**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 09 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE GREAT COMMANDMENTS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, Master, Which is the great commandment in the law? And He said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hangeth the whole law, and the prophets.*

*Matthew 22:35-40*

IT WAS A DAY OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN THE FINAL MINISTRY of Jesus. The last hours of His life were approaching. His enemies were closing about Him. The hour and power of darkness were at hand. Yet never did He stand out more clearly in matchless wisdom than in this dark hour. They had come to Him with the challenge of unbelief, questioning Him as to His authority, and He had replied to their inquiry in such wise as to silence them. They had come to Him in the spirit of political worldliness asking Him whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or not. Compelling them to produce the current coin of the realm, the Roman denarius, He had uttered a word so full of philosophy that it abides until this time as the central teaching for all men who would relate the affairs of state to the affairs of the Kingdom of God. The rationalistic Sadducees had come with their pre-eminently foolish question concerning marriage and the resurrection, and He had so answered them as to rebuke them and silence them - or to be quite accurate and to translate the Greek word literally, the Sadducees were gagged, and asked Him no more questions.

Then it was that the lawyer spoke to Him, asking Him the most subtle of all the questions, "Which is the great commandment?" The Greek word translated "which" in this question is qualitative rather than quantitative, so that what the lawyer really asked was, What is the nature of the great commandment?

On an earlier occasion, according to Luke, a lawyer had come to Jesus, asking Him, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and the Master had replied, Thou knowest the commandments. "What is written in the law? How readest thou?" The lawyer had answered in these very terms, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Jesus replied to him, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." It may be that the question of the lawyer in the present text was the outcome of that earlier episode. The question was simply, What is the nature of the great commandment, as though there were no difference of opinion as to which was the great commandment. The wisdom of our Lord's reply is revealed in the fact that He quoted from the law, for these words are found in the law of Moses. In Deuteronomy we have the first, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," and in Leviticus, the second, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Thus our Lord replied to the question by quoting the commandments, and the very two that a lawyer on a previous occasion had quoted as summarizing the whole law. To that quotation He added the declaration, "On these two commandments hangeth the whole law, and the prophets."

The Lord's answer was of the very nature of the question. The question was, What is the nature of the great commandment? Our Lord's reply was not, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; but Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. If you suggest that this is a distinction without a difference, I would point out that it is a difference between quantity and quality. All the heart is quantity; the whole heart is quality. Just as in the prophecy of Malachi it is not, Bring all the tithes into the storehouse; but Bring in the whole tithe. It is possible for a man to bring all the tithes, to be mechanically, mathematically accurate in his giving; and yet he does not bring the whole tithe unless he bring in the true spirit and for the true reason, thus introducing into the activity and attitude the spiritual element, which is the supreme. Our Lord does not merely ask for all of anything; He asks for the whole. The question was qualitative, What is the nature of the great commandment? The answer was qualitative: obedience must be qualitative. Speaking of the essential, spiritual man, the Lord declared that he must love with all the complex instrumentality of personality, with the whole heart, life, mind; heart, life, mind constitute instrumentality. Personality was addressed, and it was claimed that love must be with all the instrument, and that in the entirety of each part.

We turn from that examination of the question as to its true nature, and from that brief and hurried examination of the method of our Lord's answer, that we may consider this declaration of Christ for our own profit. We shall therefore consider, first, these great commandments themselves; second, these great commandments in relation to ourselves, ending with a final word on the Master's last declaration that on these two hang all the law and all the prophets.

The first commandment is that man is to love God. We immediately find ourselves face to face with a difficulty. Some people are quite honest enough to confess to the difficulty. Can a man love God? To some of you I apologize for the question; it sounds almost absurd! Yet, on the other hand, there are those who quite honestly say, I cannot love God. I think the difficulty is the result partly of misunderstanding of the meaning of love, and partly, and perhaps more immediately, the result of the fact that the men who say it do not know God. To know God is to love Him. One of the old writers has said, "Love consists in approbation of and inclination toward an object that appears to us as good." Whether that covers the whole ground I am not prepared now to discuss, but it does cover the ground of this particular question as to what loving God really is. Loving God consists in approbation of and inclination toward Him as we know Him to be good. Love of God must therefore be the outcome of knowledge of God. I can understand that the man who has no knowledge of God, no understanding of Him, no conception of God other than that which speaks of infinite intelligence and infinite power working together in the universe, will have no love for God - respect, reverence, awe, fear, yes, but not love. No man loves God who discovers Him only through nature. According to Paul, men are not left without witness concerning God, even though they have never had any direct revelation from God; for in the things that are created, said the apostle, man may discover the wisdom and divinity of God, man may discover, that is, the intelligence and the strength of Deity. As has often been pointed out, that truth has been reaffirmed within the last generation by the great physical scientists, who have admitted that there is to be discovered throughout nature a double-faced intelligence and power in mysterious and wonderful co-operation. But love is never born in the heart of man toward God by that discovery. It is only when we turn from nature, not to neglect its message, not to undervalue the speech that day utters to day and night proclaims to night, but to listen for another voice and to hear what God says to man, not through the mediation of nature, but through the mediation of the Son of His love, that men come to such knowledge of God that love is created in their hearts.

