**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 15 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE PROBLEMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE: THE OPPOSING FORCES OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE - THE FLESH by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

BECAUSE OF THE NEAR PERSONAL RELATI0N OF THE FLESH TO every human being, this subject is at once supremely interesting and vitally important. The flesh is part of the ego, part of myself, not all of myself, but part, and an essential part so far as the present life is concerned. The world is outside me. The devil is other than I am, a distinct personality. But the flesh is of my very self. I cannot escape it. It goes where I go, it abides where I abide; it is with me in my thinking, in my loving, in my willing. I have to take account of the flesh. I may be able to escape, in some measure, from the world in cloistered seclusions, and within stone walls. I cannot so escape from the flesh. I may be able to escape from the devil in certain surroundings, and certain atmospheres. I can never escape from the flesh. Consequently, I say we are dealing with a subject which is supremely interesting and vitally important.

Now I propose to follow the same line of examination as when I considered the world as an opposing force. First, the flesh in itself; second, the flesh as opposed to religion; third, the flesh in relation to the world and the devil; and, finally, the victory over the flesh.

We are greatly aided in this study by the Incarnation. Therein we see human nature according to the pattern, true to the ideal. We have no real understanding of what was in the heart of God when He said, "Let Us make man," until we know Jesus Christ. We may have studied human nature; we may have studied human history, we may have a large and varied circle of acquaintances and friends, but we never know man until we know Jesus Christ. It is graciously and wonderfully true that He is the Revelation of God. It is equally and as graciously true that He is the Revelation of man. I know the meaning of this life of mine only when I know Jesus. Through all the ages, so far as I may glance at them through the windows of history, secular and sacred, I see man after man, some rising above their fellows, conspicuous heights among the mountains, but I never know what man is according to the Divine pattern until my eyes rest on the one Man of Nazareth. In Him we are able to understand, as we never could apart from that revelation, the failure of all other men. Had there been no Jesus Christ in the world, and no record of Him, no image of Him stamped on the human consciousness, I can conceive that men might be very well satisfied with themselves. But no man who has honestly studied the portrait of Jesus which the gospels present, who has stood face to face with the Man of Nazareth and allowed Him to put the measurement of Himself upon life, has escaped the conviction that he ought to say, Lo, I have sinned!

I know the kinship between Jesus and myself; but, my brethren, it is when I am most conscious of the kinship that I discover the immeasurable, appalling, and awful distance between Him and myself. The distance would not appal me if there were not kinship, but it is when I know He is flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone, blood of my blood, and then see Him rising into the infinite heights, towering above me in the sublime simplicities of His fulfilment of the ideal, in the simple sublimity of His realization of purpose, that I know how low I have fallen.

Now, in that light of that revelation we turn to our consideration. The first necessity is that we should understand the meaning of the term, "the flesh." There are two brief passages which I am going to quote in order that their light may fall on the subject. The first is to be found in the opening chapter of John's Gospel. "The Word was made flesh." The second is to be found in the first letter of the same writer, in the fourth chapter, "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." Then it is certain that flesh in the first and simplest condition is not sinful. There is nothing inherently sinful in flesh. There is another passage in Romans, but notice very carefully what it really says. He was made "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He was not made sinful flesh, but in the likeness of it. He was made flesh, but not sinful flesh; and when you bring together these two words, sinful and flesh, you are recognizing the presence of something in the flesh, you are recognizing the presence of something in the flesh that does not belong to it, that ought not to be there. I lay my hand on this hand of mine, I touch this body of mine, and I handle and touch sinful flesh. But when the disciples in the olden days laid their hand on the actual flesh of the Man of Nazareth they laid their hand on actual flesh, but not on sinful flesh. And so I look at this Man - this ideal Man, this actual Man, this sinless Man, this Man Who challenged any to convince Him of sin, this Man Who claimed absolute holiness - and as I look I know that the flesh in its first and simplest condition is not sinful, that there can be flesh without sin.

