**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 22 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God by faith unto faith: as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith.*

*Romans 1:16,17*

WHEN PAUL WROTE THIS LETTER HE HAD NEVER VISITED ROME. He earnestly desired to do so, and expected that his desire would be fulfilled. That desire was created by the fact of his Roman citizenship, and by his interest in the Christian Church in Rome; and that more especially because he desired that the Church in that city should be an instrument for the evangelization of the Western world. Writing thus to the saints in the Imperial City, he declared that he was not ashamed of the gospel, and he gave his reasons.

The statement that he was not ashamed is in itself interesting. It is the only occasion on which we find Paul even suggesting the possibility of being ashamed of the gospel. I am perfectly well aware that this is a declaration that he was not ashamed, but why make the declaration? I think there can be but one answer, and it is suggested by the words immediately preceding the text: "So much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also that are in Rome." The declaration that he was not ashamed of the gospel, with its implication of the possibility of being ashamed, was the result of his consciousness of Rome, of its imperial dignity, of its material magnificence, of its proud contempt for all aliens, of the vastness of its multitudes, of the profundity of its corruption. There was no question in his mind as to the power of his gospel, and yet we detect the undertone of inquiry as he wrote: "I am ready to preach the gospel to you also that are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel."

It is always easier to preach in a village than in a city, to the sweet, simple people of the countryside than to the satisfied metropolitans. Really it is not so, but the feeling that it is so invariably assails the soul of the prophet of God. In answer to that consciousness of his soul, or perhaps in answer to his feeling that such a consciousness might exist in the minds of the Roman Christians, Paul affirmed his readiness to preach the gospel in Rome also, declaring that he was not ashamed of it, and giving as his reason that this gospel was "the power of God unto salvation." The only justification of a gospel is that it is powerful. A message that proclaims the need for, and the possibility of, spiritual and moral renewal must be tested by the results it produces. A word devoid of power is no word of the Lord. A gospel that fails to produce the results it announces as necessary and as possible is no gospel. Is our gospel the power of God?

Let me say at once that the particular burden of my message this evening has come to me as the result of a long letter which I now hold in my hand, four closely written pages which I am not going to read to you in full, but which I have read again and again for my own soul's profit and examination as a preacher of the gospel, and from which I propose to read a few sentences. The letter refers to meetings which have been held in preparation for the winter's work:

You were saying on Tuesday evening that men were everywhere inquiring after reality, and I quite agree. We often hear about the dynamic of Christianity. There are youths and young men - I speak only of those about whose temptations I know something - who have to face temptations, and even this week have cried to the Lord Jesus for help and have tried the best they knew how to overcome, yet have failed. When a young man comes to me and asks where he can get the power to overcome, what am I to say? One did remark to me, "It is not a lack in our religion that it supplies no real power to overcome such-and-such temptations, temptations that cannot be avoided, and that have to be faced?" Men don't want a merely theoretic idea or ideas about the dynamic of Christianity. They want to realize how they can practically appropriate that dynamic. Careful Christian workers want to know how far, and in what way, they may safely encourage those spiritually sick and blind to hope for spiritual help after they have believed for the forgiveness of their sins; and experience shows it must not be a matter of mere inference, for inference would be likely to promise more than what seems to be genuinely realized. To hold out hopes that experience must disappoint is disastrous. Yes, it is reality men are longing for.

I believe that letter expresses the inquiry and the feeling of many souls. I think that my friend has fastened on a word that he knows I am peculiarly fond of, the word dynamic. I plead guilty; I love the word, and I use it a great deal, and I do so because it is a New Testament word. It is the very word of my text, The gospel is the *power* of God unto salvation. The letter of my friend is practically a challenge of the declaration of my text. The text says, "The gospel is the power of God into salvation." My friend suggests that there are men who have heard the call of Jesus, who have been obedient to it, and yet have not experienced that power. I am not going to argue the points of the letter, but rather to consider the statement of Paul, hoping and believing that in that consideration and in an attempt to understand the meaning of the great Apostle at this point there may be help for honest souls whose difficulty is voiced by the writer of the letter.

