**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 18 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE PROBLEMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE: IS THE RELIGIOUS LIFE NECESSARY? by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

I CONFESS TO A GREAT SENSE OF DIFFICULTY IN APPROACHING this subject, resulting from the obviousness of the reply from my standpoint. To me the question is as though one should inquire into the physical realm, Is it necessary to breathe, to eat, to act? Nevertheless, the question is asked, and if we are to deal with it we need to get at the viewpoint of the man who asks it. We must understand his attitude of mind. The question moves on a much lower plane than the one we discussed last week. In that there was recognition of the beauty of the ideal, and the only question was one of fear whether it were indeed possible to live that life. In the inquiry that we are taking tonight the ultimate perfection of the religious life is not so much in sight as the conditions upon which that ultimate perfection can be realized. I think if a man says, Well, after all, is it necessary? he is not referring to that highest ideal of the religious life, that ultimate requirement of God that man should be perfect in his own being. He is rather standing face to face with the conditions which are imposed when a man is asked to give himself to Christ and to begin the truly religious life.

If a man is to live the religious life he must submit to authority, the one true final authority of the will of God. He must renounce all the things which he knows to be out of harmony with the will of God. It is necessary for him to cultivate the habits of the religious life; he must give himself to prayer, to the study of the Word, to perpetual watchfulness, and to service on behalf of others, without which the religious life is never possible. There must be discipline and diligence. When a man faces these conditions he asks, Is the religious life necessary? I think what he means is, "Suppose I decline, what will happen?" As I understand it, that is the question that we have to face. Such inquiry involves the necessity for restatement of the positive values of the religious life. The positive is the revelation of the negative. In proportion as we see what these values are we shall see what is the result of living the irreligious life.

I propose to confine our consideration to the individual. Taking a human life, and believing it to be spiritual in essence, I want to think of it in its continuity, but recognize the line of division at death. So in two parts I shall ask this question. Is the religious life necessary for the life that now is? Is the religious life necessary for the life that is to come? That is a very old-fashioned method of dealing with this thing, but I know of no other possible. I put the dividing line there simply because it is there. The fact of death must be admitted and taken into account. It is sometimes affirmed that we have no right to appeal to the fear of man by preaching about death. The fear of man? I do not appeal to the fear of man when I speak about death. Are you afraid of death? Why? No man ought to be afraid of death. Why do you not like to hear about death? I will tell you, in the words of inspiration, "The sting of death is sin." That is why you do not like to hear about death. So I keep that dividing line which is quite a simple and natural one, and one that we all have to admit.

What are the values of religion in the life that now is? First of all, let me speak of the principle of the life of religion, then of its method, and so lead to the results of the religious life.

First, then, as to the principle. What is the principle of the religious life? The mastery of the will of God. There are very many things I am not proposing to deal with which nevertheless must be taken for granted, all those necessary matters which cannot be neglected if men would come into proper relationship to that will, "Ye must be born again," "Repent and believe." All these are simple terms that indicate how man is to readjust life, when it is out of harmony with God. The ultimate principle is that of the recognition of the sovereignty of God, and the beneficence of His will, followed by the abandonment of all other mastery, and the acceptance of that will as the perpetual, unceasing, and ever applicable law of the life.

The method of the religious life is that of obedience to that will discovered and accepted. What does obedience mean? Inquiry, consent, activity. Perhaps that is not quite clear. Let me pause with my words for a moment. First there must ever be inquiry. For a man to say that he accepts the will of God as the master principle of his life, and then having said so in the sanctuary or in conversation, to go out and take up his business, or to make a friendship, or to decide on where to spend his holiday, or to select a house, without ever seeking to know the will of God, is the utterest nonsense, and indeed is blasphemy. There must be inquiry. The religious life in its method asks what is God's will for me here and now, today and in this matter? I said here recently that the blasphemy of the man who prays, "Thy Kingdom come," and never seeks the Kingdom, never submits to it, is more perilous than the blasphemy of the profane swearer in the slum. Someone has written questioning that. I stand by the declaration. The man in the slum was born in the atmosphere of swearing, has always sworn, does not know he is swearing. I have heard some such men in the early days of their Christianity swear in prayer, but there was no blasphemy in it. For any man to say, "Thy Kingdom come," or to recite the creed, "l believe in God the Father Almighty," and then to refuse to submit his life to Him, for six days in the week, is blasphemy of the worst kind. The religious life inquires, waits for the voice, seeks to know. When the light comes the will consents to it and inspires actual obedience. Until the consciousness is borne in upon the soul, that this or that is the will of God, the religious man never moves hand or foot.

