**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 02 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**AMBITIONS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*... desire earnestly the greater gifts. And moreover a most excellent way show I unto you. Follow after love. ...*

*1 Corinthians 12:31 and 14:1*

WE ARE ALL FAMILIAR WITH THE WORD "AMBITION." Coming to us from the Latin, it has acquired a significance quite other than that of its first meaning. Quite literally, it simply means going round. In process of time, it came to signify going round for votes. Today, it stands for that mood of the soul which makes a man go round for votes; today it stands for earnest desire, especially desire for honor in some form. Thus it will be seen that the word originally described a method, an action; while today, it is used rather of a purpose, an inspiration.

The question which has been under consideration this month by our young people has been: "What would you consider the greatest honor that could come to you; and why?" It will immediately be recognized that the purpose of the question was that of discovering the ambitions which are inspiring their lives, or which ought to inspire their lives; for it is possible for a person to cherish an ambition which is not an inspiration but which is a dead weight. The answers which I have received have been most interesting, and in some ways I cannot help saying remarkable; but I will come to them presently.

Let us first take time to consider this subject of ambition, as to its place, its peril, and its power in human life. This we shall do in the light of the text selected. I recognize that there are far larger values in this text than I intend to deal with. There is, however, exactly the light we need if we are finally to understand the proper place and power of ambition in human life.

In considering this, therefore, we will first of all dwell with some technical care upon the word of which the apostle made use, and which the revisers have translated "desire earnestly"; and King James translators, "covet." It is one word in the apostolic writing. It is the Greek word from which two well-known words in our English language have been derived. I refer to the words "zealous" and "jealous." Zealous is a word full of suggestiveness, its root idea being that of fire, of passion. Zeal is the driving force in endeavor; jealousy is that which guards the way. Thus in our two words, we have two aspects of the same central thought. The activity suggested by the word is that of mental approbation which expresses itself in strenuous endeavor. The idea is expressed exactly by our modern use of the word "ambition." It is a strong desire to obtain position, power, honor, in the best sense of that word honor.

There is a prevalent notion that ambition is wholly evil. You will remember what Wolsey said to Cromwell:

Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition.

By that sin fell the angels; how could man, then,

The image of his Maker hope to win by it.

Or, again, Mark Antony:

… The noble Brutus

Hath told you Caesar was ambitious;

If it were so, it was a grievous fault;

And grievously hath Caesar answered it.

Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest

(For Brutus is an honourable man;

So are they all, all honourable men),

Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral

He was my friend, faithful and just to me;

But Brutus says he was ambitious;

And Brutus is an honourable man.

In each of the quotations the conception is that ambition is evil. This is not necessarily so. The fundamental principle of society is that of individual self-preservation and self-realization. There will be no perfected society that is not made up of perfected individuals. A chain is as strong as its weakest link. A castle is as strong as its least-guarded door. If in society there are links that are weak, society is weak. If in the great household of men there are individuals that are imperfect, then the household of men remains imperfect. Perfect units are needed for the perfect unity. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of individuality is not individuality, but the realization of the commonwealth. The ultimate reason why every man must be perfect is not that the man should be perfect, but that the community should be perfect. Therefore, every individual must aim at high things, noble things, and desire honor. This is ambition in its simplest, purest form; and this is not evil, but wholly good.

There is one brief prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah, a simple prophecy among the great utterances of the prophet of thunder and of tears, a prophecy uttered to one man, to Baruch, the man associated with Jeremiah in his work. The heart of the prophecy is contained in these words: "… seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not; …" Jeremiah did not tell Baruch that he was not to seek great things; he told him he was not to seek great things for himself. There in a flash we have the revelation of the difference between true and false ambition.

That reveals the peril of ambition. When the whole is lost sight of and its well-being is not sought, ambition becomes deadly. Then action growing out of it becomes cruel and ruthless. When a man seeks great things for himself, what cares he how many suffer so that he succeeds; how many are downtrodden so that he may rise; how many are flung out by the whirling wheel, so long as he arrive at the goal? Such ambition is the spawn of hell, the progeny of Lucifer who fell from his high estate by ambition that was entirely self-centered.

When a man seeks great things, not for himself, but in the interest of the community, then ambition is godly, sacred, pure, the inspiration of all that is noble.

To desire honor for oneself without reference to its effect upon others is wholly evil. Along that line all despots have climbed to the thrones from which they have crushed and cursed humanity. But to desire honor for oneself in order that the honor gained may be made the occasion of help and blessing and healing is the very way by which - I say it reverently, but I say it - our Lord and Master has climbed to the throne of universal empire and will at last heal all wounds, end all weariness, wipe away all tears, and lead the race into the beatific Kingdom of God.

