**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 09 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE CONDITIONS OF RENEWAL by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Acts 20:21*

WE AT ONCE RECOGNIZE THAT THIS IS NOT A SENTENCE. AS A matter of fact, the text consists of two phrases, incidentally employed in the course of apostolic discourse. Paul halted at Miletus in order that he might meet the elders of the church at Ephesus and speak to them, as he did not expect to see them again. In the course of his address, delivered to those elders, in the interest of the church at Ephesus, and therefore as always, in the interest of Ephesus itself, he reviewed the ministry which he had conducted in that city during three years, reminding them that he had not shrunk from declaring to them anything that was profitable, teaching them publicly and from house to house, testifying to both the Jews and the Greeks of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

In these phrases the Apostle summarized the burden of his message in Ephesus in so far as that message emphasized personal and individual responsibility concerning the gospel of the grace of God which he had proclaimed there. I have taken the words because they seem to me to give the simplest formula concerning human responsibility in the presence of the preaching of that gospel of grace.

You will immediately see that the terms are those of spiritual things, spiritual relationships. It is quite easy, I think, to discover behind the words the apostolic outlook, the apostolic conception. It is quite evident that these phrases take for granted certain facts, while they reveal the immediate responsibility of men. There can be no meaning in them apart from certain facts which most evidently were present in the mind of the Apostle, facts, moreover, which he took for granted as being received and believed in by those to whom at this particular moment he was speaking.

What, then, are these underlying facts? First, the fact of God; second, the fact of man's relationship to God; third, the fact of man's being out of harmony with God; and, finally, the fact that a man out of harmony with God is a failure.

If we blot God out of our thinking or out of our belief, then there is no meaning in this text at all. It is only as we become conscious that the deep, true thing concerning ourselves is that we have relationship with God, that such relationship is at fault, and that therefore we are at fault, that there can be any appeal in such phrases as these.

Let us, then, proceed on the assumption that we take for granted the God of the Bible, the God from Whom all things have proceeded, the God by Whose power all things are upheld, from Whose government nothing can ever by any possible chance escape.

Let us take for granted, in the second place, that man is spiritual, that the deepest, profoundest truth concerning man is that he is offspring of God, that the word which Ezekiel uttered long ago for the correction of false proverbs, "All souls are Mine," is a profound truth; that the deepest thing in each individual life is not the material, is not even the moral, but the spiritual; that, therefore, the things of change in the midst of which we find ourselves today cannot be the things which find us in the deepest of our lives; that, therefore, if we live only in relation to things seen and temporal, things that pass and vanish and perish even while we look on them, touch and handle them, we are ruining ourselves in that we are failing to realize the whole meaning of our lives.

Let us take for granted that we are children of the ages and not of the passing day, that we are in our essential being related to Deity and are not wholly of the dust; that to make the order of our life such as expresses itself in such words as, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," is to fail entirely to understand ourselves. Let us further take for granted that if these things be so, then we are moving inevitably toward some change through which we shall come to a yet clearer apprehension of the reality of spiritual things and stand in the light of the Divine presence, in the nakedness of our spiritual life, stripped of all those things which today hide the spiritual from us, hide us so largely from each other, and hide us so perpetually from ourselves. If someone should say, Why do you not say plainly that we are all going to die? I would reply, Very well, let it be so stated - we are all approaching death! What is death? Death is but transition. Death is but the process of change by which personality passes from existence limited, hindered, probationary, into that which is larger, where the light is clearer, and the understanding perfected, and being comes to its fulness in some form or fashion. The reason for the fear of death is simply stated: "The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law." Men do fear death, all their lifetime men are subject to bondage through the fear of death. The fear of death that rests on the heart of humanity is born of the fact that man is conscious that if he pass away from this life, with its limitations, into larger life, he is unprepared, he has not taken sufficient account of the larger life, has neglected the true aspiration of his nature, has not turned a listening ear to the voice forever sounding within him that he is immortal, eternal. Man lives within the narrow realm of the things that are near, and when he approaches the end, or things of the end, and imagines himself as passing out to some bourne whence no traveler returns, to some unknown state of being, he is filled with fear because of sin.

What, then, is sin? I pray you notice most carefully that this fear of death is not peculiar to men and women who have been guilty of what we sometimes term vulgar sins. Indeed, it is strange and yet true that the vulgar sensualist is often free from the fear of death, and that because of that he has so completely blunted the spiritual sense in his sensuality that he has no consciousness of it whatever. The fear of death comes to finer souls - using the expression in the common language of our everyday speech.

