**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 08 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**PROGRESSIVE REVELATION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*

*John 16:12*

THESE WERE SOME OF THE FINAL WORDS OF JESUS TO HIS disciples, spoken amid the messages of which we speak as His Paschal discourses. They were uttered in the hearing of that inner circle of souls who had gathered about Him, loyal to Him, having tabernacled with Him, had listened to His teaching and had become familiar so far as was possible with His Person. To these men He says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

This has always been so. God has ever had more to say to man than man has been able to bear. And God has ever patiently waited for man's ability to bear before speaking to him other of the things that he ought to know. You will remember that Isaiah was criticized by men who mocked at his method, and said that he was a man of "strange lips" and "another tongue," that he was a man who spoke to them "line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, there a little." We have come to include these words in our prayers of thankfulness for God's patience with us, saying that He deals with us thus - "precept upon precept; line upon line ... here a little, there a little." We are perfectly right. But the lips that first uttered those words were the lips of men who laughed at the method. They criticized God's servant, saying "Whom will he teach knowledge?" That was his method. It was made necessary by their blindness and sin, and even though the prophet did not declare it at the moment, we, looking back, see the infinite grace and patience of God manifest therein.

And the method obtained even after our Master had passed back into heaven. You will remember that Paul in his great Corinthian letter says, I cannot feed you with meat be-cause you are not able to bear it; you are yet carnal. The carnal mind cannot discern the deep things of God. He said, I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Why not? Because they were carnal, and not able to bear anything else. We have made that the watchword of the preacher. It is, however, a misinterpretation of the meaning of the Apostle. Upon another occasion he says, "It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead." The Christian preacher has never preached the whole Christian message until he has preached the resurrection and the ascension, and the infinite issues of positive life that come from the narrow and straitened gateway of the Master's death. To these Corinthian Christians the Apostle said, I cannot go further on in my instruction, I am bound to keep you in the region of first principles, because you are not able to bear it.

Thus having seen that the method obtained in the old prophetic age, and in the apostolic age, I come back to my text, and I find Jesus standing amid His disciples. After the three years of instruction He was about to leave them, and looking into their faces, He says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

Shall we listen to that word of Jesus, first as a statement of the Divine method of revelation, second, as a basis of faith, a secret of peace for all our hearts; and, third, as a trumpet call to the life of receptivity.

In order that we may appreciate the value of that final thought, let us dwell upon the first. In this text we have an illustration, as I have already indicated, of the perpetual method of God in revealing Himself to men. In reading the Divine library we discover that every dispensation has grown out of a preceding one, the preceding having prepared for it; and every distinct and successive dispensation has prepared the way for another, which was coming after. The line of development is to be discovered in man's appreciation and appropriation of something new revealed. In proportion as man has learned the lesson of a particular period, God has been prepared to pass on to something else. There are many ways of tracing that line of development in the Old Testament Scriptures. Take the broadest, and therefore in some senses the least satisfactory, and yet for the moment the most easy. Taking the history of man as a sinner, leaving out from our present thought everything that goes before it, we find that God has been teaching humanity lessons one at a time, never the second until the first was learned.

We ,find God dealing first with individual man, and teaching him the lesson of his responsibility to God. Then, dealing with man as to his social interrelationship, the meaning of the family, and of society; and gradually the emergence of the national ideal. Then the meaning of community of worship, and gradually, through long and tedious processes the great monotheistic lesson, the fact of the one God.

Then after a lapse of centuries we have the incarnation, the coming of the one God into human life, rendered necessary by man's sin and failure; and from that incarnation until now, still the same line of development - progressive revelation. I believe that the catholic consciousness of Christ - I use the word in its simplest and truest sense, including within its gracious and spacious and radiant sweep all the children of God of every denomination - at the moment is the greatest and the grandest that the world has ever had, as the result of a progressive unfolding of all the essential truth concerning God which came to men by the way of the coming of Christ. Not all at once did the light come, but it has been increasing little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept.

Progress has always depended upon realization of the truth. God has never led humanity forward into any new truth concerning Himself, save as they have realized and obeyed the measure of truth already manifested. This law of Divine revelation still stands.

