**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 19 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**HIS WORKMANSHIP by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.*

*Ephesians 2:10*

THIS VERSE CONTAINS A REMARKABLE STATEMENT AS TO THE Christian life. All other conceptions of life at its very best are idealistic, but the Christian conception is also dynamic. "We are His workmanship," not merely men and women seeing an ideal which we are attempting to realize. That is not the deepest fact of Christian life, though that also is true. The word "workmanship" in this connection immediately attracts our attention. If we very literally translate here, we shall not, I am perfectly well aware, get the truest sense of the Apostle, and yet I think we should gain some light upon that sense, for the word here rendered "workmanship" might read "poems." I do not mean to suggest that the Greek word poema means exactly what our word "poems" means, but there is a quality in the word which we must not lose sight of when we read the word "workmanship." It is the quality of perfection, and the thought which the word suggests is not only that of a piece of work, but of a piece of work which is perfect. The thought, therefore, is that of poetry in its deepest, broadest and truest sense. It is the thought of rhythm, of orderliness and of beauty. We are God's workmanship. All that would be said if we simply laid the emphasis upon the fact that we are God's workmanship. Everything He does is full of beauty. Everything He does is characterized by order. Disorder is not of God. Ugliness in any sense of the word is not of God.

The method of Christianity is thus revealed. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." This phrase includes the whole mission of Christ in its application to trusting souls. It is in Christ that God is making us what He would have us to be. The sphere in which God operates to the creation of our lives and the perfecting of His thought in and through us is Christ. By the way of His incarnation man came into conscious nearness to God. By the way of His life there was unveiled before the eyes of men what was in the heart of God when He said, "Let us make man." In the death of Christ there was revealed that mystery of atonement whereby man's sin is dealt with, cancelled, made not to be, that man may find his new opportunity. By the way of the resurrection of Jesus Christ power was placed at the disposal of man so that he not only finds himself in Christ Jesus a pardoned soul, but a being equipped with all resources for the accomplishment of the Divine purpose. By the way of the reign of Christ over the individual life through the Spirit there is the administration of the will of God and perpetual communication of both pattern and power.

Yet, again, the purpose of this new creation and of this new method is manifested in the text, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." "For good works" is not a narrow phrase referring merely to specific acts of so-called Christian service; it refers to the whole life. We are prepared for good works. The Apostle is contrasting the present with the past condition of these Ephesian Christians. He says to them, "Among whom" - that is the sons of disobedience - "we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind." That description of the past covers the whole fact of life, the daily task and toil, specific acts of worship under the old idolatrous conditions, amusements, recreations, everything. All life proceeded in answer to fleshly passion and desire. Everything is changed when we are in Christ Jesus, so that all our life is to proceed, not in answer to fleshly passion and desire, but in answer to the highest motive and the highest reason, in brief, in answer to the perpetual inspiration of the Christ life which has now become our life. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works."

I want to consider the practical application of this truth to our everyday life. We shall therefore proceed to consider the orderliness of the life of the Christian in the will and economy of God, and we shall attempt to apply the teaching of the text, asking what our responsibility as Christian people is in the presence of its great and gracious declaration.

There are two subordinate statements made in this text in explanation of the one all-inclusive declaration with which it commences, "We are His workmanship." They are, first, that we are created for good works; and, secondly, that good works are created for us. That is not the exact phrasing of my text, but I think that is its exact intention.

We are created in Christ Jesus for good works. That is one statement. Omit for a moment the sphere - in Christ Jesus - and take the clear, simple statement which remains. "We are His workmanship, created ... for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them." We are created for good works: good works are afore prepared for us. Thus in this verse there is a wonderfully gracious and tender unveiling of the fact that all the life of the trusting soul lies within the plan of God. Such a one is perfectly equipped for all God's will appoints, and all appointments within the will of God are prepared in view of the equipment which He has bestowed. If I can once accept this teaching and rest upon it I shall take my way into every new circumstance knowing these two things absolutely: first, God has prepared me in Christ Jesus for whatever the day has in store for me, and, secondly, all that to which I come, step by step as the veil recedes or the mists melt, though unknown to me, is not unknown to Him. Good works are afore prepared, afore ordained for us that we should walk in them.

For purposes of examination let us reverse the order of these statements, beginning with the last and returning to the first. Take the statement that good works are afore prepared for us that we should walk in them. What is meant by "good works"? Let me answer that question generally. I believe that the phrase refers to every crisis and commonplace of life, that the whole fact of life is included in the term "good works." In writing to Titus, the Apostle, speaking of the epiphany or the outshining of the grace of God, says, "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works." I read the whole passage in order that we might set the final reference to "good works" in its proper relation to all that has gone be-fore. It is one of the most glorious passages in the Bible concerning the manifestation of God's grace. It is one of the most wonderful passages unfolding before our minds the in-tent of the coming of Christ. "He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works." That is the ultimate issue. Whatever the phrase "good works" may mean, it is here set in relation to the majesty and mercy of the manifestation of grace and glory by the work of Jesus Christ.

