paul, is subject to man, beneath his control, dependent upon him for realization and fulfillment of its hidden potentialities; and consequently sharing man's experiences. If man be noble, the nobility in creation is manifested. If man be debased, creation is debased. If man shall through sin groan and travail in pain, the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain beneath him. If man shall be manifested in the midst of creation as the son of God, the sighing and groaning of creation shall cease, and it shall be lifted to the level of the man who is over it. Such, in brief, is the cosmology behind the letter; this man's conception of things as they are, as to origin, nature, and government.

Now observe history as this man sees it. It is interesting how very few references there are in the writings of Paul to what we call profane history, to events that stand out upon the page of human history. Human history is set entirely in the light of the Divine. History for Paul begins with Adam, the first man, the head of the race. That man is seen in rebellion against the Throne, disobedient, is Paul's word. One man's disobedience produces one result in human history; the dethronement of God from the actuality of human consciousness, the degradation of man immediately following the dethronement of God, and the consequent degradation and spoiling of all creation beneath him. Paul did not look upon all the groaning and pain of creation as a process that was tending to upward development. The first man disobeying loses his sceptre because he ceases to bow to the sceptre of God; losing his sceptre, the kingdom beneath him suffers, he is unable to realize it, unable to lead out its hidden potentialities into fulfillment Creation groans and travails in pain because its king has lost his sceptre, because he has ceased to kiss the sceptre of God, or to bow to His throne.

After long centuries, Paul recognizes another point of departure; a man, Abraham, and a people, called out into separation from all that order of things which has resulted from the sin of the first man ; and this man and this people called out for the sake of all the rest, that by the life of faith, which is a life of submission to the throne of God, they might reveal to men the breadth, the beauty, and the beneficence of the Divine government. And again there follows the story of failure; failure of faith and consequently failure of testimony. The next point of departure is that of the advent of a second Man, the last Adam, the Head of a new race; with the result of the enthronement of God in human consciousness and in human life. This restoration of man to the image and likeness of God results ultimately in the restoration of the whole creation.

One man failing and falling, the whole creation failing and falling with him; groaning, travailing, sighing, sobbing. One Man victorious and realizing, and by the mystery of death bringing every man into fellowship with Himself; and creation by the manifestation of the sons of God restored to the true order of the universe. In the midst of the darkness and sorrow and sin, Paul sings, "Let us rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Upon these assumptions Paul bases the arguments of his teaching; and they constitute the sanctions of his system of human salvation, That teaching has to do specially and definitely with the gospel of the second Man, the last Adam. It is the statement in order and sequence of the method by which God, Who has never vacated His throne, never given up the reins of government, comes into the midst of all the failure resulting from the sin of the first man, in order to restore, and heal, and realize His own high and gracious purpose.

This letter is not a tract to be put into the hands of the sinning man in order that, believing what it says, he may be saved. It is rather a treatise to be put into the hands of Christian men in order that they may understand the method of their salvation.

The central teaching is first that of the awful helplessness of the sinful race; and secondly that of the absolute perfection of the Divine salvation. There is no book in the New Testament, there is no book in the Bible, that so fearlessly looks into the abysmal depth of the degradation resulting from human sin. Read the third chapter of this book, and read no more, and you will say that it is the most pessimistic page of literature upon which your eyes ever rested. Read that which immediately follows it, and follow the argument to the end, and you will say that it is the most optimistic poem to which your ears ever listened. These are the two qualities of this book. A straight, fearless, daring look at the human heart, and at human sin; and then a clear look at the Divine heart, and the perfection of the Divine salvation. Ruin and redemption; these ere the words of our fathers; we use them much less than they did, and the loss is ours. Absolute ruin and helplessness, that is the apostolic outlook upon man; plenteous redemption and perfect salvation, that is the apostolic outlook upon God.

In dealing with the ruin and helplessness of the human race, Paul divides that race into two parts. He speaks of the Gentiles, who have had the light of nature: and he speaks of the Jews, who have had the light of revelation.

