**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 17 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**CHURCHIDEALS: THE CHURCH DISCIPLINED by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican. Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if too of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.*

*Matthew 18:15-20*

*It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not even among the Gentiles, that one of you hath his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and did not rather mourn, that be that had done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, being absent in body but present in spirit, have already, as though I were present, judged him that hath so wrought this thing, in the name of our Lord Jesus, ye being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ. Wherefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

*1 Corinthians 5:1-8*

*I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators; not at all meaning with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous and extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world: but as it is I wrote unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat. For what have I to do with judging them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth? Put away the wicked man from among yourselves.*

*1 Corinthians 5:9-13*

I HAVE READ THE WHOLE OF THESE PASSAGES BECAUSE, IF I may be permitted the phrase, they constitute the classic passages of the New Testament concerning the theme of our morning meditation, that of the discipline of the Christian Church.

We have on previous occasions considered the teaching of the New Testament concerning the constitution of the Church and the government of the Church, and we come this morning to this - shall I say - most difficult and yet most necessary and important subject, of the discipline of the Christian Church.

The discipline of the whole Church, of the catholic Church is necessarily part of the government of the Church, and is therefore the prerogative of the Head of the Church. That in itself is a theme full, not only of interest, but of importance, and I think of great encouragement. It is not, however, the phase of the subject to which I am now proposing to give anything like special consideration. But that we may be reminded of the fact that the discipline of the whole Church is within the government of the Head of the Church, and that He perpetually exercises that government, and maintains that discipline; we have read together the wonderful passage from the book of the Revelation, in which the seer describes the vision of the Lord which was granted to him before the letters for the seven Asian Churches were given to him.

That is the vision of the Head of the Church in the midst of the churches, exercising government and maintaining discipline. There are seven lampstands, representing the individual churches. Christ in the midst of them, by His presence and oversight, makes them the One Church. He holds in His right hand the stars of the churches, and deals in discipline with the churches individually; and so with the catholic Church, through His dealing with the angels, or the messengers, or the stars of the churches.

There in figurative language, full of exquisite beauty, every point of which is suggestive, the Head of the Church is seen maintaining His discipline. That is a vision full of encouragement; If, perchance, some one of us had found ourselves in the midst of one of these Asian churches, say that of Laodicea, we might have been tempted to write an article - if there had been a religious newspaper to receive it - lamenting the fact of the lost discipline of the church, and there would have been an element of truth in the complaint. But the true vision is the vision of John, who saw that if this be so, the Lord is still in the midst, and is dealing with Laodicea. Not by resolution of all the churches in solemn assembly can you deal with Laodicea, but by leaving Laodicea to the government of the living Lord.

Our attention, however, is fixed upon the symbolic and mystical vision of the Master Himself.

It is a night scene, the world's night. The Church is seen in its capacity of witness bearing. The light is shining in a dark place; lampstands and stars are things of the night. But it is a day scene; Christ is the unifying center amid the churches. He is the directing authority, and His face shineth as the sun in its strength. The Church's light in the night is derived from the fact that Christ has made day for her, and her members are children of the day, and walk in the light of His countenance; they are light-bearers for the sake of the night round about them.

But behold the Central Person. He was like, not "the Son of man," as though John here were borrowing the phrase so often upon the lips of our Lord as descriptive of Himself, but something bringing the vision a little nearer to our actual and essential humanity. Not that the earlier phrase removes Christ from our humanity, but that every title that describes Him has for us become associated with unspeakable dignity. And so John says: "I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the candlesticks One like unto a son of man," of our very humanity, but so entirely and utterly and absolutely different that all the description which follows is needed. I do not pretend to have the right finally to interpret the mystic symbolism of this vision; yet there are patent suggestions.

There is, first of all, the symbolism of function. He was "clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle"; and immediately we are reminded of that passage in the prophecy of Isaiah: "And it shall come to pass in that day that I will call My servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah: and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah." He Who walks amid the golden candlesticks is clothed to the foot with a garment, and girt about at the breast with a golden girdle - the garment symbolic of His activity in judgment, and the girdle of His absolute fidelity or faithfulness to God.

