**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 1 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE LIMITATIONS OF LIBERTY by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*All things are lawful for me; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me; but I will not be under the power of any.*

*1 Corinthians 6:12.*

*All things are lawful; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful; but not all things edify.*

*1 Corinthians 10:23*

THE APOSTLE PAUL WAS PRE-EMINENTLY THE APOLOGIST OF Christianity. His mind was naturally alive to all the thinking of his own age. Its Hebrew training made him familiar with the highest religious conceptions. Its Roman sympathy caused his vision of empire. Its Greek interest made him conscious of the philosophies of the intellectual world. Yet his relation to Christ affected, rather than was affected by, all these things. To him the essential in each was included in the Lord-Jesus and thereby redeemed. His message, therefore was perpetually paradoxical, as he admitted, and then denied the ideals of his own age. He was the uncompromising foe of the tyranny of the Hebrew priests, and yet he argued passionately for the priesthood of the saints. He most evidently admired the far-reaching splendor of the Roman Empire, but for him it needed correcting, until it should become a commonwealth, answering the law of One Head and feeling with the fervor of one heart. He was captivated by the analyses of life and the mysteries of the Greek philosophies, but for him the former needed restoration to naturalness, and the latter purification by light. In Christ this man found the truth lying at the base of all error, and his teaching was uniformly directed to the work of correcting error by the declaration of the truth. It is this method which obtains in the two verses which I have read as text. They occur in a letter written for the correction of the life of a Christian Church in a Greek city. This letter reflects as in a mirror the conditions obtaining in Corinth at the time. The false conditions in the Church were caused by the fact that the Church had passed under the influence of the city. In the divisions which had sprung out of discussions around the "wisdom of words" is seen the counterpart of the philosophic discussions then obtaining in Corinth. The lack of discipline which was cursing the Church was the reflex of the toleration of impurity in the life of the city. In the lawsuit which the Apostle condemned I see the shadow of the ceaseless litigation which had become almost a method of amusement in the Greek cities. The prevalent impurity within the Church which he so sternly denounced was possible in the atmosphere of the corrupt life of the city. The disorderly observance of the Lord's Supper by these Christians reflects the degradation of religious rite and ceremony in the Greek temples. In the violation of love against which he so strongly protested is manifest the selfishness prevalent among men outside. Finally, in the difficulties about the resurrection which he combatted in so stately and magnificent an argument, is discoverable the effect in the thinking of the Christian people, of the materialization of ideals which characterized Greek thought. The cause of these conditions of life was very largely the Greek conception that man was independent of all law external to himself. This was the Greek idea of liberty. It was expressed in a proverb which, being translated, runs: "Man is the measure of all things." Within the circumference of that conception men were living and claiming liberty, declaring all things were lawful unto them. It was a doctrine of liberty. Paul affirmed it, and corrected it. When the Greek philosopher declared all things were lawful, Paul answered, "All things are lawful for me; but -"

There are two matters for our consideration. First, the Christian affirmation of liberty - "All things are lawful." Secondly, the Christian description of limitation - "All things air lawful; but -" First, then, the Christian affirmation of liberty - "All things are lawful." Notice the inclusiveness of the affirmation. Here I must trespass on your patience while we look carefully at words, for if words be indeed the channels through which truth is conveyed, we need carefully to examine them, or we may miss the truth they are intended to convey. The Apostle made use of one word, "panta". We must understand what it means if we are to perfectly realize the measurement of Christian liberty. It is the plural form of a Greek word which simply means "all." Theyer tells us that when the word stands in the plural without the article, it means all things of a certain definite totality, or the sum of things, the context showing what things are meant. In this Epistle the expression "all things" occurs no less than thirty times, and every time it is necessary, according to Theyer, to interpret the meaning by the context. I have been making careful selection of the occasions in which the widest use is made of "all things," and I shall ask you to traverse the ground in order that we may know what the Apostle meant thereby.