Then, again, when the Apostle is drawing his letter to conclusion, he writes, "And let our people also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful." You will notice that the marginal reading of the Revised Version suggests as an alternative rendering, "And let our people also profess honest occupations, that they be not unfruitful." One application of that term "good works" is honest occupations, daily callings, the profession a man follows, the business which occupies his time and attention, the everyday matters of the week days of life. "Honest occupations" is a perfectly fair translation of "good works" in Titus. When I get back to the Ephesian letter, I find that the word "works" is the same but that the word "good" is different. In Titus the word "good" refers to utility, or, as it is put there, "to maintain good works for necessary uses." I find the word "good" in Ephesians means that which is intrinsically good. What, then, is the meaning of the word "works"? It is a word which is applied to all kinds of effort. Work is an effort made. I care not whether it be for pleasure or profit, for the hope of gain, or for pure love of an object served, whether it be selfish or not. Work is an effort made. This word, which is applied to the highest and the lowest, the broadest and the narrowest, the most sublime and the most simple alike, is the word of my test. It includes all the activities of life, all the effort a man makes, not on Sunday only, but on every day of the week; not here in the sanctuary, in the pulpit, or in the Sabbath School, or in the Mission Hall, only, but in the counting-house, the school, the office, or any professional employment. It is the effort of your life, whether, I repeat, for pleasure or profit. Whether you count it high or low, mean or noble, matters nothing. I go back to the Ephesian Epistle, upon which I never can look without seeing something of the glory of the ages yet unborn, the Epistle in which the Apostle has reached the top-stone and is describing the glory of the Church; I find that he sets my life with all its works, its efforts put forth every day in every place, for pleasure or profit - he sets the works of my life in relationship to the infinite and eternal glory, in relationship to the great work of God in my character, in relationship to the fact that God is the Master Workman, making me through all these processes what He would have me be. This is a message of comfort if we will have it so. He has foreordained the works of the man He is making. He has been ahead of me preparing the place to which I am coming, manipulating all the resources of the universe in order that the work I do may be a part of His whole great and gracious work. God has foreordained good works. He has prearranged the forces of nature and the facts of life so that when I rise in the morning and begin to make my effort, it may be an effort in harmony with His character, a good work, whether I preach or play, whether I labour for pleasure or profit.

In the discovery of this fact lies the conviction which makes a man ready to submit wholly to the will of God. Joseph said to his brethren in the midst of their sorrow for the wrong they had previously done him, "It was not you that sent me hither, but God." In that moment - perchance previously he had seen it - in that moment he confessed the fact that the pit, the brutality, the exile, the imprisonment, and the long waiting were all foreordained of God. They were all part of the "good works" which God had prepared for him. Or, if I may most reverently quote the supreme instance of this thing, and bring you to that moment when Jesus of Nazareth stood confronting the power of the world in the person of Pilate, I hear Him saying, "To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." The latter words I am not careful to deal with now, but I ask you to notice Christ's great conception that there was purpose in His life, arrangement made beforehand. There is another word which He said to Pilate, "Thou wouldest have no power against Me, except it were given thee from above." There He stood amid all the darkness and brutality, and travail and pain, and agony of an hour of overwhelming defeat, conscious that God had foreordained the works of all the days. He came to tragedy and to suffering and pain, regnant, mighty, sublime, because He knew that all were part of the "good works, which God afore prepared that He should walk in them."

Do not let these illustrations rob us of the one thing I supremely desire to say to my own heart and to yours. If we would say that as it ought to be said, I think we must come down from the larger outlook and take the more partial one. It is by seeing the partial thing sometimes that we gain understanding of the whole. Tomorrow is an absolutely unknown quantity for you and for me. I do not know what waits for me tomorrow of joy or of sorrow, of difficulty or of overcoming, of testing or of triumph. Is not that enough to affright me? Not at all. I know that God foreordains the pathway. I go back to the swan song of Moses, in Deuteronomy. He is singing to his people, the people he loves, and reminds them of many things in the Government of God. Among all the things he says to them there is nothing more gracious than this - he tells them that God led them through the "great and terrible wilderness." If that were all he had said it would have produced nothing other than a shudder of memory, but that is not all. He also said that God "went before you in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents in." That lights the wilderness. That makes the desert blossom as the rose. That creates the anthem in the hour when a man cannot see one yard in front of him. The thought of God moving in front of His hosts, choosing them places in which to pitch their tents is sublime. We often sing,

We nightly pitch our moving tent

A day's march nearer home.

