**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 17 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE STUMBLING-BLOCK OF THE CROSS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*The stumbling-block of the Cross.*

*Galatians 5:11*

THE AUTHORIZED VERSION READS, "THE OFFENCE OF THE CROSS." The apostle was arguing that if he would but preach circumcision, he would no longer be persecuted; if he would conform to the method of those Judaizing teachers whose influence he was combating, the stumbling-block, of the Cross, that in the Cross which offends, would be done away, and consequently persecution of himself would cease.

Perhaps a third translation of the passage may be permitted, "the scandal of the Cross." This would undoubtedly shock our sensibilities, and yet it is really in harmony with the thought of the writer. The Greek word skandalon indicates a stone of stumbling, something over which men fall, something that does not aid progress, but rather prevents it. There can be no doubt from the whole context that the Apostle was referring to a prevalent antipathy to the Cross itself, and especially to the Cross as the centre of a religion. The offense of the Cross, the stumbling-block of the Cross was, as I have already said, even more literally and bluntly, the scandal of the Cross. In the early days of Christianity a stigma attached to the followers of the Nazarene, particularly on account of the Cross. It was something so utterly and absolutely unheard of that religion should be centred in a Cross; and whether to the Jew, the Roman, or the Greek, the Cross was a stumbling-block, a scandal, an offense, something utterly and absolutely objectionable. To the Jew the Cross meant disgrace, for it had been associated with the breaking of law, and its penalty: "He that hangeth is accursed of God." To the Roman the Cross was an indication of defeat, and there was no crime in Rome equal to the crime of defeat. To win was everything. To lose was disgrace, and the proud patrician Roman, looking upon Jesus crucified, held Him in supreme contempt because He was beaten. And to the Greek the Cross was the utterest degradation. To the Greek who stood for the perfecting of individualism, for the ideal man, in form and feature and fashion - for every man aimed at perfection - for a man to be nailed to a Cross, and to be mauled in his death, was disgusting. To preach the Cross to the Jew was to preach the instrument with which the law-breaker was punished. To preach the Cross to the Roman was to preach to a victorious people the instrument of defeat. To preach the Cross to the Greek was to preach to people who were seeking for perfect individual culture, the most disagreeable and disgusting method of death and failure. A stigma was attached to the religion of Jesus because at its very heart and centre stood this Cross.

And yet, brethren, all this was superficial and sentimental objection. To understand the real meaning of the offense of the Cross we must inquire why this Man of Nazareth was nailed to it. I propose, then, to speak about this offense of the Cross: first, as to its real meaning in those olden days; and, second, whether the offense of the Cross has ceased, whether the age has really outgrown its objection thereto.

First, then, let us look back. Standing in imagination on the green hill outside the city wall, and looking upon the Man of Nazareth Who hangs upon that Cross, we ask this one question, Why have they crucified Him? And I think we shall find that the deepest offense of the Cross existed before the Cross, and that the Cross was the outcome of it. That in Jesus against which Hebraism, calling to its aid Roman power, flung itself in fury existed before they erected the Cross, and the Cross was the most logical outcome of the offense.

Let us look carefully. The Cross of Jesus, viewed from the human side, was man's answer to all that He was, and all that He taught. Jesus of Nazareth was the most revolutionary Teacher the world has ever seen, because He was the supreme Voice and Life in the proclamation of the truth of Divine government and Divine order. In His return in life and teaching to the first laws and principles of God's humanity He was a perpetual protest against the then existing order of things; and to the men of His own age there was but one alternative, either to accept His teaching and economy, and reverse theirs, or to murder Him and silence His voice, and be rid of Him. It was the offense which His conception of things gave to their conception of things that erected the Cross.

Did you ever quietly sit down alone to ask yourself the question I have propounded? Why did they crucify Christ? Have you ever considered that it was an infinite puzzle to the Roman procurator? He came to his own conclusion after a while, and he shrewdly approached the truth. He came to the conclusion that for envy they had delivered Him. He did not reach the deepest meaning of their determination to crucify Him when Pilate said that. Their envy grew out of something deeper. In public examination and private interview Pilate attempted to understand the meaning of the malice that was manifesting itself in hounding this Man to death, and he signally failed. In his failure there is cause for our closer investigation. Why did they crucify Him? We must find our answer in His teaching. He spoke out of the sense of eternity to the capacity for eternity in the heart of man. You may characterize the teaching of Jesus by borrowing a great phrase from the Old Testament and applying it in a new connection, "Deep calleth unto deep." When men heard Him they did not understand Him perfectly, but they felt, somehow, that He had spoken to the very depth of their personality. When He came down from the mountain multitudes followed Him, and were astonished at Him, for they said, "He taught them as One having authority, and not as their scribes."

