**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 25 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**GRACE AND LAW by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before you, that ye sin not.*

*Exodus 20:20*

IN THOSE WONDERFUL DAYS OF THE EMANCIPATI0N OF THE Hebrew people and their realization of the constitutional national life Moses twice uttered these words, "Fear not." In each case they were addressed to the people when they were filled with fear. In the first case the fear was fear of Egypt; in the second, it was fear of God.

The fear of Egypt was born of what appeared to be imminent and inevitable destruction. The Hebrews were encamped before Pi-hahiroth, caught in a trap, the sea before, the foe behind, and they themselves unarmed and undisciplined for war. In their terror they cried out against Moses, and complained that he had brought them away from Egypt, and he replied, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

In the second case, that of our text, the Hebrews' fear was fear of God. After three months' journeyings they had encamped beneath Sinai. There God had spoken to them through Moses, first in terms of tender grace and then in terms of law. The giving of the law had been accompanied by manifestations of majesty and might, thunders and lightnings, a thick cloud covering the guarded mount, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud. The people trembled and stood afar off, and besought Moses that they might not hear the voice of God, and to that sense of fear he uttered these words, "Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before you, that ye sin not." These words, then, are supremely valuable in revealing the meaning of law.

First, they describe the true attitude of men toward the law in the words, "Fear not," which relate the law of God to the grace of His heart; second, they describe the method of the law of God in the words, "God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before you"; and, finally, they reveal the purpose of grace and of law in the words, "that ye sin not." This is a consideration full of importance. Innately man is an anarchist; experientially, that is as the result of observation, he admits the necessity for law, and he is always anxious that the other man should submit to it. But for himself he desires freedom from it. Restraint is irksome. We would fain go our own way without any reference to law. This attitude of mind colors our thinking of the law of God, and strangely persists even in the life and the experience of Christian men and women. Unconsciously to ourselves, we think of the law of God as hard and severe, the opposite of love and of grace; and we perpetually quote certain words in the New Testament in a tone of voice which reveals a false conception of contrast between law and grace. I refer to words occurring in the first chapter of John which we render thus: "The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." That intonation - which by the way cannot be printed - is a commentary on the text and a revelation of our misconception of it. We read the earlier declaration, "The law was given by Moses," in a tone of thunder and severity; then suddenly our voice melts into tenderness as we read, "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." In doing so we prove that we understand neither the law which came by Moses nor the grace and truth which came through Jesus Christ. The law of God is the expression of the love of God, and its giving, even in the midst of the old economy, was as certainly an activity of the grace of His heart as was the coming into this world of His Son. Law expresses the rules of conduct for a man and for all time; truth is the essential integrity out of which all such expression comes. It is in the discovery of this fact, that law is the expression of grace, that is found the inspiration of obedience which prepares the way for that final and further operation of grace whereby a man is enabled to obey the law. To know that the law of God is the language of love is to exclaim, "Oh, how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day." Until a man is brought to recognition of the excellency of the law of God he will never yield himself to the redeeming power of God. In this sense also it is true that the law is our custodian to lead us to the faith; for it arrests us, and compels us toward God, and so prepares the way for that activity by which He rescues us and enables us to do His bidding.

Our theme this evening, then is the relation between grace and law; and I propose that we consider law, first in its inspiration, which is grace; second, in its method, which is that of revelation; finally, in the purpose, which is purity; and all this as preliminary to a consideration of the fact that there are things that the law cannot do, but which grace is able to do.

That grace is the inspiration of law cannot be more perfectly illustrated than in the context. Everyone knows the content of the twentieth chapter of the book of Exodus. But how many are familiar with the nineteenth chapter? The twentieth chapter cannot be accurately read unless the nineteenth chapter has been read. They are closely and intimately related; they form parts of one great whole; they constitute a contrast end a harmony. To read the nineteenth without the twentieth is to read an unfinished fragment; to read the twentieth apart from the nineteenth is to read that which standing alone is indeed full of error. "In the third month after the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai." So the nineteenth chapter begins, It is the story of Pentecost, that is, the story of fifty days after emancipation. Fifty days after emancipation the children of Israel found themselves in the wilderness of Sinai. There they pitched their camp, and God, through the mediator Moses, began to deal with them in order to give them their national constitution. Now let us summarize chapter nineteen. We have, first, the terms of grace. These were immediately followed by the answer which the people gave to the message of grace, The chapter closes with the response of law to the answer of man. In the twentieth chapter the order is reversed. It opens with the terms of law, the Ten Words of the Decalogue. Immediately following we have the answer of man to these terms of law. The chapter closes with the response of grace.

