**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 20 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**HARDENED by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*But exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called Today, lest anyone of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

*Hebrews 3:13*

"HARDENED BY THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN."

The warning of the text is addressed to people familiar with the letter of God's word. Hence its applicability to such an audience as this. Most of us heard the first music of that motherhood which soothed our childhood, expressing itself in the songs of the sanctuary. The vast majority of us were first fascinated by Bible stories told us by those best of all theologians for children - our mothers. We know the things of God, and therefore there is for every one of us here a message of warning: "Lest anyone of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

No more solemn warning was ever uttered by any of the apostolic writers. No words to which we ought to pay closer attention, and to which we ought to give more earnest heed, are to be found in the whole of the Divine Library. Yet is it not the fact that we listen to a text like this with something of curiosity, something of wonder, as to what can possibly be said concerning it? Or if the text does indeed speak to the conscience, is it not because the old word "sin" is to be found in it, which some men are dropping out of their vocabulary today? Yet the word that should startle us is the word "hardened." We are not afraid, I fear, of being hardened. There are people today who are terribly afraid lest they or their loved ones should become drunkards. Better be a drunkard than hardened! There is more chance for the man who is in the grip of some one specific sin, who still retains a heart and conscience, than for the man who is hardened, and yet commits no vulgar sin condemned by the age in which he lives. The peril is of the subtlest, and it is the peculiar peril of those who know the terms of the law and the Gospel. I very much question whether you could find me a person hardened in the sense of my text who is unfamiliar with the Christian evangel. There are many men in this city who are quite unfamiliar with its terms, and they are so vicious that you thank God you are not as they; but they are not "hardened." If we are not startled by the word, if it produce no blush of shame, no blanch of fear, the danger is that we are already becoming hardened.

Let us consider, then, first the peril, "hardened"; second, the cause, "sin"; and, finally, the method, "deceitfulness." First, then, the peril: "Lest anyone of you be hardened." The word suggests a change, indicates a process, and reveals a condition.

When I say that the word suggests a change, I mean that no human being starts life hard. No little child is hard. Human nature is essentially impressionable. If you take a child in its earliest years out of any set of circumstances, and put it into new surroundings, you can mould its life. There is no greater illustration of this truth than Dr. Barnardo's great work. For forty years the doors of that institution have stood open to any child, the only qualification for admission being destitution. Though the children dealt with for the most part were born with hereditary taint of evil, with an environment that gave them no chance morally, the percentage who have answered the touch of Christ through Christly influence, and have become pure, and noble, and beautiful, is amazing. Every child is impressionable; every child has its windows open toward the morning; every child indulges in romance, dreams dreams, sees visions, hopes, is capable of tears and laughter; every child is plastic. The man who is hard, and who boasts in his hardness, was not always hard.

If I could put my hand, my brethren, tonight upon your shoulders, and by some mysterious process drive you back through the years, I should bring you to a period of tenderness, to a moment when you also were soft, and plastic, and emotional. You tell me you are glad the day has gone? If you knew what it really means, you would begin to weep again tonight, because you have lost the power to weep.

"Lest anyone of you be hardened." Because the word suggests a change it also indicates a process. What is this process? Let us look at it in its symptoms. What are the symptoms of this hardening? We began to fight against tenderness as being childish, and then we silenced conscience as being inconvenient to success, and finally we questioned the verity of the things unseen. This is the process of hardening.

There was a time when some of you men would have wept over a dead canary. Tonight you do not weep over lost souls! The fountain of tears has been dried up. There was a time when you blushed awkwardly when you told a lie. Today there is no blush and no inward shame. There was a time when you believed in God. Today you are hardly sure of your own wife.

The hardening process has gone forward until at last the condition of hardness is reached. It is the inevitable result of the stifling of tears, and the refusal to listen to conscience, and to believe. No tears, no conscience, no faith! Hard! Equal to dealing with business problems, but not equal to the commerce of eternity. Quite equal to touching and handling forces which are merely the affairs of this life, but not equal to laying hold on eternal life. Quite equal, in a word, to dust and the things of dust, but not equal to Deity and fellowship with God. Yet let me put this even more practically and personally. The moment comes when a man, who as a boy wept as he heard the story of Jesus, hears it without one thrill of emotion. The day comes when a man still listens to the terms of the law of God, but never trembles. The most difficult men and women to reach with the evangel are those who know it best, and are yet unmoved by it to tears, or high endeavour. "Lest anyone of you be hardened."