What, then, was the difference between Him and the scribes? He spoke out of the sense of the relation of the infinite and the spiritual to the finite and the material. He set the measurement of eternity upon passing time. Wherever He went He said, "Repent," which meant, Change your mind, your thinking is wrong, your action is wrong, you have departed from the centre of things, your measurements are false, your balances are evil, your judgments are perverted! He flung against the materialized age the force of His spiritual conception. He made heaven's light break upon earth's darkness. The voice of God sounded again in the deeps of human nature, and o'er all the region as He passed, men felt the atmosphere of heaven enwrapping them, and they hurried after Him, for never Man spake as He spake. That is the deeper secret in the ministry of Jesus. He was a voice from God, nay, the very Word of God incarnate, speaking in the syllables of human speech, and yet with all the force of infinite truth. What are men to do with that truth? My brethren, then as today, men standing in the presence of Christ have but one alternative. They must do one of two things. They must either crown Him or crucify Him. There is no middle course. And if you ask me why they crucified Christ, I tell you it was because they declined to submit themselves to the spiritual conceptions which He proclaimed, because they would have none of His views of things, because in their deepest heart, notwithstanding all their religiousness, they were godless. And when they silenced that voice, they silenced the voice of the infinite. When they took that Man to the Cross, they flung out the One Who had offended them by revealing the fact that all their thinking and all their life were false.

And yet again. The Cross of Jesus viewed from the Divine side was the logical issue of His own teaching. He Who might have summoned the legions of heaven to His side submitted to the Cross, and so by a mystery of healing love transformed the world's curse into God's benediction.

The very spear that pierced His side

Drew forth the blood to save.

All this was utterly beyond their comprehension. All this they could not answer, nor did they see the faintest gleam of its light. They were scandalized in Him, and crucified Him; and the Cross became the stumbling-block, the offense, the scandal of the age.

This is a very general statement. Let us try to look at it a little more closely. I must content myself with a mere summary of the cardinal truths that He came to reveal to men in His teaching and life. He came, first, to reveal to men the character of God. He revealed to man the truth that God is love. And, my brethren, let no one misunderstand that statement. May I not take it for granted that there is no need for me to say that when you have said that you have said everything, and having said everything, nothing must be omitted from the thinking? When I say that He came to reveal God as love I do not mean to say He revealed the fact that God is tender, and pitiful, and gracious, and compassionate at the expense of holiness and righteousness and truth. There is no fiercer fire burning in the universe of God than the fire of God's love; and if you could for one moment persuade me that God was merely a God of pity, then you would persuade me that the whole fabric of the universe is unsafe. He came to show men that God is love, and He revealed the love of God not merely in the tender, sweet, and gentle words that perpetually fell from His lips, but in the fiery, white-hot scorn that He poured forth as a lava flood against some, for you never find Jesus angry but that if you track His anger back to its source you will find His anger proceeded from His love. Perhaps the simplest illustration is the best. He was angry - do not forget it, my masters, He was angry when He said, "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for of such is the Kingdom of heaven." We nearly always repeat that word as though it was some soft sweetness falling from His lips. Put the thunder in the next time you repeat it, or you miss something. The disciples were preventing the children. The disciples imagined He could have no time for children, and He was angry when He said, "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not," and there was thunder in His voice. Why was He angry? Because a little child was to be kept away from Him, and the thunder was as much an expression of His love as the sweet winsomeness of the permission given to the children to come. When I see Him with those bairns in His arms, and His dear hands upon their heads, and His face wreathed in laughter as He looked into their eyes, I see His love no more than when He rebuked the disciples for preventing their approach. Or when He said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" I listen and I hear Him finish His sentence, and I find the reason of the thunder, "Ye shut the Kingdom of heaven against men." At the back of all the anger is love, and He came to reveal God to man as the God of love in all the fullness of the word.

In His teaching moreover, He revealed the fact of God's actual and positive and present interest in all the affairs of human life. Men had relegated God in their thinking to the position of an abstraction that formed the basis of a creed, but He brought Him back into the position of continuous conduct. He said, God clothes lilies, and is with the dying bird; He is everywhere, He knows all you have need of, and He is holding His court of investigation in the deepest thinking of your life. He taught us the immanence of God, and the activity of God, and the government of God in the last detail of human life.