In dealing with the Gentile he does not admit that God has left men anywhere without light. Those who have had the light of nature have at least had the opportunity of discovering two things about God, His wisdom and His Divinity. These are the things which men will always find in nature, and never anything beyond. It is a remarkable fact that this apostolic declaration harmonizes with the most recent findings of

men of science who have turned away from revelation. Huxley, Darwin, Tyndall, Spencer, and Bayne, all admitted the evidences of force and intelligence in nature. The admission was most forcibly put by Bayne when he declared that the varied phenomena of nature revealed the activity of a double-faced somewhat; double-faced in that it had these two qualities of force and intelligence, working in harmony. That is exactly what Paul says. The men who walk in the light of nature can and will discover the Divine wisdom and power; that is, force and intelligence. The apostle then described the state of those who had the light of nature, in character and conduct. Let me take out some of the descriptive phrases: "vain reasonings . . . senseless hearts . . . fools . . . vile passions . . . unseemliness . . . reprobate mind ; . unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness ; envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, . . . insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful." If any are inclined to make a protest against that description as being unfair, let them walk through the streets of London, where men have turned from the light of revelation, and turned from the faith of Christianity, and are walking only in the light of nature; and they will find that this is still an accurate description.

The writer then turns to those who have had the light of revelation. The Jew, judging the Gentile, called him heathen. Now what does Paul say of the men who have had the light of revelation? He declares that they do the same things. Read again the dark and awful list of the things done by men who have the light of nature. Men who have the light of revelation do the same things ; and worse, because they have named the name of God, and profess to be teachers, the name of God is blasphemed among the heathen through them.

Therefore Paul expressed his conviction of the appalling helplessness and hopelessness of humanity; "There is none righteous, no, not one" ; "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." It is the most terrible indictment of humanity that was ever penned. Thank God there is something more in the letter than that.

The second message is that of the absolute perfection of the Divine salvation provided in Christ the Son of God. Paul introduces Christ in the very first page of the letter, declaring that He was Son of David according to the flesh; and that He "was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead." I never can quote that passage without desiring to anglicize the Greek word which is there translated "declared to be" ; "Who was horized the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead." He appeared on the horizon as the Son of God by the resurrection. We must start the Roman letter there; for unless we do so, we have lost the key. The Person presented to men, upon Whom they may believe; the Person from Whom comes the new life, creating the members of the new race; the Person Who is the second Man, the last Adam, the First-born of the new creation; is the Son of God; and He was declared to be the Son of God, horized as the Son of God, by the resurrection. Deny the resurrection, and we may tear up the Roman letter. Admit the resurrection, then at once the Jesus of the gospel stories is the Son of God, demonstrated such, definitely revealed as such, so that there can be no doubt about it.

Two words tell the story of the office of this Person: Manifestation, and Propitiation. The righteousness manifested in Him is righteousness at the disposal of every man through the mystery of propitiation wrought out in His death. That is the perfection of salvation. In that Person there is righteousness at the disposal of every man, because in Him there is propitiation for every soul that believeth.

The relation of this salvation to God is that it results from the activity of His love in holiness; and is the vindication of His holiness by the activity of His love.

The result to man is threefold; that of justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Justification; that is infinitely more than human forgiveness can ever be, infinitely more than a promise to pass over, and never mention again, the sin committed ; justification is the reinstatement of the soul of man in such relationship and actual fellowship with God, as that soul would have occupied had there never been any sin, had there never been any guilt.

Sanctification; all the forces of the life of the Son of God, Head of the new race, are communicated to the members of the new race, so that they may live as He lived; growing up into Him in all things which is the Head.

Glorification; man resuming finally his true place in the universe of God, lifts again, to the place from which it has fallen, groaning, sighing, sobbing creation.

The relation therefore of creation to the work of salvation is that of the restoration of its king, the manifestation of the sons of God, and the realization of its possibilities.

Paul looks at human history and sees two or three outstanding facts; the original creation, and man; man rebelling and falling, and following that fall, the fall and sob of creation; the new daybreak, when the Head of the new race stands horizoned by resurrection; all men believing in Him, receiving righteousness, not merely imputed but imparted also; and he watches the process on and ever on, until the groaning creation ceases its groaning, and its sob and its sigh merge into the song of a great triumph. That is the march of history.

