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

**THE ETHIC AND EVANGEL OF JESUS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Ye, therefore, shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

*Matthew 5:48*

*The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.*

*Luke 19:10*

HERE WE HAVE TWO SUPERLATIVE UTTERANCES OF JESUS, which, at first glance to the thoughtful man, seem contradictory, yet, as a matter of fact are most closely related. They condense into the briefest declaration the sum total of Christ's teaching. On the one hand, we have a word of superlative truth; on the other, a word of ineffable grace. One is a word of light, searching, revealing, shaming, filling the heart with fear; the other is a word of love, caressing, healing, lifting, filling the heart with hope. The apostle John declared of Jesus, "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Here the two things find expression from His lips. If we take a larger outlook than that of the text in each case, we shall immediately see that there is no contradiction. While the first word is a word that demands perfection, it is set in relationship to declarations of love. The definition of the Divine perfection in the context is this: "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." In the atmosphere of the demand for love flashes the great word of light. On the other hand, the story from which the second text is taken is purely an ethical story. Jesus entered the house of Zacchaeus, a notorious wrong-doer, and within a short period of His entry the most marvelous moral reformation had taken place. In the presence of that mighty ethical change Jesus said, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." So that when I set each text in its context I find the value of the other constituting that context. The first text is a text of light set in an atmosphere of love; the second text is a text of love set in the shining of light.

For these two things Jesus stood in all the days of His public ministry. For these two things the Lord Jesus Christ stands at this hour. His demand is for perfection, and if He says no more than that to me He leaves me on the highway of life having discovered my failure and unable to realize the high ideal; but His gospel is that He finds the man whom His ethic condemns, and enables him to fulfil that ethic - "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." These two things must never be separated from each other. The proclamation of the evangel which even suggests that the mission of Jesus in the world was to persuade God to excuse sin is a blasphemy. The proclamation of the ethic which declares that God has set a high standard to which He demands that a man shall climb ere He receive him is equally a blasphemy. When, on the one hand, we realize that Jesus Christ, in the days of His flesh, through every successive century, and at this hour, calls for absolute perfection, and then see Him holding out to the condemned soul hands in which are the arguments which declare His power to realize in the life of the failing man the very thing He demands, then we have begun to understand the real message and mission of Christ.

A generation ago there was a phrase which was largely the phrase of the schoolman, the phrase of the scientist. It has become the phrase of that ubiquitous and remarkable individual we describe as "the man in the street," whom no one has ever seen but everybody knows: *the survival of the fittest.* With strange, intuitive accuracy, humanity has fastened on that phrase, and now applies it everywhere. Whatever it meant when it was first used a generation ago by the physical scientists, today it stands for the conception that only fit things ought to survive. Men have been applying it physically and mentally, and the Church has, or ought to have, been applying it spiritually. It embodies an essential truth. It reveals a profound necessity. It reveals a principle apart from which our life is not worth living. Only fit things must survive; the unfit must go to the wall. I go further and declare that it is a law of God, and that the chief exponent in human history of that particular law and that particular principle is Jesus Christ. There never passed the lips of Jesus a single plea for the excuse of incapacity. Through the centuries He is not leading into some heaven that lies beyond an army of mental, moral, and spiritual cripples. He demands perfection. In the presence of such a word as this we must not indulge in any of that kind of criticism which is far more destructive than the higher or the lower criticism - the profane criticism which says that Jesus did not mean exactly what He said when he uttered the words, "Ye shall be perfect." If we want to know the severity of the demand we must remember the location of the text. There never was a day when the context will search us more than today. "Ye shall love your enemies." "Ye, therefore, shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." This is Christ's demand for the ultimate fitness, the fitness of the soul, love baptized, love inspired; the fitness of the soul that cannot stoop to untruth or to meanness, cruelty or devilry, because it is mastered by love. The last spiritual, mental, physical, fitness of humanity is created by the mastery of love. Christ stands with that great word forever sounding in the listening ears of astonished, ashamed, confounded humanity, "Ye shall therefore be perfect"; and, lest there should be some lowering of the ideal, He interpreted His meaning, "as your heavenly Father is perfect."

