**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 01 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE FIGHT OF FAITH by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal.*

*1 Timothy 6:12*

WE ARE ACCUSTOMED TO SPEAK OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE under different figures. Sometimes it is described as a pilgrimage in which, staff in hand and equipped for long and continuous marches, the pilgrim sets his face toward the country where he fain would be. Sometimes it is described as a voyage over-seas in which today the blue of the sky is mirrored, and which tomorrow are swept by storm. Sometimes it is described as a race, to run in which the competitor must strip himself, lay aside every weight and set his face toward the goal, perpetually forgetting the things behind. In all these figures of the Christian life there is the suggestion of effort and of difficulty. I know there are those who speak of this Christian life as though it were easy, soft, weak. As a matter of fact, it is indeed, as the text suggests, a fight, fierce and terrible oft-times, a constant warfare from beginning to end. It is a fight which requires all a man's grit and force if he hopes to win. It is in that way I desire to represent it to you, my brothers, to whom principally I speak this evening.

The words of the text constitute a part of the final advice of the aged Paul to his young friend and fellow minister, Timothy.

The text is really a part of a threefold injunction which may be expressed by the three words which indicate it, "Flee," "Follow," "Fight." The first of these three words indicates what Timothy's attitude should be toward the evils which the apostle had been rebuking. The second affirms the true ambition of his ministry; the third indicates at once the strenuousness of his life, and by its connection with the latter part of the text, "lay hold on the life eternal," indicates the strength in which he will be able to fight his fight as he follows after righteousness and flees evil things.

I take the text away from its setting, and I do it no violence thereby, for while this is the word of the apostle to one who is called into the sacred and special work of the ministry, it has to do with life, and every man who is a Christian is in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Every man who has yielded himself to the King is called upon to fight the battles of the King in his own life and wherever he may be. Turning aside, then, from all its immediate and local application, I bring the text to you tonight as indicating this fact of the strenuousness of the Christian life.

What, then, is the fight to which men are called who follow Jesus Christ? Two forces are at work in the world. The force which gathers to the centre and the force which drives from the centre. First of all, the gathering force brings a man within his own personality into consistent life, and then brings man to man, heals the breaches and the wounds, and makes for a society which is pure, noble, self-sacrificing. The scattering force breaks a man up within his own personality, and drives men apart, severing man from man, brother from brother, the wide world over. The force of right and the force of evil are in array against each other. If I may express the warfare in another way I would say that there is a perpetual battle in the world between faith and fear. If, for a moment, you do not follow me in the antithesis, I pray you think that at the centre of all evil as its inspiration is fear, at the centre of all right as its inspiration is faith. If you take the Bible and trace your way through from beginning to end you will find these two principles are forever revealed as in opposition. You find men attempting to combine on the basis of fear, fear of each other, of some ultimate evil; and also men combining on the basis of faith in the unseen and eternal. Faith and fear are in perpetual opposition. All that which drives men to evil courses, and all that which divides man from man is based upon fear. All selfishness expressing itself in harm to other men grows out of the heart's fear. All self-sacrifice expressing itself in helpfulness to other men grows out of the heart's strong, firm courage and faith. In the world these two forces stand opposed. Every man is ranged on one side or the other. Every man's life is either a part of the force which scatters, or a part of the force which gathers. Every man's effort in every day of his life is a contribution toward the victory of evil at some point, or else it is a contribution toward the victory of good. I grant you that at the back of all expenditure of human effort by which we are surrounded, and of which we ourselves contribute a part, there is an infinite hunger and craving after God. The difference between faith and fear is the difference between attempting to satisfy this deep craving and hunger in the right and true way and in the wrong way. The wrong way is the way of evil. The right way is the way of good. These two forces are opposed even in a man's own life. A young man facing life sees before him some goal to which he desires to come; some ambition inspires him, prompts him, drives him. This in itself is not wrong. It is as it should be. God has made every young man capable of seeing lights in the eastern sky which lure him to endeavour. It is of human life, according to the plan of God, that young men should dream dreams and see visions, and build castles in the air, and aim at success. Every man who is a man has such visions and such desires. How are you going to gain your goal? By what way are you traveling toward your mountain height? How do you propose to translate your castle in the air into a solid piece of work squarely set on the earth? That is the question of importance. The suggestion that is made to the young man facing life is, on the one hand, a suggestion that he should take short cuts devoid of principle toward the goal he desires to reach. The other suggestion is that he shall find the one highway of stern duty and true principle and tramp it at all costs. The battle begins in his heart between the allurements and enticements of the short and easy method - as it appears to be - of evil; and the long, stern, and arduous method - as it appears to be - of good. In this great city at this hour the two forces are at work. The battle is set in array. Whoever may lead the hosts on the side of evil, the fact remains that through this city there are forces of evil waiting to lure men into ways of evil on the basis of fear, and other forces drawing men into the paths of righteousness on the basis of faith.