What are the results of such principle and method? What are the issues of making the will of God the master principle, of following the method, of making inquiry after the will, consenting to it, and rendering it active obedience? In such life there is, first of all, realization of fellowship with God. The man, woman, yea, or little child, who, not able to state the thing, not able to formulate perfectly the principle of life, nevertheless is submitted to God - that man, woman, little child, knows what fellowship with God means. The day is not gone when God speaks in the deepest soul of man, woman, or child if they will but listen. The consciousness of fellowship is the first result.

That fellowship means the appropriation of all forces. I believe that word of Paul in his Roman letter, "To them that love God all things work together for good," means not merely that God is laying His hand on all things and taking the keen edge off them and blunting that which would hurt, and making everything come right at last. The statement is not that all things will be compelled, but that all things work together for good. All forces are at the disposal of the man who is living in harmony with God. All the forces of life are at the disposal of the man who is living in harmony with God, so that the very things which harm one man help to make the man whose life is homed and centred in God. This means in its final statement, that the religious life is life more abundant. Life more abundant means not that there is superadded to your human life a life of another nature, but that your own human life comes to its fulfilment and realization. When a man is living the religious life whatever is in him by nature is glorified, fulfilled. He comes into possession of what he is. There is no more significant word, and yet no word that we more lightly consider, than this word of Jesus, "Whosoever shall lose his life shall find it," not another life, not an angel's life, not the life of some other person, but his own life. It is when a man is living the life of right relationship to God, and, consequently, is living the life in which all the forces under the government of God minister to his making, that he comes to fulfilment of his own life. What is in you? Someone went into the studio of David Cox - or one of the artists, I have heard the story told of several - and, looking at one of his pictures, said to him, I never saw anything like that in nature. The artist answered, No, you only wish you could. Have you that vision, the artist's vision? Can you stand by the sea, and, looking out over the waters, see glories which I cannot see? Is your life homed in God, responsive to His volition? Then that vision is not dimmed. You will see, as you never saw, that the light of God in your inmost soul illumines all your outlook on nature, What is in you - music? I love to hear music, but I am no musician. I always come to decision as to whether a piece of music is classical or not by the blackness of the page! That is not your outlook on music. You hear symphonies. If you are right with God you will be more keen in your appreciation of music than you ever were in your life. I am not talking in figurative language. I am talking about actual music. The touch of a godly man on a harp will bring out finer music than any other touch. A human life is lifted, ennobled, glorified, brought to its own when it is life lived in relation to God.

Reminding you that the positive reveals the negative, take the life irreligious, the life that has no vision of God, that never waits for His voice, has no sense of the eternal, no commerce with the spiritual, no traffic with the unseen, the life which Peter describes when he says, "seeing only the things that are near." Was there ever more graphic description of the irreligious life than that? "Seeing only the things that are near." What is the principle of that life? Self is enthroned! The exclusion of God, which means the exclusion of perfect knowledge and the exclusion of all-sufficient power. What is the method of that life? Self-served. That is obedience to unintelligent desire, strife after experience without ability to realize. What is that? Friction, fret, fever. What is the result? Self-lost. Hunger without bread. Thirst without water. Desire without ability. The illustrations of what I am trying to say in brief words are to be found everywhere. They are to be found in the East End of London. They are to be found in the West End. The East and the West are still far apart, but they are tremendously near together. The East and the West talk two languages, but out of one humanity. Give me a man of the East End who is living a godless life - he lives for himself. He was born in the very atmosphere of blasphemy. He is away down in the depths. When we begin to deal with statistics and political economy we speak of the submerged tenth and of the upper ten. Both are submerged so far as their humanity is concerned. Take the man in the East end, hot restless life, unable to find quietness, satisfaction, peace. Bruised, bitter, rebellious, angry! The word that you use to describe that man's condition is despair. I cross over from the East to the West, and here I find culture. Mark me very carefully, I am not undervaluing culture and education. Let no man charge me with such unutterable folly. I find culture and refinement. I find something in the West that it has taken centuries to produce. There I hear another word. It is not an English word this time but a French word, as though by the use of a French word you could heal a wound. I hear the word ennui. Do you imagine when you hear someone say ennui that it is a small thing? It is hell! Culture, refinement, things that are quite beautiful, admirable in most ways, but in the heart, no rest, no peace. I know the things whereof I speak. I know them better tonight than I did four years ago. I have had to listen to story after story, and to share agony after agony, and to come into definite touch with this thing. The godless life is anchorless, rudderless - no peace, no quiet - fever, friction. All the finest things absent in spite of the culture and refinement that the schools can give and the process of the centuries can give. The light of the infinite morning is never on the brow. The breath of the eternal hills never brings recreation. No grasp of God and therefore no grasp of life. I submit to you that if you simply take the life that now is, godless life has lost its own key and secret, and does not possess the power to realize itself. The godly life is the life that holds the key to all the treasure house and admits into the richest and best, even of the present life.

