**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 05 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**SIN by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Sin is lawlessness.*

*1 John 3:4*

*Lust when it hath conceived beareth sin.*

*James 1:15*

IN THESE TWO BRIEF PASSAGES WE HAVE INCLUSIVE STATEMENTS of the nature and the genesis of sin. I am proposing to consider this subject in the most personal and immediate way, desiring to discuss the question of sin in the individual life, as to what it really is, and as to how it comes about.

What is sin? "Sin is lawlessness." How does a man sin? "Lust when it hath conceived beareth sin." We exclude from our consideration, first, the question of sin among the unenlightened peoples; and, second, the question of racial inheritance. Concerning those who have never heard the Evangel there is but one thing to be said, that the Judge of all the earth will do right. Concerning the subject of racial inheritance, or, if you will, the subject of heredity, I am not proposing to speak, save to say that while it is perfectly true that very many of us may have inherited tendencies from our fathers, it is equally true that we all have another inheritance, mightier than the inheritance of evil. The mightier inheritance is our inheritance in God, both by creation and redemption. We are living in the midst of the sanctions of the Christian ideal. Wherever the ideal came from, the common consent of enlightened humanity agrees that it is right. There is no man in this house but that in the deepest of him consents to the standard of life revealed in the ethical teaching of Jesus. The standard of right and wrong for us is necessarily the Christian standard. We are all living in the light of that conception of life which has come to us through Christ, and we are all, in the deepest of us, consenting to the beauty of that conception.

Moreover, we are all conscious, however much we may debate it philosophically, of our power of choice. The man who, today, or yesterday, or the day before, committed sin, knows full well he need not have done so. I grant that there may have been unnatural predisposition to sin; I grant that the surroundings may have been very difficult; yet if a man be perfectly honest he will confess that he never yet committed an act of sin but by the choice of his own will. If the act of sin was not by the choice of his own will, then it was not sin. If you can conceive of circumstances in which a man is compelled by physical force to the doing of a thing which his conscience does not approve, circumstances in which a man has no choice left, under such circumstances he does not sin. Sin is always in the realm of the will. I am not discussing evil. Evil is a larger subject. Evil is all that is hurtful and harmful, whether as to cause or effect, whether material, mental, or moral. I am discussing sin.

Let us first, then, consider John's definition, "Sin is lawlessness." In order to understand this, we must take time to look at these two words, "sin" and "lawlessness," and see what they really mean.

"Sin." The word translated "sin" here is one of doubtful origin. From the philological standpoint, there is doubt as to its derivation. We are in no doubt, however, when we trace its use, as to what men meant by it. The very simplest definition of the word possible is "missing of the mark." It was made use of by Greek writers in at least three ways, always with the same underlying thought and intention.

The word was used in the physical realm. A man casts his spear and misses his mark.

It is used in the mental realm. A man sits down to write a poem and fails. That is a missing of the mark.

It is used in the spiritual realm, of failure to realize, coming short of the high ideal.

Turn to the other word, "lawlessness." Philologically, it means "without law." Greek writers, however, never use the word to indicate the condition of being without law, but always with reference to the breaking of law.

Now, take these two words and look at them as they constitute the one definition of my text, "Sin is lawlessness." May I change the words and indicate the meaning? "Missing of the mark is due to the breaking of law." While the word "sin" alone might indicate a condition for which the one sharing in it might not be responsible, this whole definition declares the condition to be the result of choice and action. Thus the element of guilt enters into the thought and fact of sin. The mark is missed because the law is not observed. The prize desired is not gained - and this is for the young men here - because the rules of the games are not observed. It is not merely that a man is disqualified and flung out by a judicial decision of someone outside; but that there is only one way in which to reach the prize, and that is by the observance of certain rules. If a man break the rules he misses the mark of the prize of his high calling. That is sin. Sin is first a decision and choice of the will. It is, finally, the ultimate disaster of failure, resulting from that choice of the will. It was when I knew, and disobeyed, that I sinned. It was when I came to the parting of the ways, and had the right, the power to elect, to choose, to decide, and I did so in the way of disobedience, that I sinned.

