**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 05 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

*1 John 1:3*

THE GREAT WORD OF THIS PASSAGE, WHICH AT ONCE arrests our attention, is the word "fellowship." While not exclusively so, it is peculiarly the word of John; and as I find it in this letter, and in the two brief ones which follow, I am always impressed with the thought that these letters are the result of that wonderful thing Jesus said to His disciples in the farewell discourses, part of which we read this evening, "Henceforth, I call you not servants, but friends." It ever seems to me that the word fellowship, as John makes use of it, is the peculiar and particular word of friendship.

It is an interesting fact, which some of you have doubtless noticed, that in these three letters John never speaks of Jesus as Lord, and never speaks of the disciples of Jesus - believers in Him - as servants. I do not mean to suggest that John forgets the relationship which he and his fellow-disciples bore to Jesus as His bond-servants; or that John ever forgets the supremacy and sovereignty of Christ, that He was, indeed, the Lord; but it is an interesting fact that he does not speak of Him as Lord. These are peculiarly the letters of a close, and intimate, and personal friendship with Jesus.

This word "fellowship," therefore, is an illuminating word concerning our friendship with God and our friend- with Christ; our friendship with God through Christ.

I have already said that the word is not exclusively used by John; Paul uses it, it occurs in the fundamental proposition of his first letter to the Corinthian Church, "God is faithful through whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." The word thrills us, with all the deepest, and the sublimest, and the tenderest things of our relationship to Christ, and in Him to God.

It is a rich and spacious word, full of suggestiveness, almost impossible of full and final translation. That is borne by this fact; the word which is here translated "fellowship" is translated in many ways in the New Testament - "fellowship, contribution, distribution, communication, communion." Or, if we turn from this actual word, which is an abstract noun, to the common noun, it is translated "partakers, partners, companions,"

I believe that all these are needed in our language if we are to have any idea of the richness of this one great word; the word which is descriptive of the great and gracious fact of our friendship with God and with Jesus Christ.

If we tarry for a moment longer with the word, it is only that we may inquire if there be any illustration of its simplest meaning. I think we can find one in the Acts of the Apostles. It is declared that in those early days of apostolic love and fervor, the disciples had all things in common. The word so translated is the root from which the other word is derived, and in that translation we get nearer the heart of its suggestive meaning than in any other word in the New Testament.

What is fellowship? Having all things in common. What is it to have fellowship amongst men? To have all things in common with them, What is it to have fellowship with God? Although the statement is a stupendous and amazing one, I am constrained to make it - it is to have all things in common with Him. That word is the one that indicates the perfection of our friendship with God, and my desire this evening is to lead you along a line of quiet meditation as to what our fellowship with God is, for the sake of encouragement for those who are the Lord's, and, perhaps, to win, and woo, and allure those who lack this friendship; that before this service ends they also may become the friends of Jesus, the friends of God, henceforth to know what fellowship with God does really mean.

I shall, therefore, select from these different words two, which mark two phases of the one great fact. I will take that rich word of the Church "communion" - fellowship is communion - and I will take one of those common nouns, rendering it in its abstract fashion, and say the word means partnership. Why make the difference, for they signify the same thing? Because in our use of these words we use them in different relations. We use the word communion in the realm of friendship; we use the word partnership in the realm of business; and for that reason I select these two words, because by so doing we shall come to a better understanding of what this fellowship with God means. Fellowship with God, then, as to privilege, is communion with Him; the actuality of friendship and fellowship with God, as to responsibility, is partnership with Him. I almost hesitate to say this because it is so incomplete and unworthy a method of presentation; but for the purpose of arresting thought and fixing it here, I will say that fellowship with God means we have gone into business with God, that His enterprises are to be our enterprises.

Let us first dwell on our fellowship with God as communion; our fellowship with God as friendship.

I will take three simple illustrations of what friendship is on the earthly level, in order that we may climb to the higher height, and understand what is meant by our fellowship, our friendship, with God.

I propose to give three quotations, which have appealed to me personally, as setting forth most perfectly the ideal of human friendship. I begin with these words from Mrs. Craik's Life for a Life.

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort, of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pour them all right out just as they are, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.

