**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 09 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**FORGIVENESS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*... the forgiveness of our sins.*

*Colossians 1:14*

THESE WORDS CONSTITUTE A PHRASE OF INTERPRETATION. IT stands in this verse in apposition to the word "redemption," and declares its fundamental value. "In Whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins." Redemption in its finality means far more than forgiveness of sins. In that finality it is complete restoration of the life to fellowship with God. In the fulness of redemption the spirit of man is consciously at peace with God, in righteousness as a condition, and in joy as an experience. In the fulness of redemption, the mind of man apprehends the things of God and finds perfect rest therein. In the ultimate perfection of redemption, the body of humiliation will be fashioned anew and conformed to the body of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. But this whole finality is the result of forgiveness. The experiences of fellowship are impossible apart from that of the forgiveness of sins, but let it be added immediately, they are the inevitable result of that experience. Where the forgiveness of sins is truly known, there does immediately result the sense of spiritual peace and mental rest, and the song of the final is already in the heart; so that even if today in these tabernacles we groan, we do so not as without hope and confidence that there shall be the perfecting of our personality ere the work of redemption be completed. All these phases of redemption, spiritual, mental, and physical, follow this fundamental sense of the forgiveness of sins. This, then, is the first wonder and glory of the Cross, for the Cross is the tree to which the Lord bore up our sins that we might be set apart from them, be dead to them, and so live unto righteousness.

Into the woods my Master went,

Clean forspent, forspent.

Into the woods my Master came,

Forspent with love and shame.

But the olives they were not blind to Him,

The little grey leaves were kind to Him:

The thorn-tree had a mind to Him

When into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went,

And He was well content.

Out of the woods my Master came,

Content with death and shame.

When death and shame would woo Him last

From under the trees they drew Him last;

'Twas on a tree they slew Him - last

When out of the woods He came.

To that tree He bore up our sins, that we being dead to and separated from those sins might live unto righteousness. The first value of the Cross, then, is that of "the forgiveness of our sins." The apostle's sense of the vital importance of this experience is revealed in this particular passage by two things. It is seen first in the fact that he does thus make it stand for the whole fact of redemption: "In Whom we have our redemption," and as exposition of redemption he is content to write this phrase, "the forgiveness of our sins," knowing very well, none better than he, as all his writings testify, that growing out of that fundamental experience are all the infinite reaches and values of Christian victory and Christian triumph. Here, however, everything begins, and so he puts the gracious first and fundamental part as inclusive of the glorious whole to its finality. "In Whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins." The apostolic sense of the vital importance of the experience is even more remarkably manifested in the fact that in this relation he reaches the highest level of his teaching as to the One through Whom that redemption is made possible, "In Whom we have our redemption. …" We take the phrase, change its emphasis, and make it a question: in Whom have we our redemption, this forgiveness of sins? Clustering about the brief phrase, we find the apostle's highest teaching about the Person of the Lord. Mark the phrases as I take them away from their context, knowing your familiarity with the context, and knowing that you will fill in mentally all that I omit: "… the Son of his love ... the image of the invisible God … the firstborn of all creation ... the firstborn from the dead …" the One in Whom all fulness dwells. The stupendous, majestic descriptions lend their dignity, force, and meaning to this: "In whom we have our redemption, ..." and lend the note of assurance, hope, and confidence to all sin-burdened souls, "… the forgiveness of our Sins."

If we are to escape the tendency of the age, that of questioning the fact or undervaluing the value of the forgiveness of sins, we must familiarize ourselves with this setting of the thought in relation to the One through Whom the possibility is affirmed. The mystery of forgiveness is commensurate with and must be interpreted by, the mystery of the One through Whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.

First, observe He is no solitary member of the human the Son of His love race but its Root and its Source, "… the Son of His love … the image of the invisible God …" The One from Whom all things have proceeded is God, Who is love, and the Saviour is in the Son of His love in the deepest and most profound sense of the word; in the sense of that mystic relation to Him which is taught from beginning to the end of the New Testament and has been the central belief of the church through two millenniums: He is "… the Son of His love … the image of the invisible God." So I repeat, this One is not a solitary member of the human race but the One from Whom the whole race has sprung; its Root and Source.

Again, He is no stranger to the race, but Himself its final glory, "… the firstborn of all creation." In passing it is necessary that we should remind ourselves that this expression "firstborn" does not mean first in order of time but more probably last in order of time. The "firstborn" is not one who is at the beginning but the ultimate flower and fruitage of the creation. Here the Son of God is seen in that infinite mystery of relationship to the human race which makes Him no stranger to it but Himself the final glory of it; the One toward Whom the whole creation moved by whatever process it went forward, the firstborn, the last, the ultimate glory.

