**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 09 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE TRAINING OF OUR CHILDREN by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

*Proverbs 22:6*

ONE IS INCLINED TO COMMENCE THIS MORNING BY ASKING in the presence of this text a somewhat startling question. The question would be whether Christian people generally today believe the Bible to be true. A great many who would quite readily answer the inquiry in the affirmative would nevertheless halt, and attempt to qualify, and so begin to indulge in their own peculiar method of criticism in the presence of this particular text.

"In the beginning God created" - yes! "And God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" - certainly true! "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" - there can be no question about that! "Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it" - well, that is open to question; we are not quite sure about it. This text is not so often preached from, nor so often quoted today, as in olden days; and that is because people are not quite sure whether it is true.

New methods and new ideals concerning children have made men question the absolute accuracy of this Old Testament word, the word of the preacher of long ago. Indeed, you will find sometimes that if this truth be insisted upon with anything like vehement emphasis there will be an equally vehement protest. Whether in conversation among friends, or in general discussion, or even in preaching, you insist upon it today that if a child be trained aright, it must end right, people begin to question, and I have heard personally a most angry protest against the statement of this truth on the part of Christian people whose own children have gone wrong. Ah, there you touch the secret reason why this text is not believed as it was believed, or is questioned more today than it was in the past.

Well, my brethren, this morning at any rate I intend to treat it as an inspired statement, as a declaration of truth, as something which the preacher was inspired of the Spirit of God to write because it is essential truth, and to which there are no exceptions.

Believing this I shall ask you to consider in the simplest way first the condition, "Train up a child according to his way"; and, second, the promise, or perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of it as the sequence, the necessary result, the inevitable issue, "and even when he is old he will not depart from it." In dealing with the condition, the word that arrests us necessarily is the first word of the verse, "train." "Train up a child." I want to say two or three of the simplest things about this question of the training of children. I speak with more doubt about it than I should have done seventeen years ago, but I speak out of personal conviction, and in all tenderness and love to my brothers and sisters who have the charge of children in their own homes, and especially in the hearing of those of you who have charge of children in the Sabbath school, or Day school. To all such as are privileged to touch child life, and to be in any way responsible for it, I desire to speak.

And the first is that training involves an ideal. There can be no training save to some goal. A result must be desired, and training simply means working toward that result. There can be nothing capricious or haphazard about true training. Unless there be some goal toward which we are moving, some ideal that we desire to realize, some great purpose ahead, there can be no training, and we shall never train the children of our own home as they ought to be trained, neither shall we train the children of our Sunday schools except we have some underlying conception of an ultimate for them. Training means going in a direction toward an ultimate. It means a great deal more than that, but that is the first thing.

And we are living in an age, brethren, when I am afraid in the Christian Church - and I have no message in this respect to the men and women who are outside the Christian faith; my first word to all such is, You must be born again; I have no ethic for the man who has not been born again, because he is absolutely unable to obey; he is dead in trespasses and sins - but within the Christian faith, within the circle of such as accept Christ as King and Saviour, and share His common life, I am afraid today that the ideals that we have for our children are often very low; and it is because our ideal for the child is a low ideal, that our training is a false training, and so much of the ruin and disaster that appals us constantly in the case of Christian people results from this fact.

