**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 16 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE POSSIBILITY OF RESTORATION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*If from thence ye shall seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.*

*Deuteronomy 4:29*

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY IS A SINGULARLY BEAUTIFUL one. It is not a history. It is more than a code of morals. It consists of the last messages Moses gave to the people of his heart. It is a prophecy in the fullest sense of the word. It is a book full of light and full of fire. Here the words of law are indeed uttered and the importance of law insisted upon, but as we read it we are not so much conscious of the binding nature of law's requirements as of the driving power of love's great reason. Not that in this book the moral standards are lowered, but that there seem to be wonderful revelations of the secrets by which men may realize these standards.

Sometimes I have been inclined to call this book an evangel of the law. It is evidently that, as this man spoke for the last time to these people whom he had led through forty years his heart was full of tenderness. These are the words of a man who had come into close association with God Himself, a man who had stood in the awful light in which there is no darkness at all, but who in that light had found that infinite love which goes far beyond our dreams.

In this text we have a beautiful illustration of this consciousness of the man of law of the tenderness of the heart of God. He had been supposing the possibility of the back-sliding of these people in spite of the revelation they had received. In the light of subsequent history that supposition proved to be prophecy, for, just as he suggested, they forgot God and wandered from Him, and the very calamities which he described fell on them. After describing in detail the process of such possible backsliding until the ultimate issue of it was revealed, suddenly, and apparently with a sense of relief and gladness, he turned from the fierce denunciations and said: "If from thence" - the uttermost and ultimate place of backsliding - "if from thence ye shall seek the Lord, ye shall find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul."

My message has to do with this possibility of backsliding, this possibility of turning from the higher to the lower, until, perchance, at last the lowest is reached. I am especially anxious to speak to those who may be addressed in the words of the great Apostle: "Ye did run well. What did hinder you?" Or perhaps to those of whom Christ would say in the language of His message to the church at Ephesus: "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love."

I want to speak to men and women who, in the consciousness of their own secret hearts, know full well that the running is not what it was, who have lost the joy of first love, the love of their espousals to the Lord Christ, and who are lamenting the loss. I am going to ask you, first of all, as you follow me reverently and patiently, as I am sure you will, to let, not what I say about my text, but the text itself, the living Word of God, appeal to you. I am going to ask you resolutely to submit yourselves to its light and its suggestion and its teaching, remembering your splendid isolation, that you are quite alone in the crowd, that no man, not even the preacher, can know what transpires between your soul and God. If you find that the running has slackened, or the love has grown cool, or that there is something of distance between you and the Master, I ask that you will listen to the word of hope. Or if, perchance, by the grace of God, you pass uncondemned from the process of examination, I appeal to you to pray for the man who may be sitting next to you who has fallen somewhat from the high estate. It may be that some man in this crowd is in the depths of degradation because he has turned his back on his Lord and Master. The message is especially for him.

The measure of backsliding matters nothing. The tragedy is not in the ultimate corruption, but in the first cooling of passion. It is the loss of first love that is fatal. Everything else is a necessary sequence, and sometimes the latter stages are almost more full of hope than the earlier ones. I pray that as we come to the consideration of so solemn and important a theme we may be kept by the brooding Spirit of God face to face with the unseen and the eternal things.

The text itself suggests the lines of our consideration. First, the process and issue of backsliding: "From thence," the word "thence" illuminated by the context; in the second place, the conditions on which there may be restoration: "If - if thou shalt seek the Lord thy God; if thou shalt search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul", and, finally, the great word of the text, "Thou shalt find Him."

First, for a few moments let us quietly and earnestly consider this matter of backsliding. This ancient message contains a very living revelation of it, and although the local setting is not this setting, and the coloring of the details has faded from the canvas, the outline stands clear and plain, a revelation for all time of how men, in backsliding, turn away from high things and descend to low things. Hear these words again from the context: "When ye shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image in the form of anything, and shall do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord …" In them we have a revelation of the whole process by which men backslide. When they shall corrupt themselves, when they shall make a graven image, when they shall do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord …

The first step in backsliding is self-corruption; the second is always making a graven image; the ultimate is the habitual and persistent doing of evil in the sight of the Lord. The first is inward, and consequently unknown to friend or neighbor: the corruption of self. The second is more manifest, and yet not always clearly so to other people: making a graven image, the substitution of the false for the true in worship. The last is the stage in which the inner corruption of self becomes manifest, not only in the sight of God, but in the sight of men.

