**VOLUME 6; CHAPTER 10 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH CHRIST, IN THE CHURCH, FOR THE WORLD by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear.*

*Acts 2:33*

CHRISTIANITY'S SUPREME CREDENTIAL IS CHRISTIANITY. Of all miracles it is the greatest. There are two historic facts which are indisputable: first, the death of Jesus, and, second, the Church of Jesus. Or to put that in another way, history attests the fact that somehow or other out of death came life, that after the death of Jesus there began in human history a new order of men and women, a new order of society, new ideals, new impulses, new forces. That is the supreme wonder. We look back again to the Cross of our Lord, and we may say of Him reverently in the language of the writer of the Ietter to the Hebrews concerning Abraham, but with more definiteness, Here is One, not only as good as dead, but dead; nevertheless, His thoughts, His teaching, He Himself, guide and govern those movements of the race which tend toward its perfection and its permanence. This is the supreme wonder, the wonder of all wonders.

When we turn to this last historic pamphlet of the New Testament and read the story of the new beginning of the Christian movement after the resurrection and ascension of our Lord we find the secret of the victories that have resulted. In this second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we have the account of the first blaze of light, and the first thrill of power following the resurrection and ascension. The story is always full of fascination. We can never read this chapter without feeling the thrill of it, and the power of it. The ideals suggested and revealed constitute the reason of this perpetual appeal rather than the realization of these things by the men of apostolic times, for the book of the Acts is as surely a revelation of failure as it is of victory. I do not know how far it is wise to take comfort from that fact, but I do find my own heart perpetually comforted by it. In these days of lamentation and wailing over the failure of the Christian Church I go back to the beginning and find the same story still. Through all the centuries victories seem to have been in spite of unfaithfulness rather than as the result of faithfulness.

That which began at Pentecost is abiding. There is no need to pray for a new Pentecost. There can be no new Pentecost. Pentecost was the occasion when the Spirit of God came to create and abide with the Church of God, and He has never been withdrawn. This place of our assembly is as full of the presence and power of that Holy Spirit of God as was the upper room at Jerusalem. We may not hear the sound of a rushing mighty wind, but the Spirit is proceeding from the Father through the Son into the lives of believing men and women, and still is that selfsame Spirit poured upon all flesh.

Then it may be said, Where is the secret of present failure? How is it that we are not conscious of the same experience? In answer to that, two things must be said. First, that there were experiences of the day of Pentecost that were not intended to abide. Things that were necessary at the moment have passed, but the spiritual facts have not passed. We do not ask for the sound of the rushing mighty wind, we do not seek - if we have spiritual apprehension of the true meaning of this Pentecostal effusion - for manifest tongues of fire upon the heads of the assembled saints. But, second, we do ask for the power itself, and we do most earnestly desire to know something of the experience that came to these men, that filled them with ecstasy, with joy; that irradiated their faces and put songs on lips which had perhaps never sung before. We do desire to know the secrets of that power which made prophecy prevailing in those olden days and constrained men to obedience to the Lord Christ. To know the power of this Pentecostal effusion surely we must discover its laws, and any measure of present failure is the result of failure in that particular.

The first symbol of the Christian Church was the tongue of fire. The first experience of the outpoured Spirit was fullness of life and fullness of joy. This fullness of life and joy was expressed in that strange, I had almost said weird, manifestation in which men in various tongues praised God. The tongue was not a gift enabling men to preach or prophesy, it was a gift for praise. The first function of the Christian Church is that of praise. The first function of the Christian priesthood is eucharistic in the true sense of that great word, that of the offering of thanksgiving and praise. When the Spirit of life fell on these men their eyes were opened, and they saw as they never had seen, and understood as they never had understood, things concerning Christ and concerning God; and the multitudes listening heard them in their own tongues showing forth the mighty works of God. They had become a company of priests offering praise. In fullness of life there was fullness of joy, and out of that came the words which magnified the name of God, and sounded His praise abroad.

The first impression this Church produced on the city was that of mental arrest; they were compelled to consider; it was that of mental defeat, they were unable to explain; it was that of mental activity, they attempted to explain. The city was arrested, not by a preacher, but by a Spirit-filled church. That church, manifesting the fullness of its life in great joy, in great ecstasy, and in praise, created the opportunity for the Christian preacher to proclaim the evangel of Jesus.