Too often our ideal for our boys is that they shall be educated, gain a position for themselves, and, alas, to use the phrase that so constantly is upon the lips, even of Christian people, "get on in the world." Too often for our girls we have the ideal that they shall be also educated, and refined, and accomplished, and presently, again to use a phrase which if I could I would cancel absolutely from the thinking of Christian parents, "get settled." Well, brethren, these as ideals are anti-Christian and pagan. I am not undervaluing education. It is the duty of every man to give to every child he has the best education that he possibly can. I am not undervaluing position. Let every lad be ambitious to be the best carpenter, the best doctor, the best lawyer, in the whole district. Let our girls in very deed and very truth be educated and cultured and refined, but if these are the ultimate, then what are we removed from pagans? This is not the ideal with which we must start in the training of the child. What then is that ideal? I might put it in many ways. Let me take one of a hundred. That the child shall realize Jesus Christ's estimate of greatness. By realize it I do not mean theoretically merely, but practically. What is Jesus Christ's estimate of greatness? That a man is great in proportion as his character is what it ought to be. In the great Manifesto of the King, that wonderful enunciation of the ethic of the Kingdom of God, never a single blessing is pronounced upon having, never a blessing pronounced upon doing. All the blessings are upon being. And the true ideal toward which we are to move, and for which we are to train our children, must be the realization of the character upon which Jesus Christ has set the sevenfold chaplet of His benediction. That the boy may be a Godly man, that the girl may be one of the King's daughters all glorious within, that first. Everything after, but that first. To neglect that as the ultimate, to lose sight of that as the goal is to ruin our children by love which is false love, is to harm them by the very method in which we attempt to serve. Simply to take your boy, my Christian brother, and desire that he shall be a successful merchant and business man and make money, I am not sure that it would not be kinder for you to shut your front door upon him, and let him fight his way through slum and up. To take your daughter, Christian father and mother, and simply desire that she shall shine in human society, with never a thought in your mind of how she appears in the palaces of the King, is cruel and dastardly, and not kind. Training means moving toward an ultimate, and the first thing in the training of the child is that we should see to it that the ultimate upon which our eyes are set is the true ultimate.

And now a second thing. The training of a child involves personal discipline. And as God is my witness I preach to my own heart this morning. What I want my child to be, I must be. I should like to bring that a little closer home to my heart and yours by stating it thus. What I want my child to be, that I am. Some man says, Not that; I want my boy to be better than that, truer, higher, nobler, purer! No, sir, you do not, or if you do, you desire a thing that can never be, by your influence at least. For remember this, you will make your boy what you are, and not what you tell him to be. How constantly Emerson's thought comes back to the mind when one thinks or talks of character. He says in thought, not in actual word, I cannot hear what you say for listening to what you are. That is what your boys are saying about you this morning. You say to your boy, Be good, and you are not good! He will be what you are, and not what you say. You say to your boy as he starts out on his life, Be pure, and in your own heart there is impurity. Your boy will answer what you are, and not what you say. And this is not merely the thought of a preacher, it is the science of life. If you are going to train anyone to anything, you must yourself be that, or able to be that toward which you are attempting to train. There was a gymnastic display here last night. I was sorry I could not be present; but I am quite sure they are not going to appoint me the trainer for next year. And if you saw me on parallel bars, you would know why. I cannot train the lads to gymnastic excellence. Would that I could, but I cannot do it. It is too late. There are things I think I could help a boy to do, but not that. Why not? Because I am not an athlete. Now lift your thinking back. You cannot expect your boy to be a Christian athlete if you are weak and anaemic in your Christianity. If you neglect prayer, and if the family altar is a thing you can lightly lay aside, your boy will never erect it in his home presently. I can make my child only what I am myself. Dear teachers, remember it. God bless you and help you this morning. Do not forget that, as you gather your class around you Sunday by Sunday, you influence them only by what you are in yourself. It is true of the preaching. God help me to remember it. I cannot influence any congregation by what I say, unless behind it there is the mystic force of a life true to the preaching. Thank God for the children in our homes, not merely for the privilege of training them, but for the fact that they train us. And how they train us! There is something in my own make-up which is perhaps mischievously independent, and if a man tells me I should not do this or that, I always feel like saying, Mind your own business. But if a man says, How will this thing that you do influence your boy? I am alert and listening.

And I must answer that conviction of personal necessity for discipline. If I am to train my child I must see the goal toward which I desire the child to press, but I must go that way too. I cannot persuade the children of my home to set their faces toward the King's city and Kingdom if I am a rebel.