Therefore, true ambition is a great and gracious power. To desire, to covet in that sense, is necessarily to strive. Thus it becomes the secret power which contributes to the realization of the commonwealth itself.

The great subject of the apostle in this letter was that of the Christian church; he was dealing with its unity and its diversity; with the fact that it is unified by the indwelling Spirit of God, with the fact that it is diversified in all those gifts which the Spirit of God bestows upon the individual members of the church; all which gifts are bestowed in order that those possessing them may exercise them, not for the benefit of themselves, but for the benefit of the church. Whenever Paul dealt with the church in this world, he dealt with it as realizing and revealing the Kingdom of God, the true social order, that which is to be established here in the world. Paul ever saw the church in this world as the instrument of the Kingdom and its revelation, because within itself the Kingdom principles are realized. Therefore, to members of the church he said: "Covet, desire with passion, the best gifts, not that you may hold high position and become famous, but that you may minister to the good of the whole church, and that the commonwealth may be realized most perfectly because of the gift which has been bestowed upon you."

In the church, therefore, and in the Kingdom of God, individual members are to be ambitious; they are to desire gifts as capacities for usefulness; and the very possession of such gifts is honor of the highest kind. In the Christian atmosphere, everything is conditioned by a man's relation to his fellow man. In the atmosphere created by the teaching of Christ and the presence of His Spirit, honor consists in the ability to serve. True honor within the church of God, within the Kingdom of God, is the possession of that, the use of which helps others and blesses them. Finally, the apostle teaches that the one true way of ambition is the way of love.

From that survey of the subject, let me turn to the answers to the question. I have received one hundred. A few missed the point of my question. One or two filled up their paper preaching against the sin of desiring any honor at all! That was due to their very limited conception of what honor means. If honor meant what they thought it meant, I should agree with all their preaching.

The majority, however, answered quite naturally. My purpose now is to group these answers generally, selecting one or two for special treatment in order that I may say some final words of counsel and help.

There were certain conspicuous facts in the answers received. The first was the almost remarkable unanimity of unselfishness of motive. To be mathematical, out of the hundred, that was true of at least seventy-nine of the answers. The answers that were of a more personal nature, nevertheless, revealed desires on a singularly high level. Among the hundred answers, there was one note of despair, and to that one note of despair I shall come in the last five minutes. The others I have grouped, and will deal with them so, saying one or two brief words in each case.

Twenty-two young people declare in one form or another that the highest honor which could be conferred upon them would be that of ability to help those who are in need. In many ways this desire was expressed among those twenty-two answers; but the desire to help the needy, the wounded by the way, the weak, the crippled, was found in answer after answer, and when I read them alone quietly, they moved my heart singularly.

The chances are everywhere! You can realize your ambition if that is it. Do not make the mistake of nursing an ambition, which does not become an inspiration to activity. Do not sit down and sigh for some great opportunity of helping the needy in some large and magnificent way. Remember Charles Kingsley at this point:

Do the thing that's nearest,

Though it's dull at whiles;

Helping when you meet them,

Lame dogs over stiles.

That is a perfect and magnificent piece of Christian philosophy. Never shall I forget sitting in this pulpit and listening once to Dr. Broughton as he preached from a group of texts. When he read them, I remember I could not think what he would make of them "… as He went ..." ; "… as He passed by …" ; "… as He was in the way! …" That great sermon was intended to show that nearly all the works of Jesus were wrought as He was going to some place, on the way. Thank God for your ambition to help. You will have a chance before you get home if your eyes are open. By the way, the ambition may be in part realized; and if you will begin then that ambition will be the dynamic of service that moves in rhythmic harmony with the highest intention activity of God.

Nineteen answers expressed this same desire only perhaps in a more essential way; to be able to win souls for Christ. Can there be any higher honor than that?

Again I say to you knowing how difficult it may seem to you to be, yet it is true; your chances are all about you. I venture to say to anyone who has that ambition, if you will dare to begin with all courtesy and sanity, with all manliness and womanliness and naturalness, you will be surprised to find that the very people you were afraid of have wondered why you never spoke about Christ before.

Eight declared that no greater honor could be conferred than a distinct call to enter the mission field.

