**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 18 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**CHURCH IDEALS: THE CHURCH AT WORK by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*From you hath sounded forth the Word of the Lord.*

*1 Thessalonians 1:8*

THIS IS THE CONTINUATION AND COMPLETION OF THE BRIEF series of meditations on the subject of the Church of God according to the New Testament. We have considered the constitution of the Church, its government, its discipline, and now our final theme is that of its work. This is the necessary sequel to all that has gone before.

Given a Church, constituted by the life of Christ communicated in answer to faith by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, governed by the one supreme, final, lonely authority of the ever-present Lord Himself, and disciplined with all tenderness, and yet with all earnestness, the leaven put away, and we have found that which is at once a propagative society, an equipped army, and an instrument of Divine activity.

When we approach the subject of the work of the Church, we are not considering a privilege granted to the Church. We are hardly considering a responsibility devolving upon the Church. We are considering, rather, the necessary and inevitable activity of the Church. If there be failure in those matters which we are about to consider, the reason of such failure will be discovered in failure in some of those things which we have already considered. Either discipline is lax and loose, and the Church tolerates within her borders impure men or women, or continues to manifest the spirit of antichrist in bitterness; or we have sought mediation as between the government of our Lord and ourselves, and so have not perfectly understood His way or His will; or it may be that the Church is a mixed multitude, rather than an assembly of the saints, because, through some loose method of admitting to membership, we have included men and women who do not share the life Divine, even though they sing the songs of the sanctuary. If the Church is failing in her activity, it is in all probability due to some of these causes.

The declaration of my text, this word that Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians, "from you hath sounded forth the Word of the Lord," constitutes a revelation, and the Church referred to by the apostle an illustration of these great matters. In that word and in that particular Church great principles are focused as in camera obscura, or, perhaps, I should say in camera lucida. We see, as in a picture, the great mission of the Church.

Let us first, then, concentrate our attention for a few moments on the picture presented, and then, passing outside, attempt to see in broad outline the more spacious meaning of the service of the Christian Church. This letter was written to the Thessalonian Christians. Writing to this Church, which he describes not as the Church in Thessalonica - that was a later method of address when he wrote to Corinth - but to the Church of the Thessalonians, he deals with fundamental things, both concerning life and service. Service is not dealt with at all fully, but in this passage service is very clearly seen in its relation to life. We read as our lesson the first chapter. Let that suffice for contextual interpretation. At the beginning he addresses these people, and he thanks God for three things, the "work of faith," the "labour of love," the "patience of hope"; and, when at the close of this particular chapter, he is at the end of the introductory portion of his letter, he says that they "turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven." These two descriptions are identical; that at the close of the introduction standing over against that at its commencement, and we have only just to look at them for a moment that we may see the Church, for in the opening and closing words we have the whole fact of Church life revealed to us. Between these opening and closing words is my text.

Take the opening words, "Your work of faith," which does not at all mean the work they were doing in Thessalonica as the result of faith, but that very work of faith whereby they became Christian men, "the work of faith." When men asked our Lord upon one occasion, "What must we do that we may work the works of God?" His answer was, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him Whom He hath sent"; and that is the thought embodied here, "the work of faith." That is the first fact. What is the work of faith? Turn to the concluding description of the introduction, "Ye turned unto God from idols." That is the work of faith.

And, secondly, the "labour of love"; that is the outcome of the work of faith, that which necessarily, inevitably follows it, for the work of faith on the part of man is answered by the gift of life on the part of God; and that life is His life, and that life is love; and therefore, immediately the life of love becomes the inspiration of labour. What is that labour of love? I go to the final description again, "to serve a living and true God"; that is the labour of love.

I turn back again to that first and introductory word, and the final phrase is the "patience of hope"; and that is explained by the final word, "to wait for His Son from heaven."

Thus, in the opening description, I see the inspirational things of the Christian life - faith, love, hope; and the expression of each; of faith, the work; of love, the labour; of hope, the patience. And then, in the final description, that is all stated again in another form.

Now, of course, that might be the whole theme of the morning, but it is not. Between these two descriptions comes my text, "from you" - that is, from the people of faith, and love, and hope, the people who have turned to God from idols, and serve the living and true God, and who are waiting for His Son from heaven, "from you hath sounded forth the Word of the Lord"; and that is inevitable, and that is the whole theme of the morning. Given a church according to the pattern, then there is found the fulfilment of function according to the purpose.