However, let me say to the writer of the letter, and to all such, that I agree that there is nothing more important today than that the Christian preacher and teacher should be real in the use of terms. But all who are making that demand must recognize the extreme difficulty of reality in terminology when dealing with spiritual forces that can never be perfectly apprehended. Whenever we have to deal with great forces we find ourselves in a similar difficulty. I am not an electrician, but I suggest a question whether the phrase, "to develop electricity," is an accurate phrase. I do not say that it is not, but I ask, Can you develop electricity? Is it not, after all, a word that we hazard until we come to fuller knowledge? Is there any man in this house, or in London, or in the world, who is prepared to tell us the last thing about electricity, not only what can be done by it, but also what it is? The moment we get into the realm of great forces which are intangible, imponderable, demonstrated by what they do, we are at least in danger of seeming to be unreal in our terms. We are dealing now with the most wonderful of all forces. At the close of our meditation undoubtedly there will be a sense in which some of the terms used will seem to lack reality. It is not that the force dealt with is unreal, but that it is so far beyond our final explanation that terms cannot be discovered which cover the facts of the case while excluding everything that should be excluded.

Confining ourselves now to the words selected, let us consider, first, the affirmation, "The gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation"; second, the condition on which the power is appropriated, "to every one that believeth"; and, finally, the exposition of the operation which the Apostle added, "for therein is revealed a righteousness of God by faith unto faith."

First, then, as to the affirmation. Here many sentences are not necessary. The Apostle declares that "the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The power: that is something which produces results, something which is more than a theory, something which is mightier than a law, an actual, spiritual force, producing spiritual results, an actual power accomplishing things. What it is in itself may be a mystery; how it does its work may not be known; but the Apostle declares that it accomplishes certain things, and that we may know by the results it produces that the gospel is more than a theory, more than a law, that it is, in fact, a power. Moreover, he makes the superlative declaration that it is "the power of God." This is the superlative way of declaring its sufficiency for doing certain things. In quality it is irresistible, in quantity it is inexhaustible. Yet he declares further that it is "the power of God unto salvation." This at once defines and limits the power of the gospel. The gospel is the power that operates to this end alone. The gospel is the power which operates to this end perfectly. The word "salvation" immediately suggests inquiring what the danger is that is referred to, for to know the danger is to know the scope of the salvation. Here, to summarize briefly, the danger is twofold: pollution of the nature, and paralysis of the will. In the presence of temptation men find that their nature is so weakened that they yield, and their will is so paralyzed that even when they have willed not to yield, still they do yield. That is the whole story of the danger. The Apostle declares that the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation," that is, for cleansing the nature from its pollution, and for enabling the will, so that henceforth a man shall not only will to do right, but shall do it.

It is perfectly clear, however, that the gospel operates in human lives only on the fulfilment of conditions. The gospel is not the power of God to every man. "The gospel ... is the power of God to every one that believeth." The Apostle here recognized the human possibility, that is, a possibility common to all human nature, irrespective of race or privilege. "To the Jew first; and also to the Greek"; and to the Greek none the less and none the later. The conditions can be fulfilled by men as men, apart from the question of race or privilege or temperament. The gospel can be believed by the metropolitan or the provincial, by the dweller in Rome as surely as by the dwellers in the hamlets through which he had passed, by the learned and by the illiterate. Belief is the capacity and possibility of human life every-where.

What, then, is this capacity? We must interpret the use of the word believe here by its constant use in the revelation of the New Testament. There must be conviction before there can be belief. Belief is always founded on reason. How can they believe who have not heard? The conviction is not necessarily that of the truth of the claim; it is not necessarily conviction that the gospel will work. There can be faith before I am sure that this gospel is going to work. Indeed, thousands of people have a profound conviction that the gospel will work who yet have never believed. The conviction necessary is that in view of the need experienced, and of the claim which the gospel makes, it ought to be put to the test. Jesus said to His critics on one occasion: "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God." Surely that was a perfectly fair test. He who puts the gospel to the test of obeying it will find out whether its claim of power be accurate. When a man is convinced that in the presence of his need and of the claim which the gospel makes he ought to put it to the test, he has come to the true attitude of mind in which it is possible for him to exercise faith. Faith, then, is volitional. That is the central responsibility of the soul. Faith is not a feeling that comes stealing across the soul. Faith is not an inclination toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is that volitional act which decides in the presence of the great need, and in the presence of the great claim, to put that claim to the test by obedience thereto. Conduct is the resulting expression, which is conformity to the claims made by the gospel, immediate and progressive. Whatever the proclamation of the gospel says to the soul, the soul is to put the gospel to the test by obeying. Invariably in the actual coming of a soul to Christ under conviction of sin everything is focused at some one point; and when that is obeyed other calls will be made on the soul by this gospel, which is one of purity and righteousness, as well as of mercy and of love. Faith is that volitional act which puts the gospel to the test by obedience to its claims. That is the condition of appropriation.