What does all that mean? It means that I stand in the presence of Christ and say: "If that be the standard, then, verily, I am guilty and a failure! Oh, it may be, my masters, that by the ordinary standards of respectable society you will pass; it may be that even by the standards of the Christian Church you will pass; but if you come to that solemn loneliness of spirit which is the self-consciousness of a man in the presence of Jesus Christ, you also will say: If that be the standard, God help me, I am not that. Yet that is Christ's demand. I declare that if that is all Jesus Christ has to say to me, it is a word of condemnation, and there is no help in it for me.

Now I listen to Him again, the same Christ; and with no lowering of the standard, I hear Him say, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." He bends over me, the man whom He has condemned; He bows over me, the soul whose unutterable failure is revealed; and as I lose all heart and hope, and feel that if that be the standard, not only have I not attained it, but I cannot attain it, He whispers to my heart this word of hope. Forgive me if I change His wording that I may express His meaning - I have come to make you the very thing that I demand you shall be - "to seek and to save the lost." Here, then, we have the ethic of Jesus. Here, then, we have the evangel of Jesus.

Let us consider a little more carefully this ethical ideal of Jesus. I think we must try to understand it by trying to understand Him, for if John declared that the glory which shone from Jesus' Person was "glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth," it is also recorded by John that upon occasion Jesus said, "I am the truth." Not, I teach it, not I declare it, not I explain it; but "I am the truth." That is to say, He claimed to be the incarnation of that perfection which He demanded. I am not going to defend His claim. Believing it to be true, I want to see the perfection, first, by listening to His teaching; second, by observing His example; and, third, by noting one stupendous fact of Divine relationship to Him.

First, then, by listening to His teaching. The first of my texts is taken from His ethical manifesto. It breathes the spirit of that manifesto. It catches up the ultimate claim, appeal, demand, thereof. Yet, because it is so inclusive and so vast, Iet us think of the manifesto itself, not in detail, but in general outline. First, we find in this manifesto of Jesus that He insists on supremacy of character, and of character of a particular type. As I read I am impressed with the fact that no blessing is pronounced on any human being for having anything, or for doing anything; every blessing is pronounced on men for what they are in themselves. Then I discover that Jesus reveals the nature of the character on which He pronounces His blessing. He declares that character is a matter of the soul, a matter of the hidden life, a matter that is entirely inward. There may be external attitudes and actions which convey the idea of rectitude; but if the heart be wrong there is no beatitude. He declares that the character must be purity in the inward parts, "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." Not the overt act of sin is that which is supremely to be condemned, but the inner lust after it. God does not shudder and tremble where man does, in the presence of the murderer with blood on his hands; God shudders at those movements of the soul which are of contempt, of hatred, and which presently may express themselves in murder. While the man who does not inflict bodily harm on his neighbor will escape the law of humanity, the man who speaks in terms of contempt of his fellow man is judged in the courts of heaven as being iniquitous and unholy. This is the ethic of love. These are the demands that love sets up on the human soul, and which can be realized or answered only when love masters and inspires the life. Life must be true and gracious, it must be according to light and according to love. It must be stern and hard with irrevocable justice. It must be tender and sweet with unfailing compassion. A man must steadfastly refuse to bend the neck in the presence of any oppression and wrong; and yet he must be ready immediately to embrace the wrong-doer with the love of a great forgiveness. That is the ethic of Jesus, all contained in the ultimate conception of likeness to the God Who is love, and expressed in the terrific word of my text, "Ye shall therefore be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." In the manifesto, moreover, something is added which is entirely peculiar to Christ and Christianity. Jesus says that the true value of character is not that it secures safety to the men who possess it, but that it scatters blessings on other men. Those who have this character are the light of the world, are the salt of the earth. Men are to be men of holy character, true and gracious, not that they may secure their own safety, either for time or for eternity, but in order that from them light may fall on the pathways where men stumble and are lost; in order that they may exert the aseptic influence of salt, that hinders the spread of corruption and gives goodness in other people its chance.