But now, how does a man become hardened? I take you to the final word of my text, "sin." What is sin? It would be unfair to interpret the word "sin" in this letter in any other way than by the use of the writer. In every case, from first chapter to last, he uses it of unbelief. The whole argument of the letter is intended to strengthen faith, and the whole force of the writer's appeal against sin is an appeal against unbelief, and the sin that hardens is the sin of unbelief.

In order to explain that, let me first deal with what is meant by unbelief, for I can quite imagine that someone finds reason in rebellion against such a statement. It may be affirmed that a man cannot help unbelief, because a man can-not compel his belief. Such an objection reveals the fact that the meaning of unbelief is not understood because the meaning of belief is not understood.

What is belief? Belief is that which brings a man into personal relationship with Jesus Christ so as to save that man. But what is the belief that saves a man? It is not an intellectual assent to a certain number of formulated truths. It is possible for a man to believe intellectually all the truths of the evangelical faith, and yet be lost for time and eternity. The fact that I am convinced of the truth of the Deity of Jesus, and of the atoning nature of His death, will not save me. These truths do not become dynamic simply by intellectual apprehension and consent. No man is saved by intellectual comprehension and conviction. All that may be a part of the process, but it does not save a man. What, then, is the belief that saves? Now let me go to a slightly different standpoint. What is the thing you really do believe? A man in church on Sunday recites a creed. I have great respect for his doing so. He says, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth." Does he? The fact that he recites the creed on Sunday does not prove that in the deepest of him he believes. I shall want to watch him on Monday to know whether he really believes in God. I shall want to live with him, and observe his business method, and his habits of speech, and the tone and temper of his disposition before I know whether, in the deepest of him, he believes in God. You say, "I do believe in God," and that is true intellectually, but that is not the belief that saves. The faith that saves is the answer of the will to the truth of which the reason is convinced, the handing over of the life to the claim of truth. If I believe in God the Father Almighty, not merely with my mind and heart, but also with my will, then I shall walk from Monday morning until Saturday evening, as well as upon the Sabbath day, as a man recognizing God's throne, seeking His law, endeavouring to find the way of His commandments, measuring all the activities of my life by His claim upon me. That belief saves, which compels the surrender of the whole life to the conviction of truth. The following of light is the faith that saves a man. I am always thankful to remember - and I pause to say this, though it is not part of my main argument - that the New Testament never asks me to believe in the atonement in order to be saved. I am not saying a man can be saved without the atonement. But the Scripture asks that I shall believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The belief which saves is belief in the Person of Christ, which expresses itself in surrender to Christ, even though I may have to postpone the explanation of the mystery of His being, and the marvel of His atonement, and the miracle of His resurrection.

Therefore it becomes evident that unbelief is refusal to obey that truth of which I am convinced intellectually. To know the truth, and then refuse to obey it; to hear the message, assent to its accuracy, bow in the presence of its great demand intellectually, and yet not answer its claim, that is the sin which hardens a man. When a man so disobeys, he becomes hardened by the very truth that might have softened him; he becomes enslaved and debased by the very message that ought to have made him free indeed. In that sense the Gospel is a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death; and the unbelief that hardens a man is not his refusal to accept intellectually a statement of truth, but his refusal to obey the truth when it lays claim to his allegiance, and calls upon him to tread some definite pathway. "Hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

That brings us to the central thought of the text. How is it that men commit this sin of unbelief? Brethren, is not that the mystery, the perpetual mystery? Is not every preacher confronted by it, every Christian worker conscious of it? Why is it men hear the truth and do not obey? Why is it that men, conscious that the Spirit of God is striving with them, even though they may not express the fact in these words, yet will not yield. Why are men guilty of unbelief? Here in my text is the word that shows that the writer of this letter understood perfectly the reason: "the deceitfulness of sin." The sin of unbelief is always the result of a false argument. When truth breaks upon a human soul and makes its claim, if the man does not obey, it is because he is deceived either intellectually, emotionally, or volitionally.