I want to suggest to those who wrote that, that they take time to consider quietly whether it may not be that they have had the call. I will say no more about it than that. If not, unless you are quite sure about it, keep and guard as a sacred thing the sense that it would be an honor if it were conferred upon you. Remember, that if He is not calling you to go to the mission field, He is calling you, as His child, to hold the ropes for those who are there and to help in the great work that they are doing.

Six declared in different ways that their supreme ambition was that of pleasing Christ.

Five expressed the same thing in another way, by definitely saying that no higher honor could come to them than to hear Jesus say at the end of life, "... well done ..."

How inclusive that is! And yet how searching! Let me say to my own heart and to such we may rest assured that Christ will never look into our eyes and say "... well done …" unless it has been well done! Then let us also remember that in order that things may be well done, He says, "… lo, I am with you all the days. …"

Six answers, all of them from women, touched my heart. They said that there could come to them no greater honor than that of having committed to them the care of little children either in the homeland or in heathen countries. That is a great, gracious, beautiful, motherly desire, coming up out of the hearts of these girls and women.

Let me say to these that there are crowds of little children that they may care for near at hand. It is a great ambition. The first word of the final high commission of Jesus to Peter, in the shimmering light of morning, as it played upon the Galilean Sea, was this: "… Feed My lambs."

From thirteen came the answer that the highest honor that could come to them would be that of love, issuing in marriage; with the dignity of fatherhood, motherhood, and home. I thank God for every answer so honestly written. The theme is too big for me to begin to deal with here. Let me only say to all who feel that, the sense is a sacred one; guard it. You have noticed, if you have read the Song of Solomon carefully, that three times in the course of the great love song, the voice of a singer is heard who is not one of the chorus, but who sings a recitative, and these are the words:

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem …

That ye stir not up, nor awaken love,

Until he please.

Thus in the midst of the music there is a pause, and the voice of the singer is heard in warning. At the end of the marriage, following the wooing, before the betrothal, and in the midst of the united life, that revealing caution is uttered. I would that interrupting charge could be written in letters of gold and hung in every hall in which young people assemble. In the presence of the glory of love, it warns them not to trifle with that most sacred thing in life. It is a great ambition. I thank you, my brothers and sisters, who wrote for my eyes without your name appended that thought which you nurse within your heart; the great honor of the marriage relationship, of the making of home, and of caring for your own children. Never allow anyone in your presence to speak even flippantly of the great subject. Cherish the ambition; only do not wake up love until it please, and ever remember that the crowning glory of parenthood is, the exercise of one of the most distinctively divine powers bestowed upon humanity.

All of these were expressions of desire that life may be of help and blessing to others.

Then I had a group of those that were more personal, but none the less high and beautiful. There was one answer which gave me pause; I am not quite sure about it, and therefore, I do not want to be unfair. One man wrote and expressed the wish that the day might come when his name should appear in the King's birthday list of honors, giving as his reason that such an appearance would be a proof of integrity on his part recognized by the nation. It made me pause, because I am not sure that its meaning is always as it appears. That is what it ought to mean. I take his wish at that high level. Perhaps that was the most selfish thing I read, yet the motive was not low; it was high.

One was a pathetic answer; hardly an answer, yet sincere. "The highest honor that could come to me would be that someone could make it possible for me to believe in God." That is pathetic, but it is full of hope. A man who will write that is on the highway to the light. As I have often said before, and I say again, the agnosticism that is an agony, is a birthpang; presently there will be the light! The agnosticism that is a pleasantry is a profanity. When a man flippantly tells me he is an agnostic and smiles, I know him to be an ignoramus and a fool, for agnosticism is never the final resting place for the honest man. I would counsel that one to cherish the ambition and make the ambition find an answer.

Someone quoted the verse from Proverbs, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. ..." That is scriptural. Nothing could be better than that, only it must be remembered that Scripture must be defined by Scripture. What does Scripture mean by a good name? A good name is like ointment poured forth! The woman breaking the alabaster box of ointment upon the feet of Jesus is the illustration. The biblical good name is not a name of hard equity and righteousness. It is like ointment poured forth. It is the good name of the soul that gives, serves, and spends.

Someone else wrote this, and here again is a strange piece of wistfulness. "I should consider it the highest honor possible if only I could see a miracle wrought through my faith and prayers! "

Here, again, is a soul feeling after great things, and again I say, guard the ambition, only consider the statement carefully. Remember this: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," and understand that you cannot measure the influence of your prayer by anything that appears. That is not a demonstration of the greatness of prayer which is startling and wonderful. Think again in this realm, my friend. I would not dampen that ardor or speak slightingly of the desire, but I would ask you to consider it.

