**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 14 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**GOD IN CHRIST by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.*

*2 Corinthians 5:19*

THE HOUR OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS OF NAZARETH WAS THAT in which the Light that lighteth every man came into the world. To describe the event in terms which suggest its value in the economy of God, I should be inclined to speak of it as the last crisis in the Divine procedure. By last, I do not mean to suggest that there will be no other, but rather that there has been none since.

Every student of the Bible will recognize that God's methods with man have been ever those of process and of crisis. Long periods of preparation have led up to some moment when, by a new and independent activity on His part, a new departure in human history has been made.

Without staying to argue that, at any length we must recognize, if we read the Scriptures carefully, that this has been the method of God in all human history and in all creation. Just as in the poetry and accuracy of the first chapters in our Bible we see some Divine act that we cannot perfectly understand, leading on to processes which we can follow, until we reach another crisis, when there is another act full of mystery followed by succeeding processes, so not only in creation, but also through all God's dealings with men, this process is discoverable. And so far as Scripture has revealed anything of the future, it clearly leads us to expect that the next crisis will be that of the second advent of our Lord. Today, we are living in that period of process which lies between the last crisis, that of the first advent, and the next crisis, that of the second advent.

If I were asked for the briefest declaration of Scripture, setting forth the meaning of the Christian economy, including these advents and all that lies between them, both as to its method and its purpose, I should not hesitate to quote this text: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

While not dealing in detail with the mystery of the method of the first advent, while not describing in detail the processes of the life of Jesus, while not describing in detail the processes of the years multiplying themselves into centuries, and the centuries into millenniums following that advent, and while not dealing in detail with the mystery of the method of the second advent, it gathers the whole fact into one brief and comprehensive declaration, "God was in Christ" - that is the method; "reconciling the world unto Himself" - that is the purpose.

Our purpose in this meditation is to dwell upon the method, referring only to that purpose of reconciliation so far as is necessary for our interpretation and full understanding of the method.

"God was in Christ." That is the initial and supreme wonder of our holy religion. I am anxious, that I may be able by the Spirit of God, to lead you a little beyond the first and simplest things, to the profounder sublimities of the first advent. We speak of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, and that alone is a wonderful story. But I am anxious that we should recognize that in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth there was something far more wonderful than the birth of a man, far more remarkable than the coming into human life of another human being. That assuredly did happen, infinite though the mystery may be, and forevermore transcending our comprehension of how He was human, and yet more. Nevertheless, the fact abides that the birth of Jesus was much more than the birth of a man.

While our eyes are fixed in meditation, and in adoration, upon the Child held in His mother's arms in helplessness, having gold, and frankincense, and myrrh offered to Him by the Persian Magi, which He at the moment, in His simple humanity, did not understand the value of, yet, let us recognize that we are gazing upon One in Whom God is beginning a new movement and a new method. Our eyes are allowed to rest for a moment in imagination upon the Person of a little Child, of Whom the deepest and profoundest truth is declared in the words of my text, "God was in Christ."

Let us first think, in a few brief and quiet moments, of a preliminary matter. What was the position of the world without that Christ? What did men know of God, or what could they know of Him apart from Christ? Secondly, we will turn to the more positive consideration of this declaration, "God was in Christ." Finally, in one word of application, we will consider the declared purpose of the mystery, "reconciling the world unto Himself."

Our first consideration then, which is preliminary, and of the nature of background to the foreground of consideration, is that of human thought about God, apart from Christ. Theologians have told us that man's thoughts of God are necessarily anthropomorphic. May I put that into another sentence? Man's thoughts of God are necessarily the result of man's consciousness of himself. Man does - and now I use the word man in its generic and broadest sense - man does think of God; and, thinking of God, he does so upon the basis of his own personality and consciousness. There can be no escape from this; man can only argue of God from what he is in himself, and every idea of Deity that possesses the mind of men - and will you allow that word possesses now to be a perpetually present tense, having application to past and present conceptions - results from this one line of activity. Man projects into immensity the fact of his own personality, and calls the result God. I do not care for the moment whether you think of the most depraved or degraded form of religion, using the terms of our usual speech, or whether you think of your own religion; the same thing is true.