When I have done listening to this Teacher I look at Him. When I look at Him I am more than ever impressed with the awful glory of the standard, for the purity of Jesus is something that fills the soul with ever-growing awe. There came a day when Paul was writing a letter in which he declared, "The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men." That is the value of the second text. Then he continued: "instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." That is the value of the first text. The words Paul used I reverently use of Jesus Himself. "Soberly"; that means with perfect inward self-government. It is a word that refers to the individuality, and describes life as held in check, in poise, in restraint, none of its passions destroyed, but all held in check by principle. Look at Jesus. We cannot find in the records a single instance in which he lost control of Himself. I can find instance after instance in which He surged with passion as He denounced hypocrisy in language which even at the distance of two millenniums is white-hot and scorching. But He was always Master of His language; no word passed His lips that He had to recall. I have seen Him, His bosom heaving with emotion, and His wondrous eyes of matchless beauty suffused with tears; but I never find Him sickly in sentiment. Thrilling through the threnody of His complaint is the thunder of His righteousness. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem … how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." He lived soberly, that is, with personality powerful, but controlled. That is perfection.

The word "righteously" here defines human interrelationship. It refers to the world around. To live righteously is to maintain the relationships of justice and mercy with our fellow men. Righteousness is supremely merciful. When our Lord commenced His ministry He said to John the Baptist, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." He said that when He was bending, stooping, to a baptism that was symbolic of the death whereby He would extend mercy to men. Even His enemies never attempted to bring against Him any charge of ever having wronged man, woman, or child. They did charge Him with profaning the temple, with violating the Sabbath, with being overfriendly with sinning men and women; but never with wronging man or woman, or being unjust to a child. When at last they would murder Him, they must lie in order to do it, and procure false witnesses to trap Him. They charged Him with the violation of the trivialities of their ceremonial in order to nail Him to the Cross; but they could not charge Him with being unjust to His kind.

The last word, "godly," reveals relationship with the great over-world, the ultimate world of the human spirit, the world with which man essentially has to do, whether he admits it or not, for in the hand of God is man's breath, in the government of God are all man's ways. No life is perfect that has no traffic with heaven, no commerce with eternity, no dealings with God. The godliness of the life of Jesus was revealed, not conventionally, not according to the religious standards of His day. The supreme trouble was that He was not a religious man in the thinking of the religious men of the day. He broke the Sabbath, He violated tradition, He failed to give His hands ceremonial cleansing before eating food. But He was godly. Hear His own beatitude, and discover in it a chaplet of glory and beauty that found its first resting place on the head of the Man Who uttered it: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." See God! Where? Everywhere. See God! When? Now. Jesus saw God everywhere, in the beauty of the lily, in the safety of the bird, in the glory of the harvest field, in the faces of men and women, in the vast movements of history. The vision of God was the inspiration of His humanity. His life was adjusted to God with a familiarity that often fills the soul with wonder. He spoke of God as Father, and declared His unity with Him, and His submission to Him; made the declaration that He never said anything of Himself, but uttered only the things He heard whispered in His soul by His Father, God; that He never did anything on His own initiative, but only as the Divine will constrained and controlled Him. That is godly life, perfect life. The ethic of Jesus was incarnate in Himself.

Once again, and finally, the perfection of Jesus was demonstrated by that supreme and final act of God wherein He raised Him from the dead. On the day of Pentecost Peter for the first time became a truly seeing man, all the blindness gone, understanding as he never had understood, by the sudden, glorious coming of the Holy Spirit apprehending the meaning of the Man in Whose presence he had been for three years. Referring to Jesus' resurrection, Peter declared, "It was not possible that He should be holden of it." Why not? Because of the perfection of His righteousness, the righteousness of His godly life, the righteousness which He perfected in the mystery of His dying. When God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead He said to humanity by that act, This is the type of human life acceptable to heaven. By the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead He rejected every other ideal of human life and every other conception of human greatness. By that raising from among the dead of One Who had bowed to buffeting and sacrificial death God declared in human history that the man who desires to rise to power by the oppression of others is rejected of heaven and doomed in the ultimate economy of eternity. By that raising from the dead of this Man God declared that merely intellectual attainment can never be the final ground of humanity's acceptance. By that raising from the dead of Jesus He declared that every ideal and every conception of man that does not harmonize with the perfection of that wondrous life is rejected. The raising of Jesus from the dead is God's signature to the perfect glory of the human ideal that had been incarnate in the Man of Nazareth.