Is not that a perfect description of friendship? How many people are there in company with whom you can pour out everything in your heart, say everything, say anything? Very, very few; for God does not give us many friends in this world; many acquaintances, and we value them all. But that is a perfect description of friendship. With your friend you think aloud, there is no restraint; there is no need to keep up an appearance - the blunter thing would be to say there is no need to play the hypocrite. You pour everything out, knowing this - your friend will sift between the chaff and the grain, and with the breath of kindness will blow the chaff away, and keep only the grain. That is friendship on the human level. And it describes what true friendship with God is - that is on my side of the fellowship. With God it is my privilege to pour out everything that is in my heart, chaff and grain together, saying anything, saying everything I am thinking. But have we learned that lesson? Do not we think altogether too often our conversation with God must be that of carefully prepared and often stilted phrasing? I think we never so grieve His heart as when we attempt to speak thus with Him. Conversing with God reaches its highest level when, alone with Him, I pour out in His listening ear everything in my heart; and the manner in which I have learned that secret, and live in the power of it, is the measure of the joy and strength of my friendship with God.

It is perfectly true, it may be done. I can say, and I do say, when alone with God things I dare not say in the hearing of other men. I tell Him all my griefs, and doubts, and fears; and if we have not learned to do so, we have never entered into the meaning of this great truth concerning fellowship. He will take out the grain, and with the breath of friendship blow the chaff away, only we must be honest when we are dealing with Him. I believe that if your heart is hot and restless about the way God is dealing with you, and you force yourself to the singing of a hymn of resignation, He spurns it; but if you pour out your anger as Martha did when she said, "I know he shall rise in the last day," then He will be patient, and loving, and gentle; and out of the infinite love and gentleness of His heart He will speak some quiet word of comfort.

How much do we know of this fellowship? How much have we practiced talking to God of everything in our souls?

Or take another illustration. Goethe speaking of his friendship for one with whom he held conversation, said this:

For the first time I carried on a conversation; for the first time was the inmost sense of my words returned to me more rich, more full, more comprehensive from another mouth. What I had been groping for was returned clear to me. What I had been thinking I have been taught to see.

Is not that even a more subtle and delicate definition of friendship? Not only can I pour out all the things in my heart; but my friend will say yes, and repeat the thing I have said, and repeat it definitely better than I could ever have hoped to say it.

Here again is the revelation of what friendship with God means to those who know and practice it; and even though this may be a more delicate and wonderful definition, I think we all understand it perhaps a little better, for there have been moments when we have struggled to say things to God, and have heard Him saying them again to us better than we could have said them. Is not that what Paul meant when he said: "We know not what to pray for as we ought"? Is not that the supreme inspiration for high and prevailing prayer - the consciousness of inability to make prevailing prayer? But Paul added: "The Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," that is, He says the things for us, and we know that God is praying prayers we fain would pray, and answering our imperfect articulation with the perfect words that prove His perfect comprehension.

Or once again, Dryden, describing his friendship for his truest friend, said:

We were so mixed up as meeting streams, both to ourselves were lost. We were one mass. We could not give or take but for the same, for he was I, I he.

What is that but Dryden's method of declaring that he and his friend had all things in common? And dare we take that last illustration and use it of friendship with God? Without a doubt. Here we touch the real meaning of fellowship; here we are at the heart and center of the great idea.

Let us now consider the other aspect of fellowship as partnership: mutual interests, mutual devotion, mutual activity.

Fellowship with God means mutual interests: God interested in me, and I interested in God. The overwhelming sense of the heart, as these things are uttered, is that of the inequality of the friendship. That I may be interested in God is understandable; the infinite marvel at first sight is that God can be interested in me. "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? Or the Son of Man, that Thou visitest Him." Fellowship with God means that God is interested in my being, in all its parts; in my spiritual life, in my mental ability, in my physical need. Be not anxious about what you shall eat, or drink, or put on, for your Heavenly Father knoweth you have need of these things.

Now, would to God, brethren, I knew how to say this thing as it ought to be said. Presently, the evening service will be over and the day of worship and rest done, and most of you will be back in the midst of all the everyday things we speak of as the daily task, the common round. But fellowship means that God is as profoundly interested in a man on Monday in his office and store as when in the sanctuary; that there is no part of the life in which God is not interested. I only pause for lack of words to express a thing so sublime and yet so simple. The difficulty in business, the perplexity that burdens the mind - all these things He is interested in. God is interested in me, and in my development! Oh! let us begin where it is always best to begin - interested in the growth of the child. Just as interested as you are, infinitely more, in the physical development. Are you interested in the manifestations of your child's opening mind; in the questions and problems of your child? God is also interested.

I shall not be misunderstood when I say this: that while I personally differ profoundly with what is known as Unitarian theology, I am conscious we owe a good deal to Unitarians if it only be that they have brought us back to the consciousness of the nearness of God to human life, as revealed in the perfect manhood of Jesus. And do not let us forget it for our own comfort, our own strength. Brethren we do not leave our God here when the Benediction is pronounced. Are you dreading tomorrow? Remember, God will be with you there, as profoundly interested in the piece of work your hands have to do, in the problem your mind has to face, as in the sanctuary at this hour.

