**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 6 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*And it came to pass, when Jesus ended these words, the multitudes were astonished at His teaching: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.*

*Matthew 7:28-29*

THESE WORDS OCCUR AT THE CLOSE OF THE MANIFESTO OF THE KING. They chronicle for us the fact of the impression produced upon multitudes who had been listening to His teaching of His followers. That which supremely arrested their attention was the note of authority. This becomes the more striking in view of the contrast suggested by the evangelist as he records the fact: "The multitudes were astonished at His teaching: for He taught them as having authority, and not as their scribes." Now, as a matter of fact, the most prominent note in the teaching of the scribes was that of authority. As revealed to us in the life of Jesus, these men were argumentative, dogmatic, critical, ready to ostracize and excommunicate all who did not receive their teaching. The people regarded them as the official interpreters of the law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers.

Yet, when the gathered multitudes had listened to Jesus unfolding the law of His Kingdom to His disciples, when they had heard Him pass from the winsome tenderness of the opening beatitudes to the solemn severity of the closing warnings, they were astonished at His authority as distinguished from that of their own teachers.

What, then, was the authority of the scribe? It was interpretative, dogmatic, official. None of these words is necessarily indicative of wrong condition. Interpretation is of infinite value; dogmatism has its place, and an official position is not necessarily false. To this kind of authority the people were perfectly accustomed, but having listened to Jesus, they said He taught as having authority, and yet they declared that it was not as their scribes.

His was not the authority of interpretation, although He was the great Interpreter. Neither was it that of dogmatic statement, although He taught without reference to other authorities and without apology. Neither was the sense of authority created in the mind of those who listened that of one who had a right to be heard because of some official position.

It was rather that of the self-evident truth of His teaching combined with a sense of His personality resulting there-from. To put this in other words, men listened, and then said, "That is true." As they listened, moreover, they were conscious that this man was speaking not in the name of another. He was not exercising the authority of words already spoken. His was the authority of origination, of Kingship, of supremacy, the thrilling, awe-inspiring authority of the final voice.

We are not surprised to read the statement which immediately follows our text: "And when He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him." Authoritative speech is always attractive, because man everywhere is conscious of his need in this respect. The authority may be false, but nevertheless it is attractive. Dogmatism always draws. It has been demonstrated that a man may erect a great organization upon the basis of a lie if only he will utter it with authoritative emphasis. We have no right to be angry with people who follow a false authority, for it must be remembered that the desire for government is one of the essentials of human personality. Angry with the false leader we may be, but pity should fill our hearts for those who are deceived. The great cleavage in the Christian Church between Romanism and Protestantism has been created, not by a difference as to the need for authority, but concerning its true seat. The watchword of the Romanist is the authority of the Church. The watchword of the Protestant has been, and I pray it may remain so, the authority of the Scriptures. Man instinctively seeks for authority. This is especially true in the realm of spiritual things, in those matters which affect creed, and conduct, and character. Therefore it is not surprising that the authoritative note in the teachings of Jesus drew the multitudes after Him. What the issues of their following were is not the question under consideration. We must never forget that the element of will enters largely and finally into the question of issue. My ultimate relation is determined not by what is said to me, but by what I answer. For example, the claim of the Bishop of Rome to authority in matters of Christian doctrine does not constitute authority for me. I deny the claim, and therefore am not bound by it. If I am able to establish the claim that the authority of Christ is based on truth, even then how it affects any of us will depend upon core's answer. We may keep His sayings and so build upon the rock, or we may refuse them and erect the superstructure of character upon sand. In this lies the awful majesty of human life. The supreme and overwhelming dignity of human personality is that of will. The majority of the multitudes who were attracted by His authority did not crown Him.

This whole question is a most vital one. I do not desire to discuss it academically, but rather in its living relation to those choices by which character is built.

Thank God, we are emancipated very largely from the intervention of men in the realm of conscience, but we remain profoundly conscious of the need of authority. For the sake of illustration let me speak personally. I cannot allow any man to decide for me what line of action I am to pursue, or what is to be the creed upon which my life is based; yet I do need someone to direct me, someone who shall tell me what for me is really right or wrong. In hours when the consciousness of life's strength is strong upon us we imagine that we are masters of our own thinking, and are free to do exactly as we please. Sooner or later, however, there comes to every soul the crisis when the need is keenly felt for a voice of authority, for one who will lead us into the highest, and the best, and the noblest. In order to the perfecting of life we need guidance in the finer decisions and subtler choices of the will. Any authority, to be finally satisfactory, must satisfy the reason and move the heart, and so energize the will. It is only such authority that will enable us to make our decisions with a sense of perfect rest. The message I bring you is that this need is profoundly important and is met only by the One of Whom the multitudes of olden days declared that "He taught ... as having authority." I affirm, therefore, at once, and shall attempt to prove my affirmation by argument and illustration, that there is but one voice which can perfectly answer the clamant cry of our souls. There is but one Lord and Master to Whom we may absolutely submit ourselves, and know that in such submission we tread the pathway leading to the highest realization of the possibilities of our own personality, and that one is Jesus.