The first activity in the power of the Spirit on behalf of men outside the company of the saints was that of this discourse of Peter, Observe the scheme of it. The people of the city said, "What meaneth this?" Peter replied, "Be this known unto you, and give ear unto my words," and then proceeded to detailed explanation, of which the central declaration was, "This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel." The address culminated in the word of the text, "He hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear." The city said, "What meaneth this?" Peter replied, "Be this known unto you; … This is that; … He hath poured forth this."

Now let us confine our attention to the last word of the answer of Peter to the inquiry of the city. We shall dwell on the "He" and on the "this," speaking first of the relation of the Pentecostal baptism to Christ, and, second, of the meaning of the Pentecostal baptism for the world.

The relation of the Pentecostal baptism to Christ is most clearly declared. Having quoted from the prophecy of Joel and having declared that the signs which they saw and the circumstances in the midst of which they found themselves were in fulfilment of that prophecy, Peter arrested the attention of his hearers anew as he said, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words." Then in an orderly sequence he told the story of Jesus. First, he named the Lord, Jesus of Nazareth. This was His most familiar name, the one by which He had been known, the one which had been used by the disciples in love, and by other men in contempt. Second, he declared the witness of the miracles to the perfection of His nature as he spoke of Him as "a man approved of God among you," not a man that God approved, but a man that God demonstrated "by mighty works and wonders and signs," not which He wrought, but "which God did by Him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know." The miracles and wonders were works of God wrought through the absolute perfection of Christ's humanity. Then, immediately, he came to the last fact of which these men had been conscious: "Him" - and after a parenthesis, "being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," which the men who heard him certainly could not understand - "ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay."

In these words so far the Apostle had massed all that these men knew of Jesus, the manifest things - Jesus of Nazareth, a Man demonstrated among you by God in miracles and wonders and signs, a Man crucified. Beyond this these men who listened were unable to go of their own knowledge.

But the Apostle had much more to say. He followed the mission of Jesus into spiritual heights which these men could not understand; he told them, if I may use the terms of time in relation to eternity, of the events which had followed the Cross, which for them had ended the career of Jesus, "whom God raised up"; and "being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath poured forth this." He has given to these men this fullness of life which expresses itself in the praises which have arrested the city, amazed, and made it critical.

As we read the story there is evident throughout conflict between grace and sin; the Divine activity beneficent in its intention toward men, and human activity in its intention hostile to God. As we watch the course of our Lord's ministry revealed in this wonderful paragraph we see Him as the center of perpetual conflict between sin on the one hand and the grace of God on the other.

Mark the movement of sin. Sin first expressed itself in blindness in the presence of the revelation of the life of Jesus; His words and His works witnessing to truth Himself demonstrated by God by the wonders He wrought; men were blind, not seeing, not understanding. Blinding their own eyes, hardening their own hearts, they moved ever more persistently into the mental mood of definite hostility. Sin expressed itself finally in the Cross, as there it refused the Kingship of the Christ. That Cross was man's answer to everything Christ had said, to His spiritual conceptions, to His severe and awful moral requirements, to His offer of pardon and of grace. The Cross of Jesus Christ is the very center and ultimate of human sin.

At that point in the history sin had done its worst, it had crucified the Lord of glory, and laid His body to rest in the tomb. Sinning man could do no more, he had become impotent, he had wreaked his vengeance on Jesus. One can hardly feel anything other than contempt for the rude superstition that watched the body of a dead man.

But now through all the movement observe the activity of grace. In the life of Jesus grace revealed God and the will of God concerning man. Through that life of Jesus God was calling man back to Himself. What of the Cross? Has sin there won a victory? Is that the ultimate word, is grace defeated, is the intention of God defeated? In the course of the declaration we find that which was a parenthesis so far as the men who listened were concerned, "being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." None knew the Cross like that until after Pentecost. None saw the Cross so until he looked back at it in the light of the resurrection. But looking back through the resurrection and in the light of the Spirit, Peter and the rest saw God acting in the Cross in determined love, mastering sin in a mystery that baffles us, in darkness that we never can enter, darkness which has at its center light unapproachable. In that hour and mystery of the Cross God is seen dealing with the sin that had expressed itself ultimately therein, and so dealing with it as to be victorious over it.