I bring you now to the dividing line, and speak of the life to come. Take the positive again. Let us see what the religious life is. How does the life to come begin? It begins with death. What is death? Transition. The laying aside of a tent. The entry on the consciousness of vaster environment. That is death. The tent is laid down and the occupant passes on. Of course, I am taking for granted the authority of this Book and the whole testimony of the Catholic Church (i.e. church universal). I am not going to argue these things. I simply state them. The great Lord and Master of us all uttered words once full of light on this subject. I have often quoted them in other connections; let us see them in this connection. He said, "Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." What is the concept of life that lies behind that? Do you see what the thought of Jesus about human life is? Let us express His thought in His own words, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." Or again, "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? " - What is this conception of life? That the individual is spiritual in essence. That is the Christian conception of individuality. What, then, is death? Simply the moment when a person passes on to another plane, on to another level. You remember the exquisite, marvellous line in the course of the slave's dream in which the author describes the passing out of the slave into liberty through death, and speaks of the body of the slave as a worn-out fetter which the soul had broken and cast away. That is the Christian conception of death. I want to take again a side issue for a minute. I do not want anyone to imagine I am callous in the presence of death. I am not. I know its bitterness to those who are left. I hate the idea that no tears are to be shed in the presence of it, that we are to steel our hearts against emotion. I am looking at death from the standpoint, not of those who are left, but of those who go. This is death. The earthly tabernacle, the tent, dissolved; then a building, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The earthly tabernacle dissolved. I remember Moody saying to a group of friends, "Someday you will see in the news-paper that Moody is dead. Don't you believe it. The day you read that in the newspaper, Moody will be more alive than ever he has been." That is the Christian outlook, triumph over death.

What is the relation of that life to this life? When you begin to see that death is simply the laying aside of a tent and the going on of the same person, what is the relation between the life that now is and that which is to come? It is necessarily most intimate. There is continuity. The set of the life is the same five minutes after as five minutes before death. The direction, the conception, the character, the trend is not changed in the hour of death. A great many things are changed. Environment is changed. It is a new plane, a new level, a new world, but the direction is the same. I think there are some people who imagine that when they cross over in their essential life they are absolutely changed by the passing. Not so. There is no warrant for such teaching in the New Testament. You are exactly the same. There will be a great deal to learn on the other side for most of us, and I think we shall not know it all immediately, but the direction will be the same. What is to be the principle of that life? Exactly the same as the principle of life here, the mastery of the will of God. What is to be its method? Exactly the same as that of the life here, obedience to the will of God. What is to be the result? The result of the life here I said was life more abundant. The result of the life there is life most abundant. Christian people for a long time have been praying for dying grace. Such prayer is a waste of time. What we need is living grace, "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." The statement "he was not," does not merely refer to the method by which he was taken, but to the method of all his life for three hundred years before he went. He was not, God took him into fellowship. He went with Him along the way of earth through those centuries and then Enoch was not, the earth had lost him but God had gained him into fellowship a little closer, but in the same direction. Death is not going to do anything for me that Christ has not done, or cannot do, save bring me to a larger outlook, and leave me more free for development along the very lines on which I have been progressing, if I am a child of God, from the moment I received the Christ life.