Then there is the symbolism of character. "His head and His hair were white as white wool," suggestive of His purity and His eternity; "His eyes were as a flame of fire," suggestive of His intimate knowledge, perceiving, penetrating, so that nothing escapes His observation; "His feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace," suggestive of His procedure, brass forevermore being the symbol of strength, and the furnace that of purification; "His voice as the voice of many waters." I do not know a single statement in the Bible that more overawes my soul than that, "His voice as the voice of many waters," and I never came near an understanding of it until I first saw Niagara. I had been told that I should be overwhelmed with the thunder of Niagara. I was not so overwhelmed, I was overwhelmed with the majestic music which never ceased, and yet never interrupted peace, but created the sense of it through all the district around. Many waters - waters that had run from the hills and through the valleys; the running rivers and the singing waters from far and wide, sweeping at last through the peaceful stillness of great lakes, and then finding final utterance in a perfect harmony as they swept over the height. His voice: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." The rivulets and the rivers and the streams of the past merge to the one music, and become the final speech of the Son; and His voice is as the voice of many waters, the perfect concord of infinite diversity, in the harmony of final speech. "He had in His right hand seven stars," suggesting administration, power, and protection: "Out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two- edged sword," finding verdicts, passing sentences, and uttering beatitudes; "His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength."

Thus the Lord is seen in all the fullness of His glory; presiding over the witness bearing of the Church in the midst of the darkness; perfectly acquainted with all its folly and its failure, with the peculiar sin of this church and the peculiar difficulty of that; knowing the subtle peril which confronts the near, acquainted with the faithfulness of the far, and disciplining the whole. That vision, I repeat, is full of comfort.

Yet beyond that - or shall I say rather, as I would prefer to say - as part of it, there is the responsibility of individual churches concerning the maintenance of discipline within the borders of their own fellowship. As I have tried to think of this subject - and that, let me say, under the personal conviction that one of the weaknesses of Church life today is its lack of discipline - I have been driven to the two passages chosen, because in them I find the suggestion of two lines of discipline for which the local church of Jesus Christ must be responsible. The teaching of these passages is solemn, gracious, and clearly defined. In the first we have the words of our Lord Himself, words in which discipline, in order to the maintenance of perfect fellowship within the church, is dealt with; and then we have words of the apostle - stern words and severe words as they certainly were - in which the church's duty toward individual members in the matter of conduct is brought clearly before us. While I read the whole passage, all that is possible this morning is that we should attempt to see the general line of teaching suggested by each.

Let us, then, first consider our Lord's words, They are so old, so familiar, that this whole congregation could recite them; and yet I was almost startled at a question John Wesley asked after reading them. He said: "If this be the true order of dealing with men who sin against us, where do the Christian people live?" That question is as pertinent this morning as when it was first asked; and it is because I think that inquiry is pertinent that I propose that we should listen to these words of Christ as though we had never heard them,

"If thy brother sin against thee." The true emphasis there is not on the word "against thee," but on the word "sin." The reason for action is not that I have been wronged, but that my brother is harmed, and the fellowship of the Church is injured by his sin. Notice the final words, "thou hast gained thy brother." That is the heart of the whole matter, The purpose of our going to our brother is not that we compel him to confess the fault! No, a thousand times no. That will be the process, the method. The purpose is the gaining of our brother. "If he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." I am to go to my brother, not because my brother's sin has made me suffer, but because my brother's sin is harming my brother. Thou dost not go to thy brother to establish thine own right, to break his will, and bend his neck to own he was in the wrong, but to gain him.

Thus, we become conscious of the supreme matter, which is not on the surface. Supreme matters are never on the surface, The supreme matter is that the discipline of the Church is to be exercised in that which is the essence of the Church's life - love.

But if he will not hear thee, what then? "Take with thee one or two more," The "more" does not refer to the number, but to the persistent action. Do not give him up because he will not hear you. Yet, further, take one or two; and take trusted men, take men of the very spirit of the love which makes you go. And if he will not hear them, then tell it to the Church, the ecclesia - that called out, separated company of men bound together by the bond of the one life in Christ, impulsed by the one law of love, walking in the one illumination of light; tell it to them, that where you have failed they may gain this sinning man. And if he will not hear them, then "let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican." Then he must, if he will persist in sin, in spite of Thy attempt in love to win him, and in spite of Thy persistent attempt as Thou hast taken the one or two with Thee, and finally sought the persuasive power of the Church; if he will persist in sin, then he must be put outside the Church, he must be put outside its fellowship, he must not be suffered to continue to make his fellowship in the Christian Church a garment under which he hides sin. The Church is not to afford sanctuary to any man who persistently, and in spite of every attempt of love, continues in sin.