Now I listen again to His second word, so familiar is its ineffable music, and so has it comforted the hearts of multitudes that perhaps there is need to do little more than repeat it: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." The seeking involves the whole of His mission, not merely the earthly mission, but His mission through the Spirit, the methods by which He approaches man's soul and makes His great appeal, seeking, ever seeking. The saving involves not merely the initial act whereby a soul is received, but all the disciplinary processes which follow, until that soul is perfected and presented faultless before the throne of God.

He came to seek, and why to seek? Because of the distance between those whom He came to seek and the God from Whom He came. But God is not far from any one of us. In Him "we live, and move, and have our being." He is "the God in Whose hand our breath is, and Whose are all our ways." Our distance is that of inability to know and apprehend the near. It is the distance of the blind man from the glory of the picture that is in front of him. It is the distance of the deaf man from the beauty of the symphony sounding round about him. It is the distance of the insensate man from all the movements of life in the midst of which he lives. Men live and move and have their being in God, and do not see Him. His voice, broken up into a thousand inflections, is ever speaking in their ears, but they do not hear them. He is close at hand, and they do not feel or touch Him. This Man saw God everywhere, heard Him always, and always touched Him. Man's distance from God is the distance of death from life in the midst of life. How appalling is the fact that men everywhere are near to God but never see Him. There are men who never see God in a flower, never see Him in a bird; who never see God on the mighty ocean or amid the vastness of the eternal hills. There are men who cannot see God in the war today. They are blind souls. God's judgments are abroad in the earth. His grasp is on all humanity, making humanity work out its own choice to inevitable expression, that He may correct the wrong and bring the light of life to light. Yet men do not see Him. Therefore, He came to seek, to open blind eyes, to unstop deaf ears, to touch the hard heart until it thrills and throbs with emotion. Those who are thus at a distance from God have become unlike God. He seeks them that He may restore to them the Divine image, and them to God Himself. Souls who are remote from God by reason of death are at enmity against God, hating, not God, but what they think is God. He came to seek them, to shine through the gloom, and destroy all false conceptions of God by being Himself incarnate Deity, revealing to men through the glance of the eye, the strength and tenderness of human speech, the glory of human life, all the perfection of grace and beauty, the wonders of what God is in Himself.

He came not only to seek, but to save. He begins with that central, essential fact of human personality, the spirit, linking it again to God, opening blind eyes, unstopping deaf ears, making it keen of scent in the fear of the Lord. He renews the mind also, transforming it until it becomes spiritual. The body He preserves as a temple of the Holy Ghost, and promises that at last there shall come to all trusting souls the infinite wonder that came to Him, resurrection from among the dead.

The announcement at the beginning thus becomes not a command, but a promise. Because He bends and stoops to me in my low estate, and lifts me notwithstanding all, and takes me into His fellowship while as yet I am a polluted man, sitting down to eat with me, a sinner; because He does this, I dare look into His face with reverent awe, and glad emotion of soul, and I dare say to Him in spite of my growing consciousness of failure and weakness, "Thou wilt perfect that which concerneth me."

God help us to submit ourselves to the measurement of His standard. Let us be done with comparing ourselves with ourselves, or finding some crumb of paltry satisfaction in the fact that we are not worse than other men, or a little better than a few. Let us press into His presence that He may measure us and condemn us, for by that process we shall be led to press nearer and yet nearer to His wounded side of ineffable love, that we may know His restoring and healing power, and at last be presented faultless before the throne of God.