Then, brethren, again, training involves a recognition of certain facts about the child, and that thought is enough to take our whole morning. I am going to deal with it only briefly, and yet attempt to say two or three things which seem to me to be important in this connection. I think there are two things we need to remember when we look into the face of every little child, and they are: first, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child"; second, that child has upon it the mystic sign of the Master's Cross. There is no child for which He did not live, for which He did not die. And as I look into the faces of the children about my feet, in my own home, in this church on Sunday, in our Sabbath school, I must remember if I would help them and serve them these two things. First of all, account for it as you will, I care very little about the philosophy, but I care a great deal about the fact, that there is enough of iniquity in the heart of every child to work the ruin of a race if you let it work itself out. But I remember this also, that there is not a child born that is not born to the inheritance of the Christ of God, and that is far mightier than the forces which are against them. So I have these two things to remember in the training of every child, that there is in the child, first of all, the capacity for evil, but beneath it, deeper than it, truer than it, is the capacity for good, and at the disposal of the child for the realization of the good as against the evil is all the grace of God.

These things being remembered - and, my brethren, you see how much one would care to say about these things, but I pass them - these things being remembered, now I come to the main message of my text. "Train up a child according to his way." And here is where the home is important, and where neither Sabbath school, nor Day school, can ever take its place. I suppose it is necessary in these days that we should teach children in crowds. Would to God we could escape from it. But at least we can in the home, and it is of the home I am principally thinking this morning. Every child is a lonely personality, a special individuality. You know the phrase that is often made use of concerning remarkable men. I have heard it said, and I doubt not you have too, that God made Oliver Cromwell, or John Wesley, or Abraham Lincoln, as the case may be, and He broke the mould. That is one of those curious sayings which have in them so much of truth and of falsehood. It is perfectly true that God made Abraham Lincoln and broke the mould, but what do you mean when you say that? Do you mean to infer that was the lonely and exceptional method, that occasionally God makes one man and breaks the mould so that there may be no other like him? I tell you, that is God's regular method. God made you, and broke the mould. He made every child in my home and broke the mould, and there are no two alike. Those blessed with children in the home know how true it is. They contradict each other, and disagree, and conflict in that sense is not always evil. You cannot find me two children in your own home alike. Listen, train up your family of two, or three, or four, or five, on exactly the same lines, and you may hit the goal in the case of one, and miss it in all the rest. No, you must specialize. Every child you have demands special consideration, and lonely attention. "Train up a child according to his way." You must discover what the child is if you would train the child. I think we have suffered in every way, socially, may I say, politically, and most certainly religiously, by the habit of imagining that we can deal with children in crowds, and treat them all the same way. It cannot be done. For the teaching of certain things that they must know it is necessary. But not when you are going to train a child, educate a child - not instruct a child. There is all the difference in the world between instructing and educating. To instruct is to build in. To educate is to draw out. But when you are going to train a child, to educate a child, you must find out what the child is. Let me give you one or two illustrations.

Here is a child of sanguine temperament, always hoping, never to be suppressed. Now the one business of the trainer is to put the hand upon that child, and see to it that the child is humbled. No, I did not say "snubbed." And don't you misread the English language so far as to imagine that humbling means that. The child must be kept humble, or else the child will break its own heart, when presently some morning which dawned brightly becomes a day gray and ashen. The child must be treated with such judicial care as shall save it from following the gleam that is not light at all, but which leads to darkness.

Here is a child despondent. You have tried to treat them both alike, and when it has been necessary not to encourage the sanguine child overmuch, you have nearly broken the heart of the despondent child with your lack of appreciation. That despondent child needs to be praised for every good deed done. There should be time or room for such words of helpfulness.

Here is a child sceptical, forever asking questions, an agnostic from birth, a child who will ask you more theological questions in the course of one day than you will be able to answer in a lifetime. What are you to do? Are you to tell the child that asking of questions is an evil thing? Certainly not. You must reason, and answer the questions, and take time to do it.