So wide is the field of illustration that it will be better for to confine ourselves to one portion of survey. Therefore I shall draw my illustrations from that Manifesto, the uttering of which created the sense of authority in the minds of those who heard it. We shall follow two lines: first, that of the consideration of the authority of Jesus, and, secondly, that of our relationship thereto.

At first it might seem as though something in the manner of Jesus impressed the crowds with His authority. While admitting that almost certainly there were dignity and authority in the very way in which He spoke, there can be no doubt that this manner was associated in the closest sense with the matter of His speech. It is almost impossible to dissociate these two things in studying His Manifesto. To minimize the value of the teaching is to rob the personality of its dignity. On the other hand, to be convinced of the truth of the teaching is at the same moment to realize the Kingliness of the One Who speaks. We find ourselves constantly contemplating the Teacher as we listen to His teaching. As His words fasten upon my conscience, sometimes scorching, sometimes soothing, I find myself irresistibly appreciating the Kingliness of the Person. Each utterance of His convinces my reason, carries my heart, constrains my will, and I stand in the presence of the one and only royalty, the King of men. The manner and matter alike appeal. The "how" is born of the "what." The manner is created by the matter, and thus the great sense of Master-ship breaks upon the soul. In attempting to see the Person through the teaching, nothing is further from my desire than to indulge in any merely imaginative speculation. I do not propose to attempt an ideal portrait of Jesus, but only to discover Him as He is revealed through His teaching. Taking for granted your familiarity with the general scheme of the Manifesto, I submit that it reveals One Who speaks with the authority of perfect knowledge, of pure emotion, of poised volition. His perfect knowledge is manifested in His clear conception concerning God, concerning man, and concerning their interrelationship. I do not mean to say that in this Manifesto final knowledge concerning God is given to us. Such knowledge is not possible to man. My argument is rather that the conceptions of God which underlie appeal to the deepest in man are absolutely true. As the unfolding of law proceeds, God is revealed to the mind as being essentially supreme, relatively interested, and actively reigning. There is no discussion by this Teacher as to the difference or agreement between the doctrines of the transcendence or immanence of God. He speaks familiarly rather than argumentatively. In the appeal it makes to the deepest in us every reference indicates His perfect knowledge. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God," and in that word as in a flash of light I find that this Teacher places God in the position of absolute and final supremacy. "Be not anxious," "your ... Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." In that sentence, and in the paragraph of teaching connected with it, I learn His estimate of God's interest in all things which He has made. "Seek ye first His Kingdom ... and all these things shall be added unto you." And in these words I discover His declaration of the active government of human affairs by God. Thus, listening to His teaching concerning God, I am constrained to say, "He speaks truth," Every view which He sets before me carries conviction to my reason, sways my heart, and woos my will into submission. According to Him, God is supreme, is interested, and reigns.

And yet again, while convinced that this man knows God, I ask, "Does He know man?" And I listen for His estimate of human life. First of all, I discover that He thinks of man as a being in whom the spiritual is supreme. According to Him, the measurements of life are not those of time but of eternity. The deepest consciousness of human nature is not that of the senses but that of the spirit. "Lay not up for your-selves treasures upon the earth, ... but lay up for your-selves treasures in heaven." According to these words, man is able to possess things in the infinite life that lies beyond the present. Moreover, Jesus' view of man is that it is his nature to be anxious or to seek. Jesus recognizes the restlessness which is the inspiration of endeavour. No word of His treats this as wrong in itself. He corrects the method of its activity. There are things about which man should not be anxious. There are matters in which he may seek. Jesus deprecates the turning of this power to the issue of acquiring that which is sordid and material, and urges that it be exercised toward the realization of all the highest and abiding things. More-over, He is evidently intimately acquainted with all the facts of human nature. Every beatitude suggests a common human capacity, and as we hear them falling from His lips we know that they make their appeal to the facts and forces which are part of our nature. Thus, by way of His teaching, I find myself in the presence of One who knows God and man.

Moreover, the Manifesto reveals to me His intimate knowledge of the true lines of relationship: the relationship of man to God, the relation of man to man, the relation of the things of time and sense to those of eternity and the spiritual world. Here is a Teacher Who is not an ascetic withdrawing Himself from the thousand and one matters which I must touch every day, but One Who understands me in all these, even to eating and raiment; One, moreover, Who understands the passion of my life for possession, and Who comes into the midst of everything with such light as enables me to see clearly all relationships. Thus I have found through this teaching a Person Whose knowledge is perfect - knowledge of God, of myself, and of all the interests of my life.