Self-corruption is devotion of life to any thing lower than the highest. What is the highest? That depends entirely on you. The highest to you is what you have seen to be the highest. I shall presuppose in this presence, and speaking to such a congregation as this, that you have seen the highest in the Lord Christ. That which appealed to you may not have been that which appealed to your neighbor, but you saw in Him something that spoke to the deeps within your life; some vision of His loveliness broke on you, you came to some conception of Him that appealed to you, that lured you. You knew perfectly well when the vision came that it was a vision of something high and noble and pure and good. It may have been that in His severe and noble ethic, His strong ideal of life, His fine conception of morality, you saw the height and set your face toward it. That was the highest for you. It may have been that the highest to you was the revelation of His supreme and matchless tenderness, that greatness of heart wherewith He ever traveled forth across the desert to find the lost, that superb compassion that ever made Him willing to sit by the side of sinful men, despising the shame of the Pharisee, while in comradeship with the defiled He communicated first compassion and then purity.

There came a moment when you changed your life to something a little lower than the highest, under swift, sudden, subtle temptation, it may be. You lowered the ethical standard that He had revealed, and for the sake of some advantage offered to you on the plane of the material you denied His call to your soul. In that moment you began the corruption of your life.

It may be that you refused to answer the cry of His compassion to your soul. You did not break your bread with the hungry. You declined to bear the scorn of men while you served the cause of such as were defiled. Remember, this happens to preachers as well as to others! In that moment, when we descended from the highest and refused to answer His call, we began the corruption of self, we were already on a declined plane. In the moment in which a man lowers himself he begins spoiling himself. It is the first stage.

Backsliding always begins there. Take up your newspaper, and you read of some man who held high position in the Christian Church, who is now in the depths. He did not begin with that outward act. There was first a hidden refusal to answer the call of the highest. Almost unknown, perchance, to himself at the moment, he began the descent.

So backsliding begins, begins over and over again in the midst of the Holiness Convention, at the center of a Bible Conference, because there the call comes to the highest; and if we refuse to obey we corrupt ourselves.

What is the next step? Someone will say that my figure of speech will now break down. Men do not now make graven images. I beseech you not to take refuge in subterfuges of that kind. A graven image is a thing that a man creates for himself when he has lost close fellowship with the one true and only God. All idolatry is the revelation of man's capacity for God. In these days men are not making to themselves graven images, as did these men of the olden time; but the moment a man turns from allegiance to God as revealed in Christ he puts something else in the place of God. It may be knowledge, it may be wealth, it may be that which is infinitely more mean and trivial, pleasure; but something steps in so insidiously that a man hardly knows, and it takes the place of God.

How may I know that anything has taken the place of God in my life? To whatever I am devoting my real thinking, my real energy. Whatever is the supreme and most important thing in my life, that is God to me. I may sing the songs of the sanctuary, the liturgy of the Church may still pass my lips, I may recite with intellectual conviction the creeds; but the God I worship is that to which I am giving the force and energy of my life. Ere a man knows it, when he has turned, be it ever so little, from the highest, he puts something else in the place of that from which he has turned and makes a god to suit the level on which he chooses to live.

Presently - mark the tragedy of it - he will turn even from that to something a little lower, and so, slowly but surely, corrupt the life, until the last step of backsliding is the habitually doing evil things in the sight of men. Then the man laughs at faith, sneers at the very things of religion which once were the supreme things, and mocks at high ideals. This is the ultimate in corruption; this is the stage of definite and open and avowed sin.

And what is the issue of it all? The issue of it all is clearly stated: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that ye shall utterly perish from off the land where unto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the Lord shall scatter you among the peoples, and ye shall be left few in number among the nations. Ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell."

These are the issues of backsliding; loss of possession, loss of power and influence, servitude which is in itself degradation.

When a man loses fellowship with God he loses power to possess anything that God gives him. I suppose the most flaming illustration of the thing in all the Bible is the story of Judas, the story of Judas in those last and awful hours. He turned from the highest, and he sold the Highest for thirty pieces of silver. There was no purchasing power in that silver. Judas had it, but he never possessed it, he never changed a single coin. Through the centuries I hear the clamor and the clangor of the silver flung on the halls of the sacred place, teaching this awful lesson, that the money a man gets when he sells the highest will never purchase him anything.

Do not lose this. You own broad acres. You cannot possess them without God. Oh, you may shoot over them two weeks in the year, but you do not possess them! I will come to something far simpler. You cannot possess a flower if you have turned your back on God. You can botanize, but you have no dealing with the flowers if you are away from the God of the flowers. To turn your back on God, Who gives you land, is to lose that land; and to fail to have dealings with God Who has revealed Himself to you and lured you to the highest is to lose the very earth for the possession of which you have sacrificed the highest and the noblest. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day that the very things into which you have come, all of them by the goodness of God, you cannot possess if you turn your back on the highest, which, at least, you saw, and toward which you set your affection.