What, then, is sin? Sin is failure. I use the word almost with bated breath, because to say that seems to rob sin of its terror. Yet consider it carefully. If the Bible, by the language of which it makes use, means anything, it conveys that idea. Confining ourselves for the moment to the New Testament, with which we are all familiar, the commonest Greek word for sin, hamartia, means coming short, missing the mark. It is a Greek word which was used when a marksman shot an arrow at a target and failed to hit the center. Sin is failure. Sin is being less than I ought to be. Sin is failure to realize the meaning of my own life. Sin is failure to realize the forces that are within me. It is this sense of failure, this sense of limitation, this inner conviction that perchance never expresses itself in the language of a preacher, but, nevertheless, haunts the soul; this sense that the years are wasted, that the energies of life have not brought any true return to the personality - it is all this that overshadows man when he thinks of death. It is the true Divine instinct within the soul telling it that when it sloughs off this mortal coil, and passes in the nakedness of its personality into the light of the uncreated beam, it will be seen crippled, dwarfed, atrophied, having failed to realize the profound meaning of life. That is the sense of sin.

There is in that sense of sin, moreover, the sense of pollution; or - use the word that helps you most - guilt, defilement, uncleanness. It is that sense that fills the heart with fear when death is spoken of.

For the sake of illustration, imagine a man who has no sense of failure, a man who has not failed, a man whose life has been clean, pure, straight, noble, and infinitely more than all these virtues, which mark conditions rather than realizations, a man who has found out the secret of his own being and has adjusted his life to its true center, who has filled his own vocation - that man never trembles at the thought of death. To him death is entrance on life. To him death is the hour in which, crossing the border line, he shall find himself in the presence of the uncreated beam. That is the goal of life, the high ecstasy toward which life is forever moving, the final moment when he will be able to stand unafraid in the presence of God and see the beatific vision, and find the last solution of all the problems of his own life as he rests in the presence of God. When such a man thinks of death, he says, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

In those final words of the apostolic challenge and affirmation I have introduced the gospel of grace, and the real meaning of the Christian fact.

It is in the presence of such conceptions as these that the phrases of my text begin to have meaning. As a man shall say, I believe in God, and I believe that I am indeed in His likeness and image, of His very being, offspring of Deity, and I am approaching the bound of life where the burdens of time are laid down, coming to the hour in which I pass out into the nakedness of my essential life into the very presence of God, and I am unprepared. Then he inquires, Is there any way by which I can be prepared? Is there any way by which I can overtake the tragedy of lost years and expended strength? Is there any way by which I can be born anew? Nicodemus's difficulty was not a surface difficulty: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" That is, can he force himself back through the years and undo the things that have been done, and change the set and tendency of his life? Can he begin again? That is the great cry of the human soul when the soul comes to consciousness of God, of its own spiritual nature, of the fact that this life is transient, probationary, and that the revolving wheels of time are bearing it ever closer to the moment when it stands alone in the presence of the God from Whom it came. The Christian evangel is the answer to that cry.

What, then, is the way of salvation? We may omit from our consideration from this moment forward the man who has no sense of sin. I would do it respectfully, reverently, but I would say earnestly to that man, From now on I have no message for you. I am here as the messenger of my Master, and He Himself said: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

What, then, shall I do to be saved? some soul is asking. It may be that the soul that asks will never utter those words in my hearing, will never make application with this great spiritual inquiry to any prophet, priest, or teacher. It is a question of the inner life. What, then, shall I do to be saved? The great phrases of the Apostle are the perfect and final answer, "Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

If we are to understand such simple phrases as these we must approach them in the simplest way. What is repentance? That is the first inquiry. Repentance is not self-reformation. Repentance is not sorrow for sin. Repentance is a change of mind, and a change of mind when it is true and deep necessarily and inevitably issues in change of attitude and change of conduct. The word of my text does not suggest sorrow - do not misunderstand me, I am not saying that repentance is unaccompanied by sorrow, but I want you to clearly understand that repentance is not sorrow. I have known men and women who have truly repented toward God, who at the moment had no deep sorrow for sin, but it came, and it grew and deepened with the passing years. I venture to affirm most solemnly, as a matter of profound conviction, that there are men who have been following the Lord Jesus Christ for half a century whose sorrow for sin is profounder now than when they commenced the Christian life. On the other hand, I have known men who have been genuinely sorry for sin but have not repented. There may be contrition, there may be lamenting over the thing done that cannot be undone, there may be the agony that cries out with Lady Macbeth,

Out damned spot!

Not all the perfumes of Araby will sweeten this little hand.