Men are suffering today from mistaken notions of God. I am not speaking of the heathen. I am not even speaking of the great indifferent masses who are outside the churches. There are scores of people who are worshiping God reverently, and yet do not love Him. The reason is to be found in the fact that their conception of God is a false conception. They think of Him as a King, jealous with a jealousy that is entirely human and earthly, capricious in His dealings with the human heart, and stern and holy with the holiness that is the essence of cold morality, forevermore watching men only as the custodian of some eternal principle of righteousness, and waiting to punish the man who breaks the law. I for one could have no love for such a God. I do not believe any man can love such a God.

What, then, is God according to the Biblical revelation? The whole answer is contained in one of the shortest sentences in the Bible: "God is love " When we have read the sentence, there are two things we need to do: first, to observe that the whole Biblical revelation harmonizes with the declaration; and, second, to interpret the declaration by the whole Biblical revelation.

To see how the Biblical revelation harmonizes with the declaration, I begin at the beginning. I open the first page of the first book and I have declarations full of light, full of poetry. When I say they are full of light and poetry I do not mean they are untrue. The story of the first chapters of Genesis is the story of processes by which a temporal dwelling place was prepared for man. I think there is another unwritten history of this world behind that history of Genesis. Forgive me for repeating that which I have so often said here: we have no story of creation in Genesis except in one sentence, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." All that follows is not the story of creation, but of restoration. I see the orderly process, ever on, and ever on; and in it I see Divine love working and, with infinite care, preparing for the crisis, the advent of man created after the Divine image in the Divine likeness, a being whose central majesty is the awe-inspiring majesty of will. It is a love story, the story of love preparing for the coming of man.

Everything between that and the final apocalypse of the new heaven and the new earth, the new Jerusalem and the establishment of the Divine order, is the story of love set on the accomplishment of purpose, patiently waiting and bearing. It begins in the inquiry, "Adam, where art thou?" I never read that without thinking of what I once heard Dr. Henry Weston, of Crozier, say: That, said he, is not the call of a policeman, it is the wail of a father's broken heart! The story runs through all the history: love bearing all things, enduring all things, hoping all things, a love that never faileth, the only love that fulfils the ideal of our own greatest poet, "Love is not love that alters when it alteration finds." So in my Bible I watch love moving toward its goal until the final anthem is sung, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." "The kingdom of the world is become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ." Then sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and He shall wipe all tears from human eyes. The God of the Bible is the God of Love.

I must also interpret the declaration by Biblical revelation. As I do so, I find that this God is a God of such love that He will make no truce with anything that can in any wise harm those on whom His love is set. The love of God is not weak, sentimental, anaemic; it is mighty, courageous, full of blood. It is love that will make no truce with sin in the individual life, in society, in the race, but forever fights against it in order that humanity may be delivered from the things that spoil and blast. "God is love," and over against that I set another declaration, "Our God is a consuming fire." Is that contradiction? No, it is exposition. He is consuming fire for the destruction of all that destroys, for the blasting of all that blasts, for the blighting of everything that blights. He will restore the years that the cankerworm hath eaten. How? By the destruction of the cankerworm. Judgment is the strange act of God, rendered necessary by the malady with which He has to deal; but from the beginning to the end the love story is the story of love that never flinches or trembles in cutting out the cancer in order that health may be restored. "God is love" is the great message of the Bible from beginning to end.

All the light is focused on the Cross. "God commendeth His love to usward in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." These are old and familiar words, so old and so familiar that, alas, we recite them almost without emotion; they glibly pass our lips and produce so little sense of awe and amazement. But as we ponder them and believe them, love for God is born in the heart. "We love because He first loved us."

If this command to love Him were given to men who knew Him only in the fulness of His power, in the infinitude of His wisdom, then it might be possible that they would say, We bow in reverence and in fear, but we cannot love. But when we add to the testimony of nature the testimony of the Son Who is in the bosom of the Father, then the answer of the soul is inevitably and invariably that of the hymn,

Love so amazing, so Divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all.