Then He taught men the truth of the supremacy of character. In the great Beatitudes of His great Manifesto He pronounced no single blessing on any man for having anything, or doing anything. All the Beatitudes are chaplets placed upon the brow of character.

Again, He came to reveal to men the true social order. He revealed the whole fact of the social order in half a dozen sentences. I think I may say in one of them, and that will be quite sufficient for our illustration. "Whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant." It is well that we should think in the presence of that in order that it may sink into mind and heart. If we would be great we must strip ourselves of our purple, and gird ourselves and serve somebody else. That is radical. It goes to the roots of things, and drags down the man high and lofty in the dignity of position, and makes another man great and mighty because he is serving someone else. Build your social order upon that conception, and you will have found the golden age for which men long have been looking, but which has not yet arrived.

Notice still further how He defended the dignity and the rights of men against all forms of tyranny and oppression. Listen to His Woes. He began His ministry with "Blessed." He ended it with "Woe." Over against the eight Beatitudes are the eight curses. It is an interesting study. But listen to the Woes. They are all hurled against men who tyrannize and oppress; and the whole teaching of Jesus concerning man is that a man has no right to bind himself beneath tyranny and be content. The teaching of Jesus is that there may be a good deal of incipient blasphemy in the popular idea that a man should stay in the position wherein he was born, and be content. The teaching of Jesus is that every man has inherent rights, and any man who comes between the individual and the throne of God is to be dealt with drastically, and the Woe that falls from the lips of incarnate purity is pronounced against him.

These were some of the things that Jesus taught. Now, for a moment look at the time in which He lived. It was a time characterized by the degradation of religion. There was a clouding of the Divine by the false interpretation of the men who professed to understand the Divine. The high priest was a Sadducee. The Sadducee was a rationalist in religion. The Sadducee, to take the Bible definition, was a man who did not believe in resurrection, or in spirit, or in angel. And the high priest was a Sadducee, and the men associated with Him were either Sadducees or Pharisees, men who were professing to interpret God, and all the while were hiding God, until all through that age there was a widespread infidelity, which was the revolt of the heart of man against the blaspheming of God that existed in high places. And into the midst of this age, hiding God by its very religion, Jesus came to unveil Him. Do you wonder that the religious leaders of the movement crucified Him?

Or move a step forward and see the age in the matter of government. Government was based upon expedience, upon policy. Far and wide, o'er all the earth the iron rule of Rome obtained, and the proud Hebrew was bowing his neck to that rule. Everywhere government was based upon might. Jesus came down into the midst of it all, and revealed the fact that the only government to which man ever ought to submit himself is the government that is based upon right, and that is the one and only government of God. He came and preached, as we have said, the supremacy of character in an age characterized by Pharisaism, which He described as being a whited wall, while within there was corruption and rottenness. In that age He came to preach the new order, the one social order of service, as the way to greatness, when all around vested interests were grinding men, and men were being taught that their only safety lay in their submission to the things that oppressed them. Around Him was an enslaved democracy, wickedly content, easily led. An enslaved people, and Jesus Christ came and exercised His ministry in the midst of it. As you look back at the age, and listen to the teaching, you are driven to the conclusion that the only place for Truth amid such conditions was the scaffold. The very genius of such a condition as existed in those days expressed itself in the Cross of Jesus.

And now I come to my second inquiry. Having seen the reason for the offense of the Cross, then we are inclined to say, Everything is changed now. That is what I want to ask, and my preliminary inquiry respects the Cross itself. Has the Cross altered in its essential meaning? Has truth changed? Has Christ gone back upon any positions of His earthly life and teaching? My brethren, I must apologize for these questions. The very asking of them seems to me to smack of blasphemy. He is, as is God, unchangeable, "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Everything that He announced as truth when He was here is truth now. He has no new message to this age. I will not say if Christ came to London He would thus preach. It is a supposition I am always in revolt against. Christ is in London, and He is so speaking. Whether we hear or not may depend upon ourselves, but everything He said in the days of the Judean and Galilean and Perean ministry He is saying here and now.

