**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 26 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE BEGINNING OF SIN by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

I DO NOT PROPOSE TO TAKE ANY ONE VERSE IN THIS CHAPTER as text. It is complete in itself for all that it is intended to teach, and it is required as a whole if we are to understand that teaching. Of course it is impossible now to deal with all the details of this story, and for the purpose of this meditation it is not at all necessary that we should do so.

This chapter is supremely interesting because it is the first in the Divine library on the subject of sin. The fact of the existence of evil has already been thrice recognized in the first two chapters.

In the desolation described in the second verse of chapter one, we have a recognition of the presence of evil in the universe; - "the earth was waste and void." In the charge to Adam, to keep the garden, as well as to dress it, there was recognition of the presence of evil, not in the world, not on the planet, but in the universe. Finally, the sacramental symbol, the tree in the midst of the garden, was the indication of the possibility of disobedience, a recognition that the fact of human will admits the possibility of wrongdoing.

Thus we have seen the adumbration of evil resting on the first pages. The Bible does not begin with anything perfect, save that in the first verse it does indicate a perfect God, and a perfect primal creation.

Now we come to the chapter which deals with the beginning of sin in human history; and it is a microcosmic revelation in that it shows not merely the source of the poison, but also its method, its activity, and its issue.

We must remind ourselves again that we are looking at these things in the atmosphere of simplicity and not of complexity. I attempted to emphasize that by way of introduction last Sunday evening, when we considered the garden story, and saw man, perfect but not perfected, as to his being, his nature, his vocation, and his limitation. In all these stories we are away behind the complexities of life in the midst of which we live, dealing with the simplicity of elemental human character and nature.

We shall attempt to gather our thoughts around the three personalities revealed in this chapter; the personality of God, the personality of man, and the personality of Satan. These are taken for granted in the story that is told.

We are introduced in the beginning of the chapter to a clearly defined, yet mysterious personality, wholly evil, described here as the serpent. Then we are again face to face with man as we saw him in our previous study. And here also we are in the presence of God, described first by the name Elohim, and then by the title Jehovah Elohim.

Gathering our meditation around these three personalities, Satan, Man, and the Lord God, we shall attempt to examine the teaching of the story concerning the Satanic method; the Human experience; and the Divine attitude and activity.

Satan is here introduced to us as a personality doubly disguised. Neither the beast nor the Angel is clearly seen. "The serpent" appearing to Eve was not a snake in our sense of the word. "The serpent" means "the shining one," and the suggestion is that this temptation came through the medium of a person, new to the one being tempted; a person arresting, commanding attention, neither an angel of light in all the full glory of the revelation, nor wholly a beast of the field; but some strange personality in which there was the disguise of the beast and the disguise of the angel.

Those of you who care to follow the study, will take time to trace the word serpent, or shining one, through the Scriptures; noticing especially what light the New Testament flings upon it, and discovering the harmony of the teaching which the Bible gives concerning this person.

It is enough for our present purpose that we recognize that there came into that garden scene at which we looked last Sunday evening, one who was neither angel nor beast; a living one, for that is the real meaning of the word beast, not necessarily beast in our sense of the word, but a living one, somehow of the material, of that creation beneath man and under his government; and yet shining with a splendour that suggested other powers, subtle and supernatural.

Whatever the appearance may have been we are supremely interested in watching the method of the enemy. First, he questioned the goodness of God; secondly, he denied the severity of God; finally, he slandered the motive of God.

The enemy questioned the goodness of God, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" What I am about to say may appear a paradox, but hear me through. The question was not an inquiry; it was rather an attempt to convey a suggestion to the mind of the woman, by the method of interrogation. The thought suggested was that in that sacramental symbol of limitation, there was, on the part of God, an unkind withholding of something which might have been possessed by man. In the wilderness, long millenniums afterwards, I see another Man being tempted; and I hear this as the first temptation, "If Thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." We seem here to be very far away from Eden. I am glad of this, because it reveals the fact that temptation comes in varied garbs to man, but that essentially it is ever the same. Coming to the wilderness to the Son of God, the second man, the last Adam, the tempter said, "If Thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread"; and the suggestion was that if He were the Son of God, God ought to feed Him, that God was withholding something that He ought to have; He was asked to use the power of His Sonship to change the condition in which God had placed Him for the moment.

