**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 18 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE CHURCH'S DEBT TO THE WORLD by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.*

*Romans 1:14*

IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT PAUL HAD NEVER BEEN TO ROME when he wrote these words. A question naturally arises therefore as to the reason why he wrote this letter and sent it to the Christians there. Other of his epistles were directed to churches that he had visited, some of which he had founded, to all of which he had ministered. But he had neither founded nor visited the Church in Rome when this epistle was written and sent.

Nevertheless, Paul was a Roman citizen. A Jew he certainly was - by birth; as he said of himself, he was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews," that is, a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents; he belonged to the economy of Hebraism to the last and minutest detail - but he was a Roman, not by accident, or even by personal choice, but by actual birth. When an officer of that nation said to him: "With a great sum obtained I this citizenship," Paul answered, "But I am a Roman born."

He was a Roman, having all the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship. It is perfectly evident in the study of his life and writings that this fact affected his thinking and teaching. While he was a Hebrew pre-eminently, and while he was not unconscious of the Greek thought and culture of his age, in some ways Rome seems to have affected him more than all. He was a Roman of imperial mold, a statesman with a keen sense of the value of strategic positions, and able to carry on great enterprises. In a recognition of this fact we begin to understand the reason for his writing this letter. When to this we add the supreme matter that Paul was a commissioned apostle of Jesus Christ we have the full and sufficient explanation. His supreme consciousness, that is, the consciousness that most constantly and consistently influenced him, was of his calling and commission by Jesus Christ. This did not make him unmindful of the other forces at work in his life. It rather sanctified them, and pressed them into the high and sacred service. There was no side of the apostle's life of which this inner fact did not take hold and make use. Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ knew that Rome was the strategic center of the world. He was perfectly familiar with the fact that the world was borrowing Rome's language for commerce and learning, and culture from Greece. He was perfectly aware of the fact that the Hebrew system was the purest system of religion known to the world. But he also knew that from Rome the highways stretched out over the whole known world. Rome had flung out those long-reaching arms over all the lands in order that her cohorts and legions might ride along them. I think, then, that I can see Paul, the man of contemptible bodily appearance, who yet became so transfigured by his message that kings trembled as he preached - I see him looking at Rome, and saying: Oh, if I could but start the new enterprises of the Cross from Rome as a center, How that vast government, stretching out its scepter and taking hold of all things, would help me in prosecuting the great work of my life, to make the gospel known to the whole world. How well these great roads would do for the journeys of the missionaries!

When he said, "I must see Rome," he was not impelled by the curiosity of the tourist. It was the passion of the missionary. It was the statesmanship of a man whose mind was imperial in its grasp, whose heart and will were dominated by the Christ and by His Cross. And so, when for a time he was prevented from going, he felt he must write his letter. He must at least see to it that the Christians in Rome had a clear statement of the great Gospel, and its message put in such form as to make it plain to their understanding. It is as though he had said: I will write the Gospel that Rome may have it; because if Rome has it, and it has Rome, the world must inevitably be reached by its messengers and its power. Of course, all this is simply the statement of the human side. Behind all this was the Spirit of God, leading and inspiring. In our text we have found the deep, underlying impulse of the letter. And what is it? "I am debtor," To change the form slightly, the Apostle declared: "I am in debt both to Greeks and Barbarians, to the wise and to the foolish."

This leads us to some further inquiries. What did he owe to the Greeks? Something of their ideals of culture? Very little, as his writings show, for, while it is certain that he was always under the influence of his early training in Tarsus, it is also notorious that Paul's classical quotations are very few, and perhaps, always incorrect. What did he owe to Barbarians? Nothing, surely, but their attempts to murder him. What did he owe to the wise? Certain it is that he had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, but there is very little doubt that he had paid in kind for all that he gained from Gamaliel. What did he owe to the foolish? Surely this is a mistake. He could not be in debt to the foolish!