Yet there may be no repentance. Repentance is a change of mind. That is fundamental. The changed conception always expresses itself in change of attitude, and the change of attitude produces change of conduct. So that ultimately repentance is the turning of the back deliberately on everything that is out of harmony with the will of God. Fundamentally it is turning to God. This same Apostle, in one of the first, perhaps the very first, of his letters, that to the Thessalonians, gives a remarkable description of the commencement of the Christian life, "Ye turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven." In that description you have an exact account of what repentance is. It is turning to God.

But here is our difficulty. Let me say it with all the faithfulness of which I am capable: it is the peculiar difficulty of such a congregation as this. I have preached to congregations to whom the matter is understood in a moment, a congregation of men and women in the depths. It was quite easy to talk to them about repentance; such sinners understand that repentance means turning round and facing God. The difficulty in such an audience as this is that faces look up into the face of the preacher and say, Why emphasize this? We are not turned from God. But are we not turned from God? Godlessness has many manifestations. It is not the peculiar quality of the penitentiary. It is found in the university. It does not dwell alone in the slum. It is found in the suburb. It is not peculiar to vulgarized humanity. It is the more subtle wrong of cultured humanity. Godlessness! What is godlessness? Leaving God out of account in all the actualities of life. Intellectual search that does not take account of Him. Emotional outgoing that does not seek the purifying of His fire. Especially, the central volitional activity of choice that never thinks of Him until the choice is made. Life that lives as though there were no God and yet occasionally confesses God is godless. The man who conducts his business six days a week as though there were no God and comes here and worships, profanes the sanctuary and blasphemes. Repentance is turning round and facing God, recognizing the throne, submitting thereto, asking at the gates of the high place for the orders of every day and every hour. That is godly life. Repentance is toward God, the change of the mind back toward Him, that He may be taken into account; the change of the conduct so that it may square with that master conception of life that the will of God is supreme.

Let me say, further, that repentance is induced by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but that repentance depends entirely on the choice of the human soul. It is induced by the Spirit. The Spirit of God induces repentance in the heart of a man by revealing to him the true nature of his sin, by revealing to him the attitude of God toward sin and toward himself. By the proclamation of the Evangel, by the enunciation of the Divine ethic, the Spirit induces man toward repentance. The Spirit reveals to man what sin is, showing him that sin mars the life, that no man can come to fulfilment of his own life who forgets God; that, because the very forces of life are God-created forces and life cannot come to highest realization or fullest meaning save within His will and under His law, sin therefore spoils the life. The Spirit reveals to man that such sin spreads insidiously. The forgetting of God which is casual becomes the forgetting of God which is habitual.

Trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God Who is our home,

and the little child, granted that its surroundings are what they ought to be, is familiar with God. How wonderfully familiar a little child is with God, but with the passing of the days there is, first, the casual forgetfulness, the failure to recognize God in the hour of volitional choice, then the forgetfulness that hardens into a habit until God is shut out of life, and the finest things of life are blunted, spoiled. The Spirit brings home to man this sense of failure.

I know the things whereof I speak; I know them in my experience, and I know them in this ministry of dealing with men and women personally that God has committed to me. Not many days ago a cultured, refined man, brilliant in scholarship, looked into my eyes, and I never shall forget the look of haunting fear on his face as he said, "Oh God, what a failure I am!" It was the sense of sin, of the spoiled life. I am inclined to think that this man might have said with the rich young ruler of old, in the presence of every commandment in the second table of the decalogue, I have broken none of them. It was the sense of failure that swept his soul. The Spirit of God thus brings a man - to use an old phrase, the phrase of our fathers, may it come to us with power - to conviction of sin.

The Spirit of God comes revealing to man not merely what sin is and that he is a sinner, but also revealing the attitude of God toward sin and the attitude of God toward the sinner. What has the Spirit to say concerning God's attitude toward sin? "Thou that art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that canst not look on perverseness." What has the Spirit to say about God's attitude toward sinners? "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." The attitude of God toward sin is that of relentless hostility, because sin spoils man. God's attitude toward the sinner is that of love stronger than death, mightier than the grave, so infinite and wonderful and profound that it stoops to the level of the ruined man, and, gathering to itself all the pain and agony resulting from sin, cancels it in the passion of His own heart.

By this ministry of unveiling the Spirit induces repentance, but if repentance be induced by the work of the Spirit it must be a human act. Here is the realm of tragedy. Men come to this point, the Spirit revealing the fact of sin to them - not always in the hour of Christian worship, sometimes suddenly unexpectedly, right in the midst of daily business, sometimes in the presence of a great bereavement, sometimes when hope is springing within them and some new joy is coming to them - and, tragedy of all tragedies, there are men who do not respond to the Spirit and decline to repent, and turn back again to the beggarly elements of sin. For the advantage of the moment, for the supposed advantage of the moment, they shut out the vision of the infinite and bend themselves to the immediate. That is what some of you have done over and over again.