If these are the positive aspects, mark well the negative. What is the beginning of the life to come for the man who is irreligious? Death, What is death for that man? Exactly what it is for the other, transition, the laying aside of a tent, the entry upon a vaster environment. What, then, is the difference? Let me answer that question, by asking another. Is there still a point of identity? Yes, there is. As in the life of the saint the word that marks the relation of this life to the life that is to come is continuity, so also is it in the life of the godless man. The set of the life here is the set of the life hereafter, The direction of the life here is the direction of the life hereafter. When a man lays aside the tent he enters upon a larger, more mysterious, wonderful existence, What is he there? What he is here. You ask me about a second probation. The word of God has nothing to say about a second probation, and I have nothing to say about it. I do know of the present probation, and I know that the probation of today is to every man in the world, and I know that the basis of the present probation is the light a man has, and not the light he lacks. As a man passes out of this life into the next the matter of supreme importance is not what he believes about Jesus, for there are thousands who have never heard His name. What is the matter of supreme importance? The set of the life, the direction of the life. The matter of supreme importance to me as I pass out of this world is not the actual influence of the moment, but the direction, the master passion of the life, the thing that drives and impels and inspires, for that is the central thing after all. "As he reckoneth within himself so is he." What is your thinking? That is the deepest of you! Is it passionate desire to do the will of God? That is the set of your life and death does not change it. Is the deepest thing in your life desire to please yourself? That is the set of your life and death does not change it. You go out into the vaster environment in which vaster environment you discover more terribly and awfully your inability to satisfy the deepest cry of your own life. Hunger without bread. Thirst without water. Desire without answer.

I pray you consider his question. If life is one and indivisible; if I have now begun the life that runs on, and if continuity is the word that tells the story of that which is to come in its relation to that which now is, then I ask you to carefully consider the question: "Is the religious life necessary?" You must decide whether or not you are prepared for the continuity of the life you are now living. Strip yourself of the habit of saying your life is this, or that, or the other. These are the methods by which you are attempting to satisfy the deepest thing in your soul. Do not measure your life by the method but by the purpose in your deepest heart. That is a difficult thing to get men to do. Take that round of pleasure, of strenuous work amassing wealth, and has a moment come in your life when you have said, "My soul, in this pleasure, in this wealth, thou hast found thy resting place"? Have you really found it? It is not the fact that for the moment pleasure is pleasure, that wealth is a delightful possession and gives you power that matters. The inquiry is, '"Have I in my inner heart and life found rest in these things?" For, remember, the life that is to come is a continuity of the life that is, only all the present things, the transient things, will have passed away and the soul will go out in its nakedness, in its loneliness, and if it have not found satisfaction it will lack it forever. In the life religious the soul goes out in its loneliness, but if it have satisfaction in fellowship with God, it is satisfied forever.

The religious life is the life of obedience to light. The discussion of the problem of the heathen in Africa or in London is irrelevant, I am not dealing with it. What is your light? Put yourself into contrast, some of you, with the people in the West end. Some of them have had no more chance of vital godly life than the worst man in the East end slum. Put yourself into contrast, and remember this, you are not going to be judged by their standards nor they by yours, but each by the standard of the light possessed. Your light is not a rushlight that you yourselves light in a room which you have darkened by pulling down all the blinds. The light by which you will be judged is the light of the Christian revelation, as you have been brought up in its very presence and atmosphere. The religious life is the life that obeys the light. God as revealed in Christ. Man as revealed in Christ. That is the light. The religious life is obedient to it. Are you obedient to that light? Here is the almost overwhelming difficulty of the hour. These lectures have provoked letters, the majority of them kindly, courteous, but terrible in their revelation of the fact of how men will fritter away their time and strength and intellect on the fringes of things, and refuse to come to the central purpose. As to whether verse thirty-nine in chapter thirteen, is in harmony with verse forty-one in chapter twenty-two, a man is going to risk his eternal welfare on that. Suppose they do contradict themselves utterly, take out of your Bible that one imperial lonely splendor of Christ and walk in the light. That is the religious life. Is it necessary? Again I say, I leave you to decide. For me it is necessary, in order that I may live the life that now is at its highest, best. Necessary, entirely, absolutely necessary in order that when the fetter is broken and thrown away I may find home, and refuge, and rest, and fulfilment of my being. For I lack rest forevermore, if I have deliberately chosen in this life to disobey the light.