**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 11 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE PROBLEMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE: HAS MAN ANYTHING TO DO WITH GOD? by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

TO THE EARS OF THE CHRISTIAN BELIEVER THE QUESTION seems superfluous, and I think I may almost say it sounds grotesque. That fact notwithstanding, to vast numbers of men and women it is the most perplexing of questions, and constitutes the initial religious problem. If that question could be settled the whole attitude of their life would be altered.

The question is full of interest at the present time. It exactly expresses the mental attitude of the scientist to-day. Thirty years ago the scientist was not in the humour to ask questions; he was making affirmations, declaring quite reverently, quite devoutly, quite honestly, but with absolute dogmatism, that God, if there be a God, is unknowable by man. That is not the mood of the scientist of to-day. He is on the much saner and safer ground of asking, not necessarily in this language, but to this effect, and in this spirit, Has man anything to do with God? He may not yet write God with a capital G, indeed he may not use the word God at all, but he is recognizing that behind all material phenomena there is something, and he is now inquiring honestly, reverently, with profound earnestness, what relation has man to this fact? The question is an interesting one for another reason. It indicates the point at which theology becomes religion or fails to become religion. Theology is the science of God, the truth concerning God, the facts concerning God so far as they have been discovered and recognized. Theology is not religion. I believe it to be quite necessary to religion, but it is not religion. A man may be theological and irreligious. The point where theology merges into religion, or else declines to be religion is where the question is asked, Has man anything to do with God?

The question is interesting in the third place because it challenges the Bible. When I use the word challenge, I do not mean it attacks the Bible. The Bible assumes an affirmative answer to that inquiry. The Bible never argues for the existence of God. It takes God as granted. From its first stupendous and majestic word to its last glorious refrain it is a book the theme of which is the relation between man and God, defined, enforced. So that when I ask the question, Has man anything to do with God? I challenge the Bible. I do not contradict it, but I inquire as to its accuracy.

This initial question, which is a serious question to hundreds of men today, is of interest because it exactly expresses the mental attitude of the scientist today, because it indicates the point at which theology becomes religion, and because it challenges the Bible.

Now faith - and by faith I mean for the moment the attitude of mind of the Christian man - recognizes the right to make such an inquiry. It also insists that the right to inquire involves the responsibility to consider the evidence. I want to make that quite clear to my friend who is inquiring. You have a perfect right to inquire. Do not believe any preacher, or any man who claims to be a prophet, who tells you that you have no right to ask questions, You will never find bedrock for religious faith until you have learned how to ask questions. It is equally true that the right to ask questions involves the responsibility of considering the evidence. You have no right to ask questions and then imagine that there is no answer. You must listen to the answer. You are not bound to accept it, but you must listen to it. That is to say, the man who asks a question does by such action indicate the fact that his mind is open, and that he desires an answer. If not, then the man who asks questions is a trickster, and we have no time for him, and no patience with him. When Jesus stood confronting Pilate, and Pilate asked Him questions, Christ said to him, "Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee?" Is your agnosticism first hand or second hand? It is a very important question to begin with when you are going to ask a question. If the question you are asking in the presence of the Christian religion is a question you have heard in Hyde Park, and you repeat it glibly because you think it sounds clever, then, in the name of God, I have no time or patience to deal with it. But if the question comes up out of the agony of your soul, as a sob out of your inner life, out of a tremendous, passionate desire to know the truth at all costs, then, because the hand of my Lord has been upon me in ordination, my business is to try to help you. I may not have gotten very far, but as far as I have come I want to show you the way. You remember Tennyson's "In Memoriam," and how he describes the fight of doubt for faith. I know it is an old story, but listen to it again: -

You say, but with no touch of scorn,

Sweet-hearted, you, whose light blue eyes

Are tender over drowning flies,

You tell me, doubt is Devil-born.

I know not; one indeed I knew,

In many a subtle question versed,

Who touched a jarring lyre at first,

But ever strove to make it true:

Perplext in faith but pure in deeds,

At last he beat his music out.

There lives more faith in honest doubt,

Believe me, than in half the creeds.

He fought his doubts and gather'd strength

He would not make his judgment blind,

He faced the spectres of the mind

And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;

And Power was with him in the night,

Which makes the darkness and the light,

And dwells not in the light alone.

From that I take the one line I endeavoured to emphasize, "He would not make his judgment blind," which means not merely that he would not accept a dogma simply because the preacher declared it to be true; but also that he would not accept his agnosticism as final until he had tested it by every power of his mind. If you ask questions you must be willing to weigh the answer.