This is the account of God's first messages to this emancipated people, half vulgarized as the result of the long process of slavery. They were now to be organized into national life, a life of peculiar character. In God's dealings with the world they were to constitute a theocracy, a nation through which He would reveal Himself to other nations for their healing and blessing. The story records, first, God's terms of grace, the Hebrews' answer, and His immediate response in law; then His terms of law, their answer, and His final response in words of grace.

The terms of grace in chapter nineteen are remarkable:

Thou shalt say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel, Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My Voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me from among all peoples; for all the earth is mine.

Mark that interjection. At the very beginning of their history God reminded this people that they were not His peculiar people in the sense of the rejection of other peoples: "All the earth is mine" - and "ye shall be unto Me a dynasty of priests, and an holy nation." These were the terms of grace. I think no one will quarrel with that definition when I remind them of the fact that we find in the New Testament that when Peter wrote his letter for the strengthening of trembling souls, he climbed no higher height in his description of the Christian Church than that of these words. The words thrill with the tenderness of a great love. They constitute the revelation of the infinite purpose of the heart of God.

They answered, saying, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." Then, if we were reading this chapter for the first time and could have that inestimable blessing of coming to it with a fresh mind, we should inevitably be impressed by the change in the language. The Lord said, "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when speak with thee." Let the people not come nigh! Set bounds and fences round about the mountain so that no beast shall touch it! This was God's response to man's answer to His terms of grace. Then followed the giving of the Ten Words, the terms of law amid the thunders and the lightning, out of the darkness and the cloud; and then men answered, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." To that cry of fear the response of God through Moses was, "Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before you, that ye sin not." This was followed by instructions concerning an altar, and sacrifices, and the promise of God, "I will come to you."

The opening note was that of grace: I have "brought you unto Myself"; the final note was also of grace: "I will come unto thee and I will bless thee." Between the two we find man's arrogance, God's unfolding of law, and man's trembling. Fear not! God's purpose is that of grace, and therefore His plan must be that of law.

Let us glance at this matter from a slightly different standpoint, that of law as a method of grace. The ready answer of these people, which I have already described as the answer of arrogance, demonstrates to us how little they knew of their own hearts. They said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." This is not to condemn them for saying this. I hope nothing I have said, even this description of their words as words of arrogance, would convey that impression. When these people said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do," they were uttering the deepest thing of their lives. They were speaking out of the very depth of their souls. Surely He had brought them out of Egypt, surely He had borne them on eagles' wings, surely He had shown His power, and now in terms of infinite grace He had spoken to them: I have brought you unto Myself, to make you a dynasty of priests, for all the earth is Mine, and you are to be a blessing to all nations. To this they replied, Yes, we will fulfil that high vocation, we will be obedient, and do anything that God says. This was the voice of noble aspiration, but they did not know what lay between them and realization; they had not found the measure of their own incapacity; they had not learned their weakness. Therefore law was given, revealing God to them, and themselves to themselves as in the presence of God. The function of law was that of revelation, never that of salvation. In the words of Paul in his Galatian letter, one little sentence reveals the truth concerning law, "The law is not of faith."

Law is a revelation. It was a revelation to these men, first of life according to the will of God. It was a revelation to men of the standards of life in the economy of God. As the first ten words were uttered they constituted a revelation of holiness in human life. They are words which define man's relationship to God and man's relationship to his fellow man: broad foundation words, on which all future codes were to be erected. They discovered God in His purity, in His holiness, in His justice, in His righteousness. The first four revealed man's relation to God as the foundation of all morality; the last six revealed man's relationship to his fellow man as the expression of his obedience to the first four. From these words of the law there shone upon men the light, the awful light of the holiness of God.