First, let us remember that when the Greek used this phrase and declared "all things are lawful," he referred to the sum total of material things and moral values, and all the forces of life of which he was conscious. How, then, did Paul use the term "all things"? We are not left to speculation. In the third chapter is his own definition. "Wherefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours," and then there is a parenthesis evident in the fact that the main argument is taken up at the twenty-third verse, so that if you read directly from that central word of the twenty-first verse to the end of the twenty-third verse, you will find the main statement, "All things are yours ... and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." Between the first affirmation, "All things are yours," and the latter words there is Paul's exposition of his own use of the phrase, "all things" "whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come." Not only, therefore, does the Apostle include all that the Greek philosopher included, but he sweeps out into a realm that far transcended anything that the Greek philosopher saw or understood. "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas." The naming of these men is the naming of emphases of truth for which they stood. Every system of thought is yours. Again, "the world" is yours, with all its forces, and its movements. And "life," which you are perpetually attempting to analyse and account for; and "death," which to you is but a cessation of life, and a mystery, both are yours, that is "things present," an inclusive phrase which is the boundary of the thinking of the Greek philosopher; and things to come, which Greek philosophy denies, but which Paul includes in his "all things." Thus, when Paul wrote, "all things are lawful to me," he included all the schools of thought, and the world, and life, and death, and things present, and things to come. Then notice the claim in its nature as well as in its inclusiveness, "All things are lawful." Here, again, we take the word "lawful," and ask what its real meaning is. The root idea is the word is that of being out upon the public highway. It is the opposite of imprisoned. With regard to all things, I have liberty, I am not in prison, I am not shut away from any of them, I am on the great highway walking amidst them, and I am free. I have power and authority in respect to these things; they are permitted to me. He thus affirmed the freedom of the Christian man with regard to all things in the universe of God - material, moral, and spiritual. If we are to understand what the Apostle means there must be contextual exposition. You will find in the fifteenth verse of the second chapter a principle of discrimination. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things." The Christian man in the midst of things lawful to him does not take them promiscuously, but with discernment. He puts upon things lawful to him the measurement of the infinite. He that is spiritual judgeth or discerneth all things. Further on, we have a balance of relationship "All things are yours" is not his last word, for he adds, "and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's." The final thing for the Christian man is not all things which are lawful, but the Christ who reigns over him, and God Who is at the back of the Christ. It is a great cosmic conception which the Apostle gives us here. First, then the infinite God, then Christ, then the Christian man, and, finally, all things stretching out beyond him, the man recognizing that he is crowned in the midst of all things, but never forgetting that he must exercise the principle of discrimination in dealing with them.

Then in the eighth chapter at the sixth verse, is a great philosophy of the universe. "Yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto Him." I go a little further, and I see this cosmic conception still dominating his thought, for in chapter nine and verse twenty-five I read "And every man that striveth in the games is temperate in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." That defines the attitude of Christian endeavor in the midst of all things. In the tenth chapter at the thirty-first verse, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." This is the law of action in the midst of the all things which are lawful. At last, in the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth verses of chapter fifteen, I find Paul's vision of consummation. "He put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He saith, All things are put in subjection, it is evident that He is excepted who did subject all things unto Him. And when all things have been subjected unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all things in all things." That is one of the most magnificent and stately passages in the whole of the Apostolic writings, and I can only hope that its majesty may break upon our consciousness as we read it. If we take these passages - and I am perfectly conscious that what I am saying is calculated rather to provoke thought, after the service, for I cannot cover all the ground tonight - we shall discover the Apostle's conception of "all things." It is as wide as the universe. It sets the horizon far back and widens the outlook, making the magnificence of Greek philosophy appear poor in comparison with the tremendous sweep of the Christian conception. Standing related to all, he says, "All things are lawful for me." There is nothing essential to the universe that I have not liberty to use. By hint and suggestion, he shows the relationship existing in the universe - God, Christ, the Christian man, and everything beyond him. He declares the direction that everything is taking in the universe, all things centreing in the Christ, to be finally presented to the Father, until at last God shall be in all things, and all things shall find in God their perfect fruition. I interpret the Apostle's word only by his own writing; I would not have dared to say he meant so much if I had not taken his argument and followed the movement of the phrase to this great consummation. The Christian man stands centre of the universe, of the present and the coming things, known and unknown, material and moral and spiritual, and he is Christ's and Christ is God's.

Now notice the limitation of Christian liberty. It is threefold -

"... But not all things are expedient."

"... But I will not be brought under the power of any."

"... But not all things build up."

This is the threefold test of how far I may use the things lawful. The test of personal progress - not all things are expedient. The test of authority - I will not be brought under the power of any. The test of social relationship - not all things build up.