So far, we are quite consciously missing the whole heart of his meaning. Let us attempt to express that meaning in other language. He meant: The Gospel has been committed to me for men; and so long as there is a Greek or a Barbarian, a wise man or a fool, who has not heard it, I am in debt. The Gospel has been committed to me not merely in order that I may hear its message, and obey it, and become a saved man. All that is true, but it is only preliminary, initial. The Gospel has been given to me for others.

Now we begin to reach the underlying impulse of Paul's life. We begin to understand its passion, its movement, its enthusiasm, its terrific drive. We sometimes talk about the terrific strain made on ministers in this age. The fact of the matter is that we hardly begin to understand strenuous service as compared with Paul's. Sometimes we are taken severely to task by well-meaning friends if we travel easily by train and preach twice during the week. There were no trains for Paul; there were no resting places for Paul. He crossed tempest-tossed seas and mountain ranges, and knew real perils on land and sea. What, then, was the driving force? Why hurry, Paul, why hurry? And he would have replied: I am in debt, and I must pay. I have a Gospel, an evangel, a message. Let me go and tell the men for whom it is intended. "I am debtor." There is the ring of tremendous responsibility in this. "I must see Rome." I am in debt to Rome. I have a Gospel for Rome. I am ready to preach it in Rome.

This is the language of the true Christian man in every successive age of the Church, and therefore it is the true language of the whole Christian Church. In broad principles, that word of Paul declares the attitude and responsibility of the Church to the whole world of men, irrespective of differences of birth or of attainment. The Church of God is in debt - in debt to the world. Not that the world has given the Church something for which she has to pay, but that God has given the Church something for the world.

But, you say, the world hates God. That is partly true; but it is yet more true that God loves the world. But, you say, the world will not have God. That is also partly true; but it is wholly true that God wants the world. And it is for that reason that He has given the Church something, not for her self, but for the world. If the Church appropriates this great evangel, and sings her songs about it, thanks God in her worship for what He has done for her, and stops there, she is playing the harlot, she is prostituting her very nature to base uses. I make no apology for these blunt and brutal figures of speech. They are the figures of the Old Testament prophet and of the New Testament apostles, and there is nothing I feel we need to have borne in on our hearts more than this, that until we take this Gospel and give it to the world we are dishonest - we are in debt.

Let us now take time to consider the nature of this deposit, which the Church has received for the world, in order that we may the better apprehend the character of our responsibility. Let me at once say that I am not using the word "deposit" at this point carelessly. In writing to Timothy, Paul said, "I know Him Whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day." The words, "that which I have committed unto Him," are exposition rather than translation. To translate more literally what the apostle wrote we may render the statement thus: "I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit against that day." Now, it will be seen at once that this may mean that He is able to guard that which I have deposited with Him, or it may mean that He is able to guard that which He has deposited with me. Both in the Authorized and Revised Versions the idea of the translators was that the apostle meant that Jesus was able to guard what the apostle had deposited with Him. I do not so understand the statement. It is out of harmony with the whole reason and purpose of the letter. I have no doubt that he intended to declare, "He is able to guard the thing He has committed to me." The idea was that the Lord had deposited something with the apostle, and that the apostle held the deposit in trust for others. Referring to this deposit, Paul said, I have had to suffer for it. I am not ashamed of it. My joy, my comfort is that if God has given me this sacred deposit He is able to guard it. There is no need for me to be anxious to guard the deposit of truth. God can do that.

This, then, is the sense in which I have used the word deposit, the sense in which the apostle uses it in this case, as of something deposited with him.

What, then, we may now inquire, is the deposit? In order to find the answer, I look at the text in the light of the context. "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it" - and there follows the description of the deposit of the great Gospel committed to him and the Church. First, there is a description in general terms - "lt is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." That is the heart and center of the whole matter. Power unto Salvation! That is what our Gospel is. Not education, not entertainment, not social organization, save as it is true that all these grow from this root. Salvation in the New Testament almost invariably means rescue rather than amelioration. Rescue and all that naturally grows out of rescue. It is salvation from evil, both moral and natural. Salvation from the penalty of evil, salvation from the power of evil, salvation from the presence of evil.