Suffer me still another word in the preliminary stage. Let those who are honestly inquiring recognize the difficulty of faith in the presence of their inquiry. By that I mean to say there are those who are so certain, so irrevocably certain of God, that it is very difficult for them to argue for Him or for man's relation to Him. I remember my dear old father saying to me over and over again in days when I did not so perfectly apprehend his meaning as I have come to do since, in my own experience, I am far more sure of God than I am of myself. Now, if you are an inquirer you can hardly understand that. Even if you think it false and that we are very foolish, please to remember that it is a conviction, that it is a sincere conviction, and remember also that if the man of faith has to be patient with you, you must learn to be patient with the man of faith. All that is very preliminary, yet I have taken time to say these things, because they indicate, so far as I am able to do, the attitude of my own mind toward the man who is inquiring in the spiritual realm.

In attempting to deal with this question I do so as giving evidence rather than as pleading a cause. Twenty-five years ago I came as a young man into a place of almost unutterable darkness about spiritual things. Two inquiries came to me with forceful power. First, is there a God after all? Second, and if there be a God, have I any personal relations with Him? Has He any personal, direct, immediate relationship to me? I am bound again to pause a moment to say there are, perhaps, some of you here who have been Christians for years who never came to such a crisis as this. I can only say, be patient with those who have been through it. Without undervaluing the quantity or quality of your faith, I still believe that what Tennyson says is true: the man who faces the spectres of the mind comes to find a firmer faith his own, not firmer than yours, but firmer than the faith he had before he faced the spectres of the mind. I want to say as I look back to that period of the eclipse of faith - I think that is a correct description of what took place in my own mind - it was not caused by anything moral. I say that only in order to intensify the testimony I desire to bear to any who may be facing similar inquiries. I believe that Dr. Torrey affirmed that infidelity and immorality are always closely allied. That may be true in some senses, but I do not believe that all infidelity springs from immorality. I do believe that infidelity will work out into immorality, but that is another matter. So far from these inquiries arising out of any moral delinquency, they came immediately following the most definite experience of spiritual blessing that ever came to me. The eclipse swept over me in a day, and hung over me for months, even for two years. I had been brought up in a home where my first slumbers were wooed by songs full of the music of the name of Jesus. The whole atmosphere of my home life was an atmosphere permeated by confidence in God. I never learned to doubt when I was a child. I had no chance. Then suddenly, and apparently without cause, these inquiries came. Is it true that there is a God? And if it be true, has that God anything to do with me? It is the second of those questions which is the real theme of our talk together tonight. The first is intimately related to it, and I choose to begin there.

My answers to these inquiries in each case are of the simplest. I propose to give the answers that came into my own experience, and to tell how they came. These answers do by no means reveal the final structure of faith. That is not yet completed. There are a great many things I am not yet sure about; things about God, and about man, and about Truth. The structure is in process of building. The final exposition, the ultimate explanation, I am still waiting for. These first answers constitute the rock foundation upon which faith is being built, and the first stone of the structure of faith laid upon that rock foundation. Twenty-five years ago, when the light came, I began again the life of faith, finding a firmer faith my own, and I did so, first upon the rock foundation of a simple conviction; and from that conviction came a first deduction, which deduction was the first stone in the structure of faith, which is not yet finished.

What, then, was that first piece of rock that I found underneath my feet in the day of faith's conflict, in the day of faith's eclipse?

This: The consciousness of myself and the universe became the conviction of God. After a process of inquiry, and of attempt to restate the doctrines of the faith in such terms as would enable me to accept them; and finding myself utterly unequal to the task, there came a moment when, standing alone on the earth in the midst of the universe, I seemed to come to the consciousness of myself and of that universe. That consciousness compelled me to affirm, It is infinitely easier in the presence of myself and the universe to believe that there is a God than to believe that there is not. It was not much to stand on, but it was a bit of rock under the feet of a man who had been sinking, You say, You demonstrated nothing. That is true, but I had a conviction. You cannot demonstrate a great many things of which you are absolutely sure. You are sure that the woman you call mother is your mother, but you cannot demonstrate it. I did not get mathematical demonstration, but I got conviction, and came at last to say: Here am I, here is the universe. I cannot believe that there is no God! There is a God! It was not much, just a bit of rock; but, oh, God, what a bit of rock means to a man who is drowning. I started there. If you can get a bit of rock under your feet, never mind the temple, never mind the Church; never mind the theologians; put your feet down and stand squarely on it.

Now, I should like to describe the process by which the conviction came. That is not easy, but I propose to attempt it with all brevity. That conviction came as the result of a look back, a look around, and a look on.