What, then, according to that first Divine intention as revealed in Jesus, is the flesh? The idea is the instrument of the spirit, perfectly adjusted to the material under-world and to the spirit over-world. Man who is not a body, but who is a spirit inhabiting a body, is able to touch all the material through the medium of his flesh. When the psalmist, referring to the flesh, to the body, said, "We are fearfully and wonderfully made," he uttered a tremendous truth. Through the medium of the flesh man has been able to examine and discover, and manipulate, to exercise the dominion for which he was created. The body is the perfect instrument of the spirit, subservient to it, answering it; the medium through which the spirit touches all lower creation, and the medium through which all lower creation comes into living touch with the spiritual that lies beyond it. There is no inherent evil in flesh according to the original purpose and intention of God.

So that when you speak of the body of a man in terms of disapprobation be very careful lest you be found to blaspheme against God. For remember this body of mine is as much a work of God as is the spirit that indwells it, and it is a work of God made to fit the spirit, to be the dwelling place of the spirit, the temple of the spirit. Infinitely more sacred than any temple, or cathedral, or church that was ever erected is every human body. Made to be the instrument of the spirit, fearfully and wonderfully made, delicate in its organism, tough and tremendous in its strength, is the flesh.

How, then, can flesh be an opposing force to the religious life? Let me again cite three scriptures, and, at first, there may seem to be very little connection between them, and not much bearing on our subject. The first quotation is from the gospel according to Matthew, and the account which the evangelist there gives of words spoken by our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane to three of His disciples, who when they ought to have been watching were asleep. It is a word having a local setting and colouring, but revealing a great, and shall I say, an appalling truth. Jesus said to these men, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,"

The second quotation is from the Galatian letter, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." The Greek word, epithumia, may be translated "desireth." Let me use that word here. "The flesh desireth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." In the Revised Version the word "Spirit" is spelled with a capital letter, and quite accurately. The whole context shows that the apostle was referring to the Spirit of God. In the first quotation I made, the quotation from our Lord, the word should be written with a small 's', for the reference is not to the Spirit of God but to the spirit of man. The third quotation is from the first letter of Peter, "All flesh is grass."

Now, what are the facts which these Scriptures suggest to us? First, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." In that word Jesus revealed the fact of internecine strife in human life, that is, mutually destructive strife. In these very disciples there was strife between the aspiration of the spirit and the ability of the flesh. The spirit willing, conscious of the beauty of the religious ideal, having seen the glory of the Christ, and having earnestly desired to follow Him; and the flesh going to sleep. Peter had said but a little while before, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I." That is the willing spirit. That is the essential man, the deepest man in Peter, desiring to be true to his Lord, declaring that he can die for Him. In the garden Jesus said, "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest thou not watch one hour? "

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. That is the trouble. Over and over again you find in the case of the man who has never yielded to Christ the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. I know it is said that there can be no admiration of the good and true on the part of unregenerate man. That is not true. There are thousands of unregenerate men who know the beauty of holiness, but they cannot be holy. But now I am far more anxious to deal with the flesh as an opposing force in the lives of those who have yielded themselves to Christ, who see the ideal revealed in Christ, all the things high and excellent and beautiful. In such the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. I ought to watch, but I go to sleep. I ought to win, but I fail. Jesus Christ could not have said that of Himself, The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. In His case the spirit was willing, and the flesh was equal to the demands. There was never any failure. There was never any internecine strife between the spirit of Jesus and His flesh. His flesh was forevermore the instrument of His spirit, obeying it, answering it, serving it, helping it. Not so with other men, Not so with me.

Notice the second of these two quotations. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit; and the Spirit lusteth against the flesh." That is to say, there is not only internecine strife, but in human life there is antagonism to the purpose of God in the realm of the flesh. The spirit of God is leading me toward the heights and calling me to the spiritual outlook and conception, and the flesh is dragging me to the depths and suggesting that I live the life of the animal. That word sounds hard and uncouth. Are you in rebellion against that definition? Are you saying, "Not the life of the animal; you cannot speak of the cultured life of to-day as the life of the animal"? Absolutely, if the sum total of life may be thus expressed, "What shall I eat, what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed?" That is animal life. It means food and warmth and animal comfort. The flesh is drawing every one of us to that. That is the temptation of it, That is the suggestion of it.