All our conceptions of God, to go back to the word of the theologians, are anthropomorphic. I am not speaking, of course, of a man as he appears to his brother men. I am not speaking of that which is external, and physical, and material, and unimportant - transient, and therefore not important, and only in that sense unimportant. I am speaking of man in the essential facts of his personality. And man does necessarily take these essential facts, when he thinks of another Being, and project them into immensity. His conception of that other Being, greater than himself, is that, nevertheless, of his own nature, it is created on the pattern of his own personality.

Think of the essentials of human life, and I am going to take the very simplest - the essentials of which every child is conscious. The first word of human consciousness is "I am," and when that word of human consciousness is analyzed, these are the terms of its expression: "I know," that is mind; "I will," that is choice; "I can," that is force. These are the simplest things of human consciousness. Man takes these ideas of experience, and projects them into immensity, and so constructs his idea of God. Mind, infinite knowledge; will, supreme choice and consequent government; force, absolute ability. These things underlie all streams of religious thinking. Wherever religion has placed at its center, personality as Deity, it has been because man has taken of himself, and has imagined something of the same pattern, the same nature, the same kind, but vaster and greater.

Now mark what man has been doing. In every case, apart from Christ and apart from His ministry, man has projected himself into immensity, and consequently, he has projected into immensity all that is in himself. In every case, therefore, there has been an amplification of failure. Self-centered life flung out into immensity postulates a self-centered God. All the things of human limitation, resulting from human sin, abide in human conceptions of God, apart from that which has come into the world through Christ. An enlarged conception of mind, an enlarged conception of knowledge, based upon man's own consciousness of knowledge, which is limited, creates an imperfect conception of knowledge. Man has never come, apart from Christ, to a consciousness of full and final and perfect knowledge of God and consequently, man persists in his attempts to deceive God. When man attempts to deceive God, he, by that very action, reveals the fact that he does not believe that God knows all and perfectly.

The whole system of sacrificial worship in other religions is that of attempting to persuade God to change His mind, and alter the method of His procedure.

Or, if man thinks of will, his will is capricious and revengeful, and he flings that out into immensity, and his conception of God is upon the pattern of what he is in himself.

Consequently, in all religions other than the Christian, through all the ages, the deities postulated are grotesque representations of humanity. The underlying ideals revealed in the deities referred to in the Old Testament - Moloch, Baal and Mammon - continue this statement; the deification of the emotional in Moloch, of the intellectual in Baal, of force and power in Mammon. In every case, at the back is a human being, and the monster that is worshiped is but the projection into infinity of the failure of the human being.

The gods of ancient Greece and Rome, or the gods men worship today - sensuous gods, vindictive gods, lazy gods, trivial gods - prove the same truth. We only know these things because we see them in another light. We see these gods by comparison with the one God Who has been revealed to us.

But when, apart from revelation, man seeks a deity, he evolves his conception of deity from himself; he must think of that being upon the pattern of what he is in himself. And so, to make the illustration simple, given a man trying to think of God, he thinks of himself, and then of someone as himself, but vaster; but the things he sees in himself, his evil as well as his good, the wrong as well as the right, the meanness as well as the nobility, are all present in his god, and the visions of men apart from the Christian religion are filled with deities, grotesque and enlarged limitations of man in his failure and in his sin.

My youngest friend will allow me a simple illustration, and the older ones will be patient. You have but to think of a magic lantern. Here you have a small picture, and you look at it, and on it is the figure of a man. You put it in the lens, and away yonder on the sheet is the same man, magnified. But it is the same man, it is the same picture, and if here in the lens the picture be that of a man twisted and distorted and grotesque, the picture there on the sheet is twisted and distorted and grotesque. That is exactly what men have done in their creation of gods. Take all the gods of the heathen world and trace the lines, and you will find they are focused in the men who imagined them.