Moses went on to tell the people that they would be scattered through the nations, be held in contempt by the world. I am one of those who never feel that they have any right to speak disrespectfully of the Jew. I believe the Jew is still God's man. But I cannot escape from this tremendous truth, and I had better express it in the language of one of the prophets, Jeremiah, who said: "Refuse silver shall men call them, because Jehovah hath rejected them." Never forget this: deeper than the Nonconformist conscience, deeper than the Christian conscience, is a human conscience which is in perfect accord with God, Who is the unwarped Conscience of the universe. When a man turns his back on God men despise him. The most worldly man holds in supreme contempt the Christian man who once set his face toward the highest and then turned back to the beggarly elements in which the worldly man is always living. Do you not know that there is something profound and searching in the thing the man of the world says to Christian men in surprise: "I did not expect to see you here"? When a man turns from God he loses not only his power of possession, but also his influence. He is despised, held in contempt.

The last descriptive word concerning the issue is the most terrible. The people of Jehovah, the people of the eternities, the people of vision, the people delivered by the high hand and outstretched arm of God, the people who came through the sea, and have been fed in the wilderness, and in all material things have had traffic with the spiritual; the people whom God has been teaching that man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, they are to serve gods without eyes, or ears, or hands, or smell, insensate deities, gods having no answer in the hour when the heart is wrung with anguish and cries out for succor; gods, the supreme helplessness of whom is revealed in one prophetic word: "There is no breath in them."

If we turn from the high to the low, then also will come the hour when we shall serve as slaves the god to whom we have given ourselves; and when our hearts are lonely and we cry for help, there will be no answer. No eye will pity, no ear will hear; we shall stretch out lame hands, and our gods will not be able to put underneath us the everlasting arms. It is not when the sun is shining that humanity becomes most conscious of itself. It is out of the bruising of life that men utter their supreme cries. The last stage of turning from God is the appalling loneliness of the darkling void in which God is not, and from which no answer comes back to the soul in its agony. Is there someone listening to me in that ultimate place of loneliness? I beseech you to remember that you are not alone, "Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet." He and you meet in the depths! Listen! "If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him." That is the message of the text.

On what conditions? Notice most carefully these words. The search is not geographical, it is not circumstantial. A man is to seek for God, and not for the lost condition. Moses did not say to these people, If in that day of ultimate back-sliding you shall seek for the land you will find it. Nay, verily! Nor, If ye seek for the lost influence you will recover it. He said, If ye seek for God you will find Him. The search must be for God. Let us solemnly consider this. If, indeed, you have descended from the heights and given yourself to the lower things, and have reached the ultimate, or if you are on the way to the ultimate, it is useless to making up your mind that you are going back to the heights. You won't do it that way. It is useless to determine that you will get back your lost influence. You will never get it that way. What then, is the soul to do? Search for God, turn back again to God.

Moses repeated his "if" in order that there might be no misunderstanding of his meaning. He not only said, "If thou shalt seek for Him"; he added, "If thou search with all thy heart, and with all thy soul."

I am not going to suggest that if you are at a distance from God the pathway back is necessarily an easy one. I am going rather to say to you: In the Name of God and your own humanity, be done with your fooling, and put blood and passion into the business of getting back. With all your heart, and with all your soul, means bringing resolutely yourself together in your endeavor to seek after God. That is the condition of getting back. It is of no use to sigh for the lost heights, it is of no use to resolve that you will so live as to win back the lost influence and the lost power. Never, never, never! You had better become for a little while - do not misunderstand me when I say it - you had better become for a little while careless about the heights, you had better come down into an appalling loneliness in which you say, O God, if there never be a height again for me, if there never again be influence for me, let me find Thee, let me get into real, living, vital, first-hand relationship with Thyself. That is the true attitude of a seeking soul.