Now, my brethren, there must be no - forgive the ugliness of my word, I use it deliberately - there must be no shirking of this duty on the part of the wronged person. If your brother in this fellowship or in any fellowship has really sinned against you, because of his sin it is your duty to go and see him, and to deal with him. There is a false charity abroad within the fellowship of the Christian Church, which makes men say: "Oh, yes, this man wronged me, this man sinned against me; the thing he said was a sinful thing, the thing he did was a sinful thing; but I would rather not take any action." We have no right to say that, because there is no purely personal matter among Church members. The whole assembly is affected by the sin of one. The tides of the Church's life are weaker because one in the fellowship continues in sin. The Church's testimony to the neighborhood, to the city, to the nation, to the world, is feebler by reason of that fact. Thus not in the interests of the man alone, although that is always first, but finally in the interests of the fellowship, we have no right to refuse to exercise the discipline of love in the case of anyone who has flagrantly sinned to our knowledge.

Take one brief glance at that more terrible passage in the writings of Paul. The inclusive law which the apostle enunciates is that the leaven is to be purged. Leaven communicates itself, spreads its own corrupting force wherever it comes. Leaven must be purged out of the fellowship. A little leaven - one man sinning, and permitted to remain within that vital fellowship and relationship of the Church - will spread, first unconsciously and insidiously, but most surely throughout the whole Church.

The individual case quoted by the apostle was flagrant illustration, such as in all probability we should rarely, if ever, have to deal with in these days; and I am not going to dwell upon it. But Paul gives us general illustrations. I read them again, not to consider them in detail, but to ask you to notice one or two simple matters. Notice, first, that if some of these forms are not present today, others are; and notice, in the second place, what strange and apparently unequal things, according to our moral sense, the apostle puts very near together. "Fornicators, covetous, idolaters, revilers, drunkards, extortioners."

A man said to me some months ago: "I am a church member, and if I were found drunk on the streets there would be a church meeting. But did you ever know a church meeting held to discipline a man for covetousness?" No brethren, I am not going to deal any further with this list, but let it be very carefully considered.

Leaven is to be purged; the sinning man is to be put outside the fellowship of Christian men and women. The particular case, as we have said, was a most flagrant one, a terrible example of wrong-doing; and the most terrible fact was that the Church had tolerated this man, and allowed him to remain a member of the fellowship. I cannot tell what lies behind this picture in the Corinthian letter; I dare not dogmatically affirm; but because human nature abides so much the same through all the passing centuries, I wonder whether this man was a wealthy man! I wonder whether he was, in that false sense in which we use the word, an influential man! I do not know; perhaps I have no right to libel the Church in Corinth by the habits of the Church today; but this is the truth we have to learn: That for a Church to allow any man who is living in sin, and is known to be living in sin, to retain his fellowship, is to permit leaven to remain, which is corrupting the life of the whole Church, and rendering it weak where it ought to be strong.

Now, how are these sinning men to be dealt with? That man to whom you go, and he will not hear you? He is to be accounted as a heathen man and a publican - that is, he is to be put outside the fellowship. By what authority? "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." The sinning man in Corinth is to be put outside the fellowship of the Church. By what authority? When you are gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus. The whole matter resolves itself into this: that it is in the living presence of the living Christ that discipline is to be exercised.

In the case of the sinning man in Corinth, Paul said he was to be handed over to Satan. He had already given himself over to Satan by his sin. Then the Church must deny him the shelter of her fellowship, that he may work out to finality his own willful sin and his own chosen relation to Satan. The Church - I reverently say in this connection - is to act in harmony with the abiding method of God in dealing with persistent sin. It is to give sin its opportunity to work itself out to finality. It is to create circumstances for the man who persistently sins, which will compel him to make his sin visible; or else to turn back again from the sin, that he may be delivered, as this Corinthian man undoubtedly did. I hasten to add that, for when you read the second letter you have full instructions for receiving him back, for he was filled with sorrow.

It is a solemn method, but I pray you ponder it - it is God's method. Is there lust in your heart? God will put you into circumstances where that thing will be manifested sooner or later. Is Judas a thief? Give him the bag, and he will either demonstrate himself a thief, or be driven back to Him Who can make him honest. The Church of God is not only disloyal to her Lord, and paralyzing herself; she is violating the eternal order of the universe if she permit men to retain their fellowship with her, who are willfully and deliberately continuing in sin.