These are the tenses of salvation. A man is saved from the penalty of evil in the moment in which he believes; he is saved from the power of evil by all the processes of sanctification; he will be saved from the presence of evil, finally, at the coming of the Lord Jesus. This, then, is our Gospel; it is a Gospel of salvation as justification, as sanctification, as glorification. It is the salvation of the spirit of a man, which is justification. It is the salvation of the mind of a man, which is sanctification. It is the salvation of the body of a man, which is glorification. It is a salvation which deals with the whole man: spirit, mind, and body. Thus the Gospel is essentially a message for such as are in need. It is the message of Christ, Who distinctly affirmed, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." If for the sake of argument it be granted that there may be human beings who have no need of moral cleansing and spiritual renewal - we by no means say that this is so, but suppose that it were so - then they have no need of a Gospel, and our Gospel has nothing to say to them. On the other hand, those who know themselves spoiled, mastered, depraved by evil, are in need of a Gospel, and it is for such that the Church holds the Gospel as a deposit.

It is, moreover, the Gospel of salvation through the power of God and not through the power of man. There is a kind of evangelism much in vogue in certain quarters at the present hour which speaks of the conflict in every man between angel and beast, and which declares that man's hope lies in his power to destroy the beast and cultivate the angel. Well, all I can say is that I know all about the beast in my own life, but not so much about the angel. But if this evangel says to me, All you have to do to be saved is to make the angel master the beast, then I declare it is no evangel, for I cannot do it. But if the evangel tells me that there is a power of God that destroys the beast by giving me a new life, which is the Christ life, then have I hope. The Gospel declares the possibility of salvation by the power of God. That is the deposit which creates our debt to the world.

Our context takes us a step further in the revelation of the nature of our deposit as it says: "For therein," that is in this Gospel, "is revealed a righteousness of God by faith unto faith, as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

The Gospel, then, is, first, the announcement that righteousness has been revealed. That is the fundamental and inclusive theme of the Roman epistle. The righteousness of God has been revealed in a person. We often speak of the righteousness of Christ. That is not incorrect in some senses, but it is at least a suggestive fact that the Bible never speaks of the righteousness of Christ. It speaks of the righteousness of God, and Christ is that righteousness. If men want to know what righteousness is they must know Christ. They cannot have a true idea of righteousness until they know Him. Every other conception of righteousness is faulty and false. In Him alone the righteousness of God is revealed.

But, further, the righteousness of God is revealed in Christ not as pattern only, but also as power. The Gospel declares that the righteousness of God revealed in Christ is at the disposal of the man who needs salvation. Such a man may be saved on his side by the activity of faith, and on God's side by the bestowal of righteousness, a righteousness which gives him the pattern of his life, a righteousness which, through the mystery of Christ's dying, being communicated to the man, becomes the dynamic of his new life.

That is the Gospel which the Church holds as a deposit for the world. Oh, the music there is in it for my heart! I cannot read this great doctrinal treatise, argumentative and logical as it is, without the song born of the experience begotten of its teaching finding expression. I was lost, but there came to me the Gospel of salvation, and that Gospel of God's salvation was, first, the revelation of God's righteousness in Christ. That was a revelation of surpassing beauty, yet the unveiling filled my heart with fear and a new sense of my own failure and unworthiness. Then, while I looked and was afraid, behold, I saw that the hands were wounded, and the side; and I discovered that the infinite mystery of death admitted me into the infinite dynamic of life.