The whole situation is illuminated for the inquiring soul by the explanatory word: "For therein is revealed a righteousness of God by faith unto faith." That is the exposition of what the Apostle has already written concerning the gospel, both as to the nature of the power that is resident in it and as to the law by which that power is appropriated in individual lives. The declaration that there is a revelation in the gospel of the righteousness of God does not mean that the gospel has revealed the fact that God is righteous. That revelation antedated the gospel; it was found in the law, it was found in human history, it was found everywhere in the human heart. Out of that knowledge comes the agony of soul that seeks after a gospel. The declaration clearly means that the gospel reveals the fact that God places righteousness at the disposal of men who in themselves are unrighteous, that He makes it possible for the unrighteous man to become a righteous man. That is the exposition of salvation. Salvation is righteousness made possible. If you tell me that salvation is deliverance from hell, I tell you that you have an utterly inadequate understanding of what salvation is. If you tell me that salvation is forgiveness of sins, I shall affirm that you have a very partial understanding of what salvation is. Unless there be more in salvation than deliverance from penalty and forgiveness of transgressions, then I solemnly say that salvation cannot satisfy my own heart and conscience. That is the meaning of the letter I received: mere forgiveness of sins and deliverance from some penalty cannot satisfy the profoundest in human consciousness. Deep down in the common human consciousness there is a wonderful response to that which is of God. Man may not obey it, but in the deeps of human consciousness there is a response to righteousness, an admission of its call, its beauty, its necessity. Salvation, then, is making possible that righteousness. Salvation is the power to do right. However enfeebled the will may be, however polluted the nature, the gospel comes bringing to men the message of power enabling them to do right. In the gospel is revealed a righteousness of God, which, as the Apostle argues and makes quite plain as he goes on with his great letter, is a righteousness which is placed at the disposal of the unrighteous man so that the unrighteous man may become righteous in heart and thought and will' and deed. Unless that be the gospel, there is no gospel. Paul affirms that was the gospel which he was going to Rome to preach.

Then we come to a phrase which is full of light. He tells us that this righteousness therein revealed, revealed in the gospel, is "by faith unto faith," in which phrase he tells us exactly how men receive this power. He has already told us that it is to everyone that believeth, then he gives us an exposition of that phrase. As he has given us an exposition of "salvation" as the revelation of righteousness of God at the disposal of men, so now he gives us an exposition of the phrase "every one that believeth" in the phrase "by faith unto faith."

The phrase is at once simple and difficult. There can be no question as to its structure. Taking the phrase as it stands, and looking at it grammatically apart from its context, it is evident that the second "faith" is resultant faith. The faith finally referred to grows out of the faith first referred to. "By faith unto faith." It is an almost surprising thing how successfully almost all expositors have hurriedly passed over this phrase. What did the Apostle mean? Did he mean that is an initial faith on the part of man which results in a yet firmer faith? That is possible, but there is another explanation. I believe the Apostle meant that the gospel reveals a righteousness which is at the disposal of sinning men by the faith of God unto the faith of man. The faith of God produces faith in man. The faith of God. Ought such a phrase be used of Him? Verily, if faith be certainty, confidence, and activity based on confidence. The faith of God is faith in Himself, in His Son, and in man. On the basis of God's faith in Himself, and on the basis of His faith in His Son, and on the basis of His faith in man, He places through His Son a righteousness at the disposal of man in spite of his sin. That faith of God becomes, when once it is apprehended, the inspiration of an answering faith in man. Inspired by God's faith I trust Him, I act in consonance with the faith that He has demonstrated in human history by sending His Son, and by all the provision of infinite grace.

I take my way back from this epistle and observe once more the Lord Jesus as He revealed God to me, and that is what He always did in dealing with sinning souls. He always reposed confidence in them in order to inspire their confidence in Himself. If Thou canst do anything, said one man to Him; If thou canst … ! All things are possible to him that believeth, was His answer. That was the Lord's declaration of His confidence in the possibility of the man who was face to face with the sense of his own appalling weakness. There are many yet more remarkable and outstanding illustrations in the New Testament. The Lord ever dealt with men on the basis of His confidence in them, in their possibility in spite of failure, always on condition that they would repose an answering confidence in Himself. A supreme illustration of this was afforded in the upper room on that last night when He was dealing with the disciples in the sight of His approaching departure. Mark most carefully His conversation with Peter. Peter, demanding to understand Him, in agony in the presence of the gathering clouds, said: Where art Thou going? Jesus replied: Whither I go ye cannot come now, but ye shall come hereafter. Again Peter asked: Why cannot I come now? I will follow Thee anywhere. I will die for Thee! Jesus replied: Wilt Thou die for me, Peter? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice. Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. If I go away, I come again to receive you to Myself. I go to prepare a place for you.