Now, let it be granted that somewhere in this crowd that cry has gone up to God. No human ear has heard it. No human eye has been keen enough to detect a soul's turning back to God; but God has seen it. Now, then, I may come to the last word of the text, "Thou shalt find Him." This is certain, because it is you who changed, and not He; it is you who wandered, and not He; it is you who turned your back on Him, and not He His back on you. The Bible never speaks of God being reconciled to man; it speaks of man being reconciled to God. Oh, if you are going into dialectics, you can prove that one involves the other; but I am going to stand by the language of Scripture, for there is supreme value in it. I affirm to you, and I say it for the comfort of my soul - for I also have known backsliding - God never turned His face from man. Thou shalt find him. Where? Right there, where you are. Oh, but I am out of the land, I am in a foreign country, I am far away from the center of things! Nay, for thou art not far away from God, and He is the center of all things. But I am in the desert! And God is in the desert, and when your face turns back to Him resolutely, He will make the desert blossom as the rose. I have wandered far from the fountain of living waters, and I am on the sandy wastes, dying of thirst! God is there, and in the desert He shall make the springs of water to flow. He has never turned His back on you. I wish I could reach that man tonight who feels he is far off, and that nobody cares, and that even the Christian Church is prepared to give him another push downward in order to be rid of him. Man, God is with you where you are. Turn thy face toward His face, and He will lift on you the light of His countenance!

Thou shalt find Him, and to find God is to find everything. Suppose, for the sake of argument - I shall not end there - but suppose, for the sake of argument, you never win back your influence, you never reach the old heights of experience and ecstatic joy, to have found Him is to find everything. Ah, but that was only a supposition. To find Him is to find all in another sense. Go back over the process of your backsliding. How did it begin? You corrupted yourself. To find Him is to find yourself redeemed in all the full, vital sense of the word; to find Him is to find the One Who heals the life. Old Jacob coming back from Jabbok said a great thing: "I have seen God face to face, and my life is healed" - in our modern sense of the word, infinitely more than "preserved." "Preserved," in our modern sense, suggests to us that Jacob meant, Behold the wonder! I have seen God, and I have not been destroyed! It means infinitely more. I have seen Him, and I am healed. When he finds God, the man who has corrupted himself knows that he is redeemed.

To find God is to be able to use the language of Ephraim, "What have I to do any more with idols?" What, indeed, have I to do any more with idols after I have found God? Dagon falls and is broken into a thousand fragments when the soul has found God.

Evil ceases to be dominant in the life, the outward habits and activities of evil end; and goodness becomes dominant. There will yet be conflict. That will never end until we pass into the life that lies beyond. But the victorious element will be goodness, and the fall and blunder by the way will be the accident and not the habit of the life. To find God is to find not merely the ideal goodness, but the dynamic for goodness. The paralyzed, powerless, beaten soul that has been for years the sport of lusts and passions and evil things will be able to say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

The issues of backsliding also will be changed. The land will be repossessed. To find God is to find the flowers, and to find the birds; to find the things which you thought were yours, but from which you were excluded by sin.

My mind travels back over forty years. I am a boy again in my father's garden. There comes into that garden a young man who has been brought to Christ in some services that my father has been conducting. I was only a boy. In that garden that young man walked round with me, and his arm was round me, and suddenly he stooped - I see him now - to pluck a nasturtium leaf. He showed it to me, and said, Look at it, look at it! I looked at it. He said, Is it not wonderful? Look at the glory of it. And to think I have lived thirty years and never saw one till recently. I have never forgotten that. I know now what he meant. To get back to God is to get the key of everything, to enter into the land and to possess.

It is also to find a restoration of power and influence. You need not trouble about the Pharisee who will not receive you. Live your life with God and your influence is going to tell.

And, yet again, instead of being the bond slave of gods having no eyes or ears or hands or feet, insensate deities, the bond slave of dead things, after restoration to God you will find yourself reigning in life, realizing all the meaning that was in the heart of God when He gave you your first breath and your original being.

Are you away from God? Was it only yesterday that you turned from the highest? Oh, back to Him, back to Him! You traveled further than you knew when you said, "No," to the high and the noble thing. Back to Him tonight! Where are you? In the far country? You have lost your reputation, nobody really wants you? Back to God, back to Him now! See Him in the face of Jesus, find Him by answering the call that comes to you when the very Name of Christ is named. Answer Him! After Him! And do it now! Put into the business all your heart and all your soul. Gather yourself up, and now, with all the passion and principle of your life, in the silence, in the quietness, without sign or signal, without human eyes or ear detecting, resolutely break with the past and turn your face to God. In the sight of heaven and of hell act, and act now.

"Thou shalt find Him." Will He come in a flaming glory? Oh, perchance not. Will He come with some trumpet tone that I cannot mistake, a supernatural voice? Almost assuredly no. How, then, shall I find Him? Perhaps your first consciousness of nearness will be the new passion for the high, reborn within you, and the first thrill of power by which you begin to move on toward Him. It may be that your first consciousness of the answer of God will be the sense that you are not alone in the darkness.

So we will end, not with words of exposition, but with this great word of Holy Scripture - and let the "thence" apply to the place where we are if we are at any distance from God: "If from thence ye shall seek the Lord, thou shalt find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul."