**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 10 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE EVANGEL OF GRACE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*The gospel of the grace of God.*

*Acts 20:24*

THE TEXT IS NOT A COMPLETE SENTENCE; IT IS ONLY A PHRASE, but what a phrase it is! The mere reading of it lifts the soul to the highest levels of thought; the horizons are set further back, and the sense of the spirit is that of space, beauty, and strength.

The three outstanding words suggest the supreme things of man's hope and confidence: Gospel, Grace, God, The seven words leave the three shining in a connected glory: "the Gospel of the Grace of God." The music is in an ascending scale. "The gospel," and the word is suggestive of hope and expectation, "of the grace," and immediately we are in the presence of the mystic melodies that merge into the ultimate harmonies: "of God," and once again the music ascends into the sublimity of unuttered silence. "The gospel of the grace of God."

"The gospel," good news as to the things that are possible to sinning men, to the sons of sorrow, to souls burdened with the silences of the unexplained things. Grace, the attitude and activity making these things possible to the sons of men. God, the source whence all the gracious gospel proceeds.

"The gospel of the grace of God" - not a sentence, but a phrase. Yet what a phrase, a phrase which is in itself a theme, a phrase which I reverently affirm might be written on the cover of the Divine Library as its title, "The gospel of the grace of God": a message, the supreme burden of all Christian preaching and teaching, from the days of our Lord Himself, through the period of apostolic exposition, and on through the centuries of prophetic utterance, evangelistic appeal, and perpetual application, and a burden to all such as have entered experimentally into the things suggested by the phrase.

The phrase was used by Paul at Miletus in his farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. He was on his way to Jerusalem. At the time his experience of the communion of the Holy Ghost was that of the Spirit's witness that bonds and affliction awaited him. The sky was dark with gathering clouds of trouble, yet he did not count his life dear to him, but he did count it of supreme importance that he should fulfil his ministry of testifying to the gospel of the grace of God. He had received that ministry in personal experience, and by the direct, immediate command of his Lord. This is his own account of how it was received: "The Lord said, I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest. But arise, and stand upon thy feet: for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Me." Thus, according to his own account, in those solemn hours of first communion with the risen and glorified Lord he had been called to testify to "the gospel of the grace of God." His first preparation for this work was his own experience of that gospel as it was revealed to him, not by an apostle, but in the Person of the Lord Himself. Now, after a period of well nigh a generation of faithful service, he was looking back over the way, and he crystallized the burden of his wonderful apostolic ministry into this phrase, "the gospel of the grace of God."

What is that gospel? The text does not declare it; the text refers to it. I cannot take this text and deal with it statement by statement; for while it is flashing with the splendor of the central words of Christianity, it makes no statement, but it assumes the burden of the apostle's ministry, the message of all Christian prophets, the great love story of the evangelists, "the gospel of the grace of God."

I have already touched on the significance of the words by way of introduction. I refer to them briefly again. The gospel is good news. There is not a note of anger in this message. There is no syllable of judgment within this gospel. It may be necessary sometimes to strike severer notes, and to tell foolish, wayward men what must be the inevitable result of refusing to listen to the message of the gospel; but no condemnation is in the gospel itself, it is the way of escape from condemnation. There is no judgment here, it is the message of the infinite compassion and mercy of our God.

It is good news of grace. Grace defies definition as surely as love defies definition, and as certainly as God defies definition. Grace is love in itself and in all its abounding activities, and love is God in Himself and in all His wondrous attributes. Who, then, can define grace? In its application to human need our fathers defined grace perfectly when they declared that grace is free, unmerited favor. But grace existed before favor was needed. Grace was in the heart of God before it was necessary that it should be operative in the interests of men. There is no definition of grace save by the way of the activity of grace. I know what grace is when I observe what grace accomplishes. I understand the real meaning of the grace of God only when I am brought to an apprehension of what grace does. So, leaving the word in its mystic glory, in that mystery which is revelation, and that revelation which ever enfolds itself again in infinite mystery, we proceed to inquire what grace has done for its own self-revelation.

I propose to say three things concerning this inclusive gospel. First, the gospel of the grace of God is a declaration concerning the attitude of God toward sinning men. Second, the gospel of the grace of God is a revelation of the activity of God on behalf of sinning men. Finally, the gospel of the grace of God is a proclamation of the fact that man, sinning man, may be accepted by God.

But let it be remembered that the gospel of the grace of God is centered in the Son of God, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," so opens one of the evangelists' stories. If it be the gospel of the grace of God it is the gospel of the Son of God. This good news to humanity has come through the Son of God. There is no gospel to be found anywhere for sinning men apart from the Son of God. There is no gospel in nature; law is there; beauty, glory, strength, are there. As I observe nature I discover God in His might and in His wisdom. I so discover God in nature that I am quite able to sing with the psalmist in profound astonishment,

When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers,

The moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained;

What is man, that Thou are mindful of him?

The glory of God revealed in nature is such that I am amazed as I think within my own limited experience of myself that God can have any thought for me, or visit me; but when, turning my eyes from the wonders of the Divine revelation in nature, and looking within, I know my sin, not merely the inherited poison, but the actual rebellion, that I myself have chosen evil when I have known good, I turn back to nature and I ask for good news, I find that nature has no good news for the one who breaks law! To break law is to be broken by law. To sin against the rhythmic operations of nature is to be ground to powder by the magnificent forces of nature. There is no gospel in nature. Poets may tell you that nature weeps. Nature has no tears of pity for the breaker of law. We speak of the gentle kisses of the sun. The sun on the man who breaks law is scorching, flaming, destructive. There is no gospel in nature.

There is no gospel in human religion. Human religion may be perfectly sincere. Human religion may have certain values. These things I am not now discussing. But there is no gospel in human religion. The sincerest souls of men that have groped after some form of religion have confessed that they found no gospel. The ultimate note is always one of hopelessness. After many reincarnations the soul at last may reach forgetfulness, nothingness, loss of individuality! That is not a gospel. It may be the last speculation of despair; but there is no gospel in it. There is no gospel in human religion.

If we would have a gospel we must come to the Son of God, for it is only in and through Him that we hear its music, know its promise, or are brought to understanding of all its gracious facts and forces.

This gospel of the grace of God, which is the gospel of the Son of God, is the declaration of the attitude of God toward men. In this regard Christ is Revealer. Christ did not come into this world of ours in order to create a new attitude on the part of God toward man. He did not come to change the mind of God. He did not come to persuade God to be gracious. He did not come to propitiate God, and turn Him back again to the sons of men. He did not come to reconcile God to man. There is never a note in all the New Testament that declares He did. I care nothing for the casuistries in which you tell me that if I am reconciled to God it is the same thing. It is not the same thing. It is a fundamentally false conception of the mission of our Lord and of the terms of the gospel to declare that Jesus Christ came into human history to change the mind of God. He came to reveal to man the mind of God, to reveal the abiding attitude of God toward men. In Him God was unveiled, not changed. Through Him God spoke no new message, but the perpetual message of His heart. The gospel of the grace of God is first of all a declaration on the part of our Lord of the attitude of God toward men.

Is it possible to summarize that declaration in brief phrases? I shall attempt to summarize by saying that in the declaration there are three things. The gospel declares God's love for the sinner. The gospel declares God's hostility to the sin of the sinner. The gospel declares God's determinate counsel and purpose to make possible the canceling of sin, in order to gain the peace and the purity of the sinner.

In the first place, the gospel declares that God's attitude toward the sinning man is that of love. That is fundamental. All this gospel is contained in that one verse, the simplest and profoundest in all the New Testament, the most familiar to this congregation, and the least explored as to all its rich and varied values, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." The gospel reveals the fact that during these probationary days no man can put himself outside the love of God by whatever he may do. It is an old and familiar story; doubtless you have heard it from me: a Sunday-school teacher was asked by a boy in his class, Teacher, does God love naughty boys? The teacher said, No, certainly not. What blasphemy, unintentioned and quite thoughtless, but absolutely untrue! My dear Sunday-school teacher, that boy who worried you most today, God loves him, and loves him in his naughtiness. The gospel of the grace of God is, first, a declaration in the history of the world that God loves men however they have sinned, however far they have wandered, however deep the stain may be, however polluted is the heart. God loves men. Oh that we knew how to preach it, that we knew how to say it, that we knew how to proclaim it to men fast bound in sin and nature's night, this great and gracious fact, the first value of the gospel, its fundamental message: God loves the sinner in his sin.

If that be fundamental the resultant truth is that the gospel teaches us God's hostility to sin. That is not to contradict the first statement but to give true exposition to it. Because he loves man God cannot compromise with the poison that destroys. The intensity of the Divine hostility to sin is the Divine love for the sinner. The white heat of God's anger against every form of iniquity is the abiding fire of His infinite love for man. So that no man can be at peace with God and with sin at the same moment. The gospel declares that; that is its burden, its message. It was the message of the life of our Lord, the message of His perpetual teaching; it was the last and awful message of the Cross, that if a man be at peace with sin God is at war with him for very love of him. No man can be at peace with his sin and with God at the same moment. I do not say that no man can sin and be at peace with God. A man may be at peace with God, and yet blunder by the way, fall into sin, but the moment he has sinned the sin he is at war with himself and with his sin. That is evidence that he is at peace with God. The gospel reveals fundamentally the fact that God loves the sinner, and necessarily the resultant fact that God is at war with sin.

But that is not all the gospel declares concerning God. If the gospel did not reveal to us these attitudes, love toward the sinner, and hostility to sin, there is no message of hope in it. The attitude of God revealed in the gospel is an attitude essentially of purpose and of power in order that the sin against which His wrath is kindled may be removed, so that the sinner for whom His love burns may be delivered.

God cannot rest in the presence of sin without making possible its removal. That is the heart of the gospel, the reason of it; that is the grace of God. God hates sin, and therefore all the resources of His might and of His wisdom must provide a way of salvation, and the must depends, not on any human standard of right and wrong, not on any claim that man can have on God; the must depends on God's nature, His being, His heart; He must, because of what He is in Himself, make a way by which His banished ones may return, He must accomplish the possibility of human redemption. Grace in God is compassion, and compassion is sorrow, and compassion is passion in action.

The gospel of the grace of God is, first of all, a declaration of these attitudes toward men in their sin. It may be that unfallen angels need no gospel. It may be that in some sweet morning by and by, when we have done with the trammels of the flesh and have entered into that larger life, we shall discover other worlds peopled by wondrous beings of whom we have never heard, and of whom we have never dreamed, who never, never sinned, and therefore never needed a gospel. But the phrase of my evening message is a phrase for this world, sin-stricken, sin-smitten, a phrase for men who are conscious of evil in their own lives, of crimes committed, of sin permitted; and it unveils before the wondering and astonished sinner's sight the heart of God toward himself. Toward men who are out of time with the rhythm of the universe, who by their own pollution have introduced discord into its order. God is full of love, and hates only that in men which spoils them; and the moving of His compassion makes it necessary for Him - necessary, in order to be true to the profoundest, deepest things in His own nature - to make possible the putting away of sins that the sinner may be restored to the fulfilment of life.

Our second declaration grows immediately from our first. The gospel not only reveals the attitude of God, it declares His activity on behalf of sinning men. If compassion is passion in action, the gospel declares what that action is. Here, again, Christ is at the center. As He is the Revealer of the Divine attitude, He is the Redeemer in the Divine activity. He came to accomplish in time and in human history the determinate counsel of God in eternity. He came from the Father, into the world, and returned to the Father. He came from the Father in order to carry out in human history and in time and in human observation for the purpose of the capture of the human will the things which are in the very nature of God, and which in the presence of sin, are eternal verities and not merely the accidentals of time.

Man awakened to a sense of his spiritual life is always awakened to the consciousness of sin. Man awakened to the consciousness of sin through being awakened to a sense of his spiritual life, looks back, looks in, and looks on. He looks back and there is with him the burden of the past; he remembers the sins of the years, and asks what can he do with them. He looks within and is conscious of the importance of the present, the inability not to do again the thing he did yesterday. The sin of yesterday, how it burns; like a phantom of the night it haunts the soul; in the gay hour of brightness and frivolity the sin of yesterday passes before the vision, and the sun is eclipsed and the whole world is plunged in darkness. But the agony of all agonies is that the man, conscious of that sin of yesterday as guilt, is yet more conscious that it is in him as power mastering him. He vows in the silence of the night that he will never sin the sin again and ere twenty-four hours have passed over his head he has sinned it, and knows he will sin it again, and yet again.

The guilt of the thing done yesterday, God have mercy on my soul, how terrible a thing is that! It is that sense of sin that the greatest master of English poetry expressed in the tragic and awful language of Lady Macbeth, "Out, out damned spot." You do not need to go to a theater to see that acted, it is acted in your own soul. Yes, but keener than that, more terrible is this, that I shall put another stain there, and I cannot help it! That is the tragedy of sin.

With that sense of the past on the soul, and the sense of present incompetence weighing on the spirit, the eyes are lifted to the great future with its terrors; they are inevitable, they are the results of these things of yesterday and today, the guilt of past sin, the power of present sin; all the future is lurid with the gray of gathered thunder clouds. That is the tragedy of a soul conscious of sin! If the gospel is worth anything it must deal with all that.

"The gospel of the grace of God" first proclaims pardon for the sinner, the forgiveness of sins. You tell me it is a moral impossibility, and over against your moral impossibility I place the mystery of the Cross. If you can explain the Cross in the terms of time, if you reduce the Cross to the level of a Roman gibbet on a green hill in Palestine and a dying man, of course it can never deal with moral guilt to the satisfaction of a human soul, to say nothing of the satisfaction of an eternal, holy God. But when the Cross is seen as a mystery, a mere unveiling in time of that which is eternal in principle, an unveiling in the awfulness of a vulgar tragedy in blood of the breaking, crushed heart of the God Who suffers because men sin, then I begin to feel that the spot will come out, I begin to know what can be expressed only in the imperfect language of material symbolism, but which is in itself the essential mystery of redemption, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." The gospel reveals the Divine passion, pain, agony, sorrow, whereby the past is canceled, made not to be, put away, forgiven.