Whether it be in a profession or in business, here or there, the deepest thing in all your life story will be the contribution you make toward this great battle between evil and good, fear and faith. This battle is not one which is fought by preachers or teachers only. It is not a battle fought only by men who are openly vulgar, and are attempting definitely to demoralize human life - would God there were none such, but there are such! The battle is not one between the leaders merely. Every man in this house is in this great fight. You are fighting the battle in every hour and every moment of your life, as your life's force is being exerted on the side of good or of evil, according to whether the underlying inspiration is that of fear, which attempts to save self, or faith, which attempts to glorify God. That is why the apostle charges Timothy to "fight the good fight of the faith."

The leader of the forces of faith is Jesus Christ Himself. In the letter to the Hebrews the writer describes the heroes and heroines of faith through the ages. At last, passing from the eleventh chapter into the twelfth, you read these words which describe the One who is "The Author" - and now allow me to offer you a more literal and immediate translation of the Greek word - "the File-leader of faith." That is to say, the writer of this letter to the Hebrews puts Jesus Christ at the very forefront of the army that fights the good light of the faith. Although in point of time and in appearance in human life He came long after the men already mentioned, Abraham, Moses, David, and the rest, yet Jesus Christ is the File-leader, the one moving first. The whole life story of Jesus, on the human side, is the life story of One who lived by faith. He saw the ultimate victory. He believed in the triumph of righteousness. He wrought with God along the mysterious way of human life and by victory gained over all temptation, and testimony borne in His own age, and at last by the infinite revelation and mystery of His passion, fought "the good fight of the faith." He it is who leads the armies of the faithful.

If a man is to fight this fight of the faith where is he to begin? He must begin with definite and personal submission to the great Leader of the army of the faithful. Every soldier in this fight must be enlisted of his own will and must yield his will to the will of the Commander. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." The personal application of that is that if a man would gather he must be with the Christ, and that if he is not with the Christ he is therefore scattering. You cannot "fight the good fight of the faith" until you have crowned the Christ. The first thing, then, in Christian warfare is enlistment under the leadership of the One who stands in front of us, the File-leader of faithful souls.

Then follows a statement of the all-inclusive equipment for the fight. The charge of the apostle here is not that a man shall fight to lay hold on eternal life, but that a man shall lay hold on life eternal in order to fight. I am afraid that has not always been the interpretation of this passage. We have very often read it as though the apostle meant that a man is to fight the good fight of the faith and presently to lay hold on eternal life. If that has been our interpretation it is because of a common mistake which postpones the possession of eternal life to the ages beyond. Eternal life is something for today.

What is eternal life? Some recent translators have, as I think, very beautifully expressed the thought in the words "age-abiding life," or the "life of the ages." Eternal life is not a condition to which a man comes after death. Eternal life is that mystic and wonderful life which is in all the ages, past, present, and to come. It is the infinite force at the back of everything. Now, says the apostle, in the midst of things present, in the midst of the battle against evil, in all the fierceness of the conflict, fight, laying hold on eternal life. The force in which man is to fight against fear and on the side of faith is that of the appropriation of this eternal life. Let me express this in a slightly different form. Eternal life is not merely a quantity. It is a quality. A man can live eternal life here in London just as well as in heaven. Unless he live it here how can he live it there? It is the life which defies change, the life which abides when all its varied expressions pass away. "Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal." Take hold on this principle of life and in its power fight the fight of the faith.