But it may be well that we inquire again, Why is such a Gospel necessary? And again the context gives us a complete answer in the words: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness." A revelation of righteousness was made necessary by the revelation of wrath. The revelation of righteousness by the law was in itself a revelation of wrath to the Jew, because the Jew had not obeyed the Law. The revelation of righteousness through conscience in the Gentile was a revelation of wrath to him, because he had not walked in the light of conscience. This Gentile application is most pertinent to ourselves. Let us consider it. Concerning the Gentiles the apostle declared - quoting the Authorized Version - that they were "men who hold the truth in unrighteousness." The Greek word means, to hold down, to imprison, to prevent its working. That was the reason of wrath. When is God angry with a man? When that man holds down the truth in unrighteousness. Let me attempt to express that in another way. God is angry with a man when he does not follow the dictates of his instructed conscience. In the case of the Jew the same principle obtained, but with another application. He was guilty of holding down, that is, of preventing the operation of the written law in his life. That to him was unrighteousness. The Gentile was held responsible for the measure of light which he had but did not follow. That was his unrighteousness. The Jew has sinned against law. The Gentile has imprisoned the truth in ungodliness and unrighteousness. Therefore the wrath of God is over both. Both Jew and Gentile need salvation in the sense of rescue.

The age has not changed - at least, if the age has, human nature has not. I have no care to argue with men whether they are sinners through Adam's fall. I hold that they are, but one note of the Gospel is that such race failure and pollution is accounted for, and atoned for, in the Cross. The point of human responsibility is that men have deliberately chosen darkness, even though the light, whether of law or of conscience, has been shining on them, because of which God's wrath is on them. Because of that they need salvation, and our Gospel deposit is the proclamation of the possibility of saving such. If wrath is revealed because of man's unrighteousness, righteousness is revealed as available for man by way of the infinite and superabounding grace of God. That is our deposit. It is committed to us. We are, therefore, committed to the work of proclaiming it to the world.

And now, finally, it must be remembered that this Gospel is for all men. In spite of all arguments to the contrary, that is the plain teaching of the New Testament. If I did not believe that I could never preach again. But there is no room for doubt or question. This Gospel is for all men, and for all men it is committed to us. This was made perfectly clear in the last command of Jesus to His first disciples. To them He said: "It is not for you to know time or seasons, … but ye shall be My witnesses." He then described the circles which bound the sphere of responsibility. Let us note them. "In Jerusalem" - that is the first circle, the city in which we dwell. "And in all Judea and Samaria" - this circle is wider, embracing our native land, and the country adjoining. The last circle is described in the words: "And unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

Jesus Christ, the Head of this church, is Head of the holy catholic Church. He stands in our midst, and He says to us: You are in debt to Westminster, to London, to England, to the uttermost part of the earth. So long as anywhere there is a man who has not heard that Gospel, we are in debt. So long as anywhere there is a soul underneath wrath for disobeying light, and we have joy and a glorious Gospel, we are in debt. For dealing with evil and all its issues this Gospel is sufficient. Every manifestation of evil is, therefore, a call to us. Personal evil, social evil, national evil, racial evil, are saying to us, Bring us your Gospel.

Oh, heart of mine, listen! Listen to the cry of the war. Listen to the cry of the woman on the streets. Listen to the cry of evil everywhere. What are these voices saying? You are in debt to us. You are in debt, for you have the Gospel. Bring it to us. The man of Macedonia is crying to us as clearly as he called to the apostle!

It is a great privilege to have such a deposit; but, oh it is a great responsibility! Debt is always dishonorable. A man is pitied when he is bankrupt; but if he has the money to pay, and he does not, then is he a rogue, and must be punished. We are not bankrupt. We have the Gospel that will meet the need of the age. If we hide it and keep it from this city, this land, this world, we are dishonorably in debt.

Suppose the Church fails to discharge this debt. Nay, let us close on a more personal note. Suppose I fail to discharge this debt. What then? Ah! what then? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Can any sin be greater than that of withholding a supreme remedy from supreme need? Have we ever asked ourselves which judgment is likely to be greater - judgment of the disobedient Church or judgment of the men who needed the Gospel and never had it because of her disobedience? If "holding down the truth in unrighteousness" brings the wrath of God, surely there is no sin so great as that of having this Gospel and not passing it on, telling it out. The Church's responsibility to the world is marked in these words. She is in debt to man because all her glorious evangel is hers for them. May God lay on us the burden of this duty, and send us out to discharge it. As the Church discharges this debt, she fulfils her mission in the world.