A young fellow in a business house told me an almost grotesque thing. He had become a teetotaller, and had kept his pledge for some time, when one night in a mad frolic, and exhibition of wickedness, the other men in the house absolutely forced him to swallow brandy. He did not break his pledge. He did not sin. They sinned, but he did not. I know the illustration is rough, almost grotesque, but it gets to the heart of what I want you to see. How often that has been true in your life is another matter. You talk to me of the seductions of a certain hour and place. Why were you in that hour and place? I should need to cross-examine you very carefully before I would be willing to agree that there was no guilt in your sin. You speak to me of the fact that you have in your blood, in your life, tendencies to evil, things that drive you. Have you put proper guard upon those tendencies? Have you used the common sanity of the athlete in your fight against them? I am not speaking yet on the highest ground, but on the lowest. Is it not true of the vast majority of men who are sinning today that they "have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin"? Until a man has resisted unto blood in his striving against sin, he has no right to say he could not help his sin. If sin is never sin in the sense of guilt until a man violates law, directly a man does violate law it is sin. When you state excuses for your choice of wrong, state also in common honesty the resources which were at your disposal, which you neglected. There are many excuses. There are men in this house tonight who live in the midst of circumstances very difficult for them, men who come to see me and talk with me, and write to me - I thank God for every such chance of helping men. All the environment in which you have to spend six out of your seven days is difficult. I grant it. I know it. Over against the difficult environment and the difficulty of the tendencies which you say you have inherited put the resources which are at your disposal if you will but avail yourself of them: the resources which are at your disposal in God, of which you may avail yourself if you fulfil His one condition of crowning Christ, the resources which are at your disposal in the comradeship of the saints, the resources which are at your disposal in prayer, prayer on the highway, in the midst of the environment, when the forces of evil are massed against you, prayer, which is but a sigh, a sob, the uplifting of the heart, but which couches the very hand and heart of God and brings deliverance to men. When next you tell me you are bound to sin, be careful that, first of all, you have considered not only the difficulties by which you were surrounded and the perils in your way, and the things which were against you; but be careful that you have also taken into account all the resources which were at your disposal.

In turning to James I want to read a few more words than the actual words of my text. "Each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust when it hath conceived beareth sin: and the sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death." This is a remarkable passage. In it three things are clearly revealed concerning sin. First, the basis of it, lust. Second, the method of it, a man is drawn away, enticed by his lust. Third, the issue of it, lust, being drawn away, conceives and bears sin. When I see the external act of sin, I ask what lies behind it. An enticement and a drawing away. And behind that what?

"Lust." It is absolutely necessary first of all that we should understand that deepest word in my text. What is lust? We have come to use this word almost exclusively in one sense. What does this word mean as it appears upon the page of the New Testament? Let me give you one or two illustrations where it occurs, which will prove that it does not necessarily, or indeed radically, mean what we have come to associate with the word in our speech today. When Jesus was approaching the end, coming near to the Cross, He sat at the table of Passover with His disciples, and said to them, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you." To translate that in another way would be to read, "With lust I have lusted to eat this passover with you." It is the same word exactly, the suggestive Greek word epithumia. Peter in his letter, speaking of the great redemptive work of Jesus, says, "which things angels lust to look into," "desire" as we have it translated. It is the same as the word in my text.

Once again, Paul writing in that wonderful letter, so radiant in its revelation of Christian experience, to his children at Philippi, said to them, "having the lust to depart, and be with Christ." I am sure you see at once what I am trying to bring you to understand about this word "lust." Desire is not sin, and there is no sin that men commit but at the back of it there is desire which is not sin. If only you can get far enough back into the mystery of your sin you will find desire which is not wrong in itself. Go back to an illustration which I am perfectly sure I have used more than once in this pulpit. I take it again as being the most graphic I know. Paul in writing to the Ephesian Christians said to them, "Be not drunken with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit." That seems a strange bringing together of opposites. Behind both is the common lust, the same desire. Why does a man drink wine? Because the taking of it opens a window, lifts him, exhilarates him. I dare not say enthuses him, for the difference between enthusiasm and excitement is radical. The word "excitement" simply means things in rapid movement without order. Enthusiasm means God-filled. But the man is after vision, light, excitement, lilt, and lift. What does a man obtain when he is filled with the Spirit of God? Vision, lift, enthusiasm, the thing that puts him high above all the troubles of life and enables him to keep beneath his triumphant feet the very things which perplex and harass and make difficult the way of man. The desire for the vision, for the lift, for the sense of fullness of life - it is that which drives a man to drink. If I should tell a man that when he appeals to drink for the satisfaction of that desire he is on his way to find God, I should lie. He has then, in answer to the cry of his soul after God, turned his back upon God. Desiring to find life, he has deliberately turned his face to death. Seeking the sun rising, he has knowingly begun to follow the will o' the wisp which leads him on to the swamps from which there is no return, save by some miracle of the redeeming grace of God. It is perfectly true that lust, desire, is in every life, and in every advance of evil to man; every suggestion of evil is made to something which at its root is right. Lust is not sin, but sin comes out of it.

