**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 02 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**WISDOM: THE FALSE AND THE TRUE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.*

*1 Corinthians 1:30*

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*1 Corinthians 1:30 (A.V.)*

THIS LETTER OF PAUL WAS ADDRESSED TO "THE ECCLESIA OF God which is at Corinth." There can be no full or final interpretation of it, save as we understand the significance of that introductory description. I do not feel that the opening verse is so arresting to us as it must have been to those who dwelt in Corinth. The Greek citizen would have said: What does this mean? I know what the ecclesia of Corinth is; but I know nothing about the ecclesia of God in Corinth.

It is that distinction which is important. The ecclesia in Corinth was the municipal authority. Every Greek city had its ecclesia. The ecclesia - I hardly like to put it this way, and yet the modern phrase will certainly help us - was the town council. The ecclesia, moreover, was composed of free men. No slave could become a member thereof. It was a called-out company, governing the life of the city.

Now let us come back to the epistle itself. Paul here made use of a term which our Lord Himself had employed, the explanation of which was the peculiar stewardship especially committed to him. He was pre-eminently the apostle of the Church. His Gospel was supremely that of the Church. Wherever he went he planted churches. As men believed in Christ he gathered them into fellowship, and thus constituted an ecclesia. The ecclesia of God in Corinth, then, was God's authoritative fellowship in Corinth, the fellowship of souls in Christ gathered together in order that God's voice might be heard, God's authority be found, and God's will be made known. When Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth he was not at all anxious about ecclesiastical order merely for the sake of ecclesiastical order. He was anxious about ecclesiastical order and life for the sake of Corinth. It was in order that the city might be reached, that the city might have a true light, and a true love, and a true life; he was anxious that God's fellowship of governing souls therein might be in such right relationship with God that their testimony might be a testimony of truth, and a testimony of power.

The city of Corinth at that time was noted principally for its schools of philosophy, for its luxury, and for its lasciviousness. It was the day of decadent philosophy in the Greek life. Intellectually, in Corinth it was the hour of debates, discussions, divisions, disputes. Men ranged themselves around emphases into sects, and parties, and schools.

Moreover, at the time this letter came to it, Corinth was morally depraved. The standard of morality was at the very lowest. It was degenerate, wallowing in bestiality.

And, once again, Corinth at this time was religiously materialistic. Men had fastened their faith on the idols they had erected. Men were living in the atmosphere of a Sadducean philosophy, a rationalistic philosophy; and religion was devitalized because it had become materialistic.

Now, when we take up this letter to the Corinthians, we discover that all these things in Corinth had invaded the Church of God in Corinth. The Church, which had been placed in Corinth in order to interpret to Corinth the will of God, had been affected, influenced, demoralized by the forces of Corinth. The Church that should have invaded Corinth, strong in her own essential life and light and love, had been invaded by Corinth, and her testimony had been weakened. The Church was affected by the spirit of the times, and was weakened in her influence.

Our text occurs in that section of the letter which is devoted to the intellectual condition of the church, resulting from the fact that she had fallen under the influence of the intellectual condition of the city. Throughout this section the apostle puts two things in contrast: the "wisdom of words," and "the Word of the Cross." Corinth was the center of the wisdom of words. The philosophical discussions were discussions around words. This spirit had come into the church. Men had listened to the different emphases of Christian teachers, and, disputing around these, some had said: We are of Paul; others, We are of Apollos; and yet others, We go back to the true foundation; we are of Peter. Lastly, there were those who said - it is wonderful how these things continue through the centuries - You are all wrong if you name these names; we are of Christ only. Here we find the spirit of disputation invading the church, and Paul dealing with this wisdom of words, proclaimed anew the Logos of the Cross. In the course of his argument he claimed that this is the true wisdom; it is the wisdom of God.

To the Hebrew, the Cross was a stumbling-block, something across the pathway of Hebrew progress. That is what all the Hebrew disciples had felt - Peter, James, and John - when they had protested against the Cross.

To the Greek the Cross was unutterable foolishness, characterized by a lack of intellectuality. A cross, a Roman gibbet, and a crucified man, and some empty talk about resurrection - unutterable foolishness!

All this Paul admitted; but, continuing, he declared that to us who are being saved, to those who having heard the evangel, have yielded themselves to it; to those who are determined to test the evangel, not by their own inability to understand it, as the Greek, not by their own prejudices as to a Divine economy, as the Hebrew, but by yielding to its claims and seeing what result it produces in the lives of others - to such it is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

In that connection Paul made this great declaration: "Christ Jesus, Who was made unto us wisdom from God, both righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." The text is the summarized word concerning Christian wisdom made by this Christian apostle in a Greek city. He admits that it is foolishness to the Greek mind, but he emphatically claims that it is wisdom.