It is God's method with the individual. If I speak experimentally, it is in order to illustrate the truth. What is His method with me? "Line upon line." Yes, but when did I come to the second line? Never until I had learned the first. By learning the first I do not mean committing it to memory, or accepting it theoretically, but obeying it, and being transformed into its intention; for truth is always a sanctifying force. Truth is not a commodity that a man has any right to place upon his shoulder and label. Truth possessed by a man is valueless. Truth possessing a man is valuable, and it is when any particular truth concerning Jesus Christ has come to me not merely as an illumination, but has become part of me by sanctification of my life, that I am ready for some other lesson.

Brethren, here is the meaning of the arrest of development in Christian character which is so often manifest in our own lives. How is it that some of us have lost our first love for the Word of God, have lost our appreciation of things Divine, are looking back with a sigh of regret to days long gone when the light was clear? In every case because somewhere we disobeyed the truth, we refused to submit ourselves to the light that came to us. There can be no advancement or development until there has been obedience to the particular thing God said to us. Where? I do not know! You know! One year ago, ten years ago! Some of you may have to tramp your way back for twenty years to find the point where development was arrested, and it was because you refused to obey light at that point. God cannot advance in the unfolding of essential truth because as yet you have not been prepared for the greater truth by obedience in the first thing He said to you.

I have said that the catholic consciousness of Jesus Christ is far finer today than it has ever been, but is it not a sad thing that it is nevertheless so imperfect as to create divisions within the catholic Church. Oh, these divisions! How can they be healed? There are men this morning in the Christian Church, absolutely sincere in their loyalty to Jesus Christ, and yet we are absolutely opposed in certain views concerning Jesus Christ and Christianity. Why? You cannot answer that individual question by individual examination. You must take the larger and wider outlook. You must become conscious of the Church, the whole catholic Church of Jesus Christ before that question can be answered. And when you have become conscious of it, then the answer is to be found in this conclusion, that the Church itself has not been true to the things which have been certainly revealed to her somewhere. And all divergence of opinion means, somewhere, disloyalty to truth.

Our responsibility consists in finding out whether or not we are true to the thing about which we are absolutely certain, and convinced. If we get down to the simplicity of our Christian life, to the fundamental things about which we are all agreed - and thank God there are such things - are we true to these things? Have we obeyed them? So long as the Church holds truth as an intellectual quantity it becomes its curse, its bone of contention, its reason of division, the rock upon which it goes to pieces. But when the whole Church of Jesus Christ in its individual membership will answer the demand of truth, and walk in the light of the revelation, then there will be the coming together of those that have been divided, not by any organic attempt at reunion, but upon the basis of God's unfolding of His new meaning.

We are quarrelling about some things He has never revealed. Men are differing, even to bitterness, about the future of the wicked. God has said no final thing in Scripture about the future of the wicked. He has said quite enough to lay upon the heart of every preacher the awful responsibility of what it may mean for a human soul to cut itself off from God. But no man has any right to anathematize me, or anyone else who does not hold his view upon the future of the wicked. These things are not fully revealed.

For centuries the Church has been divided about Arminianism and Calvinism. God has not said the last thing about the great problem, and why should we quarrel about it? We have disobeyed light and wasted time trying to discover other light, while still disobedient to the thing He has spoken. This is the perpetual method of God. The law of revelation still stands, that He can never reveal new truth to those who have disobeyed the truth received. I find in my text a basis of faith, and therefore a secret of peace.

In spite of what I have said concerning the necessity for obedience to truth, before we attempt any further intellectual apprehension of its meaning, is it not a fact that there is nothing the heart of man rebels against so much as the sense of mystery? The rebellion against mystery is that by which man has beaten his way into new discoveries which on the other side have been new revelations from God. And yet we have to admit that the mystery is still there, in every department of life. There is no pathway that I traverse long before I come face to face with mystery. But mystery is another word for human limitation. Finally, there is no mystery. At the heart of mystery is intelligence. "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." That is the great and essential word that denies mystery. Mystery to me, surely yes! Mystery in every flower that blossoms, and every day that comes. More mystery I think within my own personality than anywhere outside it. Mystery, yes, but not to God. At the heart of the mystery is the Light. Behind the clouds through which gleams of glory break occasionally upon our waiting vision is the Light itself. As God is essential Light, so Jesus Christ, God incarnate, is Light. He said upon one occasion, "I am the Light of the world." He brought into human life all that human life needs of illumination, of instruction, and of intelligence. So to Him in the things that I desire to know there is no mystery. "I have yet many things to say," and the things that are mysteries to me He holds in trust for me, and He holds them in order that I may know them; the essential light is to come in gleam after gleam until it burns to the eternal brightness upon my life. He holds in trust, but He reveals them to me line by line, and precept by precept as I am able to bear.