Yes, but it is equally true I am to be interested in the things of God, in His ultimate ends and His present enterprises; that as His heart and mind are set upon my perfection, upon that ultimate realization when I shall be presented perfect before His throne; so also this fellowship demands that my eyes are to be forevermore upon that goal. If God will find His rest in me when I am perfectly conformed to His will, I should never find my perfect rest until His kingdom is established and His glory perfectly come.

Partnership also means mutual devotion. God's resources are all at my disposal. And now I must speak, I fear, the language that indicates duty - my resources ought all to be at His disposal. His resources are all at my disposal; His Knowledge, His wisdom, His power, are all at my disposal. How small a demand we make of Him! How often we settle down in our own wisdom and neglect asking for aught, while He is waiting to give! How constantly we dishonour Him because we do not appropriate all He has put at our disposal! All His resources at our disposal!

But have we responded to the other fact that all our resources are to be at His disposal? All of them, not a tithe, not tenth. Oh! tithe your possessions if you will, but let your tithing be the evidence that the nine-tenths are also His. The man who takes his income and says, One-tenth is God's and nine-tenths are mine, is a bad Jew, and certainly not a good Christian. All belongs to Jehovah, just as the one day in seven is the symbol of the fact that the seven days belong to Him. All our resources at His disposal. That is the law of friendship, and if He put all His at my disposal, and I keep back part of the price, how unworthy I am of this great fact of fellowship with God.

But partnership means also mutual activity. God accommodating Himself to my weakness and I rising by that accommodation into co-operation with His mind and with His strength. Of these two things, the one to emphasize is that of God bringing Himself to my weakness. "Thy gentleness hath made me great." Do you remember George Mathieson's description of gentleness? He declared that when you speak of a brook running down the hillside, and away through the meadows, as a gentle brook, you are using a false term. He says there is no gentleness in a brook, but that if you watch the mighty ocean when it kisses the golden sands, and does not harm the child at play, then you may speak of gentleness. Gentleness is strength held in reserve, and placed at the service of weakness - "Thy gentleness hath made me great." Why does not God move more quickly? Why does not God accomplish His purpose in the world, and put an end to all the things that fret and puzzle us? Count that the long-suffering of God is His patience. Remember, that it would be possible, as we believe in God, for Him to end everything with a crash. But where would some of us be if He did so? Vulgarity is in a hurry; omnipotence is never in a hurry. All His processes are slow, as they appear to us, because of the gentleness of God. He waits for men. If it be a marvelous thing that Enoch walked with God, it is a more marvelous thing that God walked with Enoch, waiting for him as for a weak little child along the way. Just as you, father - strong man, equal to great speed - walk by the side of your little child that is just beginning to walk, accommodating your strength to the child's weakness, your speed to the child's slowness; so God forever accommodates Himself to our halting pace.

I wonder if that brings to your heart the comfort it brings to mine! I look back over my own life tonight, and see how wonderfully it is true; He is waiting, always waiting. I have kept Him waiting when I ought not, but He has waited even then. Always waiting - so patient with my foolishness, my weakness, my fear. Our fellowship is with God, and fellowship is friendship, and friendship means partnership which, on His part, is the accommodation of His strength to my weakness.

But the gentleness does make us great, and by comparison with the pace we once had, how much quicker the pace is today; and by comparison with what we once were able to do, how much more we are able to do today! Let us not be afraid of boasting in the Lord, but say: "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." He leadeth us everywhere in triumph. When you think of the "all things," and the triumph, in comparison with God's ability, then you will remember again the slowness and weakness; but when you think of what He enables us to do in comparison with what we would have done without Him, then we marvel at the victories and accomplishments, for He is enabling us.

If God accommodates Himself to us in gentleness, He enables us to rise to new activity with Him, in almost overwhelming power.

Our fellowship is with the Father. The fellowship of the friendship that says everything, knowing that He will listen and blow the chaff away; the fellowship that says its best, and hears repeated by the friend the inner meaning of the best; the fellowship that merges into such identity of interest that we discover that God and we are in every deed in partnership with each other. He is committed to all the things that pertain to the fulfilment of my life, while I am committed to all the things that pertain to the fulfilment of His purpose and of His glory.

And yet, brethren, there is another test of friendship which goes beyond these, a more severe test of friendship than the ability to talk and be listened to, than speaking the innermost thought that the friend may repeat it better, than the merging of lives. The supreme test is the ability to say nothing, and be content when nothing is said. Silence is the final proof of friendship, and contentment in silence. When I want a holiday and a true rest, I want a true friend, and the true friend is the one I can sit with in the railway train and say nothing. When I am introduced by courtesy, and acquaintanceship results, and I must always be saying something to my host, that is not friendship. Very valuable for a little while; but in the home of my friend I sit down, and stare at him, and say nothing. He looks right back at me, and says nothing.