But, you tell me we have grown away from these ideas; you tell me there are a great many men in the world today who do not claim to be Christian, who yet have a wonderfully true and accurate idea of God, of His uprightness, and beneficence, and tenderness, and holiness; you tell me there are men who will not accept the Christian doctrine of incarnation, who yet have a beautiful ideal of God. I know it, but whence came it? Every advance in man's conceptions of deity is Christian, even though the men who hold the new and higher view do not name themselves Christian.

It is almost a grotesque way to state it, and yet you will catch my meaning, when I say that I am perpetually inclined to say to the men who have these high and noble ideals of Deity, but who deny my Christ, what Samson said to the Philistines: "If ye had not ploughed with my heifer, Ye had not found out my riddle."

In the light of these considerations, we turn to the declaration of the text, "God was in Christ." This, then, is the meaning of incarnation. God answers the human necessity; enshrines Himself in humanity; thinks, speaks, chooses, acts through human channels; comes into the very midst of human history, after man had begun to write that history; and thus gave humanity the one and only Man from Whom the lines flung out into immensity include God as He really is.

All that was found in the perfect manhood of Jesus may be projected, and the result will be the truth about God. Fall back if you will upon my simple illustration of the camera. See in this same picture of your New Testament that which you put into the lens, and when the light shining through it projects the figure full of truth and unsullied splendour on the canvas, I see God. Every line is a line of beauty, and every expression of the face is full of beneficence, and yet of righteousness. I come back to this Man of the New Testament, and I follow Him and watch Him, and I take the things I see and fling them out, and I find God. I will take, for illustration, these self-same things to which I have made reference - the mind, and the will, and the force. Now I must leave you to wander at will, through these gospel stories, and I hope some of you may, and watch the working of the mind of the Master, anywhere and anytime; and when you do so, let the lines pass out until they fill the infinite spaces, and you will have found the working of the mind of God. Observe Him in the hour of His choices, anywhere and anytime, and then fling the lines out into immensity, and you have discovered the good and perfect and acceptable will of God. Mark every effort of Jesus, every putting forth of strength. See it in its purpose, watch it in its method, observe it in its victory, and fling the lines out, and you will find that He is vindicated in what He said. "My Father worketh even until now, and I work." There is perfect harmony between the two.

Mark well the mind of Jesus in its essence by observing its activities; it encompassed vast eternities, and compressed him into the simple speech of childhood. I have taken up an old sea-shell, and have put it to my ear, being told when I was a boy that if I would I could hear the ocean. Of course I heard it; the shell was made by the ocean, fashioned by the ocean, was of the ocean, and the ocean of the atmosphere repeated the action of the atmosphere of the ocean, and I heard the sweep and the music of the sea in the shell. Quite reverently - the figure is an imperfect one, I know - I put my ear and listen when this Man speaks, and He speaks in little words, all human language: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Oh, my masters, put that shell to your ear this morning, and the infinite speech of eternity is singing itself through your soul, and as you obey you find rest.

So there came into human history two thousand years ago, a Man through Whose personality, whether of mind, or of will, or of force, I fling the lines out into immensity, and the result is God. A new revelation of man has resulted in a new revelation of God.

At the back of all the activity of this Man, love was the motive. The expression of His activity was service rendered to others, and all the way I see Him flaming in white hot anger against everything that bruises and hurts; and whether I watch Him taking children in His arms and blessing them, or watch Him when in quiet dignity He pronounces the eight woes upon a guilty city, it is ever the vision of God that is breaking on my life. "God was in Christ," and what is the result? We have found God, and He is a God of joy and a God of sorrow, a God intimately interested in all the details of human life, a God forever active; and all these things I have come to know through the Child, and Boy, and Youth, and Man of Nazareth.

Did I say that God answered man's method, that man's method is that of projecting man into immensity, and God adopted it? And did the way in which I said that make it appear as though God were turning from His own first purpose, and accommodating Himself to human failure? By no means. That is God's return to first purpose. He made man in His own image and after His own likeness. And man, true to himself, might have flung out upon the canvas of eternity his own image, and have found God. The most intimate relationship existed between man and God in the Divine economy. But, when man shut his eyes to the farflung vision, and began to live as though that upon the earth which was material was the whole of himself, then he became distorted, iniquitous - exactly the same meaning is in the two words - sinful, sensual; and then, lifting his eyes to the heavens, were shadows indeed, and all his knowledge of God was based upon the knowledge of his fallen self, and was evil. But in Christ, we have the very effulgence of His brightness, and when all that He is in humanity is seen and enlarged, we have found God.