How shall I find eternal life? The answers are as familiar to you as is the Book of God. You have heard them from childhood. Hear the words of Jesus, "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." Yes, but how am I to know the only true God and Him whom He has sent? Hear another of the statements of the New Testament, "He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them which believe on his name: which were born" - there is the beginning of eternal life in the soul - "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." When a man sees Jesus Christ and obeys Him, yields to Him, in that moment he has taken hold on eternal life. He has put his own life in all its meaning into immediate connection with the life which abides, the life of the ages, and in that strength he is called on to go forth to this warfare.

What is to be the soldier's spirit? First of all, the man who fights after having crowned Christ fights in perfect confidence because he knows His leader and is convinced of the ultimate issue. In the letter to the Hebrews the writer says, "We see not yet all things subjected to him. But we behold ... Jesus." The victory is not won. The final crowning of Christ Himself has not come. He is still waiting in the hidden mystery of the heaven until "his enemies be made the foot-stool of his feet"; but we have seen Him and to have seen Him is to be perfectly assured that He must win. It is impossible once to have looked into the face of the Son of God, to have seen Him in all the radiant beauty of His purity, the matchless majesty of His victory over sin, and believe that at last He can be defeated. If I am in the fight against evil in my own life and in the fight against evil in the world as a soldier of Jesus Christ, I fight in perfect confidence.

The man who fights under the direction of Jesus Christ fights not only in confidence but in cautiousness. The great word of one of the Old Testament writers is forever true in his experience, "Happy is the man that feareth alway." There is a foolhardiness which names itself courage, but is not courage. There is a species of pious blasphemy very much abroad in the world today about the power of the grace of God. I have heard men say that if they have once given themselves to Jesus Christ the grace of God is able to keep them in all sorts of places and conditions. It is not. The grace of God is able to keep a man in any place into which God brings him, however grave and perilous; but the grace of God is not sufficient to keep a man when a man deliberately puts himself into a place of peril outside the pathway of the Divine will for him. I have heard men say with regard to strong drink that the grace of God is sufficient to keep a man. So it is, if that man will obey the law of God and abstain absolutely and utterly from the thing that has marred him. If a man plays with fire he will be burned, notwithstanding his relationship to Jesus Christ. If a man attempts to try his courage by putting himself into a place of temptation he will fall, notwithstanding the fact that he has crowned Christ in his life by some act of submission in the past. The soldier who is to fight the good fight of faith is to "flee" from all evil. I pray you remember that there are moments in this great conflict of faith as against evil when you will demonstrate your courage more surely by using your spurs than by using your sword. There are places to which no man can go who is to fight this fight. The place of peculiar peril is to be avoided. The good soldier of Jesus Christ is the man who fears, and fears always. Not confidence merely, but caution also.

The good soldier of Jesus Christ is one, moreover, who understands that there must be conflict unto victory. That the victory is possible he believes. Then if it be possible, however stern, however strenuous, however terrible the conflict, he is to press right through until the end. You have heard the story of the Spartan son who returned home and said to his aged father, scarred by many a battle, "My sword is just a little too short for me." Said the old man, "Add a step to it." You tell me your sword is just a little too short for you to win. One step more, and one thrust harder. The last five minutes win the fight, not the hours that have preceded them. Some man here has been fighting his fight for weeks and months. You tell me you are just giving up. In God's name I charge you, fight through. It is the last five minutes that mean victory. There must be perseverance.

The soldier of Jesus Christ is not only a man having confidence and caution, and determined perseverance which issues in victory. He is a man who will endure hardness and so himself become hard, in that sense of the word hard. Hardness is a quality which comes only through enduring hardness. By hardness we mean not that hardness against which we are warned in the New Testament, the hardness of conscience and heart, but the toughness which enables a man to "stand ... to withstand ... and having done all, to stand." Hear one word as an aside. Some man says, "I lack that hardness. That is where I fail." I say to you, "Once more out upon the field, one more campaign, and you will be harder. Another victory and the fibre of your moral courage will be tougher." It is by fighting on until the victory is won by strong endeavour that man gains the hardness which makes him at last a valiant and victorious soldier of Jesus Christ. All these things are necessary if we are to "fight the good fight of the faith."