The Spirit of God is calling me to the life of spirituality, the life that takes in eternity in its outlook, and has dealings with God in all its transactions. The flesh says, Just for today, what shall I eat and what shall I drink?

Once again, "All flesh is grass." That is to say, the flesh has on it the stupor of death, and always asks for ease instead of effort, for licence rather than liberty, and the issue is riot instead of realization. All these things are things of death.

In this way the flesh is an opposing force to the Christian life. I am not entering tonight on the question of how this happened. I am simply dealing with the fact. You can have your own theory about how it happened. I have my Bible and I still believe that man has fallen, and the humanity which I share, and which I meet in the city and in the village, on land and on sea, both rich and poor, both bond and free, is one humanity, fallen humanity; not humanity climbing up, but humanity helplessly and irrevocably down, so that it never can rise, except by a miracle of Divine power lifting it out of the dust. I am dealing with the fact. The moment a man sees the spiritual, and answers it by following Christ, he becomes conscious of conflict with the flesh. The conflict of the child of God with the flesh is the conflict of the subjugation of a recovered empire. Before you were a Christian you lived in the flesh. Now that you are a Christian you live in the spirit. Your own spirit is enthroned. You had it in the prison and starved it and neglected it, and sometimes even said that you did not possess it. In the moment in which you gave yourself to Christ He put that spirit, your spirit, back on the throne of your personality, and He put it there in partnership with His own Spirit, in order to realize your whole life; and the first thing is that the flesh become subservient to it. But the flesh does not become subservient immediately. The flesh which so long was degraded by the fact that you allowed it to have its own way by answering its lust, and dwelling wholly within it, when put in its right place, under the spirit, rebels. Regeneration does not mean a sudden convulsion, of such a nature that all the fibers of my flesh cease to make their own demands. The fight is long and strenuous, and sometimes almost to blood. I want every young Christian here, every young man and every young woman who is fighting this fight, to remember that he or she is subjugating a recovered empire. You have set up the throne, but you have to win and cultivate and restore the whole territory. A man can be cleansed in a moment by the Spirit of God, but there is then the whole campaign of subjugation to go forward. What I do plead for is that you shall be patient. That very thought comes out in the words, "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." That is 'a recognition of the fact that the flesh which has been rampant and masterful for years, when you take the throne in the fear and fellowship of the Holy Spirit of God, is not immediately subjugated, the long habits of years are not immediately broken.

Now, remember the relation of the flesh to the world and to the devil. As last time, I indicate this in very brief sentences, yet the three must always be taken in connection with each other. The degraded man is the man who degrades the world. The degraded world hinders the remade man. For the interpretation of the meaning of that I must refer you to the things I said when speaking of the world. The degraded man, the man who has lost true balance and proportion of things, and instead of being spirit with a body subservient, has become spirit imprisoned by flesh; he degrades the world. Then the world so degraded hinders the man in the moment in which he is remade. The old appeals and allurements of the world make their appeal to the flesh which has not yet come into the absolute consciousness of the mastery of the spirit.

The devil appeals to the degraded man through the degraded world, and he appeals to the remade man through the same medium of a degraded world, and thus fights against all the purposes of God in the man and in the world; for no man will ever be able to take hold of the world and use it as God intended he should use it and bring it to ultimate perfection unless he is a spiritual man. God's purpose for him is defeated, and God's purpose for the world is defeated so long as he is degraded. When man has found his right relationship to God, and the flesh is what it ought to be, what it was in the Christ, then "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." The earth will come to its ultimate fullness and realization when man has found his true relation to God, and to prevent that the devil presents the degraded world to man and attempts to lure him back to the things of the dust only, forbidding him to take into consciousness the things of the eternities.