That revelation of holiness was in the hearts of the men who heard it inspiration, the creation of desire, or of admiration of the ideal. Perhaps as Paul became the most remarkable illustration in the apostolic records of incarnate Christianity, so also Saul of Tarsus was the most remarkable revelation in the Bible of incarnate Hebraism. In his Roman letter Paul declared that after the inward man, he delighted in the law of God; he knew its glory, he knew its beauty. That is the first thing that the law does for a man. Men who break the law with apparent ease and wicked persistence, nevertheless do know in the deepest of their lives the glory and the beauty of the law they break. The most depraved and immoral man - and herein lies the heinousness of his sin - knows the excellency of the ideal to which he will not conform. Strange paradox of human consciousness, but undoubtedly true. The law reveals God and reveals holiness, and carries to the souls of men inevitable conviction as to its height, its nobility, and its grandeur.

If the law is thus a revelation of God it necessarily becomes to the men who receive it a revelation of themselves. When the light of the law flamed on these men they knew their failure, and they knew their weakness; and so while it is true that law becomes an inspiration, the final word is that law becomes a condemnation. It is the revelation of failure. Because in the light of the requirement of the law I learn how I fail and how weak I am, it rests on me as a perpetual condemnation and denunciation. The law, then, is a revelation which inspires and creates admiration for goodness in the soul of a man; but as it reveals it condemns, making a man conscious of how far he has come short and of how appallingly weak he is. Grace declares a purpose beneficent and beautiful, and man says, I will obey. The law then reveals to him the conditions on which he may enter on the purpose beneficent, and he is filled with fear; but the language of law is the language of grace.

Thus we come to the final note: "That ye sin not." There are many words in our Bible translated "sin" in both Hebrew and Greek, but the common word in the Hebrew and the common word in the Greek have exactly the same significance. Sin is missing of the mark, failure to realize; and that whether it be wilful or ignorant. If we are dealing with sin as guilt, then the sin of ignorance brings no guilt with it. It is wilful sin that brings guilt. But if we are dealing with man, and attempting to see his place in the economy of God and the purpose of heaven for the true realization of life, then sin is failure. If a man comes short of the highest fulfilment of his own life, that is sin. The law was given that men may not sin, that they may not miss the mark, that they may not fail to realize the real meaning and purpose of their own lives. In what sense does law minister to that end? Only as it reveals to man the standard, as it brings to him the measurement of his own life, as it unfolds before him the possibilities of his life, and reveals to him the conditions on which it shall be possible for him to fulfil those possibilities.

In this connection we must take a wider view of law than Exodus affords. We go back to the beginning of human history as the Bible records it, and there we find law, not the law which was here uttered, but human life conditioned in the will of God, God uttering His own word, a commandment laid on man as a safeguard and revealing to him his relation to a supreme authority. That is law. Leave these earlier records and come to the New Testament, and in the teaching of Jesus we find law; but the Master goes to deeper depths, searching the profound things of human life, no longer merely conditioning external conduct, but setting up His standard in the inner recesses of motive and desire. The broadest conception shows that law is a revelation to man of himself, made by the grace of the Divine love; a kindly and tender declaration of the path in which he should go, that he may not miss his way; statement of the principles that govern his life, that he may not violate them. In Christ men are set free from the law which is Hebrew; but they are brought under the law of the Spirit of life. Thus in the new economy we have a yet clearer unfolding of the truth that law is the language of love. God bending over a nation or bending over a man says to it or to him, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." That is not the language of hardness, of severity, of unkindness. It is love showing the nation or the man that life must be adjusted to the supreme things in order that it may rise to the height of its possibility.

This is true of every one of the ten words; and it is equally true of the words of Jesus. They are severe, they are awe-inspiring, they search and scorch and frighten the soul, if men will listen to them. Nevertheless they are the words of infinite compassion, of infinite tenderness; they are words uttered to my soul in order that I may know the way wherein I should go, if I am not to miss the meaning of my life, if I am to realize it in its height, its breadth, its depth, its glory. Jesus said that He did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might have life. Bear in mind that great declaration, and then hear me while reverently I say that He did condemn the world. That is not to contradict the word of the Lord, it is to attempt to understand it. Jesus is not in this assembly to condemn; but how He does condemn! The purpose of His heart is not condemnation; but if I remit my soul to His inquiry, to His investigation, then I lay my hand on my lip, and say, Unclean, unclean! He condemns me.