"From you hath sounded forth the Word of the Lord." "Sounded forth"; that is, quite literally, echoed forth. Chrysostom said, "sounded as a clear trumpet note." "Sounded forth." It is not that these people went everywhere preaching; but it is that these people, in their unity of life as a church, became an instrument through which the Word of the Lord was sounding forth. I would like to use another word than "sounded forth," another word than echoed forth, I would like to use this word: "from you the Word of the Lord reverberated"; through the valleys and over the mountains, and away through Macedonia and Achaia, the Word of the Lord reverberated. I learned the value of that word reverberated in this sense from my beloved friend, Dr. Pentecost. When speaking of Moody's missions in this country, he described them as missions which reverberated. When Moody was preaching in Newcastle, the thrill was felt to the southern coast. From you reverberated the Word of the Lord.

Dr. Findlay says that the expression "the Word of the Lord" is the "designation for God's revealed will" in the history of the Old Testament, a fine and perfect definition of the meaning of the phrase there. In the New Testament the phrase means Christ Himself inclusively. Particularly it means, first, always an argument for the Lordship of Christ. The Word of the Lord is the argument for His Lordship, and that is supremely the Word of the resurrection of Christ; and then it is the fact itself of His Lordship; and then the Word of the Lord is the whole system of His ethical instruction, the laws of the Kingdom. The Word of the Lord is the argument that proves Him Lord, that resurrection wherein He was horizoned as the Son of God, and by the vision of which the disciples were born again unto a living hope; the fact that He is Lord of all, and all the laws which govern those who are underneath His Lordship, all that is within the Word of the Lord. That Word of the Lord sounded forth, reverberated through Macedonia and Achaia; and the instrument was that fellowship of man and woman who had turned to serve, to wait - in faith, in love, and in hope.

This, I repeat, is a picture in camera of the Church at work. Let us leave the passage, and take the wider outlook on New Testament teaching; first, concerning the place of the Church in the scheme and the work of God; secondly, the work of the Church in fulfilment of that intention; finally, the power of the Church in the doing of that work.

First, then, the place of the Church in the Divine scheme. Let us attempt to see that scheme by quotation of three well known but apparently separated passages. You will immediately detect the connection, and the purpose for which I bring them together.

"God is love."

"The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father) full of grace and truth."

"The Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."

I now look back again at this particular passage in the Thessalonian letter, and I observe that in its very first verse the apostle writes: "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace." We begin in that salutation with the final result, "the Church of the Thessalonians, the Church which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all"; and then we see the sphere, "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus," the Church in Him Who is love, but in Him Who is love because in Him Who is the unveiling of the love, the revealing of the love.

"God is love." That is a fact altogether too great for human speech or understanding, out of which all the movements for man's uplifting have sprung. I quarrel entirely with the theologian who talks of love as an attribute, Love is essence; and if you would understand it, you must take all the attributes, and see them in their interdependence and mutual inter-relationships. It is the final word. If you at all object to it, it is because you do not understand love. If you are a little afraid that in the saying of a thing like that we are robbing God of the awful fact of His holiness and righteousness, it is because you do not understand love. Yes, but love is love; and "Love is not love that alters when it alteration finds." Love is strong as death, mightier than the grave; love will pause at nothing to make possible the recovery and restoration of the sinner. That is a height I cannot climb; it is a depth I cannot fathom; it is a spaciousness that defies me; but you know it, and I know it. The supreme, the ultimate fact is that God is love, and out of the being, God is love, proceeds the doing, "God commendeth His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

And so naturally, we pass to the next of these three declarations: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father) full of grace and truth." Christ was first the Revealer of the love in its attitude toward man in his need; but he was more, and we fail sadly if we use only the word Revealer about our Lord.

Christ was the instrument of that love, the One through Whom it operated in the activity of redemption. He was the Revealer of an attitude, and the instrument of an activity. The Word was made flesh, pitching His tent among us, by the side of the place where our tents are pitched, in the same campus. May God the Holy Spirit make these things real to us. He pitched His tent among us, by the side of man as Man, not by the side of a Jew as a Jew, or of an Anglo-Saxon as an Anglo-Saxon. By the side of a Jew, yes, thank God; by the side of an Anglo-Saxon, yes, thank God; and in each case because by the side of man as Man. What for? To unveil an attitude and to accomplish an activity.

Thus, finally, we have the last of the three declarations: "The Church, which is His Body" - His instrument, as He is the Instrument of God - "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all," as it pleased the Father "that in Him should all the fullness dwell." The Church is the Body of the Christ, that through which Christ is still active, that through which God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.

The Church, being the Body, at the disposal of the Lord, the Word of the Lord will reverberate in the thunders of an infinite music over all nations and continents and peoples.