Thus, the first suggestion of the Tempter is that God is unkind, that restriction is unkind. This was not declared, not announced, not affirmed, but it was suggested. That is always the beginning of temptation. For the purpose of immediate illustration, instead of thinking over the vast expanse of diversified human life as we know it today, let us think back within our own personal experience, and we shall find that whatever form the temptation of sin takes, at the heart of it there is suggested the idea that restriction which forbids the thing we desire is unkind on the part of God. That is the first suggestion of evil.

Evil is ever inconsistent. This is part of its method. A most contradictory word follows immediately. The woman said to the serpent "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." To that the Tempter emphatically replied, "Ye shall not surely die." If in the first movement, I have the questioning of the goodness of God, in the second I have the denial of the severity of God. The affirmation is a distinct negative of the emphatic declaration of God, made to this man when He put before him the sacramental symbol of the limitation of his liberty. This was a minimizing of sin, a declaration that disobedience will not have the effect which God has said it will have; and consequently, it was a minimizing of the value of holiness.

Thus while the first suggestion was that restriction is unkind; the second was that restriction is unreal. First, God is not good in that He deprives you of anything. Secondly, God is not severe, He will not punish you as He said He would if you take of the fruit of the tree.

Come to the wilderness again, and again the suggestion seems entirely different, while yet it is the same, "Cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee." In one case; Take this fruit and eat it and you shall not die. In the other; Cast Thyself down, and Thou shalt not die. It is the very same temptation in its central meaning, though the method of declaration is different, that there can be no punishment as the result of trafficking with God and disobeying His clearly defined law.

Finally; - and here we reach the heart, the most awful revelation of evil - the motive of God is slandered; "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." One almost trembles even to interpret so evil and awful a suggestion, yet this is it. It was the suggestion of selfishness and jealousy on the part of God. It was the suggestion that God was keeping man outside his own kingdom.

The motive of God was thus slandered as the enemy declared in effect; He knows that you will be as gods knowing good and evil; He is jealous, He would keep you out of your kingdom.

I come again to the wilderness and hear the Tempter saying, "Here are the kingdoms of the world; You ought to have them all; You ought to be able to possess them; but You cannot possess them because of Your loyalty to the will of God, because of Your poverty and Your lowliness, and Your refusal of the things that other men are seeking. Behold, I will give Thee the kingdoms of the world from which Thou art being kept by abiding within the law of Thy God." Again the principle is exactly the same.

The appalling thing is the element of truth in every lie that evil tells. In this third chapter of Genesis, I see the supreme illustration of that which Tennyson sang,

A lie that is all a lie may be met with and fought outright;

But a lie that is partly truth is a harder matter to fight.

Take each of these temptations, "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" That was the truth, but it was the truth so framed and presented, with veiled suggestion, that it was the most monstrous lie. "Ye shall not surely die"; that was true, but it was the interpretation of death on the level of the material; man sinning, did not immediately die after the fashion in which men use the word; that is physically only. "You shall be as gods, knowing;" you shall come into a kingdom from which God has excluded you. Directly as they sinned they came into the kingdom, and they knew.

Therein is revealed the subtlety of temptation. The Satanic method is that of uttering a partial truth, and suggesting a lie; of seducing men, by the uttering of a half truth, to yield themselves to that which is of the very nature of evil.

All this is testified to by common human experience. The first definite step of wrong to which we can look back, that act in which we overstepped the boundary within which we had walked in childhood, was taken after inward thought. That thought took the form which inspired to outward action of evil when we imagined that it was unkind of God to deny us something which we desired. Then followed the thought that violation of the law would not result in punishment. Finally, we persuaded ourselves that God was keeping us out of something which by right belonged to us, that He was unjust as well as unkind. In answer to such suggestions we acted in the hope of gaining our kingdom.

I hold in my hand a little book unveiling the soul of a man who gave himself to all the courses of evil. The tragedy of the book is that I am afraid it was not an honest book, as subsequent events proved. This man wrote:

I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste an eternal youth gave me a curious joy. Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation. Desire at the end was malady, or madness, or both.

"I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation." As though he had said, there were things from which God shut me out by His law. I felt I had a right to enter into those things, and I went to the depths! And what depths they were; depths not to be named in the company of clean men and women. That was an illustration of the out- working in the nineteenth century of this selfsame principle. Here is the method of Satan. It is unkind of God to keep you from those things that lure you. God is not severe after all; you will not die if you disobey. You have a right to know, even though you break His law to gain knowledge. These were the suggestions of evil.