Yet we must go further. A man repenting is not a man saved. I may turn my back on sin and my face toward God, resolutely and with determination; but something more is needed. Change of attitude does not undo the past, neither can it alter the nature. Given a man repenting in answer to the Spirit's illumination, what does he really need? What he needs most of all is forgiveness, absolution. He cries for forgiveness for the past, does not believe it possible at first, cannot see how he can be forgiven; but he asks it, and I believe I interpret the deepest feeling of your heart as I speak out of my own experience and say, If you could persuade me that God simply says, We will say no more about the past - then I want more than that! I want loosing from the past, some cleansing from its defilement, I want something that shall purge me as hyssop cannot. I want some hand to blot out the past.

I need more. I want to be sure, when I turn my face to God, that He will receive me again. I who have rebelled against His throne, I want to know whether He will take me home again. I need more than that. And here is the profoundest thing of all, to me at least, I want to know how I shall be able to manage tomorrow, for, so help me God, I speak out of my own experience, if salvation means simply sin forgiven, and I am left paralyzed, it is hardly worth while. I have to face the same temptations, Can I be enabled? I have to go back from this quiet hour in the sanctuary to the city, to hear the thousand siren voices, to be lured by the glitter of the straw in the dust! Can I be made strong so that I shall stand erect? Whether I look back or within or on, while I repent I am still a needy soul.

This sense of need is met in the Apostle's second phrase: "Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." As he said the words I venture to affirm that before his eyes there gleamed the glory of Christ Himself, and he saw how that Christ stands confronting the repentant soul, bringing to that soul everything for which it asks. What about this past? "Who His own self bare our sins in His body upon the tree." I had better leave it there. To try to explain that would but be to darken counsel with a multiplicity of words. To attempt to tell how in some infinite transaction in the darkness God has made possible the blotting out of sin is beyond me and increasingly beyond me. The longer I live, the less I can understand its mystery and the more I know its power. Christ confronts the soul and says He will put His hand, His pierced hand, across the page of the past and blot it out.

What about God's acceptance of me? Christ tells me that I need have no fear in this matter, that God never turned His face away from me, it was I who turned my face away from Him. In the one matchless picture that Jesus gives us of the Father in that old familiar parable in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's gospel that fact is revealed: "While he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." That is God. That is what Christ came to show us. Christ did not come to persuade God to love us, but to show us that God never ceased to love us. He did not come to make God change His mind; He came to make me change my mind, and to tell me that when I turn back to God, God is far more than halfway to meet me. Even the parable of Jesus breaks down - I say it reverently - for God in Christ came all the way to the far country to find me, and now

My God is reconciled,

His pardoning voice I hear.

He owns me for His child;

I can no longer fear.

With confidence I now draw nigh,

And Father, Abba Father, cry.

What about tomorrow? How am I to stand erect who have so often fallen by the way? How am I to master the things that so long have mastered me? Again the Christ stands before me and says, I Who have blotted out thy sin, I Who have revealed the Father to thee so that thou mayest know His face is toward thee still in love, "lo, I am with thee all the days." A quaint yet beautiful story comes to my mind. To an old Scotsman his master said one day: "Donald, I am going to give you that little cottage and bit of land for your own." The Scotsman looked into the face of his master and said, "Master, I don't think I want it." "Why not?" "Well, I have saved nothing, and I can't stock it, and I can't work it." "Oh," said the master, "I think we can arrange that. I will invest a little capital, and give you the stock." The man looked up into his master's face and said, "If it's you and me together for it I think we can manage." Christ says, I give you back your birthright, I bring you back to God, blot out your sin, readmit you to the fellowship that you turned your back upon. I say, I am afraid, I am weak, I have failed! He says, "I am with you all the days." Then, reverently employing my parable, I say, With Christ I can. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." If He will be with me in the coming days, then verily I can.

Faith is more than intellectual assent to the accuracy of a gospel. It is the venture of the soul on the gospel. Here is a check. I hold it in my hand signed. I believe in that check; but I really believe in it when I endorse it and cash it. Here is an enterprise. I believe in it. I really believe in it when I share in its processes. Then join it, and we shall know you believe in it.

Venture on Him, venture wholly,

Let no other trust intrude.

Look into the eyes of Christ and say, I repent, I turn to God, I come, oh, Christ, to Thee. I trust in Thy promise. I yield myself to Thy command. Lead on, and I will follow Thee. That is faith.

Wherever a man shall thus venture on the word of this Christ, having faith toward Him, having repented toward God, then life begins anew. If the vessel hath been marred in the hand of the Potter He will make it again another vessel.