Yet again, and here we touch the inner heart of the matter; He is no stranger to the tragedy of sin but is the One Who was identified with all even unto death; the One Who vanquished all and Who therefore can no longer be described as "firstborn of creation," the final flower and fruit of a process, but "firstborn from the dead" and thus the Originator of a new order and a new race, the One Who moves toward the ultimate realization of the Divine purpose.

Once again, He is no mere heroic dreamer attempting splendid things. There have been many such in the history of the world, but Christ is not to be numbered among them. I repeat, He is not merely a heroic dreamer attempting splendid things, but One Who accomplishes all in the sufficiency of the fulness of Godhead; the One in Whom all fulness dwells; the fulness of originating power, the fulness of capacity for suffering, the fulness of capacity for overcoming all suffering and originating a new and redemptive order. "In Whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins."

Thus the apostle, unlike so many of his interpreters, makes no attempt to discuss the forgiveness of sins as in the abstract and apart from the Person to Whom the great evangel is immediately related. By these things redemption must always be interpreted, and in their light the possibility of the forgiveness of sins must be considered. As a Christian man, I must decline to enter into any argument or discussion with any man as to whether the forgiveness of sins be possible until that man shall come face to face with this Person. It is a subject transcending all science save theology, and theology, the science of God, is progressive and growing and has never reached its final statement by way of system or exposition. It is inclusively contained within the Divine writings, and its greatness and grandeur are revealed by the fact that through these running centuries, devout and sincere thinkers have differed and have seen only parts of the whole. The catholic church moves on toward the final exposition, but we have not reached it yet, and until we have reached that final science of God we cannot discuss finally the possibility of the forgiveness of sins because it is related to God Himself. In the same way I affirm that this is a truth vaster then all philosophy save that of the wisdom of God. I suppose I shall do no violence to philosophic thought and the history of philosophy if I say that human philosophy has never yet reached the hour when it has been able to admit the possibility of the forgiveness of sins; and that because of its own inability to take in the whole sum of things as that sum of things is contained within God. Behind philosophy there lies theology, and if it be not finally uttered, neither is philosophy finally apprehended, and therefore no man can explain philosophically the mystery of the forgiveness of sins.

We are gathered in spirit around the green hill, around the tree to which Jesus of Nazareth went. Flashing upon it, in the light of these descriptive phrases, we find that He is the Son of the Divine love, the very image of God, the firstborn of creation, the firstborn from the dead, the One in Whom all the fulness of Deity dwells. We are amazed, mystified, and held away, so that we confess that we cannot finally understand; and yet out of the supreme and effulgent glory of the mystery and majesty of the Person, the song that rejoices our heart is this, "In whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins."

It seems to me, the possibility must be conceded when these things concerning the Person of the One Who claims authority are apprehended. I do not say that the possibility is understood. I do not say it is explained, that man can finally give a definition of the mystery of it as within the Divine economy, but grant this Person, and the possibility may at least be admitted.

From that level let me descend. The possibility of the forgiveness of sins is demonstrated also by the experience of the forgiven. Perhaps this never can be cumulative; perhaps it may be true that we cannot take the forgiveness of this man and the forgiveness of that man and join them together and declare that there is added weight to the argument. There is no aggregate of sin and no aggregate of sorrow; sin is individual, sorrow is individual; we cannot add sin to sin and make a great whole; we cannot add sorrow to sorrow and make a great totality; we must deal with individuals. As in the realm of sin and sorrow, so here also perchance. The experience of one individual, however, is enough to arrest attention and demand consideration. Therefore, I declare that the possibility of the forgiveness of sins is demonstrated by the experience of the forgiven.

What then is that experience of the forgiveness of sins, as an experience? First, it is moral readjustment; second, it is mental transformation; third, it is spiritual emancipation. Having consented to admit that there may be no aggregate of experience, you must bear with me if I speak out of my own experience and become a witness rather than an advocate. What is this sense of the forgiveness of sins which I claim to know and have within my own soul, against which claim you can by no means produce any argument strong enough to render me an unbeliever in that which I myself do know. It is first that of moral readjustment, second, that of mental transformation, and consequently, that of spiritual emancipation, It may be that in the order of the Divine procedure within the soul of man, spiritual emancipation is the first thing, then mental transformation, issuing in moral readjustment. So far as personal experience is concerned, this is the order; moral readjustment, mental transformation, spiritual emancipation.

