**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 04 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE ATONEMENT by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*You, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unreproveable before Him.*

*Colosssians 1:21,22*

THERE ARE TWO BRIEF DECLARATIONS IN THIS COLOSSIAN LETTER which may be said to embody its teaching. The first is that in which the apostle declares, "In Him," that is in the Lord Jesus Christ, "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The second is that in which he tells those Christians to whom he was writing, the saints at Colosse and the faithful in Christ Jesus, "In Him ye are made full." The theme of the letter is that of the glorious Christ, and of all the glories of the Christ at the disposal of His Church in order that she may fulfil all the good pleasure of the will of God.

In the course of dealing with these great subjects the apostle wrote some of the most wonderful things, if I may suggest such a distinction, that the New Testament contains concerning our Lord and Master. In the passage which we read this evening He deals with the threefold fact of His glory; His glory in relation to His Father in that, He "is the image of the invisible God"; His glory in relation to the whole creation in that, He is "the firstborn of all creation," all things coming by the word of His power, all things moving to the goal of His purpose, all things consisting, or being held together by Him; His glory in relation to the Church, in that, He is the Head of the Church, "the firstborn from the dead"; and, finally, He says of Him "That in all things He might have the pre-eminence."

It is not to be wondered at that in the midst of such spacious and wonderful declarations concerning the glory of Christ, the apostolic reference to the Cross should be equally spacious and equally mysterious. It is in this great passage in which we see Christ in His relation to the whole cosmos, its Originator, its Sustainer, its Goal; that we also see Christ in His relation to the chaos, its Redeemer, its Reconciler, its Restorer. In this passage the apostle declares that through Christ the work of reconciliation is accomplished; not only between individual men and God, not only in the complex mystery of an individual life, not only in this world, but also the heavens.

Thus the apostle places the Cross of Christ at the very center of everything. As Christ Himself is at the center of all things, and as all things are upheld and made consistent by His power, so also at the center of all is His Cross. The power of the Cross is felt not only in the nearest things but to the utmost bound of creation. The work of the cross must be ultimately measured, not merely by what it does within individual life, but by what it accomplishes in the heavens, among angels, and at last by what it has done in the being and nature of God, because by it righteousness and peace are able to meet together and to kiss each other.

In an atmosphere so full of glory, in the presence of declarations concerning our Lord and His Cross so calculated to fill the soul with awe, we come to this central word, this word that touches us most nearly and most intimately, the word that reveals the way of our reconciliation.

This statement first reveals our need of reconciliation; secondly, declares the provision made by God in Christ, and unveils the method thereof in so far as it can be unveiled for our eyes; and, finally, makes clear to us the purpose of that reconciliation in the economy of God.

The need of reconciliation is made clear in the words, "You, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works." The way of reconciliation is declared in the words "reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." The ultimate purpose of reconciliation in the experience of man is declared in the last words, "to present you holy and without blemish and unreprovable before Him."

The need of reconciliation. Let us at once interpret the meaning of reconciliation by the term atonement, always remembering the true and simple meaning of that word. Our fathers were accustomed to say that the word atonement means at-one-ment. That has been contradicted, but it is a very interesting fact that the very last of our lexicographers, Murray, declares that to be the true meaning of the word. The verb "atone" is not that from which the substantive "atonement" is derived, for the substantive preceded the verb, and at-one-ment was a word used in our language before the verb "atone." The word "atonement" does not actually reveal the method of reconciliation; it rather describes the state of reconciliation. In our theological formulae we use the word as indicating the method which produces the result, and then attempt to explain it. I am not using the word in that way now, but rather in the old and simplest sense, that of being brought into at-one-ment with God.

Is there a need for this? Has man lost his at-one-ment with God? The apostle declares that he has and describes his condition as, "alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works." This is not mere rhetoric. It is a most careful setting forth of the truth concerning man in his sin, beginning with the profoundest, essential fact in human personality, the spiritual, which is alienated; describing in the next place the mental attitude, the consciousness of human life, "enemies in your mind"; and dealing finally, with that physical side of personality which is the expression of the spiritual, "in your evil works."