The love of God produces love to God.

How, then, are we to know that God is love? In one way the answer already has been given, yet let us face the difficulty a little more carefully, for there are men who stand in the presence of the Cross, who yet cannot see in it the revelation of God's love. Let us be patient with them, for we find our way into an understanding of the love of God revealed in the Cross, not by declaration, but by a new attitude of soul, which is a venture of faith. God speaks to us through the Son, in His teaching, in His Cross, and in His Resurrection. He calls us, commands us, to follow Him, to believe on Him - that is, not to be convinced of a truth about Him, but to trust Him as an act of faith, to go after Him. When we commence to do so we find the terms of discipleship are of the severest, "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple. … Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." We make the venture, obey and command, and in obedience we discover the beneficence of the command. By obedience we come into an understanding of the infinite love of the law. Browning never reached a higher height in all his singing than when he said,

I report, as a man may, of God's work - all's love, yet all's law.

Law is found to be the expression of love when it is obeyed. Obedience to the command of Christ produces results in the life that demonstrate the love that inspired the command. That is the argument for the man who cannot see that God is love, or that love is proven by the Cross of Christ. At the beginning, the command to love God may be the command to discover God by obeying Him. I cannot love Him unless I know Him. "The Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath revealed Him." I have looked, and yet I do not love. I am not persuaded, not sure, I hesitate in fear on the brink. There are great problems in this Christian fact that trouble me intellectually, and I am holding back. The very Cross appalls me rather than fills me with a sense of love. How shall I find Him? How shall I know?

By obedience, by testing Him. That is the supreme challenge of Christianity. If any man will go after God by the way of the Cross, that man will inevitably come to know Him in such a way as to compel his love. If a man will prove Him by obedience, and not discover Him as love, then that man will have the right to say he cannot love Him. But that man is not yet born! Many men imagine they are perfectly honest in intellectual difficulty, and they are, up to a point; but the ultimate appeal to the man in intellectual difficulty is: test this doctrine by testing it! No man will begin to obey the law of God spoken in the Son of His love but that he will come at last to know that the God Who speaks is love, and that the sternest things He says are the tenderest, sweetest things of His love. Thy right hand, cut it off, thy right eye, pluck it out; because thy right hand causes thee to stumble, because thy right eye causes thee to sin. He that loseth his life! Ah, that is what I do not want to do. I want to keep my life. I want to realize myself. I crave for the fulfilment of all the forces of my being. If any man would come after Me he must lose his life. A stern word, surely not the language of love! Listen again! "Whosoever shall lose his life for My sake, shall find it," his life. That is a strange paradox but it is the experience of the saints and of all who put their trust in Him. He shall find it, his own life. If I consent to lose it by abandoning it to Him, as King, Lord, Master, I find it, and the life I yielded I possess.

I lay in dust life's glory dead,

And from the ground there blossoms red

Life that shall endless be.

We can know God only by obeying Him, making the venture, taking the first command that He lays on us and obeying it; by so doing we shall discover that the reason of the challenge is love and the way of obedience the way of realization. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." He can be loved only as He is known. He can be known only as He is obeyed.

The second commandment, Jesus said is like the first, and it is the outcome of the first. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." What will inspire such love to my neighbor? Only the love of God. When love of God is removed from self to God then that love will seek the objects of God's love. When I see that my neighbor is as dear to the heart of God as I am, then, if God's love to me has won my love to Him, my love inevitably goes out to my neighbor. An illustration of that principle is found on a human level in that old sweet story of David. When David came into his kingdom he inquired, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Can you find me anyone Jonathan loved? If you find me anyone that Jonathan loved, I must love him. They found Mephibosheth, who was lame in both feet, and David took him to the royal palace, set him at the royal table, gave him the royal bounty, and loved him, all for the sake of Jonathan. I said it was an illustration on a low level; but it is a true level. When a man has seen God and his heart has gone out in love to God, he will turn and say, Are there any of the off-spring of God that I may love for the sake of God? That man will begin to love his neighbor as himself when his love for himself has been transferred to God and has come back in the mystery of the finding of himself in right relationship to God. Then a passion is born in his heart to go out and seek those who are missing the vision, the virtue, and the victory, and bring them back again to the Father's house and to true relationship with Him.