My true friend meets me some morning, and there is not the old smile, there is not the cheery word. Now if there be true friendship, I am not disturbed by these things. I am quite sure that this attitude is on the surface, that there is a reason for it. I prove my friendship by respecting his silence, and not seeking for explanation. I think that is the final proof of friendship. The moment you ask your friend to declare his friendship, you reveal your doubt of his friendship. Well, I am afraid we shall have to look to heaven for this friendship, but we have it in God if we will, and it is here we fail.

Is there an hour when you can no longer pray? Then do not pray; and know this - God knows. Of course, if the reason of your inability to pray is that you have violated the Iaws of friendship, that you have sinned against it, then speak with repentance and with tears, until you be restored to joy and salvation. But if there be no conscious reason in your own life, let me quote from the ancient prophecy - "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant? He that walketh in darkness, and hath no light."

Well, now what are we to do, prophet, because we are often there? Let him compel himself to sing? Nothing of the kind. What then? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon the Lord without speaking. God is equal in His love to the strain of a silence that is born of honesty. Are we? Nay, nay; am I? And I shall not answer with public confession, but I do want the thing to search me. That is where I break down. If God does not speak, and there is no light and no revelation, I begin to wonder if He loves me. Oh, cultivate heart-silence.

And, my brethren, God's truest friends are those to whom God is most often silent. Would to God I could comfort some heart with that. The light has gone out, and you are obeying Him, walking in darkness. Do not imagine that is because He cannot trust you; it is a supreme proof of His trust; silence is the last test. Our fellowship is with the Father, so that if we are driven to silence we need not be afraid; so that if He is silent we ought not to be afraid.

It was a great hymn to which Bliss was writing the music when he was suddenly taken from life in a railway accident. They found in his writing-case the music, half-written, to hymn:

I know not what awaits me;

God kindly veils mine eyes,

I'd rather walk in the dark with God,

Than go alone in the light;

I'd rather walk by faith with Him,

Than go alone by sight.

We often sing it. May God make it true to us. That is the final proof of friendship.

"My soul, wait thou upon God," "Oh, yes," we say, "we will do that; it is the easiest thing to do." Nay, it is the hardest thing to do! It is much easier to work for God than to wait for God. It is the waiting that tells and wears the heart. It is suspense that kills. There is relief in the hour of catastrophe, if there has been long waiting. Remember how often He has had to wait for thee. Let us be ashamed that we are keeping Him waiting, and yet let us know that His friendship will bear the test. If in our deepest heart, when there is no song, no psalm, no ecstasy; no joy, we are true; His friendship will bear the strain. And He wants us to be such friends that we can bear the strain of silence and the great test of quietness.

But, my brethren, we need to practice our fellowship. He wants to talk to me of His own secrets, of the meaning of my life, and the way He would have me go; and I believe, brethren, one of the greatest lacks in the present day is that we do not take time to listen. "Oh," you say, "God does not speak to men now as He spoke to Abraham." I do not believe it, I think the true thing to say is that men do not listen as Abraham listened. We do not give God the chance to speak. The practice of fellowship.

I am listening, Lord, for Thee,

What hast Thou to say to me?

Quite easy to sing in a crowd; but we want to learn to practise it in our own individual life; and the practice means that we must take time to speak to Him of our work and His work; of our need and responsibility; of our sorrows and of our joys; of our defeats and of our victories. That is the practice of this fellowship, and we need to take time for these things.

Brethren, in closing, has it ever occurred to you that God is often disappointed that we are so busy doing things for Him, that we have not time to talk to Him? I feel that is true of my own life. I feel increasingly that I have to guard against being so busy for God that I have no time for God Himself; and God created man for His glory. For what is man to be? What is the ideal of human life? That he may enter into the secrets of God, and be the friend of God; and if God's friends never visit Him, never talk to Him, even though they are busily occupied in His work, they are robbing Him. Let us see to it that we take this great word and attempt to enter into the fullness of its suggestion.

Oh, presently we shall be back again facing the problems and perplexities, and doing that piece of work we laid down yesterday, glad to be away from it for very weariness. But now, when we take it up tomorrow, let us remember God is as interested in it as in the song with which we close the Sabbath. And if we will, brethren, that very piece of work - so poor, so commonplace that we desire not to do it - will become transfigured; and we shall find that the least thing of every day is part of God's method for building the city, and winning the world, and bringing in His kingdom.

May it be ours, therefore, not only to hold the doctrine of fellowship with God, but to practice it and enter into all the fullness of the blessing, for His name's sake.