Mark the method. "Each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed." I think with rare discrimination James here makes use of two words and they are both remarkable.

"Drawn away." It is a hunting figure, a figure of a man who is engaged in trapping animals, and the word means seduced from safety into snares. The next word "enticed" is a fishing figure, and includes the thought of a bait held out. The thought of the word enticed is "seduced by a fancied advantage." Mark the process in your own soul while I try to describe it to you as in mine, for, ah me, I know it, and you know it. There is desire in my life. Here is a suggestion that I shall satisfy that desire by being drawn away from the straight line which I see in front of me. I am enticed by the bait that offers me immediate realization of the thing I am after. I turn away, mark the word, turn away from the law which is in my conscience of right and wrong, I turn away to satisfy the lust. Lust is right, but the suggestion is that instead of answering the desire of my nature within the realm of God's holy law, I shall attempt to answer it outside. I am enticed. I am drawn away. The desire is right; the peril is that I am asked to satisfy proper desire by breaking law. Preaching some time ago on the subject of temptation, I illustrated this fact in the temptation of our blessed Lord. Every appeal of the devil was an appeal made to something which was perfectly right, but the suggestion of the devil was that there should be satisfaction of the proper desire by turning aside from law, being enticed, drawn away. You have not yet reached sin. Lust is not sin. Temptation is not sin. Desire is not wrong. The fact that you are drawn toward lawlessness is not sin. The fact that you are enticed by suggested advantage toward breaking law is not sin. You are yet upon the highway of rectitude. Christ desired, but He never sinned. Christ was tempted, but He never sinned. You may have come as far as this many a day and yet have not sinned. You will perpetually have to come as far as this. You will be conscious of desire for all kinds of things for which you have been made of God. Allurements will come and enticements and suggestion that you should step outside the proper line of rectitude which you know full well and satisfy your craving by some illicit process. That is temptation, but it is not sin.

When does sin begin? James is careful to tell us. "Then the lust, when it hath conceived." We may translate this word "conceived" here in order to help us, by a number of words - to clasp, to seize, to arrest, to capture. Here is a desire in my life. It is not sin. Here is temptation luring me from the line of rectitude. That is not sin. The will within me decides that I shall turn from the line of rectitude and take this suggestion and lay hold upon it, seize it, capture it. What then? The act is committed. That is sin. When I seize the bait the hidden hook seizes me. The hook is not sin. The hook is the penalty, the first pang of hell. The sin is in the deliberate choice of the will and the determined act by which I turn aside to answer, not my desire, but the allurement to the fulfilment of desire in an improper way. When you turn toward evil courses, when you go out upon the highway or into the hidden and secret and shameful place, you are not seeking God, you are turning from Him. In your heart and conscience you know the thing which is right and the thing which is wrong. There is desire within you for vision, light and life in its fullness. Oh for the thrill and throb of a great life. Who does not desire it? Every man does who is physically, mentally and spiritually sound. He desires it. It is the cry of his life after God. But when you turn to the ways of lust and licentiousness you are not answering that cry, you are answering the seduction which suggests that you turn by short and illicit methods to satisfy desire. Sin is the answer to the suggestion that I break law to satisfy desire.

A man wins when he says, "Desire is perfectly right. It is right that I should desire vision and life at its fullest, but I must find these things along the line of law." If you listen to the voice and turn aside, know this, and know it forever - be not deceived, I pray you; "God is not mocked" - you sin, and you are not seeking God. Listen to me, you are trying to dodge God and get your prize without God, and you cannot do it. Lust, desire is enticed, is drawn away, and if man with the will shall seize upon the bait, then he sins.

Remember, this is not only a revelation of the genesis of sin. It is also a revelation of the nature of sin. It is not a thing to be pitied. It is a thing to be smitten, to be punished. Its punishment lies in the line of its own activity. If a man will turn away he turns to death, for mark the last word of James, "The sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death." The man who is indeed alive, desires fullness of life, vision, sense of God, and turns to find fulfilment for these things in the evil and pernicious ways of ungodliness, is not after God, he is attempting to get round God and win something which his nature wants without God, and he never succeeds. This is sin, not merely against himself, not merely against the community, but against the cosmic order. Sin as the wilful choice of wrong is not a part of God's cosmic process. It is rebellion. It is treason. It is chaos. Let every man who feels allurement to satisfy desire apart from the way of God know this, that when he turns in answer to it to the house of evil, to the method of wrong, he is not after God, but lifting the fist of rebellion in the face of God. There can be but one issue for all such high treason, and that is the nemesis and the ruin of alienation from God and the consequent cutting off of the possibility of all that man most seeks after.