This love of neighbor is no sickly sentimental thing. For that reason I read from Leviticus. Christianity is supposed to be an advance on Hebraism; it is an advance on Hebraism; yet sometimes, when I pause to test the action of Christian people by the laws laid down for the Hebrews, I wonder! Did you notice how very practical that passage in Leviticus was? Thou shalt not glean the corners of thy field, but leave them for the poor. Thou shalt not gather the fruit that falls from thy vineyards and trees, but leave it for the needy. How about your gardens? How about your trees? It is quite impossible, you tell me; one cannot obey that kind of thing in this age. Then God have mercy on the age! Twitchell of Hartford, Connecticut, told me how, when war broke out between Spain and America, he preached on the advantages of war. Charles Dudley Warner sat and listened to him, and when he had done, said to him, "I would like to have moved a resolution, that in view of your sermon Christianity should be postponed to a more convenient season! " He was right if Christ and God are right. Loving your neighbor is not singing hymns about your neighbor, not holding religious sentiments toward your neighbor, not merely hoping that someday your neighbor will go through the pearly gates into heaven. Loving your neighbor is to pour out the life in sacrificial attempt to heal his wounds, rest his weariness, and lift him to the level on which God would have him dwell. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Glance again at these great commandments, and consider them relatively. I want to observe, first, that this inexorable standard of law cannot be lowered without the destruction of the life for which the law was made. If God abandon His requirements then all will be failure. No human life comes to perfection in any other way than by the perfect love of God. No human life ever comes to perfection of possibility that is loveless toward the neighbor. It is an inexorable law. God will brook no division of the man, either in heart or soul or mind; because that part of the heart or soul or mind that fails in love is atrophied, it will perish. The lover of God will love men; and he must, or he breaks the law of God and denies the love of God.

Yet hear again the great commandments and mark how reasonable they are. "With all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"; not with thy neighbor's heart or soul or mind. If indeed it be true that your heart is a small thing, that your life is a weak thing, that your mind is a feeble thing, yet God is asking for that small heart, weak life, feeble mind. Only, I pray you, remember this, your heart is not so small as you have imagined, your life is not so weak as men have thought, your mind is not so feeble as you yourself have dreamed. If you will but love with all that you are, you will find enlargement of heart and life and mind in the power of love. Do not sigh through the days because you do not love God as someone else does. He does not ask you to love Him as someone else does. He asks you to love with all your heart. Just as I am, weak, poor, unworthy, I come in answer to the love of God, and begin to love, and that is all He asks.

Again, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." There is room there for a whole sermon, "as thyself." How do I love myself? Remember that this must be conditioned by the first commandment. We are thinking of that love of self which is true and proper. My love of self in love of God becomes a passionate desire that I may be what God would have me be. That is the true love of self. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," passionately desiring that he may be what God would have him be. Love of self does not make me blind to my shortcomings. Love of my neighbor does not make me blind to his shortcomings. True love of self makes me the enemy of the things that spoil me. True love of my neighbor makes me the enemy of the things that spoil him.

Mark this, the whole heart, mind, soul for God; for thy neighbor "as thyself" seeking that the whole heart, soul, and mind of thy neighbor shall harmonize in perfect response to the love of God, and so shall be fulfilled all the meaning and mystery of thy neighbor's being.

May I not affirm that if we know God the command is easy. God is lovable, because God is love.

O God, of good the unfathomed sea!

Who would not give his heart to Thee?

Who would not love Thee with his might?

O Jesus, Lover of mankind,

Who would not his whole soul and mind,

With all his strength, to Thee unite?

So sang a man who loved his God. It is the question of his astonishment that anyone can do other than love the Lord. That is the question of every man who in obedience to the law of God has discovered the love of God, and in whose heart and soul there springs responsive a new love to God.

Remember the final statement of the Lord. On these two depend all the law and the prophets. Take the word simply as it referred to the ancient economy: the whole expectation of the Mosaic economy is fulfilled by the man who loves God; the prophets, their denunciation of sin, their call to righteousness, are obeyed in answer to the impulse of the love of God. The new fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, is love of God. The old fear of God, which was the beginning of unutterable folly, was slavish fear, fear born of ignorance of Him, fear that made men hurry away, banish His name, refuse to meet Him. The new fear is not fear that He will hurt me, it is fear lest I should hurt Him, fear lest I cause sorrow to His heart, fear lest my sin wound Him again. That is the fear that is the beginning of wisdom, and that is the fear of love.

So God claims and calls for love, and He enforces His claim and argues His call by His own great love. You say to me to-night, I do not love God. Then act as though it were true that He loves you; obey Him, follow Him, and you will discover in the pathway of obedience that He is love. "Seek first His Kingdom," kiss the scepter of the King, and you will find that on the throne is the Father of infinite compassion.