First, the test of personal progress. Not all things are expedient. I think the word is almost unfortunate, not in its first meaning but in its present-day use. We have come to speak of a thing as being expedient when it is a thing that pays, without reference to principle. That is the degradation of the word. The word simply means foot free, set at liberty. The figurative idea of the word is that of freedom to make progress upon a pathway. The thing that is expedient is the thing that hastens the traveler upon his journey. The Greek word means "to carry together," that is, to co-operate, and the best translation you can possibly have of the word is "profitable." The profitableness is to be tested by the lawfulness already considered. Paul stands in the center of the universe, and he says all things are lawful to me. Art is lawful; also music, science, games, meats - all are lawful. But some of the things that are lawful are not expedient; they will not hasten the running; they will not minister to the progress; they will not make for development into perfect union with the cosmic order, which centers in Christ and God. That is the first principle as to the thing we may do, or may not do. There are a thousand things lawful to me in London that are not expedient, that will not help in my progress, that will not make me any stronger for the ultimate issue - things that will not minister to my strength for co-operation with Christ and God. All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient. Something is expedient for you that is not expedient for me; something is expedient for me that is not expedient for you. Every man stands alone in the great cosmic order, and every man must find his own relationship to lawful things, first by this principle: Is this something which ministers to my development so that I may fill my place in God's ultimate will and intention?

Secondly, there is the test of authority. "I will not be brought under the power of any." As a matter of fact, in the Greek there is here a distinct play on words which is not apparent in translation, nor is it possible to express it in English exactly. I may suggest it by saying, All things are in my power, but I will not be brought under the power of any, or perhaps by saying, All things are permitted me, but I will not ask permission of any. Here, again, is a great principle. The man submitted to Christ must submit to nothing else. The man under the authority of Christ must have no other authority over his life. Man must test relationship to all things by this principle, this thing is lawful but it must not master me. This thing comes within the scope of the universe, into which I am brought to have dominion over, never to be dominated by. Perhaps if I leave the principle there it is hardly helpful, so I take a simple illustration or two. What is the true relation of the Christian man to money? Money is lawful, but I will not be brought under the power of money. What is the relation of the Christian man to knowledge? Knowledge is lawful, but I will not be a slave of knowledge. What is the relation of the Christian man to love? Love is lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of love. The Christian man asserts his liberty by recognizing its limitations; his liberty to use anything perishes when the thing he uses becomes his master and he becomes its slave. This is a wonderfully searching principle if we will but have it so. This thing is lawful to me, but if this thing, habit or friendship, or manner of thinking, or passion of living, masters me, then have I not lost my liberty? And is not the fact that a man loses his liberty when he is brought under the power of anything a revelation of the necessity for the testing of liberty by this principle? I sometimes think I would have these words, "All things are lawful for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any," printed so that every young man could see them rather than any others. All things are yours, but ye are Christ's. Keep that balance of relationship and you are safe; change it and you are in peril. One is your Master, even Christ, and all things are lawful to you, but you must not let them master you; for if once the innocent, legitimate, proper thing becomes master it is no longer innocent, it is absolutely illegitimate, it is unutterably improper. Love, for father, mother, wife or child, becomes improper when a man is so brought under the power of it that he no longer yields first allegiance to the throne of the Christ and the throne of God.

One other test: "Not all things build up." That is the test of social relationship, and my reason for saying so is the context. "Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbour's good." Here, again, is a limit on my liberty. All things are mine, but there are some things which if I take and use I shall not build my neighbour up by so doing. Such things are not lawful. I beseech you notice carefully that this goes infinitely beyond what the Apostle has said in another letter, "Destroy not thy brother, for whom Christ died." This is more. He not merely says that the thing which is lawful to me becomes unlawful if it destroys my brother, but that the thing which is lawful to me becomes unlawful if it does not build up my brother. As a Christian man I am to recognize that over me are Christ and God, and under me all things - Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, and life and death, things present and things to come; but I am not to indulge in any of them save as I bear in mind that side by side with the necessity for my own advancement is the necessity for contributing to the building up of my brother's strength, and the thing that builds not up is not lawful to a Christian man.

This great affirmation of the Apostle makes it necessary for us as Christian men to assert our liberty, our possession of all things. That man is sadly mistaken who imagines that we as Christian men are excluded from anything that is essential to the universe of God. All things are lawful. We make a yet more terrible mistake if we imagine that we may exercise our liberty by indiscriminate use of the things that are lawful. The tender, strong love of God in Christ lays restrictions on our liberty; first, things lawful are to be exercised for our progress toward Christ's consummation; secondly, things lawful are to be kept under us while we are under Christ; and, finally, in the great, far-stretching universe, in which all things are lawful, we make illicit use of the lawful things if we ever forget for a passing moment that we cannot live alone, that our brother's life and our brother's edification are part of our responsibility. I thank God for the breadth and the narrowness of Christian liberty, and I pray that we may ever remember that there are limits to the liberty where-with Christ has made us free, and that to keep within the limits is to live in spacious liberty.