That, however, is not the ultimate fact. The condemnation of His scorching law is in order that I may be driven closer yet to Him for salvation. Grace utters the law, that man may discover sin, and, remitting himself to its measurement, may find his failure.

If law is the expression of grace, it is not its final word. Law brings man to a consciousness of his sin, and has no more that it can do. What will grace say to a man who stands condemned by this uttering of law? Let us first remember this, Grace does not deny that man's sin. The business of grace is not to hide sin or cloak it over or deny the reality of it. Let us remember, in the second place, that grace does not excuse the sinning man. Nevertheless, in some infinite mystery of love, grace operates in such a way that the sin of sinning man may be forgiven and the sinning man himself be conformed to the very ideal of purity and beauty which the law has revealed. To go back to the illustration in Exodus, grace first says God's purpose is to bring man to Himself, and man agrees. Law then discovers to man his own weakness, and man is afraid, and says, "Let not God speak." Has grace no more to say? Grace then says, "Fear not." There is a way of approach. It is the way of an altar, the way of a sacrifice. The central word of grace is that of God, "I will come to thee." That is what grace says to the man condemned under the law; it draws near with healing, with renewal.

If you ask me how grace can accomplish this, I point you to the Cross and ask you to listen to the words of inspiration as you gaze on the profound mystery. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses." Or again, "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died." By an infinite transaction in the very Being of God, grace, having spoken in the law and thereby revealed to me my failure, reaches me, captures me, holds me, remakes me, energizes me; and all this in order that I may become that which law has revealed to me I have failed to be.

If again you ask me for an illustration of how this can be, I shall take you to the simplest figure in the New Testament used by Christ and His holy apostles, realizing that it is but a figure, realizing that it is a figure that we do not often make use of in this regard, and yet convinced that it is one of the most illuminative in all the New Testament. I mean the figure of the forgiveness of debt. What is it to forgive debt? Remember, in the first place, that no man can forgive debt except the man to whom the debt is owed. Let me reverently place the illustration on the commonplace level of the currency. Here is a man who owes to another man a hundred pounds. He has nothing to pay, he is bankrupt. The man to whom it is owed, in grace forgives it. Has he a right to do it? No one will question the right. How does he do it? By himself suffering the loss. That is the principle of the Cross, He bore our sins, He carried our sins, He made Himself responsible for our moral debts. He Himself took over our suffering. Grace is set upon the perfection of man. Grace initiates the law whereby the man may be made perfect, and reveals to man his imperfection and his weakness. Then grace confronts the bankrupt soul and says, I forgive by suffering the loss. I know the frailty and the imperfection of all this illustration. I would not use such a figure if it were not a figure in the New Testament. Yet this is exactly what God does. He forgives by suffering loss. The very grace that is set on my perfecting and has given me the law that I may know what perfection is, and thereby has revealed to me my imperfection, steps into the breach, gathers into itself the infinite loss, cancels the bond, and so gives me forgiveness and life.

Think once more in the realm of that illustration, on the level of human interrelationships the illustration may break down in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, but in the one-hundredth it is fulfilled in the sense in which I now use it. Let us go back to the two men. The one owes the other. The other forgives his debt, himself suffering the loss of that which is owed. What happens? The forgiven man goes out to begin again, freed from encumbrance, freed from the burden. In the passion born of gratitude for the act of grace he gives himself no rest until a day comes when he pays his debt.

I do not hesitate to use the illustration now. So will it be with all the truly ransomed. He Who met me, and revealed to me my failure, and made known to me how far I am in debt, He Who then in infinite grace bore the loss Himself, and uttered the word of freedom, He, at last, by the inspiration of the love and gratitude of my heart, by an operation of power given to me in the economy of that grace, will present me faultless before the throne of God; He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

Law is beneficent, the language of love, and yet it condemns. The grace that utters law has other things to say, and by virtue of what it is in itself brings to men more than law. It brings the pardon and power by which at last, measured by the standards of law, they will be perfect in the sight of God.