Then my question must proceed a step further. Has the age altered? I am not proposing to discuss the age in any application other than that important to ourselves. What are the forces in the midst of which we are living today. There is still abroad the spirit of Sacerdetalism, which veils the face of God, and libels Him before humanity. I am not speaking of the Sacerdotalism of any section of the Christian Church, but of that general attempt, that cursed, and damnable attempt that is still prevalent, to stand between the individual soul of man and God. It is not the peculiar property of any one Church. It is to be found almost everywhere. You find it in Romanism. The very genius of Romanism, that with which I quarrel, is its dogmatic avowal that it interprets God to me. Personally I do not quarrel with the Romanist who wants candles and incense, and vestments. My quarrel is with the man who says to me, We represent God, and unless you see God this way, you cannot see Him. My quarrel with him is not merely because he makes such a puerile claim, but because when he tells me he is revealing God he is hiding God.

But there is not merely the Sacerdotalism of Romanism, but of Angelicanism, and also that of what is called Modernism in Biblical interpretation, the new priestism of scholarship, which tells the people that they must accept the views of experts on the meaning of its message, or whether it is true. All this is resulting in the veiling of the face of God.

And there is yet another form of priestism which I would speak of as Holinessism. Let no one imagine I am saying anything to undervalue holiness; but this movement which consists in a scheme of teaching, and a mechanical arrangement for blessing, interpreted by teachers who interfere in my life, and tell me what I am to do or not to do, is priestism clothed in a new garb. The terrible part of all this is that man is crying for an interpretation of God, and his crying is the result of his sin; and instead of turning to the one Interpreter, and one Priest, he will accept the view of anybody. We are in the midst of an age overshadowed by Sacerdotalism in one aspect or another, and men are not seeing the clear and open vision of God as they ought to see it.

And if you come to the question of human government, how many of us believe in God? There is not a government in the world at this hour that believes in God absolutely and utterly. There is not a government in the world at this hour that will not weaken in loyalty to righteousness at some point of policy. Where is the government that believes in God first and last? Do not let us waste time in discussing governments. How about ourselves? How far do we believe in God? How many business enterprises do we enter upon, purely upon the basis of profit and loss? My brethren, vested interests are still enthroned, and we will have it so. Men are still enslaved, waste and want abound on every hand. I need not stay with its description. What I want to say is this, that everything that Jesus stood for, and everything that the Cross really means as to deep underlying principle, is as unpopular today as when Jesus was crucified. The age is not Christianized. Thank God, there are Christian people in the age, and, thank God, their influence has forced men to certain Christly acts in the age. But the thinking of the age, the planning of the age, the policy of the age are not Christian, and the scandal of the Cross has not ceased. This living Christ of God, dying on the Cross, is as much crucified in our midst today as He was of old. But the working out of a principle into human observation upon the green hill far away did not exhaust the principle, and the principle obtains at this moment.

If we have really any fellowship with Him, we stand where He stood. We stand for the things that He stood for. Identification with Jesus in the Cross does not mean that from the Cross I merely obtain the benefit which is to be an assurance against hell and insurance of heaven. It means that life is identified with Jesus in the protest against the veiling of the face of God, and in determined and constant unveiling of that face before men. Has He no voice today? Is there no way in which He can make Himself heard? It is His will that His people should speak for Him, and the only way in which they can do so is the way of the Cross. To speak for Jesus out of the midst of His Cross in experimental identification with Him therein will bring men to a Calvary of persecution and ostracism today as ever. But if it bring us there, our chief joy will be that in that ostracism we have touched the inner meaning of fellowship with Jesus Christ. Oh, that we may not only look upon the Cross as something outside ourselves, but that we may press to the heart of it, to be identified with all it stands for, and bear the offense, the shame, the scandal of it.

I take, O Cross, thy shadow,

For my abiding place;

I ask no other sunshine than

The sunshine of His face;

Content to let the world go by,

To know no gain nor loss, -

My sinful self my only shame,

My glory all the Cross.

It is for us to ask ourselves, How far in us are the things for which Jesus stood, and which led Him to that Cross, obtaining and being manifest in the affairs of men? For as the Cross of old set its doom upon selfishness and unveiled the face of God, and, blessed be His name, made it possible for every man to have free access to Him, so the Cross stands for these things today, and while in all the wooing tenderness of the mystery of love as therein revealed we call the wounded and the halt, and the lame and the burdened, and the oppressed to that Cross for healing, by that self-same Cross we are to be the sworn foes of all the forces that are against God and against humanity.