Intimately related to these and immediately following upon them, we find the human experience. I shall waste no time in distinguishing between the sin of the woman and the sin of the man; they were one. There are three things at which we shall look. First of all the sense. What was felt by this human being? How did temptation appeal? We have, so far, been looking at the temptation as it came from the enemy. Now let us try to feel the sense, the experience of the woman under temptation.

The woman saw three things; that it was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes; and that it was desirable in order to make one wise. Let me interpret the story of Genesis by the language of the mystic Apostle John. The lust of the flesh; she saw that it was good for food. The lust of the eyes; she saw that it was pleasant to the eyes. The vain-glory of life; she saw that it was to be desired to make one wise. That was the threefold human emotion under the spell and power of which man capitulated in the presence of temptation.

The lust of the flesh; good for food. Get to the wilderness and watch the Man being tempted once again; "Man shall not live by bread alone." Pleasant to the eyes; the lust of the eyes. "It is written Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"; Thou shalt not live by sight, but by faith.

"To be desired to make one wise"; the vain-glory of life. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve," was the answer to the glamour of the kingdoms of the world, the vain-glory of life.

I have referred to the wilderness, for there we see temptation refused; but the human sense was the same; good for food, pleasant to the eyes, desirable to make one wise. There is no need for me to make application. Stand out in this great city and you have the whole picture; the lust of the flesh; the lust of the eyes; the vain-glory of life; that is how man is attracted. Let James put all the story in brief words. "Lust, when it hath conceived …" That is the sense.

The second matter demanding attention is that of the act, the taking of the fruit. It was volition, acting in answer to the impulse of sight, wholly within the realm of the material. It was an act impelled by sight; by that which contradicts faith, or professes to be independent of it; it was an action of the will, inspired by wit, wisdom, cleverness, observation, sight.

It is wonderful how men can be deceived by their own cleverness. It is perfectly certain that two and two make four, but it may be unsafe to act upon that fact. If you are making your calculation, and say that two and two make four, your finding may be a blasphemy and a sin. Is it not true, then, you ask? Certainly; but supposing you ought to have said, two and two, and one; you have forgotten a quantity, failed to take account of another number; then your logical accuracy is your soul's damnation. You ought to have found five, and not four. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry; but God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee." "But God," that was the One he had forgotten. He said, two and two make four; and he tried to live upon the four, when it ought to have been five; the One was the forgotten principle. That demonstrated the madness of living by sight. That is the story of Eden. Volition by sight; action impulsed by the cleverness of human calculation; turning from faith in the forgetfulness of the supreme One, Who makes the quantity in your clever four, the eternal five.

That volition by sight on the basis of the material expresses itself in rebellion against God on the level of the spiritual; and finds as the result life passing under the bondage of Satan. That was the first act of sin. Let us again take James' word. In dealing with the sense we said "Lust, when it hath conceived." In dealing with the act we say "beareth sin."

Then we come to the issue of it all, the first issue was fear. That is where fear comes into the Bible. What was fear? In this case and always, it is lack of spirit-strength. They were afraid, afraid of God! Why? Had God changed? No, they had changed. In the mystery of that spiritual life which was the essential, they had lost their knowledge of God, and consequently, they had become afraid.

Then followed shame. To me this is a very remarkable word, "they knew that they were naked." Let us disabuse our minds of some very paltry and incidental interpretations of that statement. They became conscious of the material, conscious of the flesh, and were ashamed of it; because they knew that in that act they had violated the spiritual. "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" What made you conscious supremely of the material, and in your consciousness of it, what generated in your mind the sense of shame? That sense of shame is the one note of music here. It is the one gleam of light. If there had been no shame, how utterly hopeless it would have been ever to hope for their redemption. The shame is the evidence that there was still the opportunity for return. It was the sense of the material, and the fact that they had yielded to the temptation, surging through the soul. They were naked, and they tried to cover up the material because they had become ashamed of the sin.

The final fact was that of their utter and hopeless dejection. Not satisfied with the coverings they had woven for themselves of the leaves of the garden, they hid themselves amid the trees of the garden when they heard the sound of God going in the wind of the day.

For food the hand was stretched out, and in the grasping of that forbidden fruit there was loss of spiritual strength, which issued in fear. For that which was pleasant to the eyes the sin was committed, and immediately there surged upon the soul, not the pleasantness of life, but the shame of life. After wisdom the mind stretched out, and instead thereof there came the knowledge of good and evil experimentally, which was conviction of the most appalling madness and folly. Again we turn to James, and complete his declaration, "Sin bringeth forth death."