A look back to origins. I came to realize that everything results, and to ask from what? You remember Mr. Hastings' old riddle. Here is a hen, and here is an egg. The hen results, from what? The egg. The egg results, from what? The hen. Go on, and when you have solved that you have solved the Christian religion. I only quote it to remind you that everything results. A chair. It results from what? From man's handiwork. On what? Trees. Trees? How did they come? They resulted, From what? Leather, what is that? There were animals once. Whence came they? They resulted, From what? Get on back with your journey.

That is all very childish, is it not? But put your hand where you will; put it on your own thin-veined wrist. It results from what? All that is the beginning of a journey. I do not care how far back you go, through the long centuries, the infinite mysteries, all the evolutionary processes. I do not care anything about them. Back, back. Oh, where did it all begin? The only answer that ever brought satisfaction to my soul is, "In the beginning, GOD." Yes, I can believe that. If you say mighty atom, or tell me about a protoplasmic germ, which John Ruskin translates for me and reminds me that the Greek term being translated means, first, stuck together, I ask, What was stuck together? And who stuck it together? I am not playing; my soul went through all this in agony twenty-five years ago, and no theory satisfied my reason until I said, at the back of all results, as originating cause, is God. That was my first bit of rock.

Then there was a look round, first on the vast, then on the minute. On the far-flung splendours of the starry night, on the minutiae of beauty in a handful of lichen, of moss, of dust, I looked out on life, not human life merely, but on all life, and I saw changeless change, and changing changelessness: seasons regularly moving, life repeating itself true to type, types by inoculation with new types making new mysteries and new wonders, but everywhere order, and everywhere law. I said, Who presides over all this? A double-faced something? Nothing; it all happened? I cannot believe that, Then I found that the Christian writings declare of man, the final manifestation of life, In God he lives, and moves, and has his being. I came to see that the infinitely great God is seen in the infinitely little thing, in the dust; and in the infinitely vast thing, the universe; and I said, Yes, that is easier than any other proposition.

Then I took a look on. All mystery; the light is not clear even yet, but the rhythmic order of things convinced me that at the last "that cannot end worst which began best." There is a goal somewhere, to be reached somehow, "one far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves." I am not talking theology now. Theology discusses how the goal is to be reached. The conviction of the goal brought certainty in my own soul of the one presiding Being.

Then I began to ask about the Being, and I discovered certain things from which I could not escape. Let me only name them: wisdom and might, beauty and beneficence, I came to the conclusion that all these things must ultimately rest in the Being who "spake and it was done," through Whose power all things are upholden, to Whom as the final Goal all things forever move.

Now a few brief words as to what was the result of that finding. I passed immediately to the second inquiry, Has man anything to do with God? I do not think that inquiry can long remain unanswered if God be believed in as a personal Being, having in His own being wisdom, might, beauty, and beneficence. You see, I am trying to omit all the terminology of theology. I am not speaking of righteousness, holiness, love. All these things are there. I am speaking only of the things I found apart from the revelation of Scripture. When the first conviction came to me, I came to the second conclusion, a deduction from the conviction. Because God has everything to do with man, man must have to do with God. If man is of God, and in God, and for God, as a part of creation, it is utterly unthinkable that God, having everything to do with man, man could have nothing to do with God. That was the first stone laid upon the rock foundation.

Think of the process by which I came to that conclusion. Two propositions and deductions made from them. The first proposition. Man is the crowning wonder of creation. Theories and processes matter nothing in this respect. I am not saying what my conviction is, but it does not matter at all whether man was created by a definite, immediate act within an hour from thought to completion; or whether man emerged through long processes. I care nothing. Here is the fact. Man is the crowning wonder of creation. We are all agreed on that, the agnostic, the so-called infidel, the inquiring scientist, the Christian preacher, the most indifferent man who looks about him at all. We are all in agreement. From that proposition I made this deduction. The Creator cannot be unmindful of the crowning glory of His creation. It is unthinkable that if this whole vast and minute universe has come from God, and is of God, and moves toward God, that God should be careless of the highest, most wonderful thing in all creation. You remember the psalmist's inquiry, "What is man that Thou takest knowledge of him?" The psalmist's query and our conclusion may be put together, but they begin at the poles asunder. The psalmist started with revelation, which declared that God is mindful of man and visited him. On the basis of revelation, he inquired what relation there was between man and God, "What is man that Thou takest knowledge of him?" Revelation says, Thou art mindful of him. In the presence of that statement the psalmist asked, What can man be? Our question is not that. Our question is, Has man anything to do with God? We affirm the relation, and we demand to know whether the man who is related has anything personal to do with God.