We observe, further, that the text falls between two passages which constitute a contrast. The apostle first declared that we are not to glory in the things in which the world glories. He finally declared that we are to glory in the Lord. Between the two declarations he utters this word of wisdom, and declares that Christ Jesus is the Wisdom, and therefore as men know Him and come into living relationship with Him they have, on the foundation of the profoundest philosophy and the most perfect wisdom, the true cause for glorying. Such is the argument of the apostle.

For a moment let us glance at our text quite technically. There is a difference of opinion among expositors as to whether the apostle here refers to four values when he says, "Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who was made unto us wisdom from God; righteousness, sanctification, redemption"; or whether he names one, Wisdom, and then gives the qualities of that wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, Redemption. I am not going into any discussion on the point; but immediately assume the latter view, which I believe to be the true one, and that in our Revised Version we have a more illuminative translation than in the Authorized in this particular passage. But even this translation might be amended, so that the text should read: "Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who was made unto us wisdom from God; both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." The apostle had said everything when he had written wisdom. What, then, is this wisdom? He immediately gives an analysis of it; righteousness, sanctification, redemption.

Now carefully observe - for this is most pertinent to our meditation - that if we take the text in this way, Wisdom as the one, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption as the three in the one, we have matters that stand in immediate contrast to things already referred to.

God chose the foolish things of this world. What are they? The things of wisdom, that is, things of Christian wisdom, the foolish things of the world. God's wisdom is the Cross whereby Righteousness is made possible. God hath chosen the foolish things that He might put to shame the things that are wise, all the philosophies of men, which had not prevented Corinth becoming unutterably corrupt.

God hath chosen the weak things of the world. What are they? The things of righteousness, the things which in Corinth were held in supreme contempt as being weak: the things that men did not believe in, the things that men there did not take into account when arranging municipal or national affairs. Righteousness was at a discount, it was a weak thing. God hath chosen the weak things, that He might put to shame the things that are strong. All the things in which men had trusted for the realization of human life individually, and socially, and nationally God will put to shame by the way of the things the world counts weak, which is righteousness.

Yet again, "the base things of the world, and the things that are despised." What are they? The things of sanctification, the things of holiness, the things of separation to God, the things of the spirit life, which the world looks on as despised things, base things, things not to be taken into account. God has chosen them.

Finally, "and the things that are not." What are they? The things of redemption, as the word redemption is used in my text. The particular Greek word here used is one that signifies the ultimate in redemption: resurrection, the renewal of humanity, and the realization of full spiritual life in a realm beyond the material. The world says, These things are not. There is no life beyond. There is no resurrection. There is no spirituality which will ultimately triumph so that life shall be renewed in larger meaning, and for fuller purpose. The things that are not, God has chosen these.

Christ has come into the world to make known God's wisdom to men, and to carry out its purposes for men. God's wisdom is expressed in righteousness, in sanctification, and in the ultimate redemption and realization of human life. The foundation is righteousness, the process is sanctification, the ultimate goal is that of full and perfect redemption. The wisdom of God is a wisdom that deals with humanity in such a way as to be able to save it from corruption, to realize it, and to remake and glorify it. Therefore we will not glory in the philosophy of Corinth, which looks on the Cross of Jesus as foolishness; but we will glory in the Lord, through Whom God's wisdom is thus made manifest.

Let us pass over the text again in another way, taking the great words one by one. The word "wisdom" was the common word of Greek speech; but it is to be very carefully noted by the diligent student of Holy Scripture that this word is therein used only of God, or of good men, except where the sense is most evidently ironical. It is a word that stands for the highest thought in wisdom. It has reference to clear intelligence, rather than to capacity for intelligence. It has reference to that insight and understanding which are essential and final wisdom. It is what the Greeks were seeking in all their discussions in the schools of Corinth. All their philosophies were attempts to be wise, to come to an ultimate knowledge of truth, to see things as they really are, and understand the deepest and profoundest secrets of life. Paul said that ultimate wisdom is not in man, it is in God; and he claimed that while men were disputing over the wisdom of words and looked on the Gospel as foolishness, while they looked in contempt on the Cross - in Christ and in his Cross the ultimate, final, clear, essential wisdom of God had found speech.

The test of Wisdom is that of the results produced; and the results produced by this Divine Wisdom may be expressed in these very words.