So I come to our common use of the word "lust." There is a poetic accuracy in it. What is lust? Desire. Yes, but get a little lower down. What is lust? The Greek word suggests hard breathing, passionate desire, earnest desire. If man attempts to satisfy desire without God, what is the answer? Desire which never can be satisfied. There are appalling illustrations of the truth of that which cannot be used here and now. God help me to say this thing solemnly to you. Take hold upon any proper and natural capacity of your life, I care not what it be, and attempt to satisfy it outside the lines of God's law, and you do but intensify the desire and never satisfy it. That is perdition. The craving for the thing which never comes. The God-created desire without the God-provided bread. That is the issue of sin. There are men in this house tonight who know something of it. There are men here, I dare venture to affirm, who are conscious of the fact that the more they attempt to satisfy the craving of some inner desire without God, the greater the craving becomes. Take an illustration which is commonplace. Christ's supreme illustration of evil is mammon. I pray you watch the man who attempts to satisfy his craving for possession without God. The craving for possession is perfectly right. God made man to hold a sceptre and wield power. Jesus did not tell men they were not to answer the craving for possession. He did utter words sadly and awfully forgotten by the Christian Church and the world at large, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." He did not say, "Lay not up treasures," but "Lay not up ... treasures upon earth." Then also He said, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." The desire to possess is perfectly correct, it is part of the proof of your relationship to Deity. Here is a man who turns his back upon God, or, if he still names His Name, breaks His law of love. Did you ever find a man come to the moment when he said, "I am satisfied with my getting"? Is there not always an insatiable passion for more gold? A grasping devilishness that blights everything that is human in the man and makes him cruel and hard and cynical, grinding all others to the dust that he may make his gold. You need not envy the man who, without God, has piled his millions. There is a greater hunger in him after possession than ever, and the more he possesses, the more he hungers. Lust, which is desire at its deepest, attempting to be answered outside the line of God's law, becomes in itself a very consuming fire, the "worm that dieth not" and the "fire that is not quenched." That is the issue of sin.

I warn you with all love and earnestness, with all the passion of a strong conviction, and with all loyalty to my ordination vows to preach the Cross of Christ, I warn you do not be deceived by any philosophy which declares to you that sin is one of God's processes. It is man's poison and God's enemy. It is the one thing which has brought in its wake bitterness, anguish and sorrow. If you answer the desire of your inner life outside the line of God's will, which you know full well, then the lust which was proper becomes a fire which cannot be quenched.

Who here has never sinned? I am not asking whether you are a sinner by nature or not. I am not discussing that subject now. I pray you remember that in the mystery of Incarnation and Atonement there are forces provided greater than the forces which you inherited by nature. Actually and personally, who has never fallen? I mean into actual sin, as men count sin, sin of the flesh, or of the mind? Of course the mere moralist of the hour will reckon that the sin of the flesh is an evil thing. We are on other and higher ground. We recognize also the sin of the mind, the desire for safety, for ease, for all the things which are merely self-centred.

It is for the man who has sinned that Jesus came. The Evangel of the New Testament is for the sinner.

Where does the Gospel begin? It begins where sin ends. Mark the process. Lust, enticement, yielding, sin, death. Not death postponed. Not physical death. But death here and now. Dead in trespasses and sins. Jesus Christ brings men as His first gift, life from the dead, a new vision, a new sense of strength. The man who has become the slave of the evil thing, to which he has turned himself, may know his chain broken, the fire quenched, the passion stilled as the Master stilled the storm upon Galilee, and all the incompetence of the broken will made strong again. There is but one condition, and it is that man should turn from his sins to Christ and trust Him wholly and absolutely. Though you have answered lust outside law until lust has begun to be your judgment and your pain, even here tonight, He will quench the fire and break the bands and set you free.

Do not, I beseech you, give these last words away in generalities. I am getting weary of generalities. I mean you, my brother, hidden away. Thank God, you are hidden away. No eye is resting upon you save the eye of the Master. You are hidden away in this crowd, in the grip of sin. Its power can be broken tonight and forever as you turn to the Christ of God and trust Him with all your soul and mind and body and estate. May God help all such as feel the force of sin to turn to that mighty Saviour.