God is, and He has something to do with man. He sustains him. And man has something to do with God, man receives his life from God, he lives and moves and has his being in God. Now comes the real point of inquiry. Has God anything to do with man's doing, his thinking, his habits, his morality? I submit this to you. The crowning glory of man is moral. I am not quite so sure that I carry you all with me when I say that, nevertheless, I repeat, the crowning glory of man is moral. Is it not so in a little child? You love the child when it is not immoral, but non-moral, before it has come to a knowledge of right and wrong. A child in its mother's arms is not immoral, but it is non-moral. How you watch the day when it begins to be moral, to know right and wrong, making its own choice, defying you. I shall not be misunderstood when I say there is a charm in the defiance of a little child. It needs to be guided, for defiance is but the exercise of the supreme function of life, will. It is the hour of dawning beauty. You have watched all the physical development and the opening mental power, as it looked up and inquired, talking in language no one but a mother could understand; but the crowning hour comes when the child becomes moral. What is true of the child is true of the nation, I read this morning a very remarkable article in the Daily News on W. J. Bryan; one of the most in-seeing articles, if I may be allowed that word, that I have ever read. In the course of that article I read these words:

His appeal is always to the moral conscience. The name of the Almighty is as familiar on his lips as it was on the lips of Mr. Gladstone, and it is the highest tribute to his sincerity that employing it he never gives you the sense of canting. The truth is, he lives in an atmosphere out of which our politics have passed. No one today in the House of Commons ever dares to touch the spiritual note. When we say that oratory is dead, we mean that faith, which is the soul of oratory, is dead. Oratory fell to earth when Gladstone and Bright ceased to wing it with spiritual passion. Our wagon is no longer hitched to a star.

The proportion in which that is true is the proportion in which this nation has lost its greatness and its grandeur and its glory. The proportion in which the highest spiritual emphases of morality are reckoned out of court in the legislative assembly is the proportion in which we are under eclipse. I put it that way, for God grant that the touch of ultimate spiritual morality may be felt yet again in all our national life. You know it is true. Morality is the supreme thing, the greatest grandeur in the child and the man, in the people and the nation.

Get back to the beginning. If the child, the man, the people, and the nation, are the creation of God; and if it be unthinkable that He is not interested in that which He has made its crowning glory, can it be thinkable that He is not interested in the highest glory of that which He has created, which is moral? To me it is utterly unthinkable.

Let me repeat the three things I have tried to say. First: It is easier for me to believe God is, than that He is not, when I stand in the midst of the universe. Second, I cannot believe that, man being the crowning glory of creation, God can be unmindful of him. Finally, when I look on man and know that the ultimate, most wonderful thing in him is morality, I cannot believe that God is careless about morality. Consequently, I believe that this God, Whom I have never felt with the touch of sense, upon Whom these eyes can by no means look, can reveal Himself to man, and I believe man can receive the revelation. The ability in each case is obligation. In the case of God the obligation is fulfilment.

I have attempted to go over the ground which I trod, not thus easily, but in tears and in pain and anguish, twenty-five years ago. I bring to you, in conclusion, a word from the most ancient of the Scriptures of our Bible, "Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace." My friend, inquiring at this the very beginning, the threshold of religious problems, let me say to you in all sincerity, that no man of intellectual power can rest in agnosticism. He may find himself there, but he cannot find rest there. The man who says, I am an agnostic, in an agony, and is inquiring, will find his way through; but the man who is smug and satisfied, and imagines he has reached the highest plane of intellectual greatness because he is an ignoramus will never arrive anywhere. There is no rest for an intellectual man in agnosticism. I charge you, if you are making inquiry, put your blood into it, put your life into it. "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace." Do not stand on the edge of great questions and indulge in the dilettante fooling with them. Get down to the business, and so far as you have ability, ask honestly, persistently, determinedly. It was Eliphaz who said to Job, "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace." Job was agnostic, but never rested in his agnosticism, and he said, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him." Someone says, That is exactly where I am, where I have been for a long time. Now, you must be patient with me as I bring you the Christian message. "No man hath seen God at any time. The Son Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." That God, infinite, mysterious, present everywhere, came "out of the everywhere into the here" - to borrow reverently George Macdonald's description of the baby - and tabernacled - may I be more blunt in my translation, 'pitched His tent' among us, "and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Man, my brother, there is no escape from God. Get to Him through the Son and you will find rest. You say, What of the problems of the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, theologies old and new? In God's name do not begin with these things, but begin with the God of Whose existence you are convinced. Put your feet on the one bit of rock, and you will find it not so small as you thought it was; but rather the strong and mighty rock of ages. Then begin to build the superstructure of faith by handing over your life to the light so far as it has come to you, to the truth so far as you have come to see it.