The teaching of my text is that that tent is never pitched at haphazard. I talk about tomorrow. I do not know about what remains of today. I am not sure about the next half hour. Yet I am absolutely sure that God is ahead of me preparing the works in which He would have me walk, planning the little things of my life, arranging the infinite mosaic, putting simple words into such harmony that if I will but obey and follow Him His poem shall be heard in all this life of mine. God is moving ahead and He foreordains all the crises and commonplaces of life. He is always in front of us preparing the works in which He would have us walk. Now return to the first statement. If it be true that God has prepared works for us it is also true that He has prepared us for the works. "Created in Christ Jesus for good works." We are prepared for the works as the works are being prepared for us. Therefore, we are perfectly equipped for whatever the day may bring. "Then let the unknown morrow bring with it what it may, it can bring with it nothing but He will bear us through."

We do not know what tomorrow is bringing, but we know that God is preparing tomorrow, and not only that, but that He has laid up for us in Christ Jesus resources equal to whatever He brings us to. Who was it said something about tempering the wind to the shorn lamb? It is not true. God never tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. God has provided the lamb with fleece. The shearing of the lamb is a human invention. It may be right, or wrong - I am not discussing that. If you shear the lamb and put it out on the mountains you must take the responsibility. The wind will not be any warmer for the lamb. It is a wrong idea that God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. What, then, is true? He tempers the lamb to the wind. He gives the lamb its fleece, and if I interfere with that rule I am responsible. He will not temper the wind to me. He will temper me to the wind. Is there not a phrase about finely tempered steel? You do not temper the things you want the steel to cut so that the steel shall be able to cut it. You temper the steel so that it may cut. So with me. I am tempered to the wind. Is there much of battle ahead of me? Then in Christ Jesus I have all the strength to enable me to overcome. Is there ahead of me some sorrow? Let me speak carefully, is there ahead of you, dear heart, some sorrow? God is getting you ready for that sorrow in a thousand ways you know not of, and He will never let you feel the burden of any sorrow until He has prepared you for it in Christ Jesus. That is His method. He said to Jeremiah when Jeremiah shrank back from the pathway of service, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And though in a land of peace thou art secure, yet how wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan." There was no reference to death in either case, but to difficult service. God says to him, "You are shrinking here in a comparatively easy pathway, but presently you have to contend with horses." Yes, but with all reverence I say in the presence of God's own word, "Yes, Jehovah, great Master of us all, but Thou dost never ask a man to contend with horses until Thou hast practiced him with footmen." Think of God's method in the case of children. He does not let little children feel the amount of grief you are able to bear. Some years ago there was a railway collision in Wales. When they were rescuing the people out of the midst of the debris they found a mother, dead; but clasped in her arms was a little two-year-old child. When they extricated the child from its mother, it looked up with a smiling face and then they found it had clasped in its little hands a packet of chocolate. They unclasped the little hands and the child cried, cried over the loss of the chocolate, but not over the loss of its mother. Thirty years afterwards it would have forgotten its chocolate and cried for its mother. What does the story teach? That God does not allow a little child to feel all the force of sorrow until it has been prepared. The sorrow was there. The wind was not tempered. The agony was there. The mother was taken, but the little one was not ready for that sorrow yet. God was teaching it to bear the pain of its loss by letting it grieve over the loss of chocolate. That is God's method. He is always preparing and equipping me for the things which come by the processes through which He leads me. In Christ Jesus I am equipped for everything. I know He will not permit that to come to me for which I am not prepared. We are His workmanship. He is equipping us in Christ for all His will appoints. He is appointing in His will things for which we are created in Christ.

What effect ought this view of life to produce upon us? It seems to me that the first fact is that it brings to us the conviction of grave responsibility. Perhaps you hardly expected I would say that first. I might have spoken of the safety and peace, but I choose to name those last. I say that this conception creates grave responsibility.

The responsibility is a twofold one. First, that I should find the place His will appoints, and, secondly, that I should use the resources His grace provides.