Righteousness. The word signifies in the New Testament, and from the pen of this Christian writer, perfect conformity to the Divine standard. Christ was that in Himself. He appeared in human history, One Whose whole human life was conformed to a Divine standard, to a Divine pattern; One, the keynote of Whose life had been struck in boyhood's years when He had stood in the courts of the Temple at Jerusalem and said, "I must be in the things of My Father." From that moment to the last the music of His life had been true to that chord of the dominant; it was a life adjusted to God; it was righteous life. And yet righteousness meant far more than that in the case of Jesus, and in the case of all Christian writers. We may illuminate its meaning by going back again to the New Testament story, and listening to the second of the recorded words of Jesus. As He came up out of the waters of baptism, baptized by the last of the Hebrew prophets, the Spirit descended upon Him. As He passed into the waters He said to John, "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." That is one of the profoundest words, I reverently affirm, that ever passed His lips, a word not declaring that He was obeying a prophet, or keeping the law, but that He was fulfilling righteousness. How was He fulfilling righteousness? In that mystic baptism the Sinless was identifying Himself with sinning men and unveiling forevermore to the sons of men the fact that God's righteousness is not merely purity, integrity, but a passion of love that must find a way by which unrighteous souls may be made righteous. God's righteousness cannot be fully satisfied by the ninety and nine that need no repentance. It must go out after the one that is lost, and bring that one back again. God's righteousness can never find its ultimate expression in the vessels that were never marred in the hand of the potter; it can find its fulfilment only as it goes into the potter's field and gathers up the waste and broken materials, and makes them again conformable to Himself. Righteousness when we see it in Christ is far more than hard, cold, ethical accuracy; it is fire, passion, sacrifice to make failure a success, to uplift the fallen. There is ransom in it, redemption in it. Righteousness is not a pattern merely, but a potentiality; and a potentiality at the disposal of man through the infinite mystery of passion and death that no man yet has fathomed.

The foolishness of all this to the Greek, and the foolishness of all this to the philosophy of the twentieth century, is self-evident. I am afraid that the philosophy of the twentieth century has so invaded the Church that there are people in the Church a little questioning, and inclined to think that it all very foolish. Yet, I pray you, mark the wisdom of it in the long years. Admit all the failure of the centuries, recognize the sad fact that the Church of God has never yet come to the fulfilment of her own life, or of God's ideal for her; recognize it all, I say, and yet mark this fact, that through that Man of Nazareth, that central Person in human history, there has been flowing down the centuries, among all sorts and conditions of men, a new river of energy, which touching men, has made to live those who had been dead, remade those who had been ruined. Righteousness has been realized as the result of the work of the Christ.

This surely is "wisdom from God." That is not wisdom which merely erects its standard of life, and speaks of a high ideal, and gathers all who realize it into some select circle, while the flotsam and the jetsam are swept away to the sea of ruin. That is wisdom which fastens on the ruined and the spoiled, and remakes, remolds, revives, and gives back to humanity its lost sons and daughters, enabling them anew for life. Righteousness, then, is the first note of the Divine wisdom as an ideal and a dynamic

Immediately following it, and expressing a process, we the word sanctification, a word that signifies purification by separation to the will and service of God, a word that indicates the life as entirely at the disposal of God and harmonizing with God in His purity his is the second fact in the mission of Christ. He was Himself sanctified, as He Himself did say; and He, taking hold of men, sanctifies them by putting them into that fellowship with God wherein they walk after Him and with Him, and rise into His life and into His light and into His love. Oh, soul of mine, the process is slow; I know it, not by observing others, but by living with myself! But however slow the process is, this also I know, that the passion for it is within the heart, and the aspiration of it is ever with the soul; and slowly, stumblingly, and, ah, me, shamefully, unworthily, we are yet growing up into Him Who is the Head, even Christ.

Redemption is the great word, a word signifying the final loosing of the life from everything which destroys it, the final loosing of humanity from all the things that break up and spoil. This word occurs only ten times in the New Testament. It is always used in connection with the thought of the ultimate victory. There is a sense in which a man is redeemed in the moment when he yields to Christ. There is a sense in which he will not find his full redemption until the work of God be perfected within him. That is the ultimate value. Given the righteousness which is in Christ, and the sanctification which is through Christ, the redemption by Christ is assured.

Let us take the thoughts and make them personal, particular, individual. What is righteousness? It is Christ imputed to me. No, my brethren, we cannot get away from that word! It is a great word, one that our fathers more often used than we do; but it is not the final word of Christian experience. When a man, not merely a sinner racially, but a sinner polluted and weakened by his own sin - such a man as knows sin in his own heart - when that man trusts himself to Christ he is not immediately conscious of the fulness of strength, for the habits of the Christian life have to be formed, just as evil habits had to be formed. Do not forget that. Here is a young man who gives himself to Christ, or a man far on in life, and he talks of the difficulty of being a Christian. Let such men remember that they have to form habits of Christian living as surely as they formed the habits that spoiled them. There is a growth into habit, and we must be patient in the process. Nevertheless, in the moment in which a soul casts itself on the unutterable mercy of God, in that moment Christ is imputed to that soul, and the spirit is immediately readmitted to fellowship with God. That is righteousness, Christ imputed to a man for the salvation of his spirit.