It will be easier now, I think, to illustrate than to attempt to state the case theoretically. Suppose that I should resolve this service into one of another kind, and some of you in honesty should tell us why you are not Christian people in the full sense of the word, what would be the result? You are familiar with the terms of the evangel, you have been nursed upon the songs of the Church, and yet you yourself are not Christian. It may be that once you made a profession, and once you companied with the saints, and once rejoiced in the vision of God, and once knew all the blessedness of fellowship; but things have changed, and you have become hard. Why? Because of your unbelief, your refusal to obey truth. But why did you refuse? Now, I say if we could have definite testimony, I think we should hear some things such as these. I will not imagine a single case, but will tell you actual things that have been said to me. One man tells me that he is not a Christian because he desires his liberty. There are thousands of young men in London tonight who in their deepest heart revere the Christian standard; but they are not Christians simply because they want to be free. Now, listen. "The deceitfulness of sin." Was ever unbelief more subtle than when it promises a man that if he will refuse to believe, in this evangelical sense of the word, he will be a free man. Do you not know, have you not yet discovered in your own experience, that the only free man is the man bound to the throne of God, that no man is free who is simply attempting to follow the lusts and desires of his own heart and life? Your freedom to do the things that you yourself desire to do, unchecked by law, is at this very moment weaving a chain. It may seem to be of silk, and you toy with it in its silken loveliness, and imagine you will presently snap it. But you will find that the chain about you is adamant. If you and I were talking together as man to man you would confess that already you have discovered that habit has so fastened upon you that you cannot break it. What is the story of the corruption of sin that abounds in our city? It is the story of men who have sought for freedom and have found slavery. It is the story of men who declined to have a master, and they have become the slaves of the worst taskmasters that ever held human beings in bondage.

Your own lust? Lust is not wrong. Jesus said to His disciples, "With lust have I lusted to eat this passover with you." I find it is written in my Bible, "which things angels lust to look into." At the back of every sin that curses humanity is a true desire. Sin is always the prostitution of right, the taking of a true capacity, and using it in an untrue method. If a man answer his desire without constraint, without instruction, without guidance, without master-ship, he cannot fulfil it, and at last the desire becomes a burning, flaming thirst, a passion that nothing can slake; and he becomes the slave of the desire he answered when he refused to obey the light that came to instruct him how to answer the true desire within his own life. You want to be free, my brother. Come tonight to your Master Jesus. Hand in to Him your wholehearted surrender and allegiance. Say to Him as you stand before Him, "Here and now, O living Christ of God, spirit, soul and body, now and forever, in every fibre of my personality, and every power of my being, take me!" Then you will be free. Then you will find liberty. The Son alone can make you free. If you have refused to obey the voice of truth, and so have been guilty of the sin of unbelief, it is because you have allowed yourself to be deceived by sin's promise of freedom, while all the time it has been forging your chain.

Take another illustration. A man will say to me, "Yes, I know all that you say is true. I know that the pure is the beautiful. With my mind I admire its great ideal, but I want to see life. Oh, sometimes I wish I could give all my life to speak on that one theme to the young men and women of our cities. You want to see life? Yes, you say, I should have to give up so much if I became a Christian. What would you have to give up? I would be quite willing to stop preaching for a moment if you would tell me. Will you tell me what you would have to give up if you became a Christian, which I cannot keep, being a Christian? Or, rather, what can you have of life by not being a Christian which is denied to me because I am a Christian? If you will name anything that you can do, not being a Christian, which I cannot do as a Christian man, you will know immediately that the thing that you are clinging to, that you call seeing life, is the thing that passes sentence of death upon you.

What does a man lose that is essential to his manhood when he becomes a Christian? Freedom for intellectual pursuits? Nay, verily, Christianity has set the world's intellect free. The late Lord Salisbury said that it was a good thing to study large maps. So it is. When you want to know what Christianity has done for the world, take a broad outlook over the centuries and over the world as it is, and know this, that the crucifixion and stoning of a man for scientific investigation has been made impossible by the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. Jesus Christ has set man's intellect free, has said to men in effect, You may knock at every door and demand admission, and you may enter as far as you can. The only limit set to your investigation is your power of investigation. But then Jesus Christ also says, When you have come as far as you can along the line of investigation, never forget the revealed things are yours, and the secret things belong to God.

Christ has set the intellect free. What is it that you have to abandon? Music? I will not insult the intelligence of this congregation by arguing it. You have all heard the "Messiah," and after that there is nothing to hear. Art? Certainly not, save as art may be debased in order to suggest evil thoughts. Some pictures you are hiding, or showing clandestinely, you had better burn, and you know it! Amusement? What form of amusement must you give up if you become a Christian? No amusement that is recreation. That must be your philosophy of amusement, recreation. Anything that destroys you, spirit, mind, or body, of course you must give up because Jesus is set upon making you perfect and beautiful, and He will not tolerate a retention of anything that stultifies you physically, or dulls you mentally, or blights you spiritually. In the name of God, I charge you do not hear me as a theorist, but come and see me, if you will, and tell me what you have to give up that I cannot keep. You dare not do it, my brothers, because you know that I should say to you, "What about it? Do you not think you had better give it up?" And you would have to say, "Yes." And yet you are being deceived by sin. You want to see life, and in the pursuit of life you are tracking the desert of death. Oh, the deceitfulness of sin!