We now take the next step as suggested in the address of the Apostle. The victory was won, the Lord was raised from the dead and exalted. Then followed the ascension. As in all reverence we follow the Man of Nazareth into the light and glory of the heavenly place, the Spirit through Peter interprets the activity of that sacred hour in words which entirely transcend our explanation. The declaration that the Lord "received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost" can be understood only as we follow our Lord into the light of the heavenly place and realize that He passed in as the representative One. In that moment man returned to God, and God returned to man in Christ. By the mystery of the wounds He bore He asked, as He said He would, for the Spirit that He might bestow it upon all trusting souls. Not by right of His sinless humanity did He claim the Spirit, but by the right of His passion. Not for Himself did He claim the Holy Spirit, for was not the whole history of His earthly career the history of fellowship with the Spirit? Born of the Spirit, baptized of the Spirit, in the power of the Spirit, He entered on His ministry. In the great mystery of the passion was it not also true that through the eternal Spirit He offered Himself to God? Now risen Man and ascended Lord, in the presence of God He received the Spirit as the representative of those whom He had left behind, representing them by the very wounds He bore, representing them by the passion through which He had passed. When the Father gave Him the Spirit, to use still this mystic figurative language, He gave the Spirit to Him as representing those for whom He had been wounded and bruised, whose place He had taken in the mystery of the Cross by which He had overcome sin. He represented humanity as humanity's Saviour. Then we reach the final word, descriptive of the final movement, "He hath poured forth this."

Thus the Spirit on the day of Pentecost came to these men in answer to the prayer of Jesus, not in answer to their praying, not even in answer to their obedience, but entirely and absolutely in answer to the request in heavenly places of Christ Himself, the One Whose wounds told the story of His conflict, and Whose presence there proclaimed the fact of His victory. The Spirit thus given through the Son united those on whom He fell to the Son in a life of absolute identity, ultimately making those to whom He came like the Son.

If we have received the Spirit we have received it from the Father and through His Son. If we who name His name are receiving His Spirit, we are receiving the Spirit through the Son, not in answer to our praying, not as a reward for some sacrifice we are making. All these may be conditions which we fulfil, but this great Pentecostal gift of the Spirit, making men and women one with the Lord, indwelling them so that the very life of the Lord is dominant within them, expressing the power of the Lord through them, is in answer to the prayer of the Lord and the result of what He did.

What, then, was the meaning and what the value of this Pentecostal baptism for the world? It was the creation of the Christian Church of God. That is a phrase I used carefully, the Christian Church of God. The Church of God, if you will; but there had been a Church of God in some senses before this. In the seventh chapter of this book of the Acts we have mentioned the Church in the wilderness, that is the assembly, the congregation, the ecclesia in the wilderness. This, however, was the Christian Church of God. It is an interesting fact that the phrase, the Church of Christ, is used only once in the New Testament, and then by an apostle speaking of local churches. This Church of God, the Christian Church of God, is a new entity, a new nation, a new people. The differences between this Church of God born at Pentecost and the Church of God existing before are vital differences, but we need not now stay to look at them. In that moment, when those who had been individual disciples were brought into living union with the Lord Himself and so into living union with each other, the Christian Church was born.

What, then, is the Church in the world, considering it as a whole? It is God's institute of praise, God's institute of prayer, and God's institute of prophecy. The whole Church is, first of all, an institute created to praise God. "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may shew forth the excellencies of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." The first purpose of the Church is that she shall praise God. I think we need to remember that in its first application and its simplest the first function of the Christian life is that of praising. Yet let us take the larger outlook. The Christian Church exists so to reveal God as to utter forth His praise, so to make God known to men who know Him not that in the presence of the revelation they may be filled with awe, and wonder, and amazement; so to make God known that God shall be attractive to humanity. Whether we are prepared to accept the declaration or not, the experience abides. Men of the world can know God only as God is revealed to them through His people. The Word of God can be powerful only as it is incarnate. Is not that the meaning of the central mystery of our holy religion? God came no nearer to humanity when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but He came into visibility, into manifestation. In proportion as in this Church of Jesus Christ His life is reproduced, God is being revealed anew. Our first business is that of praising Him, praising Him with lip and with life, in the actual songs we sing, in the hallelujahs we lift; praising Him by all the habits of our life, by the perpetual testimony of our ways as they announce the fact of His being, the fact of His love. That was the first effect the Church produced. Filled with life, light flashed from the eyes of the disciples, songs were on their lips, they magnified the mighty works of God, and the city was compelled to listen. In that hour of Pentecost God created for Himself by the coming of the Spirit through Christ a people for His own praise and glory, a kingdom of priests that they might offer to Him sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. Unless Pentecost produces in our life fulness of joy and makes us a people filled with praise we are failing sadly. The first function of the Christian Church is that she should be to the praise of God.