Briefly, let us notice the Divine action as answer to the Satanic method. The first suggestion was that God was not good, that He was unkind. God vindicated His goodness in His administration of justice. The very fact of His inquisition is a revelation of His goodness; He came to their level, and talked to them, asked them questions, allowed them to talk to Him, made opportunity for them to speak out the story of their wrong. The method of the inquisition traced the sin back to its source. I suppose we are always inclined to feel contempt for the man as he attempted to place the blame upon the woman, and even upon God, for the emphasis of his answer is this, "the woman whom Thou gavest me"; and we have the same feeling for the woman when she tried to plead her own weakness, "the serpent beguiled me." Ere you indulge in contempt for Adam or Eve, remember that God asked the questions and accepted the excuses, When in reply to God's question Adam named the woman, He turned to her and asked, "What is this thou hast done?" and when she replied, "The serpent beguiled me," He immediately turned to the serpent. In the form of whatever living creature he had disguised himself, that beast was then and there changed in its material fashion, and forevermore became a snake. You remember Ruskin's description of the snake, "that running brook of horror." Whenever men look upon a snake they feel the revulsion that sin ought to make in their minds. Sentence was pronounced at the center of the wrong. Yet there was a sentence upon the woman, full of grace; "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." The crowning glory of her being, motherhood, was to be sanctified through sorrow, travail, and pain. Do not let us be afraid of looking at that. What holy sanctification has come into the world, and been maintained therein by the awful and appalling mystery of motherhood through pain. There was a sentence on man, full of purpose; the highest dignity of thy being, toil, shall be gained through stress and strain and weariness. Side by side with that most sacred thing of all, the sanctity of the pains of motherhood, is the sanctity of the weariness of toil. If these things had been unnecessary to perfect men and women, they were necessary for the remaking of imperfect men and women. So that His severity was exercised in patience, and the direct lie of evil was answered.

Finally, His motive was unveiled in mercy. The devil had suggested selfishness as His motive, and that He answered in the word that prophesied the ultimate triumph through travail; the seed of the woman "shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel"; that was the prophecy of the ultimate good of the creature, and it revealed the love that motived the whole government of God. Such was the Divine activity in the presence of sin.

This is the Bible account of the origin of the sin and sorrow of humanity. If you reject it, then what? From the facts of sin and sorrow and suffering you cannot escape. How do you explain them? Do you tell me that all I see in the world of sorrow and suffering and sin are parts of an upward movement; that gradually humanity is rising superior to these things and will leave them behind? Then, my masters, what an appalling and unutterable beginning there must have been! I cannot write over the beginning, if the beginning was such as is necessary to that view, "In the beginning a good God." I must put away the idea of good altogether, and write God down a monster. But again; if you tell me that this is part of an upward movement, where are the evidences in individual or national life of a natural upward movement apart from external influence brought to bear? I affirm there are no evidences. Wherever you find an individual rising, a tribe rising, a nation rising, it is not the result of a natural movement from within; it is the result of some external touch of quickening and redeeming power.

If I accept this story, what then? I have found the theory corroborated in all human experience, absolutely corroborated in my own. I know temptation did not come to me by way of a tree, because I do not live in a garden. I saw no shining one taking the form of a beast, or beast transfigured into the form of a shining one. Yet the temptation came in the same way, by the suggestion that God was unkind, that He was not severe, that He was not fair. My heart was persuaded to imagine that because I could not do this and could not go there, I was being kept out of some kingdom that I ought to be able to enter.

So temptation came, and the sense which resulted in my capitulation to the temptation, was the same, good for food, pleasant to the eyes, to be desired to make one wise; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the vain-glory of life.

It is the same story. You can change the garments and the environment, and the language, but the facts abide. The story is true to life in London today.

If this story be true, herein is the vindication of the Christian evangel. Herein is the inspiration of all Christian endeavor. Man as we meet him is not as God meant him to be. He is what he is as the result of temptation and sin. Yet thank God, over all the darkness and sorrow and sadness there is the word of God, the seed of the woman shall at last crush the head of the serpent and master evil, even though in the process His own heel be wounded.

Tonight we are not looking on in hope, we are looking back to accomplishment. We have seen the seed of the woman crushing the head of the serpent, to the bruising of His heel; we know the perfect Victor, Who is the perfect Saviour.