Alienated. The force of the word is not, aliens. It is not the fact that they were aliens that was in the mind of the apostle, but the fact that they were alienated, and that suggests activity on the part of God. It presupposes a reason which it does not yet declare, but it declares an action, an action on the part of God. They were alienated, cut off from fellowship with God, and that by the act of God. Just as surely as reconciliation is in one of its profoundest aspects judicial, so also is the alienation that makes reconciliation necessary. Translate the Greek word literally and it reads, "you were made to be strangers," a common word at that time, used of those who had lost their citizenship.

I pause to lay all this stress upon the true meaning and value of this word, because it involves a truth which we are in danger of forgetting. This word recognizes the sovereignty of God. We are very much inclined to speak today as though the fact that we are offspring of God puts us on some equality with God, which gives us warrant to talk to Him about our rights, to make terms with Him as to how He may deal with us, or even to descend low enough in the scale of blasphemy to declare what we would do if we were God. All this is the tendency of the hour.

In the presence of the Cross, making the declaration of the need there is for reconciliation, the apostle declared that man is alienated from God by the act of God, and that in perfect righteousness by reason of man's own sin, the sin of his own will, of his own choice, wherein he has turned away from God. The turning away from God on the part of man, results in the definite act on the part of God by which He shuts man away from fellowship with Himself. "Your sins," said the prophet, "have separated between you and God." That is the Old Testament declaration. It is exactly the same truth. Because of your sins, thundered the prophets to Israel of old, God has cut you off from fellowship.

The sinning man may still pray, may still continue to cross the threshold of the earthly house of God, may still take His name upon his lips, may still sing the songs of the sanctuary, may still intellectually attempt to apprehend the doctrines of Christianity; but he has no personal fellowship with God. God will not admit him to that fellowship. No man can see the Lord without holiness. No man can have fellowship with God while he is still in his sin.

Let us pass to the next phrase and phase. In the deepest fact of human life men because of their sin are alienated from God, cut off from fellowship with him, spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. Therefore, they must be described in the words of the apostle as "Enemies in your mind." That is the consequence of alienation. The consciousness in the soul of man of God's attitude toward him in his sin, creates the attitude of enmity toward God on the part of man. Let me state it thus. God is forever at war with human failure, making no terms with it, making no peace with it, making no excuse for it; therefore, man is forever at war with the will of God which forbids his sin, which would interfere with his sin, which would take from him all the activities wherein he is destroying himself, and perpetuating evil in the universe of God. God is at war with sin in every man, and with every man who is sinning, God is angry with the wicked every day. The wrath of God abideth upon the ungodly. In the strange and mystic consciousness of every man there is the conviction this is the attitude of holiness toward his impurity, of righteousness toward his wrong, of purity toward his corrupt ion; and he answers it with the attitude of rebellion, and of persistent enmity. Man hates God because God hates man's sin. This is illustrated by the attitudes of men toward God in the world today. I am not speaking merely of blatant and brutal attacks upon the Christian religion. I am thinking also of the objection there is among men everywhere to the mention of the name of God, as though God had some cruel purpose toward man. We may talk of politics, of play, of books, if we talk about God, we are considered objectionable. Why is it that men will not talk about God? Because they are enemies in their mind against God. Why? Because they know that God is at war with sin, that God excludes the willfully sinning from fellowship, and will make no terms with their sin. Therefore, men are at enmity against God.

What is the final result? It is expressed in the words, "In your evil works." All the activities of life are evil, when they are activities out of harmony with the will of God. We look upon these activities, and divide between them as between vulgar and respectable, but all life which is godless life is evil life. The man who is alienated from God, and has no direct, immediate contact with Him and fellowship with Him, no conscious fellowship with God, that man is at enmity against God; if he does not blaspheme His name, if he does not write a book to prove He does not exist, nevertheless, he objects to hearing of Him with the result that the physical life is a life of evil, "in your evil works."