In that hour, moreover, God created in the world a great institute of prayer, for the function of the priesthood is not only eucharistic, it is intercessory. By the coming of the Spirit He created a people able to pray. Surely this is what the Apostle meant in his Roman letter when he spoke of creation groaning and travailing in its pain, and then spoke of the Church in the midst of the groaning creation, the Church groaning and travailing together with creation in pain; and at last declared that "the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." The Spirit of God understanding the pain of creation is grieved thereby, sorrow is caused in the very heart of God by the agony of humanity; that Spirit indwelling a company of people interprets to them the agony of creation, so that they enter into a new compassionate sympathy with all the suffering of the world, and thus in the midst of the groaning creation they constitute an institute of prayer. No man can pray for the world unless the Spirit interpret to him the world's agony, and the Spirit cannot interpret the world's agony to any man unless that man live in the midst of the world's agony. Not by retirement from the world, not by hiding away within a monastic institution, not by seeking to develop my own spiritual life by removing myself from the agony of the world, can I ever pray for the world; but because I live every day in the midst of its busy life, am close to it and know it, and because the Spirit of God in me leads me into the secret of the deepest meaning of the world's agony and pain so that I no longer treat it as a superficial disease that can be dealt with by the nostrums of humanity, but as a great heart trouble that needs blood and sacrifice to deal with it, am I able to pray. Out of that revelation of the meaning of the world's agony created by the Spirit in the hearts of believing men they are able to pray. The Church of God in the economy of God was created an institute of prayer.

But more, not for praise alone was the Church created, not alone for prayer, but also for prophecy, in the highest use of the great word, for proclamation. As with lip and life the saints praise, so by lip and life the saints should preach. The Spirit came uniting these men to the Lord, disannulling orphanage and canceling distance to make the risen and ascended Christ a living bright reality. By so doing He enabled these men to speak to the Lord familiarly as those who have constant comradeship with Him, and by so doing enabled them to reveal the Lord of Whom they spoke in tone and temper and habit and speech, and in all activity. Reverently and superlatively, He came to multiply and unite in the perfect Humanity of Nazareth all the scattered members of the one great Christ o'er all the earth that in the case of all of them, and not only in the case of the overseers, bishops, deacons, both by their preaching and their living they might show forth the glory of God and proclaim the power of His great evangel.

In conclusion, let us recognize that our possession of this power of Pentecost depends on our relation to Christ. Glancing at the description which Peter gave of the progress of our Lord toward the heights, we described it as a conflict between sin and grace. The question for our hearts is this, In such conflict, on which side are we? Are we in true fellowship with God in the determination of His grace to deal with sin in its opposition to the way and will of God, refusing to come in obedience to the revelation of life, refusing to yield ourselves to the claims of the Christ? Such questions must be left unanswered in great assemblies. They are for answer only in the privacy of the individual life.

Perchance the question may be stated in another way. Let it thus be asked in individual lives. What is the influence we exert? The answer to that is the answer to the question whether or not we have this Spirit of Christ. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." If any man be living still the life of blindness to all the will of God, the life of rebellion against the will of God, the life which in its practical activity refuses to crown Christ, that is demonstration of the fact that such a man lacks the Spirit of God. On the other hand, are we conscious that we have seen the glory, that in some measure at any rate already we have put the crown on the brow of Christ, and that the deepest passion of heart and life is to crown Him and make Him known to others? Then we may take heart and know by that sign that this Spirit of God has been given to us. As to whether we may be living in all the fullness and privilege of the Spirit is another question. The question that demands our earnest attention is, Are we ministers who praise His name in lip and life, do we know the secret of prayer that prevails in the midst of the world's agony, are we proclaiming the evangel in our words and in our works? If not, then let us search our hearts now and discover whether we have been self-deceived and lack the Spirit of God. As the Spirit comes we receive all that we need in order to praise and pray and prophesy. He comes in response to our belief in the living Lord at the commencement; He perpetually comes and proceeds, flowing in, filling and overflowing, in response to the attitude of belief maintained. The celebration of a festival is of no profit save as we yield ourselves to all the facts which we celebrate. May it be ours, then, to know that union with the Lord in life and service which can come only by the presence and power of the Spirit.