First, that I should find the place His will appoints. What is the tragedy of my life, of yours, if there has been tragedy in either? The tragedy has been that while He has foreordained good works for me I have not discovered them and have gone my own way, and my works have been as were the works of the idolaters of old - answers to fleshly desire. That is the tragedy of life. The first thing, therefore, is that I should find, as each day breaks upon me, God's place for me in that day, as every new crisis confronts me; and as I look out toward the coming years I should find God's place for me. You say, "That is exactly what I want to do. How shall I do it?" The first thing that you and I have to do if we would find God's place for us is to destroy our own programs and give up forevermore the perilous business of imitating anyone else. I said something like this once in the United States at a convention, and a lady came to me afterwards and said, "Do you not keep a diary? Do you not enter any engagements?" "Oh, yes," I replied. "Then how do you follow your own advice to destroy your own program?" I am old-fashioned enough to write, and to mean, "God willing," over every engagement made. I am very tired of hearing men account for certain of their actions by saying, "The Lord led me to do it," when I am perfectly sure He never did lead them to do anything of the kind. That is not what I am asking for. In the deepest of you, and of me, in that inner shrine of the personality where the will reigns supreme, the program is to be always, "God willing"; the arrangement is to be of such a nature that it can be abandoned if He change the purpose. The symbols of Abraham's life were the tent and the altar. The altar was the symbol of God's grace, and of worship. The tent was the symbol of pilgrimage, something which could easily be struck and removed. It marked a man ready to be disturbed if God saw fit to disturb Him. That is the attitude of faith. When a man settles down at any point and says, "Here am I for ever," he is in great danger of missing the Divine guidance. When a man says about his work, his business, anything in his life, that it is the final thing, he is in peril. You and I have to say, "This is His will for me. What is next I know not. I watch only for His will."

There must be not only this abandonment of the final program in the thinking and will of the life; there must also be the abandonment of the attempt to imitate someone else and walk as someone else is walking. We must understand if we are to live this life that God deals with us as though there was no one else, and we must seek from Him direct and immediate guidance as though there were no others. It is the life devoted to God, waiting for His voice to obey its call, which find the good works which He has foreordained. I am to ask Him what His will is and I am to wait until He manifests it, and I am to use for the discovery of His will not merely my faith but my reason. When Jesus Christ said in His manifesto, "Behold the fowls of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?" He did not mean that the disciples were not to gather into barns. What He meant was, "If God feeds these fowls to whom He has given no forethought and prearrangement, how much more will He feed you to whom He has given forethought and reason!" When Jesus said that the lilies of the field were clothed in majestic beauty even though they could not weave and spin, He did not mean that men were not to weave or spin. If the lilies of the field are clothed in splendor by God, how much more will He clothe you to whom He has given the ability to weave and spin! We are not to sit down in the morning and open our mouths and say, "Give us this day our daily bread," and expect manna. We are to use our reason on the basis of faith. In proportion as we do this we shall find His way for us. We shall find His works afore prepared.

Then we are to use the provision, the resources which He has set at our disposal. Everything I need is in Christ. I need not ask the question, "What would Jesus do?" as though He were not here and I wanted to speculate as to what He would do if He were here. What will Jesus do now? For He is here and all I have to do is to follow Him.

Remember these two things are absolutely interdependent, obedience and progress. If I have missed my way what is the best thing to do? The only thing to do is to get back to the point where I lost my way and start again. It is a long tramp for some of us. How many years is it since you got out of the will of God? You must get back to that point and obey, and from that point you may start again and find the way of His appointing.

If that be the fact as to responsibility think of all it means. It means perfect safety for the man God-led and God-governed. There are no risks. Never again use the word "happen" in the infidel sense. Things do not happen in that way. There is no failure. "Oh," you say, "you must not tell us that. We have known men of faith fail." Never. To sit on a throne or to sweep a crossing may alike be fine in the thinking of God. It depends upon where He puts you. If God wants you in the carpenter's shop and you leave it to go into the House of Commons you will be a dead failure there. Or if God wants you in the front of the battle, and you are hiding in a business house, you will fail. You have to get where God wants you to be if you are to succeed. As it has been beautifully said, if God sent two angels to this world, one to rule an empire and the other to sweep a crossing, they would never think of arguing on the way as to which was the more important work. Each is equally important, because He appoints it. May we learn this lesson! The ultimate test is not notoriety, but fidelity. On that basis all rewards will be made in the light of the coming Kingdom. What follows? Safety, peace. Peace in misunderstanding, in defeat, and in triumph. In the majestic words of the New Testament, peace from God, peace with God, the peace of God.

Let us be very careful lest we mar the Divine poems. We are His poems. He wants to sing a song to the world through our life. He cannot lose His thought. If He cannot sing it through us He will sing it through someone else.

There is only one question which we need to ask in the presence of every new day:

Only to know that the path I tread

Is the path marked out for me;

That the way, tho' thorny, rough and steep,

Will lead me nearer to Thee.

Only to know when the day is passed,

And the evening shadows come,

That its trials and cares have proved indeed

A "day's march nearer home."