What, then, is the inclusive and complete work of the Church? It is that of the proclamation of the Word of the Lord. From you hath sounded forth the proclamation of the Word, the fact of the Lordship of Christ. Is not this the need, the supreme need, the differentiating need, that which distinguishes itself from all others? Yes, it is perfectly true, thank God, and we are coming to see it more clearly; that He has left no nation or kindred or class absolutely without light; that there are gleams of light wherever man is found, and we are coming to understand that the message of the missionary is fulfilment of the gleam by correction of the surrounding darkness, and by presentation of the final Light. All that is true. Yet there is a distinction, a separating quality, that makes our evangel the one and only evangel; it is that of the Lordship of Christ. Christ is Lord by virtue of His absolute supremacy in human life; but Christ is Lord by a victory won in the tragedy of His overwhelming passion, and Christ is Lord supremely by the triumph of His resurrection from among the dead. Is not that what the Church is in the world to proclaim? When the Lord Christ is thus known and proclaimed, the laws of His Kingship and the value of His supremacy are revealed. Our minds are dwelling upon all the ends of the earth; but let us come back for a moment to a narrower outlook. Mr. Gladstone once said that the severest malady threatening England was its loss of the sense of sin; and every preacher knows that to be true, if he be a preacher of the Word. Is not the reason partly to be found in the fact that we have not with sufficient emphasis and intelligence preached Jesus as Lord? We have assumed His Lordship, but have we preached His Lordship? I do not know that I am making clear the thing in my mind. I will try again. I believe there are thousands of young people in our land today who will never tremble when you preach the Ten Commandments. The reason is not now to be discussed; I state the fact, I do not think you can find man or woman of intelligence, if you can but bring them into the actual presence of this Lord Christ, but that they will say, "If that be the meaning of human life, then, oh God, how have I failed!" I am talking out of my own experience. I have to repeat some things; I will repeat this. I never trembled under Mount Sinai in my life; but oh, when I measure my life by His life, and listen to the words that pass His lips, and see the central inspiration of the life of my Lord and Christ, then I put my hand upon my lips and cry, I am unclean. The proclamation of His Lordship is needed in England, where the Gospel is stultified, because men think they know it, and where preachers are afraid to preach it in its simplicity, because they imagine congregations know it; it is needed also for the ends of the earth. He is Master of all the forces destroying, He Who death by dying slew, He Who hell in hell laid low is the great Victor over all the forces that destroy. That is the Word of the Lord.

But the Word of the Lord is not only to be proclaimed as a theory by the Church; and it will never reverberate in thunder by such proclamation as a theory. It must be vindicated within the Church. The life of the Church must witness to the truth of the Gospel the Church preaches, in service definitely and positively rendered, and finally in sacrifice.

"In His feet and hands are wound-prints, and His side"; and, my brethren and sisters in Christ, whether it be here or there, we only begin to preach the Word of the Lord, to pro- claim it with power, as there enter into our work the elements of travail and sacrifice.

Finally, a word concerning the power of the Church for her work. What is the Church's power for service? I want to begin and state it thus, passing, presently, perhaps to a deeper note. I do not know that it is deeper, but I will put first something which is not always put first. What is the power of the Christian Church? The spirituality of her own life. Not the power of the Spirit bestowed, but the Spirit, the power, working through. I make the distinction carefully. I might, if I were sitting down quietly with some of you, admit that there is actually very little distinction; but I think we make a great distinction, because we put it in the wrong way. Not the power of the Spirit bestowed, but the Spirit, the one Power, working through the Church; the Church thus becoming, not the Medium only, but in her very life the operative power, and in that sense the Medium of His work. Not the power of the Spirit bestowed, as though the Spirit bestowed some power apart from Himself, and gave it to us, a stored dynamic force that we take and use until it runs out; but the Spirit Himself, resident within, molding, fashioning, shining out, moving through; that is the power of the Church.

Yes, but how shall we know whether we have that power or not? The Church is constituted by the Spirit. It is by the Spirit's baptism into life that men come into the Church. The Church is governed by Christ, Who interprets His will through the ministry of the Spirit. The Church can only be disciplined when the Church is living in that Spirit, Who is at once the Spirit of love and of light.

So I go back to my position, and abide by it. The power in itself is the true spiritual life of the Church. Give me a church anywhere, two or three, units, tens, hundreds, thousands - which matters nothing, for in the mathematics of heaven one shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight - but give me a little company of men and women, who have seen the one Lord, and have exercised in Him the one faith, and have received the one baptism of the Spirit, and are now living in answer to the inspiration of that life, and obeying its impulse. There is God's instrument, and from that Church will sound forth the Word of God. The power in itself is that of the spiritual life of the Church, and the Church is only spiritual as the Holy Spirit un-resisted, unquenched, un-grieved, has His own highway through all its membership.