Moral readjustment. There is an underlying human consciousness of the difference between right and wrong. That consciousness is human. It is not the result of civilization, it is not found alone in any peculiar locality; it exists wherever man is. In that consciousness, so far as we know, man is differentiated from everything beneath him in the scale of beings. I am growingly a believer that we do not know all about the animal creation beneath us and am inclined to believe with St. Francis of Assisi, John Wesley, and others that the animals also have an afterlife. But so far as we know, man stands alone in this matter of the consciousness of the difference between right and wrong. Ask a man for the standard and he may not be able to give it, even though he live in London, but this underlying sense of it is present. There is nothing more full of hope to thinking men than this fact, that this underlying consciousness of humanity always beats true to the revelation of God found in the sacred Scriptures. There comes back to me as I speak an illustration from the Old Testament which I think is very full of light. When Jeremiah was exercising his great ministry in Jerusalem, he said upon one memorable occasion to those people who were rushing headlong to destruction in spite of all his teaching, "Refuse silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them." I am interested in that word now, not because of its application to the children of Israel, but as the revelation of a persistent fact. Here were people who had bad light and opportunity; they had refused the light; then said Jeremiah, "men shall call you refuse silver." That is to say, deep down in the human heart and conscience there is that which recognizes the beauty of holiness, the truth of good, and the right of righteousness. If people of privilege refuse to walk in the light, the people outside watching, name them refuse silver. That is true today. Underlying all our difficulties, our problems, our procedures, and our conflicts, there is this human consciousness, and it is universal; varying in its interpretation, often crude and uneducated, but ever present. Let no Christian soul be deceived, and let no unchristian soul attempt to deceive itself. Man knows the thing that is right and the thing that is wrong. If I could but reach the deepest of the man who persists in the wrong and persuade from his reluctant soul the absolute truth of the thing he knows, he would tell me that his badness is bad and that goodness is the best. That includes immediately the personal consciousness of sin, of sin committed, of consequent pollution, and of resultant paralysis. I admit men may so harden themselves that the consciousness of sin committed brings no pang to the heart or conscience.

But now let us proceed to think of the man who knowing his own sin, becomes conscious of his pollution, and becomes conscious also of paralysis. To that man hell hardly has any terror. I am growingly suspicious of the morality that results from the fear of hell. I have had to do with men and women - and I have known something of the experience in my own heart - to whom hell would almost be a relief if by any chance they could persuade themselves that its fires would cleanse them from the sense of pollution and filth. It is that sense of pollution in the soul resulting from sin with which forgiveness deals. Involved in that sense of pollution is the terrific, appalling, despairing, agonizing sense of paralysis; "When I would do good evil is present with me." Let us not recite that as though the apostle were a dialectician pressing an argument; he was talking out of his soul, mastered by the consciousness of sin, choked by it, poisoned by it, hindered by it. That is the sense of paralysis which is the heart agony of the sense of pollution. All that is background. All that is the background of Calvary, the ugliness of Golgotha, the terrible tragedy of the green hill.

"The forgiveness of our sins" is first of all the deep, profound sense in the soul, of being delivered from sins, being set apart from them; the relationship between them and the soul, as to pollution and paralysis being broken. I have quoted more than once, though not in the exact words but with slight change, those wonderful words of Peter, "Who His own self bare our sins in His body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins …" The arresting fact in that verse is that there we have a word translated "died" which never appears anywhere else in the New Testament. It is not the usual word for death. It was a very common word in the Greek classical writers, and it was used for death. But what it really means is simply to be set apart from. That is the sense of forgiveness, the sense that comes to the soul who trusts in Christ; who obeying His call and falling in with His simple condition of repentance and faith, now receives the gift, the setting apart from sin. It is always accompanied by the sense of humbling, the sense of shame, and the sense of sorrow. It is always accompanied by the sense of gratitude and joy and singing. It is a strange, mystic consciousness, Christ-begotten and in no other way begotten; that which every man and woman who has truly trusted in the Lord knows in some measure and which no man or woman finds apart from Him; a mystic sense, no longer as a theory but as a fact - I am forgiven. I repeat, that always brings humbling, and to live a forgiven soul is to live in all humility and in all gladness.

You may discuss this scientifically, philosophically; you may come to the conclusion that science admits no possibility of forgiveness; you may declare that in all your thinking you have never found how this thing can be; and I object to your scientific and philosophic thinking concerning the definite experience of one soul. I know my sins are forgiven. If you will not admit the aggregate, at least stand reverently in the presence of the individual confession.

It is more than a sense of being set apart from one's sins, it is the sense of positive freedom. Witness the new moralities that spring out of this conviction wherever it takes possession of the soul of man. Mark the men who tell you they have been forgiven, men who have been in the grip of every form of evil and bestiality; mark them and see springing out of those lives all beauty and truth, all grace and loveliness; listen to the songs coming up from the souls that were filled with the darkest despair; witness the humility which manifests itself and the new service that begins!