Thus, while an initial act of sin called for alienation, continuance in sin results from alienation; and therein is revealed the utter helplessness of man in his sin. The profoundest fact in human life is the spiritual, and if it is excluded from God, alienated from God, then that spirit life has no right of entry within the veil; it has not ceased to be, but it has no way of appropriating the resources which strengthen it; it is offspring of God, and yet excluded from fellowship with God. Therefore, the mind is at enmity against God, and the works are evil works.

How can there be reconciliation between God and a man in that state? We turn immediately to the next words of our text; words full of sublimity, to be considered with great reverence, "Now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." In the words, "In the body of His flesh," the apostle refers to the actual human life of Jesus of Nazareth. Behold it for a moment, and think of it, as it stands in vivid, startling, almost appalling contrast to the picture of humanity which we have been considering. Man is alienated from God. This Man lived the life of perfect fellowship with God. Man because of his alienation in spirit from God, and the consequent enmity of mind against God, is in his bodily life performing evil works. This Man, because of His friendship with God, went about doing good, good works instead of evil works. This Man is of my humanity; but by this contrast He is seen to be entirely different from that which I am. We know the meaning of Paul's words, alienated, enemies in your mind, in evil works. We know every phase of the description experimentally. We know their inter-relation; that because we were away from God, our minds were at enmity against God, and the works of our lives were works of evil. Knowing these things, we come into the presence of this Man in the body of His flesh. Everything is of our nature, but is not of the nature of our living. We were alienated! He lived in perfect fellowship! Our mind was enmity! He was the Friend of God, the One in Whom alone that phrase has ever been perfectly fulfilled and manifested in meaning to the sons of men. Our works were evil. He did only good works.

Now, let us understand this. We have not yet reached realm of reconciliation. Not by what He was in the body His flesh can He reconcile me to God. The whole stupendous truth is declared in the next two words, "through death".

The incarnation is not reconciliation. In its very nature it cannot be, for God in Christ, in the perfection of the life of Jesus, is the sternest foe of sinning man. That fair and beautiful life condemns my faulty and sinning life.

The teaching that fell from His lips, the ethic He revealed as being the will of God for man, simply brings me to consciousness of my humiliation. It is impossible for me to realize that high ideal.

All His deeds were deeds directed against the evil works in which I live. If I have nothing in Jesus other than that unveiling of Divine purpose, and that picture of a Man Who is of my nature but lived in other relationships, then there is ill no reconciliation. I am still at war with God in Him. If Jesus Christ were merely a Teacher, a Social Reformer, He could win this country and all civilized countries within six months. But it is because He still stands for heart purity, for rectitude of spirit with God, for the fundamental things of holiness and righteousness and truth, that men are against Him. Not in the body of His flesh with its revelation of the true meaning of every human life and the divine intention for human life, is there reconciliation, nor can there be.

This Man died. Now, if our reconciliation could have been by incarnation, then that death was the most awful reflection on the power and wisdom of God that has occurred in all human history. Unless there be some profound meaning; unless it be, as Peter said it was, of "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," unless there be something infinitely more than the capture of a victim by brutal humanity and his murder, then the permission of that murder undermines my faith in the goodness of God and in His righteousness, for the problem of evil is focused here. Sigh as you will over the sorrows and sighings of humanity, over the problem of evil, there is no problem of evil in London slum or suburb, in China, Africa, or India, comparable to that of the Cross. What is the meaning of that death, the death of One Who in the body of His flesh lived a life of perfect harmony with God, realizing the Divine purpose, illumining the Divine meaning, and satisfying the Divine requirements?

"You … hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." This declaration does not attempt to tell all the secrets. The New Testament never has made that attempt, and those men who have made the attempt have proved their inability.

"Through death"; and if we would interpret the meaning of the word "death" there, we must do so by remembering the Person referred to. The image of the invisible God; the first-born of all creation; the Origin and Sustainer and Goal of the cosmos; in a mystery entirely baffling my poor finite mind, He came into flesh, and He died. That is the one death. There is no other death by the side of that. The death is infinite because the Person is infinite. In the body of His flesh "through death." Here is the manifestation, the unveiling. Just as in His life, the grace and glory of the Father are unveiled by their veiling in flesh; so that death, of infinite passion and pain, is an unveiling. We must interpret the death by the One Who died. There is no analysis of this, no plumbing of its depths, no possibility of satisfactory theorizing!