Or, again, another man says to me, "Well, I am not a Christian because I am not fully persuaded of all the truths of the Christian religion." If you adopted that method in any other department of life, where would you land yourself within the next seven days? The perpetual law of life is that a man accepts the known fact and acts upon it, afterwards investigating the mystery that lies behind it. And yet there are men - I know them, I hear from them; they come to see me, and tell me they are not Christian because they do not understand the mystery of incarnation, or the mystery of atonement, because they cannot quite follow all the statements of the Bible concerning the methods of God. My brethren, Jesus Christ presents Himself to you, attested by tens of thousands of witnesses in the passing centuries, as the One Who gives you at once the highest ideal of life, and is able to communicate to you a sufficient dynamic to enable you to realize your ideal. Obey that, and postpone the rest! I know there are men who tell me they understand all the mystery of the Christian truth. I thank God with all my heart that Christian truth is so large that at present I do not perfectly comprehend it all. I thank God for its vastness, for the infinite reaches of it. This heart of mine, poor little restless thing as it is, is yet so big that it would rebel against a religion formulated and tabulated, in which the last thing could be recited in a creed in half an hour. It is the vastness of the reach; it is the sense that this thing is greater than I, that there are infinite reaches stretching out on every hand, that makes me thank God in the midst of the mystery. I have found foothold, and I have found it upon the rock of Christ, and from that vantage ground I may inquire.

Because of the mystery, in God's name do not refuse to obey what is no longer mystery, the plain fact of what Christ is, and what He can do for you.

Compare your present position with the past. Take your childhood, and put it into comparison with your present position. I do not say possession, material possession. I said your present position, the position of your own inner life. What is the difference?

I remember, I remember,

The house where I was born,

The little window where the sun

Came peeping in at morn;

He never came a wink too soon,

Nor brought too long a day,

But now I often wish the night

Had borne my breath away.

I remember, I remember,

The fir trees dark and high;

I used to think their slender tops

Were close against the sky.

It was a childish ignorance,

But now 'tis little joy

To know I'm farther off from heaven

Than when I was a boy.

Is that what you are saying? You have done wonderfully well, so the world will tell you. You have made a great deal of money, you lost yourself. When you lost your tears, you lost God's finest gift to you. When you lost your conscience, you lost the balance wheel of your life. When you lost your faith in God and man, you lost everything that makes life high, and noble and beautiful.

Ah me, there is another song that comes back to a man's heart tonight, a song which I wonder people can sing without catching its pathos and tragedy:

Backward, turn backward, O time in your flight,

Make me a child again, just for tonight.

Mother, come back from the echoless shore;

Take me again to your heart as of yore.

Kiss from my forehead the furrows of care,

Smooth the few silver threads out of my hair,

Over my slumbers your loving watch keep,

Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

I do not know who wrote it.\* I do not know the circumstances but I tell you that is not the cry of a baby for toys. It is the wail of a soul after God. Listen!

Tired of the hollow, the base, the untrue,

Mother, O mother, my heart yearns for you.

Many a summer the grass has grown green,

Blossomed and faded, our faces between;

Yet with strong yearning, and passionate pain,

Long I tonight for your presence again.

Come from the silence, so long and so deep,

Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

My brethren, do not check that emotion. If those lines have touched a chord that has not vibrated for years, thank God for it. If there is a sob in your heart tonight, it is a sign of hope. Follow it; it is a gleam, and it is because long ago you refused to follow some gleam like it that you have become hard as the nether millstone.

But there is another word, and it is a word that the King James's translators and the revisers have written with a capital letter. What is it? "Today." "Exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called Today." That means to say that if you have become hard, you are still in the place you can be remade.

Today! O blessed word of hope,

And laden still with heaven's own breath,

The night is passed, and has not come,

Between the shades life conquers death.

Light falls around the ruined soul,

The wind of God blows with new lust!

Fling back the shutters! Swing the door!

Answer God's breath upon thy dust!

Then day shall never end in night,

But night be merged in perfect day;

And all the forces of God's life

Control thy life with mighty sway.

\* The verse is from "Rock Me to Sleep," by Elizabeth Akers Allen. - Ed.

It is Today, and you may go from the sanctuary without word spoken to any friend, with all the fallow ground ploughed up, and with the promise of harvest, and the blossoming of the rose where the desert has been. But, my brethren, in order to do that you must obey the truth you know. So believe with all the mind, and all the heart, and all the life, and you shall find the remaking of your life by the grace of God.