Take out of that conversation its central value. It is Christ's confidence. He said to Peter, in effect: I know the worst that is in you, the forces that you have not yet discovered that within four-and-twenty hours will make you a denier, cursing and swearing. I know the worst, but if you will trust Me I will realize the best in you. I know the best in you. I shall have perfect confidence in you, provided you will have confidence in Me.

Let me take a superlative declaration. Whatever we think about humanity, Christ thought it worth dying for! He believed in it, in spite of its sin, in spite of its unutterable failure. When He confronted sinning souls He believed in them. He knew their incapacity. He knew that of themselves they could do nothing; but He knew also that in them was the very stuff out of which He could make saints who would flash and shine in light forever. In spite of the spoiling of sin, there was that in them with which He could deal. If I may borrow an awkward word from the old theologians, God believes in the salvability of all men. God puts righteousness at the disposal of man by faith in Himself, in His Son, and in the man at whose disposal He places it. If that once be seen, men respond to that faith of God by faith in Him.

Let us come away from the realm of argument into the realm of experience. All true Christian workers, men and women who know what it is really to get into close touch with sinning souls, and into grip with the spiritual life of men, have learned that the way to lift men back out of the slough of despond is to let them see that Christian workers believe in them, The way to lift any woman back again out of the degradation into which she has come is to show her you know she is capable of the higher and the nobler in the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. "By faith unto faith." By faith a righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. By the confidence which God reposes in Himself, and by the confidence He has in the possibility of every human life, He has placed righteousness at man's disposal through Christ. No man will ever avail himself of that except by faith. No man can appropriate the great provision save as he responds in faith to faith. As this faith of God in man is answered by the faith of man in God, then contact is made between the dynamic that is resident within Himself, and placed at the disposal of men by the mystery of His passion, and the weakness and incapacity of the human soul.

Such was the gospel of which Paul was not ashamed. Such is the gospel. The accuracy of the theory can be demonstrated only by results. That is the whole theme. I am here this evening to affirm once more - and I do it no longer as theory, I do it as an experience; I speak from this moment not merely as advocate, but as witness - that "the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation." However hard and severe the affirmation may seem at the moment, I am nevertheless constrained and compelled to affirm that if the gospel does not work, the failure is in the man, not in the gospel. If that be not true the whole Christian history is a lie. If that be true, then all the thousands and tens of thousands of human beings who for two millenniums have declared what the gospel has wrought in them have been woefully deceived, or have been most mysteriously perpetrating fraud throughout the centuries and millenniums. If it does not work, then that man who says that he has been delivered from besetting sin is a liar, and he is sinning in secret. Either this declaration is true, or the gospel is an awful deception, enabling men to hide secret sin. I pray you think again. If you have imagined that there is no dynamic in the gospel, think again, and examine your own life again, and find out whether or not you have fallen into line with the claims of the gospel and fulfilled its conditions. I assert that it is not enough that man shall hate his sin and cry out for help; he must put himself in line with the power that operates, he must fulfil the conditions laid down. It is not enough to submit to the Lord; a man must also resist the devil. It is not enough to resist the devil; a man must also submit to the Lord. There are men who submit and cry for help, but they put up no fight against temptations. They will never appropriate the power. There are men who put up a strenuous fight against temptations, but they never submit, never pray, never seek help. They will never find deliverance. "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The gospel is that wherein the fact is revealed that righteousness as a power is at the disposal of a sinning man by God's faith in that man, inspiring man's faith in God. If men would discover the power of this gospel they will do so as they submit to its claim immediately and thoroughly.

If this were the time and place, as it is not, I could call witnesses. They are in this house: men who have known the very temptations delicately referred to in this letter, subtle, insidious temptations; but who also know that the gospel has meant to them power enabling them to do the things they fain would have done, but could not until they believed in this gospel.

I would like my last note in this address to be an appeal to any man who is face to face with this problem. My brother, God believes in you, and that in spite of all the worst there is in you. God knows the worst in you better than you know it yourself, yet He believes in you; and because He believes in your possibility He has provided righteousness in and through the Son of His love and by the mystery of His passion. I want you to respond to God's faith in you by putting your faith in Him, and demonstrating your faith by beginning with the next thing in obedience. You also will find that the gospel is the power of God, not theory, not inference, but a power that, coming into the life, realizes within the life and experience all the things of holiness and of righteousness and of high and eternal beauty.