"Through death." What is death? Death is the penalty of sin. We cannot escape that word penalty. Death is the penalty of sin, not merely its issue, its outcome; that also for the method of God's penalty is always poetic. Penalty is the fruitage of sin necessarily. Then here is the mystery, that the Sinless died.

May God help us to remember this that before that of Calvary we never can see everything. These are some of the things we may see. In the mystery of that Cross, this One upon Whom our eyes have been resting is not in conflict with God. He is working together with God. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself"; not merely in the days of public teaching, not merely in the days of miracle and wonder-working, not merely in the subsequent days of resurrection light, but surely also in the Cross, "God was in Christ reconciling." "You … now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." That act of death no man can fathom. It excludes me forevermore as I try to understand its deepest meaning. So far as I am allowed to say this let me say it, I have never read a book on the atonement that has quite satisfied me, but everyone has given me some new and true view of it. Still, I have never read a book that has satisfied me. There are quantities and elements that defy analysis and elude comprehension. That death, at the heart of the universe, is felt to its remotest bound, for He reconciles all things in the earth and in the heavens to Himself, and in that great reconciliation, great because of the Person and the death, I find my possibility of reconciliation. By that death is created the greatest possibility for the man who is alienated, that he may come into fellowship with God; for the man who is at enmity against God, that he may come into friendship with God; for the man whose works are evil, that may come to fruitfulness in all good works before God.

Now, I am certainly touching things we are all familiar with, for I am touching the realm of the experience of the saints. There are men and women, thank God, many of them in this house who know I am speaking the language of their own experience, men and women who can say, "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ," by which they mean God speaks to them and they speak to Him. They call to God and He hears them. Men may indulge in all the speculative arguments against prayer that they please, but they will never disturb the certain confidence of these people. They know, they hear the voice amid the roar of the city, they hear the voice in the silence of their own heart. God speaks to us, we speak to God. We are no longer alienated, made to be strangers; we are made fellow-citizens with the saints, and fellow-citizenship with the saints means right of access to God. We know that God is, not because you have argued for Him, or demonstrated Him by syllogism, but because He speaks and we hear, we speak and He answers. That possibility was created through this death. It is by what that death has done for us in our own moral consciousness that we have found our way to God. It is out of that consciousness of sin forgiven, which in this same chapter the apostle speaks of as "our redemption the forgiveness of sins," that we have come to fellowship with Him. That fellowship means friendship, we love to speak of Him and all His wondrous ways. In the days of formalism, when Malachi delivered His message, he declared, "Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another and the Lord hearkened and heard." God is still hearkening and hearing men and women who love Him, as they speak of His name out of friendship with Him, and love of Him.

This fellowship and friendship issues in the possibility of fruitfulness in goodness. Very slowly does the full fruit come! We know that all too well; but thank God, He is patient with us. It is first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, and He with patience waits for the final fruitage.

The ultimate purpose is that we should be holy, that is, no longer alienated but in fellowship with life, holy in character as He is; without blemish, that is, no longer enemies, but by love satisfying love; and un-reprovable, that is, no longer evil workers, but pleasing Him in all things.

Let this last matter be most carefully observed. The work of reconciliation which He did is necessary to a reconciled life. Concerning this there is very much false thinking today. The atonement is too often spoken of as though it afforded a mere provision of pardon. It does that; but infinitely more. Its results are judicial, necessary to experience. It is judicial, but it is radical; it touches character.

Atonement was necessary. Until alienation, and enmity, and evil works are dealt with there can be no reconciliation. God cannot be reconciled to man in his sin. Man must be reconciled to God in His holiness. The possibility of holiness is the true gospel hope for those who know their alienation, and who in response to the constraint of the Holy Spirit enter into fellowship by the way of the Cross. We may find our way back into intimate personal fellowship with God; "Nothing in my hand I bring simply to Thy Cross I cling."

If we so come, we shall know the reconciliation; and it will be reconciliation that begins with the consciousness of God and issues in love of God, and finds its crown in the works that are pleasing to God.