When, then, is sanctification? Not Christ imputed, but Christ imparted to the soul. Now we touch the realm of process and of development and of growth, the growing up in all things to Him Who is the Head, the growing in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the process of separation by which Christ is imparted to the life. This is the realm of slowness. This is the place where we mourn. It need not be so slow as it too often is. Do not let us excuse our slowness. I came across something in my reading recently, just a conversation between two people. One man said to his friend: "Well, you know, thank God, He knoweth our frame, He remembers that we are dust." "Yes," was the reply, "but we need not be any dustier than is necessary." We often quote a text like that, and then stay in the dust when we need not. But there is a necessary slowness in this process of sanctification as Christ is imparted. But slowness is not failure. The growth into Him is continuous. If we are Christian men and women we are growing more like Jesus - I will take the old, dear, sweet, ineffable name of the Nazarene - we are growing more like Him. Are we? There is no person more evangelical or orthodox in the universe than the devil! He holds no heresy, he knows all the truth. A man may know all the truth, and yet not be like his Lord. The thing that matters is that we should be actually growing up to Him in all things, that He should be imparted to us, that we look with His eyes, and become like Him, love-mastered, and light-illuminated souls. That is wisdom surely, God's wisdom in Christ, bringing men into conformity with Him Who was perfectly conformed to God; and so having them realize their own humanity.

Then shall come the hour, the final hour. How shall I speak of it, that final experience when Christ shall be not merely imputed as righteousness, or imparted as sanctification, but implanted as redemption? That is the hour to which the seer looked forward when he said: "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him." That is the hour to which the psalmist of the old economy looked forward, not so intelligently perhaps, but with equal glory of expression, when he said: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness." Perfect redemption!

The Greek philosophers were unequal to producing these effects in human lives; and there came into Corinth an apostle of the Gospel, and he preached, and a few souls believed, and the process commenced. In their Church fellowship these souls became the new regenerative center for Corinth, if Corinth would but hear and obey. This is wisdom on the highest level, because it is not the wisdom of an idea that vaporizes, it is the wisdom of a truth that energizes, and, touching life, heals it and helps it.

We do not wonder that the apostle said: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Christ is the Wisdom of God, and all earthly wisdom is but foolishness. The philosophies of men are vain when we come into the presence of corruption and sin, and the undoing of humanity! But when He comes, lo! the desert blossoms as the rose, the marred vessel is made again, and I, even I, withered, paralyzed, darkened in the mind, groveling in the dust, even I begin to breathe, live, hope, aspire, and climb. We glory in the Lord!

Christ is the Righteousness of God. All earthly strength and power will pass and perish. Man is unequal to the maintenance of himself, or of those relationships which make for permanence. This righteousness will take hold on the individual man, and will remake him as within himself, setting back into true proportion and balance his complex nature of spirit, mind, and body, until at last he himself shall be a veritable kingdom of God. By the multiplying of the number of such grows the Kingdom of God. We glory in the Lord!

Christ is the Sanctification of God. All earthly values fail, the things that the world counts of worth. The honored and the noble things of men are base and mean. It is true that the honored and the noble things of God are base and mean in the view of the worldly philosopher; but yet we know that at last purity will abide. We glory in the Lord!

Christ is the Redemption of God. All earthly hopes are doomed. The goals of men are but mirage. The final realization of the spiritual purpose, and the beatification of humanity in the Kingdom of God, this is the hope that burneth like a beacon and flasheth in perpetual glory. It is in the presence of this that we lift up the heart, and are assured. We glory in the Lord!

Our glorying in the Lord is vain save as we are abandoned to Him in will, and so co-operate with Him in power. Our position is sure. Our promise is certain. If we have believed in Him we are responsible only for the process. We shall demonstrate to our intellectual satisfaction the wisdom of the Gospel of the Cross only as we yield ourselves to its claim. In proportion as we do that it will produce in us the effects that demonstrate its infinite and abiding wisdom.

Let us, then, submit ourselves to that indwelling Spirit Who carried forward the process, and go forth, for our own lives, and for all our social outlook, and our racial hope, to glory in the Lord, Who is the Wisdom of God, "both righteousness and sanctification and redemption."