Then I got one that was touching and beautiful. I think a hundred could have written it, but one girl wrote: "The highest honor that could come to me would be to know that in my life my mother's prayers are answered!" I know what your mother prayed for you; I know what mothers pray for us; I am with you! If presently, for it has not been so yet, if presently all my mother prayed for me can ever be true of me, that is the greatest honor I want. Cherish that ambition, live toward it, strive toward it! That ambition will be the inspiration of great living and of great service.

Another wrote, "The highest honor that could come to me would be to be loved and trusted by all in sorrow." Is not that fine? Let me ask you a question. Who is your neighbor? That question was asked quite cynically of Jesus, and you remember how He answered it. He did not tell the man who His neighbor was; He gave him the parable of the good Samaritan. Do you want to be loved? Then love! Pour out your love on some needy soul, and the answering love will satisfy you.

Another answer was written by a woman. "The highest honor that could come to me would be to have good health and a strong spiritual life." I am ambitious for these things.

I wondered as I read that, how much pain lay behind it, how much weakness and suffering. If I could find that woman and talk to her alone, I would say this to her: "Whom He loveth He chasteneth." There is a profounder meaning in your pain and weakness than yet you know! God grant you His peace!

It seems to me it is good thus to ask ourselves what our ambitions really are, and then to ask why we have such ambitions. I suppose soldiers are ambitious for the Victoria Cross. Well, they can buy them! They are worth about 7 1/2d., I believe, as metal. But it is not the Victoria Cross men are eager for, but the thing that it signifies; the heroism that deserves it! If we have discovered what our ambition is, let us submit that ambition to the apostolic test. Love must lie at the heart of it, or it is a perilous and evil thing. If the ambition stand that test, if the reason why I desire this or that thing as an honor, is the love within me, then let me cherish my ambition, cling to it; let me be jealous and zealous in the prosecution of that which will issue in the realization thereof.

If our ambitions do not stand the test, what shall we do? Begin all over again by coming to the Christ Who sees the whole. His ambition was to reach the throne of universal empire as Saviour. The throne of universal empire, as empire, did not satisfy Him; He had that; but He "… emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." What took Him thus down? Ambition! "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, … and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. …" The name He won and bore aloft to the throne of imperial, universal power was Jesus, and the name Jesus He bears because "… it is He that shall save His people from their sins." His ambition was to sit upon the throne, not as sovereign merely, but as Saviour. To that Lord, let us come, and to that One, let us yield ourselves, that we may re-adjust our ambitions.

Now in conclusion, someone wrote upon the answer paper these words from Jean Ingelow:

To strive - and fail. Yes, I did strive and fail.

I set mine eyes upon a certain night

To find a certain star - and could not hail

With them its deep, set light.

Fool that I was. I will rehearse my fault;

I, wingless, thought myself on high to lift

Among the winged. I set these feet that halt

To run against the swift.

That is a note of despair which suggests there was honor coveted and not won; ambition cherished but never realized; and the writer seems to me to be settling down upon that terrible disappointment.

Seeing you chose to express yourself in poetry, let me answer you in poetry. Let me ask whoever wrote that answer to take Robert Browning's Grammarian's Funeral, quaint, peculiar, strange in many ways, but wonderful poetry. Read this, and read it all:

That low man seeks a little thing to do,

Sees it and does it;

This high man with a great thing to pursue,

Dies ere he knows it.

That low man goes on adding one to one,

His hundred's soon hit;

This high man, aiming at a million,

Misses an unit.

That, has the world here - should he need the next

Let the world mind him!

This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed

Seeking shall find Him.

That is finer philosophy than the other. What did you tell me, that you set your eyes upon a certain night to find a certain star, and you could not hail them with its deep-set light? You did better than you knew probably. The only wrong you have committed is that of imagining that you did not attain that toward which you were aiming. It is the aim, the ambition, and the consecrated activity that grows out of it, which matter! No, who is there here among us who has ever seen anything of the real glory luring him or her to the heights who has already reached them?

We had better get back to the Bible. This man Paul when he had been three-and-thirty years following Christ, wrote his autobiography in a love letter, for the Philippian letter is preeminently a love letter. In the third chapter we have these words, and here is nothing finer in literature:

"Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal. …"

Mark his attitude, dear friend of mine who wrote that poetry. Take heart! The night is black, the stars are not seen, but they are there! Keep your eyes toward them, and presently, ere you know it they will be seen! Or, it may be that you will never see them, because while you look, the morning will break and the stars are never seen when the sun is shining!