And one final word as to the purpose, "reconciling the world unto Himself." Man's misconceptions of God have resulted in man's hatred of God. I want you, if you will, to think of that, and think of it carefully. You tell me that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and I agree with you. But I ask you, Why is the carnal mind at enmity against God? And from the very letter of Paul that declares that the carnal mind is enmity against God, I make another quotation. The carnal mind does not know God, nor can it. It is at enmity against God. Yea, verily, I need not argue it; I need not argue it in London. But whence the enmity? The enmity is the outcome of ignorance. You say we are far away from the idolatry of our Hebrew Bible, with its Baal and Moloch and Mammon. I am not sure, but I will not press that. We are far away from the idolatries of ancient Greece and Rome. Again I am not sure, but I will not argue it. But you are not far away, or humanity is not far away from its hatred of God. It does not express itself in brutal and vulgar language always. It expresses itself in the West End in the fact that the name of God is tabooed, and you must not mention Him. Men do not love God. Why not? They do not know Him. The old German sang well and truly, and you remember Wesley's magnificent translation: -

O God, of good the unfathomed sea,

Who would not give his heart to Thee?

And whenever a man gets that vision of God, he gives his heart and everything else to Him.

But though humanity has had a revelation of God in incarnation, the incarnation as revelation does not reconcile men to God, neither can it. The birth of Jesus was the birth of a Man perfect in Himself, but other men will not be reconciled by that birth. The old prophet saw far beyond his own age, and I quote you his language: "When we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him." Do you imagine for a single moment that the prophet meant that there would be no beauty in the Servant of God when He came? I do not so read the prophecy. There was no beauty that would appeal to men. Why not? Because they are blind and cannot see. And here is the root of the trouble with the world.

"God was in Christ" is a great word, the meaning of which is not exhausted by the birth and life of Jesus. We must go on, and include the cross. The cradle demands the cross; or else I have seen a Man, strangely other than I am, and I shall hate Him because His purity rebukes my impurity, and His spacious, spiritual and eternal conceptions are a perpetual rebuke to my clinging to the dust of my materialism and the devilish sin that I love. Such hatred was the cause of His crucifixion. That is why they crucified Him.

And then, to face another mystery as infinite as the first, God in man suffered, as man apart from God suffers. And out of that came the fulfilment of all that began on the morning of the birth of Jesus. And when at last, by the infinite mystery of that dying, the life of that self-same Christ is communicated to men, they see Him as they had never seen Him, and they find God as they had never found Him, and in the vision there is at once illumination and energy.

So that brethren - let us remember this also - while we sing our carols at Christmastide and rejoice in the presence of the Child, not by His coming, not by the beauty of His Babyhood, the strength of His Manhood, the glory of His moral character are we saved, but by that final mystery to which this all led, the mystery of His cross; and by the way of His death I find my way back into His life for illumination and for energy. It is thus that we find God, and not only find Him intelligently, but find Him in victorious relationship and fellowship; and, to use the daring and marvelous and awe-inspiring language of Peter, we are made "partakers of the Divine nature."

And so we have attempted to look a little beneath the surface, and have been compelled ultimately to look at something infinitely beyond the birth and life of Jesus. We know God through Jesus. No other interpretation is correct. How important then that we should know the Christ and know Him intimately. And to do it, brethren, we must begin at His cross. He is known, not by outward contemplation, but by inward revelation; and that inward revelation comes to the men who meet Him at the one trysting-place He has provided - His cross. And so I leave you at the cross, for there we must begin, and by the mystery of its cleansing tide and its regenerating forces we come into sympathy with Jesus, the Man of Nazareth, and find our God, and so our peace.