If that be the central teaching of the letter, what is its abiding appeal? It first recalls men to the true sanctions and the final standards of human life, those of the Divine throne and government. This book calls men to measure themselves no longer by the standards of their own aspirations or ideals, but by the standards of Divine requirement.

If any man will obey the call which demands that he shall abandon the standards of his own age, the measurements of his own imagination, the ideals of his own heart; and presenting himself to the throne of God, accept the purposes of God, what is the result? It is always the same. Every mouth must be stopped; all the world must become guilty before God. If we measure ourselves as among ourselves many of us will find a good deal to satisfy ourselves in the exercise. If we measure ourselves by our own ideals and aspirations we shall not be quite so satisfied, but we shall think that we are doing fairly well But if we have done with false measurements, and stand in the light of the Throne of holiness and purity, and are measured there, we shall lay our hand upon our lip as surely as did the leper, and cry unclean, unclean; guilty before God.

This letter calls men to the exercise of the only faculty which can apprehend the unseen; that is the faculty of faith. That is what submission to the throne of God means; it is remitting all the life to the unseen; and the only faculty which can do that is faith. God in great grace has stooped to the human level and has presented Himself to the human mind, in order that faith may repose upon that manifestation, and make connection with the infinite forces that lie behind the manifestation. That is the meaning of the incarnation. By incarnation God did not come any nearer to humanity, but He came into observation. He was as near

to humanity before the mystery of the appearing in Judaea, as then and since. But He then came into visibility. He has given men a vision in the Son of God, horizoned by resurrection. This letter says belief in Him, faith in Him, the Son of God, is the starting point of the new life. If you ask me to discuss the reason, I reply that it is not upon the basis of reason that man finds his way into life. This is God's appointment, God's provision ; that when a man shall rest upon this Jesus, believe into Him, venture everything on Him, risk eternity and heaven upon Him, then by that act of faith, that man takes hold of all the forces of the spiritual and unseen, and receives in answer the value and dynamic of righteousness.

This letter calls men also to the attitude which alone is evidence of faith, that of dedication, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies." If a man shall say he have faith, and there be no works giving evidence of his faith, then his declaration that he has faith is not true. Faith in the death of Jesus is expressed in consent to die to everything that caused His death. Do I trust in His death for my salvation? Then I am to show my trust by reckoning myself to be dead to the things that caused His death. If I simply consent to trust in His death, and there be no corresponding consent to death in my own life, then my profession of consenting is blasphemy and impertinence. Faith in the life of the Son of God is to be expressed in the habits of the life of that same Lord Whom we trust. We are to present our bodies as alive from the dead; and it is in the activities of life, harmonizing with the life of Jesus, that we give evidence of our faith.

The present application of this letter to the Church of God is that the ultimate value of the salvation which God has provided is the glory of God; and the supreme responsibility resting upon those who share this life is that of communicating to other people the great evangel.

On the first page he writes it, "I am debtor . . . I am ready . . . I am not ashamed of the gospel." Do we feel we are in debt to every man we meet, that he may know our salvation and share it? That is the great responsibility, and in it is involved that of the personal necessity for the full realization in character and conduct of all God has provided for us, not merely that we should be beautiful in character; but in order that through our conformity to our Lord, men may see Him and be attracted to Him. In order that men may share the virtue of His dying, He calls us to fellowship with His sufferings. Do we rejoice in the plenteous salvation? Then let us remember that it lays upon us these tremendous responsibilities.

What does this letter say to the men and women who are outside, who are still living as members of the lost race? Two things, First, all have sinned, all are guilty. Then what? God is "just and the Justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." Come with all your weakness and pollution, your inability, the awful helplessness of your own nature; and put your confidence in this Christ ; and He will blot out your sins through the mystery of the shedding of His blood; and by the gift of His life communicated, He will negative the poison, quench the fires, break the chains; and lifting you into fellowship with Himself, make you a channel through whom His virtue shall flow to creation for its healing and its lifting.

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