To my own heart this morning that is a foundation for faith. The thing which today is a mystery to me, tomorrow will be a revelation. The very veil that prevents my seeing through to the heart will resolve itself into the method of revelation presently.

Soft they shine,

Through that pure shrine,

As beneath the veil of Thy flesh divine,

Beams forth the light,

That were else too bright,

For the feebleness of a sinner's sight.

He veils in love, but my heart says in the presence of the veiled mystery, He knows, He holds in trust the things He holds for the moment! Consequently I wait in my limitation by faith in Him.

Take Him away from me, remove Him from before my eyes, tell me that He also is a struggler amid the mists, attempting to find out; tell me moreover that He is a half-informed personality in human history, then I have no focusing for essential light. I am more afraid of light than darkness, I will hark back to the mist to escape the blinding glare of the Throne of the infinite Knowledge.

But Love, standing before me in this Man Who is also God, says to me, I know these things, troubled heart. There are things you do not know, and I have them to say to you, but you cannot bear them yet. The reason of My withholding is not capricious. It is not that you are to be perpetually shut out from final knowledge concerning all your problems. It is because your eyes are not ready for the light. The mind is not trained to grasp, is not prepared for the apocalypse. I have the things to say, but you are not yet able to bear them.

If that be the basis of faith, it is also the secret of peace. His very chastisements are grievous, but afterward I learn that the very processes of His discipline are leading me into larger capacity for revelation. My friend, Margaret Bottome, of the United States, founder and president of the King's Daughters, was telling me some time ago of how upon one occasion a friend of hers came into possession of a chrysalis of one of the most gorgeous butterflies. She took care of it toward the day of emancipation when it should find its colour and beauty. She watched patiently the struggle of the life within, and thinking it a pity that there should be such a struggle, she took her scissors to help it out. Oh the disaster of it! That butterfly never found its wings, nor lived its life. God might help me out of some present pain, some present anguish. He might make it easier for me, but He would cripple my wings. And through the process of mystery and even of pain and withholding He is not withholding, for He is preparing me to see.

And so, finally, and, as I think, naturally, the text becomes a trumpet call to the life of receptivity. His will is to reveal to us the deep things of God, but He waits for the fulfilment of condition on our part. What is my responsibility? Quick response to the demand of the truth that He has revealed. As I make that response the truth makes me free, sanctifies me, and I am prepared for another line, another precept, a little advancement. The trouble with us all is that we are so fearfully content not to know. I am never so anxious about the soul who rebels in the presence of mystery if that soul will remit the story of rebellion to Jesus Christ as I am about the man who is content to sing the hymns he sang ten years ago, as though they were the finality of Christian experience. One or two things at the beginning, and the revelation did not proceed. 'Why not? Why was it that we did not get further? We make up for lack of growth in development by singing: -

Where is the blessedness I had,

When first I found the Lord?

If we were true to Jesus Christ the blessedness of this morning would eclipse in its glory any blessedness that preceded it. The trouble is that we are content not to know the deep things of God, to live upon the surface of things. I have heard people say that they will be quite content if they get just inside heaven. Just to get inside is pure selfishness. Oh that there might come upon us the passion to know the deep things of God, to look into the mist with eyes intense in their longing, until we see it disappear, and the light break. Oh, to ponder the things He has said until we hear their clamant call, and obey. He will lead us on into deeper things, and higher things, and better things.

Surely if we hear Him say, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now," we ought to reply, "Oh, Master, prepare us to receive them. Bring us back to the point where we were disobedient." You know where you lost the line of your development. Something He told you to do, and you have not done it, though the years have rolled away. Something He told you to cease doing, and you are still doing it. Some call of truth disobeyed. Back to it, my brother, this morning, back to the point of your disobedience, and there obey.