One other glance at the two stories, taking now the Corinthian one first, and repeating that which for other purposes I have already said. When Paul wrote again to these Corinthians in his second letter, he said: "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be made sorry, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you. But if any hath caused sorrow, he hath caused sorrow, not to me, but in part (that I press not too heavily) to you all. Sufficient to such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the many, so that contrariwise ye should rather forgive him and comfort him, lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you to confirm your love toward him" (2 Cor. 2:4-8). There is no doubt that the same person guilty of incestuous sin is here referred to, and that the discipline exercised had wrought within him repentance of soul. The attitude of the Church toward the one who repents is to be that of readiness to restore, comfort, and love. That we are never to forget.

This becomes far more powerful and forceful when we turn to the words of Christ Himself. If he will not hear the Church, what then? Now we need to be most careful! What then? "Let him be unto thee" - what? "A heathen man and a publican"? No! What then? "A heathen man and a publican"! You certainly cannot print that. The different tone is the evidence of different temper. We can say an orthodox thing in such a way as to make it the most damnable heresy. The supreme business in all this discipline is not that of mechanical activity, but that of spiritual tone and temper. If this man will not hear the Church, what then? Let him be a heathen man, excommunicate him, banish him, damn him? No. That is Rome, and that is hell; and let us be done with it! What then? Let him be the man for whom I came to die; let him be the heathen man, the Gentile, the publican whom the Son of man came to seek and save. That is what he is to become to you. He is to be the man that you will pray for, as you never did before; for whom you will watch, and whom you will follow to the ends of the earth, in order to bring him back, won by the compassion of your love.

That is Christian discipline. Not the anathema that rejoices in its curse, but the wail and the agony and the patience and the sacrifice which never lets this man alone until he is home again.

"Let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican." We must put him outside; we must not allow him to have the shelter of the Church; but the moment he is over the border-line, after him, after him, though the way be rough and long, and it means wounding and suffering; never give up hope - let him be the heathen man and the publican.

When the Church exercises its discipline in that tone, and in that temper, discipline becomes beneficent, gracious, producing purity, not only within her own borders, but in the very lives of those whom it becomes necessary for her to discipline.

The theme is difficult. I can talk freely here. I am under my own vine and fig tree. I hate discipline! I would rather do anything than go and tell a man about his fault. I would rather do anything than have to tell a man he has done something wrong. I always feel I am the culprit. But evil must not be tolerated within the fellowship of the Christian Church. You have no business, if there is someone over there with whom you are not on speaking terms, to remain inside the Church. Out with you, and get it settled! You are paralyzing the fellowship. Evil must not be tolerated; wrong conduct must be judged; the tolerated evil is leavening the whole camp and corrupting the Church of God.

To allow a wrong-doer to continue in Church membership is to inflict wrong on him by giving him a false sense of security. Put him out, in order that he may see the darkness, and that the lurid light of judgment may arrest him. Let him know there is no shelter for a man who persistently sins. Do not lull him into false security by allowing him to stay in the fellowship, and imagine that he may continue in sin that grace may abound. The Church must be pure. No consideration of delicacy, of sensitiveness, of peace, must prevent our loyalty to Christ.

But if, indeed, we thus act in obedience to the pure and holy impulses of the Christ life, that same Christ life is full of tenderness, full of compassion; and, as I have tried to say, will drive us out after those who must be dealt with in discipline.

And let it never be forgotten that repentance is always a door to reinstatement. Let us have no lengthy probation for a sinning brother. Get him in. The Church is not the abode of absolutely perfect men and women - at least, this is not! The Church is a nursery; the Church is a home. Home! That is the most sacred room in your home where the little child is sick, where the aged pilgrim lingers on. The most beautiful thing about home is that it is the place of refuge for the weak. Yes, for those full of trembling, and full of sighing and of sobbing; this is the place. Lest they be swallowed up of overmuch sorrow, lest repentance should become hopelessness, they are to be received.

And the last thing of all, what is it? "I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned I saw ... One like unto a son of man … And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, Fear not."

There is no more difficult or delicate thing awaiting us in our Church fellowship than this of discipline, but amid the golden candlesticks walks the Son of man.

"In His feet and hands are wound-prints, and His side." May He give us of His Spirit that we may dare to deal with sin, and refuse to find it harbor or refuge within our fellowship; and then that we may dare to suffer and die to save the sinning man, that he may find his place again in the fellowship of the redeemed.