And yet again, if that be the power in itself, observe the power in its working. I have nothing other to do than to go back to those descriptive phrases that we dwelt upon by way of introduction. How does this power of the Spirit operate for the sounding forth of the Word of the Lord? In obedience, in service, and in perfect confidence. Obedience - the work of faith, ye turned to God. Service - the labor of love, ye serve the living God. Confidence - the patience of hope, ye wait for the Son from heaven. There is the threefold inspiration of faith and love and hope; and waiting for the Son. Where the expression is lacking, it is because the inspiration is absent; and where the inspiration is absent, the expression is lacking.

What, then, is the law of power in the Church for the accomplishment of her work? First, that of passivity, the cessation of all self-controlled effort; secondly, an entire yielding to the interpretations and energies of the Spirit of God; finally, activity going, speaking, doing.

First, passivity, the cessation of all self-centered effort. A man may deal with theory, and miss the whole impact of the truth. I am convinced, brethren, that during the past five and twenty years one of the greatest hindrances to the Church's progress has been her ceaseless fussiness in attempting to devise new methods for doing God's work. We are always trying by our own wit and wisdom to find some new method. Let us be done with it. What shall we do? Yield ourselves to the interpretation of the Spirit of God and to the energies of the Spirit. Let the Spirit of God have His way. That is where we fail. The Spirit is the Spirit of light; He flings a light upon our pathway, and indicates that which is God's will for us in service; and we are afraid, the Cross lies there; we draw back. The Spirit is the Spirit of love. He touches us with a sacred impulse to help that degraded man or woman whom we see on the highway, an impulse to give up the quietness and the comfort of the home life, and the home worship for the dark and desolate places of the earth; and we shrink back - the Cross is there. And because we have not yielded to the Spirit in passivity, we fail; and we attempt to make up for our failure in devotion, by finding out new methods of helping God. If we will only let the Spirit have His way with us, if we will walk where He indicates, and do what He says, counting no cost, holding back no alabaster box of ointment for ourselves, then, in the rush of the fire and the sweeping of the new force, far more than half of our mechanical activities will be burned up; but we shall be out upon the highway of God's great enterprises in the world, going because we are driven by this great Spirit in-dwelling, speaking, perchance, not with the education and the elegance and eloquence of old, but in power, which matters far more, doing - yes, I am bound to say it, though it hits my heart - not half so many things, but a few things better. And then - ah, then - the Word of God will reverberate, will sound forth.

My brethren, the Church of God thus at work is safe-guarded against heresy. I am not going to describe any particular heresy; but the Church, obedient to the Spirit, answering the Spirit's interpretation of the Christ, cannot go far astray; and a Church thus at work is safeguarded against false motive in service, false initiations, false methods, false aims; safeguarded against all fear and panic, against all weakness. The Church thus constituted, thus governed, thus disciplined, and thus at work, is a Church to which three great things are forever guaranteed: first, vision, and then virtue, and finally victory. She will see; she will have strength to move on to the doing of the thing seen, and victory will follow wherever she goes.

I close this brief series of four meditations on the Church with this word. After all is said and done, the individual responsibility is the only one for each individual man or woman; and, therefore, why should I say any more to you? Nay, rather let me get away somewhere from human eyes, and have this out with my Lord.

Am I of this Church? Have I been born anew from above? Do I know the life of God in my own soul by the touch of the Holy Spirit? If not, however much I admire the ethic, however readily I agree to the beauty of the example, I am not of this Church. I may be on the borders, but I am not in; though I may have had clean water sprinkled upon my brow, or been plunged beneath the water, though I may have had hands placed upon my head, or my name passed by solemn church meeting, I am not of the Church, I am not of the Christ.

And as to government, am I under the Lordship of Christ? No, I am not going to make confession here; but I must ask the question. I must ask it anew. A man is bound to go back at times to searching, to wonderment as to why there has been failure, and why not greater success.

Discipline, have I been eager to discipline the man with a mote in his eye, while there is a beam in mine? God help me. Am I an instrument so ready to the Lord, that from me the Word of God is not simply heard - sounding brass, tinkling cymbal, a clang, and a clash, and a clatter, God deliver us - but as reverberating music is sounding, bidding lonely watchers look up and hope, and wounded souls listen, and stricken men crowd up and hope, and wounded souls listen, and stricken men crowd to my Lord? So may we investigate along, somewhere ere the sun set, as to whether we are fulfilling our responsibility in the Church of God.