Here is another child, brother of the other, or sister, it may be, who is credulous, and believes all things without inquiry. Your business with that child is to ask it questions, to show it that there is a necessity for testing the spirits, and being perfectly sure of things.

Here is another child born, as scientific men are very fond of telling us, with a religious temperament. Guard that child carefully. Be afraid lest the temperament should lead to fanaticism.

Here is a child born with an irreligious temperament, with no leanings toward spiritual things. Then that child must be led into the light, the interest must be awakened, and that by showing the child that all the things of dust, which it most loves, are allied to Deity.

The illustrations are imperfect. I trust the philosophy is clear. You cannot take half a dozen boys and girls and treat them all in the same way. You must take them child by child, "Train up a child according to his way," and the business of parents supremely is that of attempting to discover what God has put within every child, in order that it may be led out to fulfilment.

I think therefore that the training must be twofold. First of all, it must be positive. The children must be taught that they belong to Christ, and led to the point of recognizing this fact and yielding themselves thereto. In the second place. the children must be taught that sin is their enemy, and therefore God's enemy, and it is therefore to be fought perpetually. It is the old-fashioned method of the Sunday school that we need to get back to, and not away from. Did I say "method"? Perhaps you will let me change the word. It is the old-fashioned passion of the Sunday-school teacher we need to get back to. I have read with great interest during the last days a book entitled Bible Teaching by Modern Methods, containing papers and reports of discussions at the Round Table Conference recently held in connection with our Sunday School Union. If you have time for nothing else, borrow the book - not mine, because I want it - and read the first and last lectures, Dr. Davison's lecture, in which he again emphasizes what indeed is the true aim of Sunday-school work; and Dr. Adeney's lecture, in which he emphasizes the fact that our teachers must be trained, and the work must devolve upon the ministry. Our first business is to bring the child into a recognition of its actual relationship to Christ, and a personal yielding thereto. Let it be done easily and naturally. Do not be anxious, if indeed your home is a Christian home, that your child should pass through any volcanic experience; but as soon as possible the little one should be able to say, Yes, I love Him and I will be His. It is as simple as the kiss of morning upon the brow of the hill, as the distilling of the moisture in the dew, or it ought to be. Thank God for men who, having wandered far away, have come back by volcanic methods, but thank God for the little ones who have been led to the point of yielding and finding their Lord before any other lord has had dominion over them. Training should be toward that. Every child is called of God to specific work in the world, and the specific work ought to be discovered by those who train them; and when the capacity is found, then let a child be trained toward it.

Now one or two words concerning the text's declaration of sequence. "Train up a child according to his way, and even when he is old he will not depart from it." I desire in this connection, first of all, to observe that only upon the fulfilment of the conditions enunciated have we any right to expect a fulfilment of the promise made. I have no business to expect that my child will fulfil the true purpose and intention of its own life if I neglect the training of the early days. I want to say also in this connection that this whole text answers objections. For instance, you may say to me in the presence of the text, and of my insistence upon this training, Then the untrained must go wrong. If I fail to train my child, the child must go wrong. No, not necessarily. I say that with reserve, and yet I am compelled to say it. You may neglect your child in your own home, and some Godly Sunday-school teacher may do the work you have neglected. Then you say to me again, Then the wrongly trained must go wrong. Not necessarily. It is not always so. There are children wrongly trained at home, who yet at last have found life and its great fulfilment. But what I want to say to you is this, that the man or the woman who finds the child, and really trains it up to the high ultimate, will possess the child in the ages to come, for we still believe that the things of time are finally the things of the eternities, and that the relationships of time can be the relationships of eternity only as they are fulfilled in the power of the eternal things. I want to put that, if I may, more superlatively, although I shall not enlarge upon it. I hear people sometimes who have been very careless about their children, very careless about their training, very careless about their Godliness, who thought of all the things except these things, when their children are taken from the world, speak of their hope that their little ones will meet them when they also cross the border line. Well, I do not know. Yes, perchance, but remember, your child if you fed it and clothed it, and educated it, and neglected its relation to God, will be more eager to meet the Sunday-school teacher who led it to God than you. Spiritual relationships, after all, are the final relationships. No, you and I have no right to infer negative conclusions from the text, although we should take solemn warning from the fact that we cannot infer conclusions. The promise is a positive one, and we stand by it. It does not say if we do not train our children our children must lose their way. But it does say, "Train up a child according to his way, and even when he is old he will not depart from it." That is, he will fulfil his life, he will fulfil God's thought for him, and purpose for him, and intention for him, the intention that lies within him as a prophecy and a potentiality. The promise is the declaration of a sequence. It is not a capricious word spoken to men, but the unveiling of a law which operates, and from which there is no escape.