Where is the fight to be fought? In the first place, in secret. You will never be able to fight the good fight of the faith in London until you have fought it, and are fighting it, in your own heart and life. There are many ways of stating that truth. It is an old, a commonplace truth, yet one which I feel needs to be restated. There are so many men who desire to have something to do in the general moral uplifting of society who have never yet enlisted to fight against evil in their own hearts and lives. The first battle is the battle within, against wrong in the heart and life. Yet remember, as I have already said, this battle also, first and fundamental, can be fought only under the leadership of Christ. My trouble in dealing with young men is that so many of them misunderstand Christianity. They imagine that all they have to do is to make some confession of loyalty to Jesus Christ and that He will nurse them over all the way. Nothing of the kind. Crown Him. Follow Him. Fight under Him. The severest battles of a man's life are fought out in secret and in his own individual soul. Temptation to evil in its varied forms comes far more subtly to a man when he is alone than when he is with others. I begin my fight inside; in the secret recesses of my inner life, in the hall of the imagination, in the chamber of the affections, there the fight must first be fought. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." I am not anxious to make any appeal to young men to fight the fight in the city. I am perfectly convinced you will be bound to do that if once you have fought the fight in your own life. Your whole life, if that life be homed in the will of Christ winning His victory, will be part of the force by which He lifts and purifies the city. The fiercest battles of the individual life, the longest, the most strenuous, are the battles fought in absolute loneliness. May I, with all reverence, illustrate what I am thinking from the life story of Jesus? Do not forget that in the will and economy and purpose of God He lived longer in private than in public. Think you there was no significance in that? Three years of public life, and, reckoning from twelve years of age, when He was a boy coming up to the Hebrew confirmation, eighteen years in quietness, hidden away. Where do you suppose, so far as the manhood of Jesus is concerned, the fiercest battles were fought, in the presence of the crowd or in Nazareth? I tell you, in Nazareth. There were battles to be fought in the presence of the crowd.

It is not particularly heroic to do right when you are in the midst of people who applaud you. It is easy for the men of this brotherhood to be pure on Sunday when they are in the brotherhood, and I am not at all sure that it is particularly difficult to be good in the midst of opposition. I tell you frankly, I have never quite understood the young fellow who does not love to put up a stiff fight for God when men are against him. It calls out the fibre that is in him. But, ah, me, my masters, when the comrades in the Christian war are not with me, when the soldiers who would oppose me and make me fight are away and I am alone, then the fiercest fight of my life is fought. There are curious notions abroad in the world as to ministers of the Word of God. Some people seem to imagine we are free from temptation on account of our calling. I tell you we are the special objects of the devil's attack. In the loneliness and seclusion of the study, with only books of religion about a man, oh, the temptation to sloth, to indolence, to pride, to fear, to traffic with the Word of God for some subtle motive. It is there, when I am alone, that the light is fiercest. Unless a man wins there he will never win anywhere.

How shall I win there? By laying hold on eternal life. This Son of God who is the Leader of the hosts laid down His life in the light and the darkness of the cross - and let no man tell me there is no mystery in the cross. In that infinite hour of His agony He made it possible for me to lay hold on life, and if a man will lay hold on life by crowning Him, he can fight alone and win, he can fight with his comrades in arms and win, and he can fight against opposition and win. The first battle is ever in loneliness. That is the thought I desire more than any other to impress on you.

What is to be the final issue of this fight to which we are called? The triumph of right in our own lives and in the world. On that I am not going to dwell.

How are you fighting? Take the week that is gone. You have spent so much of thought, so much of energy. On which side has it all been exerted? Have you helped, by thinking and speaking and working, the victory of evil? Did you think and speak and work last week so that God Almighty got some help out of you toward the ultimate victory?

I call you in the name of the great Leader of faithful souls to fight the good fight of the faith, and I say to you tonight, you can fight that fight only as you lay hold on eternal life. I say to you finally, eternal life is yours here and now if you are His. It may come silently, gently, so much so that you hardly know the moment of its coming. When you take your life and hand it over to the great Captain of Salvation, you lay hold on eternal life, and in the power of that life you may begin your fight and win in secret and in public, in your own life and in every endeavour for the Kingdom of God.