But this Teacher is more than One of intellectual accuracy. He is also a Man of pure emotions. His sense of justice is of the keenest. His words are characterized by a fine scorn of imperfection, and yet they thrill with the tone of delicate and exquisite sympathy. He is not a mere man of tears, maudlin in His pity, and unable to help me. Neither is He merely an iron-handed administrator. He is both. The same lips said, "He that looketh on sin with desire hath committed it," and "Your Father knoweth." No tone of mine can give full expression to either of the things in these words. The first scorches and burns. The second has in it the infinite music of the love of God.

And yet once more, through this Manifesto, I discover a Person of perfectly poised volition. For Him it is evident there is one centre for all life, and that is the throne of God. His conception of life in all its varied capacities and responsibilities is that it must maintain its relation to that throne. All His decisions are regulated by that central passion of His being.

"Having authority." And it is the authority of One who knows God, knows me, and knows the lines of relationship. It is the authority of pure emotion. I cannot fear and dread Him, though His sense of justice be of the keenest, though His scorn of imperfection be of the finest, for both are atmosphered in a sympathy which is exquisite in its tenderness. It is the authority of a will perfectly poised in the good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God. Standing in imagination among the multitudes of old, and listening to Him, I am con-strained to say, "I have found my King."

And yet, again, let us think of the teaching, for it was this which led to the Person. As we attempt to review in general outline that teaching, let us ask ourselves the simple question, Are these things so? A survey of the Manifesto reveals certain estimates of Jesus. He first of all declares that character is supreme. That is the meaning of the opening of this discourse. He pronounces no blessing on having or doing, but all on being. This is certainly startling and remarkable. Men have never come into perfect agreement with this view - at least, in their active life. We still say, "Blessed is the man who has" money, property, position. We still say, "Blessed is the man who does." Jesus says, "Blessed is the man who is." According to His estimate, the great man is the man of character rather than the man of property or of activity. Now, whether in active life we yield to this conception or not, I affirm, without fear of contradiction, that we are all convinced that the estimate is true, that the great man is the one who is pure and strong and tender rather than the one who owns anything or even everything. In the presence of that fundamental estimate of the King the heart is convinced.

To take another emphasis, having declared the supremacy of character, Christ proceeded to declare to the men who by yielding to Him had accepted his view of the supremacy of character and of its nature, "Ye are the salt of the earth. ... Ye are the light of the world." In these words lie affirmed the importance of influence, and revealed His conception of the kind of influence which the world most needs. Salt is pungent and antiseptic, and not always pleasant in the vicinity of a wound, but it saves, it heals, it blesses. Light flashes and flames, and is not always welcome to the man hiding in darkness, but it will help him to find his way out if he desires to come.

Take another emphasis, that on the necessity of law, concerning which He said, "I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." Do any of us think that He was wrong in this? I will not stay to argue it. Every man's deepest conscience assents to His wisdom. Or, again, mark another emphasis, that which He laid on the matter of the true motive of righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees consisted in doing right in order to be well thought of by their fellow men. The motive was bad, as it is not strong enough to ensure righteousness under all circumstances. The righteousness which exceeds is that which acts in response to the throne of God and for the glory of God. When I was a boy I remember writing in my copybook, "Honesty is the best policy." No one questions the truth of that, but the man who is honest only because it is the best policy is at heart a rogue. Again we are compelled to consent to His view as to the motive of righteousness.

Further, He recognizes that there is a place in human life for anxiety, and the recognition appeals to me. It is useless to tell me not to be anxious, that it is wrong to think, and plan, and arrange. The capacity for these things is in my very nature. This King does not forbid them, but brings them into highest use. He says in effect, "Take the capacity, which is restlessness to achieve, and use it, not finally to procure things which pass and perish, however necessary they may be, but rather to put the fire and passion of it into the business of seeking the Kingdom of God." Thus He places anxiety in its right relation to infinite things.

Or to refer again to things already dealt with, His emphasis on the care of God and the true responsibility of man appeals to the deepest within us.

Taking a still more general view of all, we find that this Teacher has a twofold intention. He is seeking by His enunciation of law to realize the glory of God, and this by securing the good of men. Now let us pause a moment and earnestly ask ourselves certain simple questions. Are these conceptions true? Has He said one false thing? Where do we differ from His positions? Where does our criticism commence?

I think I can answer the questions. We begin to criticize by saying, "It is too high. It cannot be obeyed." And at this point I will not argue. All I ask at the moment is, Is it high? Are we prepared to grant this?