But that is not enough, I must be superlative; this is a superlative theme. I will speak for myself. Hear me as a witness rather than as an advocate. It is not enough that the thing I did yesterday is forgiven. Unless the power that compelled me to do it is broken within me, it is not enough. If the message for the past is the mystery of the Cross, the message for the present is the might of the resurrection. The one lonely, supreme event in human history is that He rose from among the dead, and that by way of that resurrection He revealed to men the fact, not only that His life was perfect, and that by His passion it is possible for Him to forgive sin, but that His life, perfect within itself, bruised in the mystery of the great atoning work, is liberated that it may be bestowed upon sinning men, that they may share His purity in power, and that by living relationship with the risen Lord they may obey His sweet and mighty word, "Go and sin no more." The gospel proclaims not merely pardon for the past, it proclaims power for the present. If not, it is not a sufficient gospel. But it is sufficient. The witnesses are here. It is not the habit to call witnesses in this building; I sometimes wish it were, but they are here, men and women, young men and young women, who know that the power of Christ is equal to snapping chains, putting out fires, and setting their feet in the high way of holiness that leads to life.

The witness of the power is the demonstration of the pardon. If I preached simply the great mystery of the Cross whereby men are pardoned, and then I saw men who professed to believe it continue in their sin, I would doubt my gospel. But when the process from pardon is that of power over sin, then I am convinced of the actuality of the pardon our Lord pronounces.

Finally, has the gospel anything to say to me about tomorrow? For I call the testimony of the saints, wherein I bear my part, that whereas we know the joy of sin forgiven and whereas in part we know the power that triumphs over sin, we also have to say, as this same apostle said when he wrote to his Philippian children, I am not yet perfected, I have not yet apprehended that for which I was apprehended in Christ. Is there to be ultimate deliverance? Is there to be a day of full realization? Will all the powers of my personality one day harmonize with the good and perfect and acceptable will of God? Let my question be answered from the same letter. He has already said, "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect. … I count not myself yet to have apprehended." But he did not sit down and sigh. What did he do? "One thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on towards the goal." What goal? Read to the end of the great paragraph. He speaks of a day in which the Lord shall "fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory." That is the last and final perfecting of the life. All my life, mysterious, complex, made more wonderful than ever by the revelation of His gospel will harmonize with Himself, and I shall see God and be satisfied, and shall stand unashamed in the light of the heavenly spaces: "He shall present me faultless before the throne of His glory."

The last word may be spoken very briefly. "The gospel of the grace of God" not only reveals the attitude and proclaims the activity of God, it declares the acceptance of men by God; Jesus Christ is the Revealer and the Redeemer, therefore He is the Reconciler. He came to bring God to man's consciousness, and to bring man to God's fellowship. If God may be brought to the actual consciousness of man, then man will be brought to fellowship with God.

This phase of our gospel again is threefold. It declares, first of all, our reception by God in and through Jesus Christ, in Christ Jesus made nigh, accepted in the Beloved. Such are the rich and gracious phrases of the New Testament revelation.

It declares also our regeneration, re-creation. In Christ Jesus we are made one with the Father, "partakers of the Divine nature." He Who condescended in infinite mystery to tabernacle in flesh as the result of the operation of that incarnation consents to tabernacle in flesh today, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?"

Consequently, acceptance with God means renewal in Christ Jesus; we are heirs of God, and therefore all His resources are at our disposal, and so we "grow up into Him in all things."

We may be acquainted with the terminology of the gospel, with the terms of the gospel, yet we may be lost. It is not enough to hear the evangel. It is not enough to apprehend some of its spacious meaning. If you will go back in that address of Paul to the elders of the church at Ephesus you will find the conditions on which men may enter on all the virtues and values of the great gospel. "Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," repentance, change of mind which is active, determined. The gospel is the message that calls men to that. "Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," the attitude and activity of risk, venture. The gospel is the argument for that.

What of my yesterday? Jesus promises me pardon, forgiveness. What of my present incompetence? He declares that He has power sufficient to enable me to go and sin no more. What of tomorrow? He illumines tomorrow with the promise of His own advent and of my resurrection and of ultimate fulfilment of all God's purpose in my creation.

Shall I venture on Him? Shall I make trial of His word? And the answer yes is the activity of faith. When a man hearing the gospel shall answer its call to repent, and its argument for faith, then, presently, "the gospel of the grace of God" shall be to that man not theory merely, but the joy of his life, the strength of his endeavor, the peace and assurance of his soul.