And I make an appeal. With such an ideal, and such a training, and such a promise, the only fear we need have about our children is fear for ourselves. You tell me in answer to all this, Ah, but there have been such failures. Well, why? And who am I that I should judge? You know how constantly it is being said that the children of ministers so often turn out ill. Why? Well, I do not know, but I will make you these suggestions. Children turn out ill from Christian homes sometimes because of the laxity which imagines that a child's happiness consists in self-pleasing, imagines that for the child to be perfectly happy it must have its own will. There is all the difference between letting a child have its own will and its own way. To train a child in its own way crosses the will sometimes. But never do it with passion. Passion burns to destruction. Reason fires to construction, and we must always make this careful differentiation. You mean well by your child. Are you too gentle, too tender? Have you an anaemic conception of love?

Or, on the other hand, it may be and I give you this as a personal conviction, it is more often due to, the sternness which forgets the needs of young life. How often I have seen it. You talk to me of a Puritan home and upbringing, and you know the sternness of the moral policeman regime, and the moment the boy crosses the threshold, with a sigh of abandonment he is into every excess of evil. Said a man to me some years ago, "How is it I have lost my children?" And I said to him, "I do not see how you have lost your children, they are sitting round your board, most of them, and you do not seem to have lost them. They respect you, and look up to you." "Oh, yes," he said, "but there is not a boy round my hoard who trusts me." And I said to him, more for the instruction of my own heart than to imagine that I could help him. "What do you mean?" "Why," he replied, "there is not one of them makes a confidant of me." And I looked the moan in the face and said, "Did you ever play marbles with them when they were little?" And he said at once, "Oh, certainly not." And I said, "That is why you lost them." My brethren, this thing is a burden on my heart. I am not talking pleasantries. We do not lose our children when they are seventeen. We lose them when they are seven. I am not talking to mothers. I never do! And that is not a flippant remark. I would like to hand all the bairns over to mothers for their theology. It is the fathers of the Christian Church who have failed with their children. You are a good man, and a hard man, and your children know it, and they respect you, but they do not trust you, and you lose them. There may be a laxity that is too gentle, a love that is anaemic. There may be too much iron in your blood, too much sternness.

How shall I find the happy medium? Be very much and very constantly in comradeship with Jesus Christ. That is the last thing I have to say. If I am going to be so severe as to be true, and so tender as to hold, I must know Him, the Man Who could look right into the soul of a Pharisee and scorch it with His look, and into the eye of a little child and make the child want to come and play with Him. Oh, I must be much with Christ if I am to be with children. In God's name, if you do not know Christ, keep your hands off the bairns. You cannot train the boy to be a missionary carpenter unless you are a Christian man and in fellowship with Him constantly. The parent's responsibility cannot be relegated to Sunday-school teacher, or Day-school teacher. To do that will injure me and place my child in danger. I have tried to talk to you. God knows how much I have talked to myself, and all I can do in the presence of the old affirmation of ancient scripture which is fresh in its application today is to pray that my Father will keep me so near to Himself that I may know how to be a father to my children.