Many years ago a man in Birmingham said to me, "My quarrel with your Christ is that He is not practical." And I said, "Give me an illustration." He replied, "Confucius said to his followers, 'Be just to your enemies.' Christ said, 'Love your enemies.' Confucius is practical. I can be just to my enemy, but I cannot love him." That was a criticism honest and straightforward. I said to my friend, "But suppose you could be brought to love your enemy, what then?" He answered, "Then you would solve all the problems of human nature." That is all I ask. Is this ideal high? Is it noble? Does it at least command your admiration? Do you recognize its tone of authority? The multitude of Jesus' own day passed from the mountain impressed with the authority of His teaching. "He taught as having authority, and not as their scribes." The scribes dogmatically interpret authority, but Jesus has authority.

Then it would seem as though there were no more for the preacher to say. The issue is so evident. Yet here begins his most solemn and tremendous work. What are we going to do? There is really only one thing to do, and that is to be true to conviction. There is only one honest attitude in the presence of established authority, and that is obedience. And yet, here is the realm of uncertainty. The relation between conviction and issue is dependent upon that most awe-inspiring power of human personality, the power of choice.

Therefore, in conclusion, let me say three things. First, a word concerning the logical relation between conviction and conduct. That may be expressed in one word - submission. If there is authority in this teaching of Jesus, when the logical issue is that I submit. Submission may be explained simply as the crowning of the Person and consequent obedience to His teaching. But there is a possible alternative. This also may be stated in one word - rebellion. Rebellion against the truth of which the intellect is convinced - that, namely, of the authority of His teaching and the consequent supremacy of the Teacher - must mean submission to the base, surrender to the low, which, in turn, means ultimate degradation. Mark the fact carefully. This high truth stands before you, claiming the consent of your inner consciousness. That you have granted. You have said, "Yes, that is the ideal, that is the Teacher." Now, if, after having given such intellectual consent, you turn your back on Him and choose to disobey His teaching, by such action you submit yourself to that which is low, to that which is a lie, to that which will inevitably degrade. That is the appalling alternative. If we could but see this hour as God sees it, then we should see how, within the next few minutes, crowds of men and women, yea, all of us, will pass into close personal contact with the Teacher, and in that contact shall crown Him, and so find our feet set upon the highway which leads to the realization of life at its best; or, rejecting Him, shall hand over our lives with all their capacities to the low, the mean, the ignoble. There is no middle course for anyone who has stood in the presence of the King.

Let us follow this thought of the issue a little further. What follows submission? Inevitable conformity to the likeness of that to which we submit. Obey the truth and the truth will make you free. Crown the high ideal and it will transform you into its own nature. What is that? Heaven. Where? Here, and forever. On the other hand, rebel against conviction, deliberately refuse to crown the Christ, decline to submit to the true. What then? Instead of conformity, disparity, difference. Instead of growing likeness to Him, increasing dissimilarity, drifting further and further from truth, and what is that? Hell. Where? Here, and forever. You make your own choice. God grant you may choose aright.

A final word. Someone in this audience is saying, "I will submit." Such decision immediately brings the one making it into a new consciousness of sin and failure, a consciousness more profound and overwhelming than it has ever been before. Consent to the truth of what Jesus utters and abandonment to its claims is always followed by a keen sense of it sin and present inability. I have often said, and sometimes have been misunderstood, that having been brought up in a godly home, and saved thereby from many of the vulgar forms of sin into which others who have lacked my privilege have fallen, I never trembled in the presence of Mount Sinai. I always feel the profoundest sympathy with the young man who looked into the face of Jesus, and said, "All these things have I kept from my youth up." But while the majestic mountain of the ancient law never filled me with trembling, when I came to the clear shining of the ethic of Jesus, and stood in the presence of the rare and radiant loveliness of His perfect humanity, then I cried, "I am unclean, a sinner before God." Such is the experience of any soul honestly submitting to Him. And more, sin is not merely a pollution, it is a paralysis. I am not only defiled, but weakened. It is not merely, and not principally, that I cannot wash out the stain; it is that "when I would do good, evil is present with me" as a poison, as a disability. In the presence of these things, what are we to do? The acceptation of the ideal of truth never enables a man to realize it in experience.

Thank God, when the King had ended His Manifesto He had not finished His work. He went forward until He hung on the cross, and in the stupendous and unfathomable mystery of that darkness bore our sins in His body on the tree. Yet more, He returned from among the dead, victorious over all the forces which are against us, and having won out of death a life which He communicates to all such as put their trust in Him. Now, as I come to the wicket gate to enter the Kingdom in obedience to the call of the King's authoritative voice, He first gives me pardon for my sin upon the basis of infinite justice, but He gives me infinitely more. He gives me His own life as the dynamic which shall work to the realization of His ideal. Trust Him as the Saviour, crown Him as the King, and you will find, not only the quiet rest of the reign of truth, but the infinite ability of the communication of power.