Finally, can I have victory over this flesh life? Do I mean to say by the things already said that all the while and always I must be defeated? Assuredly not! I have said, and I believe, that the conflict is long and continuous, but defeat is not a synonymous term with conflict. I need not be defeated. There can be victory over the flesh. Hear these words of Paul in the letter to the Romans, the eighth chapter and ninth verse, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." Take that whole passage, and be patient with me if I ask you to read it in the Revised Version, and notice particularly the spelling of the word spirit. You will find it written with a capital letter in certain places and with a small letter in others. After the most careful examination I am able to make, I am convinced our revisers have spelled the word correctly. "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit," that is, your own spirit. If the Spirit of God dwells in a man that man is living on the spiritual side of his own nature, not on the fleshly side. I can live in the flesh or in the spirit. The difference between life high and noble and life low and ignoble is the difference between life in the spirit and life in the flesh. Life in the spirit means the spirit of man enthroned. Then is the flesh bruised and battered? Certainly not! What, then? The flesh is in its proper place, properly nourished, and forever more the servant of the spirit and never the master of the man. That is true life. Man can live in the flesh, answering every cry of his mouth and every appeal of his eye, and every itch of his hand, and every passion of his dusty nature. Where in such life is the spirit? Imprisoned, choked, starved, neglected. Where are you living? "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." If you have the Spirit of God, then you are living in the spirit and not in the flesh.

Then I turn to the Galatian letter, and find these words in the fifth chapter, "I say, Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would." That is the statement of a principle. The flesh desires against the Spirit in order that you may not do the things that you would when you are following the Spirit. The Spirit desires against the flesh in order that you may not do the things you would if you are following the flesh. In the presence of the lust, the desire, the temptation of the flesh, what am I to do? "Walk by the Spirit." The only way of victory over the flesh is that of the reception of the Spirit and obedience to His direction. If we fight the flesh in the power of the flesh we shall be beaten by the flesh. If we have received this Spirit of God, Who takes our spiritual nature and puts it back on the throne, He says to us, Now, follow Me, walk by My rule, do the thing I suggest, obey Me, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

You say to me, Now you are becoming mystical. No, I never was more practical in all my life. The way of the Spirit is revealed in the simplest things of life and in the simplest way possible. When did you yield to the flesh last? I ask for no public answer, no answer made to me in language. I ask for answer in your own heart. The moment you admit that you yielded you recognize the fact of allurement, temptation; and temptation and allurement recognize the fact that the voice of the Spirit was telling you the way, but you yielded to the flesh and obeyed it, and did not obey the voice of the Spirit. The Spirit said to you, Not that way home, but two miles round to be out of temptation! But you went that way home, and went down. Do not say that Christ cannot save you, and that the Spirit cannot keep you. It is a lie. If you will not obey Him He cannot. Of course, if you have never yet given yourself to Christ you do not know what it is to have the indwelling Spirit. The first thing necessary is the yielding of the life to Christ. Yield to Him. From the moment that is done, the Spirit is there the Mentor and Watcher, and infinitely more. Not the Mentor merely, but the Might you need. Not the Watcher only but the Worker able to deliver you. There is no man or woman here belonging to Christ who has fallen into known sin by yielding to the clamant cry of the flesh, but that if you are quite honest you will have to confess you did it wilfully and in disobedience to the call of the Spirit.

"The spirit ... shall quicken also your mortal body." That is not a reference to the resurrection. It is a present thing. The quickening of the mortal body means bringing the flesh into such subjection to the Spirit that the Spirit does master it. He breathes through the pulses of desire His coolness and His balm. He breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the prisoner free.

What I have desired to do supremely tonight - I know not whether I have succeeded - is to help every young Christian struggling in the presence of the pull of the flesh to understand that this fight is in the economy of your salvation, and that you are subjugating a recovered empire; and I want you to see that the only way in which you can have victory is that of obedience to the Spirit of God, Who interprets to your spirit the will of God. I want you to see, moreover, that if that be the only way it is a sure way; and so surely as we follow the leading and guidance and call of the Spirit of God resolutely we shall have victory not only over the world but over the flesh, and the flesh will become again an instrument of the Spirit. Our members yielded to Him, He will make use of them; the eyes of this poor earthly tabernacle may flash with the light of His love; the hands which have been ministers of iniquity may become ministers of His mercy to others; and the feet which have taken us into the highways and byways of evil may carry us, under the bidding of His love, on errands of mercy and loving kindness and help to the sons of men. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost? Yield yourselves, therefore, and your members as instruments of righteousness." So comes the victory, and more than victory, the redemption of the flesh and the realization in it of all the purpose of God.