Forgiveness is also mental transformation. There is a sense in which this is gradual, progressive. Peter charged those to whom he wrote to "… grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Do not separate those two things. We very often quote that passage partially, "grow in … grace." It does not end there;. "… and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Mental transformation is immediate but progressive. We know the Lord and follow on to know the Lord and so grow in knowledge. Through those great letters of the imprisonment, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon, there runs one note of almost agonized prayer on behalf of Paul's children in the faith. What was it he was asking for them? They had faith, and he thanked God for their faith; they had hope, and he rejoiced therein; they had love, and he gloried in it; yet he prayed that they might have full knowledge. This mental transformation is first a new apprehension of God; second, a new apprehension of self; third, a new view of other men. A man forgiven knows God as he never had known Him before. Intellectually, he may have been convinced of His existence and have feared Him with a quite wholesome fear. Following forgiveness, the intellectual becomes emotional, and the fear of Him which was dread of Him, becomes fear lest His heart should be wounded by his sin. A new vision of God and a new understanding of himself, and of his relation to God and to all things in the midst of which he lives, and therefore, a new view of his brother-man; all these follow forgiveness. A new passion for knowledge and a new devotion to inquiry, the discipleship which will issue in full knowledge; these also result and that progressively.

So finally, forgiveness is spiritual emancipation. The forgiven man is the worshiping man; the forgiven man is the serving man. I have not brought these words idly together; they are closely related, not only in experience, but in revelation. I go back once more for illustration to the mystery of the wilderness temptation of our Lord and to the answer He gave the enemy as he finally assaulted Him, "… It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Observe the relationship between the two. The man emancipated spiritually is the man who worships and who serves; no man serves in the full sense of the term, unless his service proceed from worship, and no man worships in the full sense of the term, unless his worship drives him out to service.

The forgiven man is the spiritually emancipated man. He worships, and the first exercise in his worship is praise, while the second is prayer. The first note is praise, not prayer. The new life bestowed upon the forgiven man, the tearing away of the veil between himself and God, and dissipation of the darkness, the sense of God, does not first create within him a desire for something for himself even on the highest levels. He desires first to give to God; there breaks from his heart a song, crude and mean in its expression though it may be, but sacred and holy as a vestal flame in its inner inspiration. I sometimes think the best level of illustration is the simplest. Those who have had to do with souls in the deeper darkness of life, those who perhaps are devoid of all educational and intellectual advantage, have seen new-born souls beginning to worship. Worship is praise, the emancipated spirit, finding the face of God and singing. Our priesthood is first eucharistic. I do not like the word in some senses because I want every child to understand it; but I use it of set purpose for it runs all through the New Testament. What is the eucharist? The thanksgiving! Our priesthood is not first intercessory, it is first a priesthood of thanksgiving. When a man knows his sins forgiven, he finds spiritual emancipation and he begins to praise. Then he comes to a sense of his brother's wrong, and he begins to pray.

Spiritual emancipation means not worship alone, but service, for it means a spirit brought back into right relationship with God and realizing within itself Divine inspiration. The forgiven soul immediately finds fellowship with that in God which makes forgiveness possible. It begins to know something of what it is to fill up that which is behind in the sufferings of Christ, to share His Cross, to be driven out to serve as He served. The Divine inspiration is the Divine compassion, and blessed be God, it is something more; it is the Divine energy. That enables us in all service which the Christ appoints, and the Cross is its true and only way. These are the spiritual emancipations which come as the result of the sense of forgiveness. I am not surprised that when Paul said "In Whom we have our redemption ..." he covered the ground and exhausted it, calling the first phase of the experience, "… the forgiveness of our sins."

Finally, quietly and reverently, we gather back in imagination to Golgotha, to the Cross itself. What is this upon which we look? We look upon the outward symbols. Let us remember that, for that will keep us reverent in the presence of the Cross. We cannot look upon the inner mystery. Here is light too bright for the feebleness of a sinner's sight. Here are matters too profound for the comprehension of finite intelligence. These are symbols, signs. They are signs material, and mental; signs which admit us a little nearer to the heart of infinite mystery.

What are the material signs? The place of a skull, the Roman gibbet, and a Man of matchless tenderness and beauty and sinlessness dying, cruelly murdered.

As He passed through the darkness, words passed His lips giving me symbols in the mental realm of the spiritual things which lie behind. I listen to them, not daring to omit any one of them. "Woman, behold thy son! … Behold thy mother!" There are some things I dare not begin to try to interpret! Listen to this, "… Father forgive them, for they know not what they do …" Ye men and angels, who is this, what does this mean? Listen to this, "… Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Listen to this, "… I thirst." Listen to this, "… It is finished." Listen to this, "… Father into Thy hands I commend My spirit ..." How much do we know? The supreme knowledge is that we cannot know. We have been led to the margin of unfathomable things, and most wonderful of them all is that which I have omitted, "… My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

"In Whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins." I come to that tree, and I come a sinful man! Dare I doubt? So help me God, I dare not! I venture; I believe: "My God is reconciled, His pardoning voice I hear." The mystery grows upon my soul as the years run on, but the healing and the peace are more precious today than ever. There, and there alone, let us find our rest.