**VOLUME 6; CHAPTER 14 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**ETERNAL LIFE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life.*

*John 3:36*

THE FIRST WORD OF JESUS IS, "REPENT." WHEN MEN, hearing that call, indeed change their mind, and ask, "What must we do to work the works of God?" He answers, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him Whom He hath sent." The question then arises, What is the issue of such belief? The answer is, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life."

No question can be more interesting or more vital than that which inquires the meaning of this phrase, "eternal life." A partial definition narrows the outlook and gives half a conception which may be false because partial. For instance, eternal life has been thought of too often as though it were a quantity. It is a quantity; but if we think of eternal life only as a quantity we miss the profoundest and most wonderful truth about it.

Eternal life is a quality, and therefore a quantity. A man who has eternal life never dies, he cannot die; death for him is abolished, made not to be, is swallowed up in victory. He may fall on sleep with regard to one manifestation of his life, the purely earthly and physical, but he never dies.

John says more about eternal life than any other of the New Testament writers. Let us take two parentheses, one in the beginning of his gospel, the other in the beginning of his first epistle.

That in the Gospel reads: "And we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 2:14).

That in the Epistle reads: "And the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (1 John 1:2).

John declared in each of these passages that if we would know what eternal life is we must know Jesus Christ. He declared that he saw eternal life in a Person - in Jesus. Very remarkable are the words he used, suggesting a merging of the tangible and the intangible. "The Word of life," seen, touched, handled, all which means that John came to know eternal life by knowing Christ. Eternal life is no more a mystery, but a revelation, no more something concerning which we have to speculate; it has been revealed in a Person. Those words from the great intercessory prayer of Christ contain the same thought: "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ."

Then we may reverently examine eternal life as it is revealed in Jesus. First, we will look at the essential quality thereof, and then consider its relative consequences as manifested in Jesus. The essential quality is marked by the word "eternal." Eternal means not only unending; it means of the ages. Life which is of the ages lacks the quality that makes for ending, and is a life undying, because there is nothing in it of the element of break-up or decay.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews declared that we have not a High Priest "after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life," that is, a life that partakes of the very spirit and nature out of which the ages come. Ages come and ages go, but this life is the dividing principle of them, and continues while they rise and fall. It is endless life, eternal life, the life of the ages. It is the very life of the eternal God Who fashioned and framed the ages themselves.

The difference between eternal life and temporal life is that when a man is living eternal life his intellect operates in the consciousness of eternity rather than in that of time, his emotion is actuated by infinite values and infinite issues rather than by present or perishing reasons, and his will is dominated by the supreme and undying truth rather than by transient currents of thought. In his epistle, Peter says of certain persons, they are "blind," more correctly, they are near-sighted, "seeing only what is near." Eternal life enables man to see the things that are near in the light of the things that are far. The peculiar wrong and disaster of human life as it is being lived in the world today is that all our ideals, apart from the Christian revelation, are ideals that look on things in themselves, and not in relation to the larger issues. I am told sometimes that certain men in this age are far-seeing men, and I am somewhat amused when I hear it. When I ask how far can they see, I am told that they see exactly what is to be the result of a war scare on the market! How far is that? Far enough to buy up all the steamship lines and merge them! That is to say that they see nothing beyond the place where blue sky dips into blue sea. Such men are blind, near-sighted! They are burying their vision in the dust of today, they have not begun to see; they are living temporal life. If we take their philosophy, rub away the tinsel of it, and bring it down to the dead level of truth, it may thus be expressed: "Let us eat, let us drink, for tomorrow we die." But here is an old woman, a church member, who has been praying for forty years. She never saw far enough to make provision for old age; but she has "endured as seeing Him Who is invisible." That is far-sightedness, that is eternal life.

Jesus did not measure the movements of His time by the men of His time, He did not lay on the affairs of His own age, the measuring line of His own age. He lived eternal life.

First, His intellect operated in the consciousness of God and eternity. I love to think of this in small things. Flowers, what did He say about them? One passing reference is enough. "God so clothes the grass of the field." Years ago I walked into my father's garden with a young man who had been led to Christ under my father's ministry. Picking up a common nasturtium leaf, and putting it in my hand, he said, "Is it not beautiful? God made it." That man was a far-seeing man. He was looking through the delicate tracery of the nasturtium leaf to God behind it. You tell me this is old-fashioned! Yes, old as the everlasting hills, white with the hoariness of eternity, and unless we have that vision, we are near-sighted. God open our eyes in order that we may see! When Jesus said God clothed the grass, He talked in the language of the eternal, not in the language of the temporal. We might follow Him through all the gamut of interest in life. Birds? "Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father." Children? He declared that every little child has an angel who beholds the face of God. Home? When they came to Him with their casuistical questions concerning divorce, He said, "From the beginning God made them male and female," sweeping past the dictum of Moses to the infinite purpose of God. Whether He touched a child or a flower, a problem or a pain, He thought and taught in the infinite consciousness of God. That is eternal life. He lived with feet squarely planted on dear old mother earth, but brow lifted high into the infinite light, while the light of the ages of God played on His temporal pathway.

His emotion also was actuated by infinite values and infinite issues. Behind all failure He recognized possibility. He saw in every man the image of God, marred, bruised, battered by sin. He knew that behind the ruin lay the possibility, and when He looked on a man He saw him not only as he stood there in the degradation of his sin; He saw him a being having come out of the infinite, traveling toward the infinite, and He knew that the little hour which He was spending in Jerusalem or Jericho was but a part of the infinite whole. His life, coming out of eternity, embraced eternity, until of His own it is said, "having loved His own, which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." That is love eternal.

His will was dominated by the Supreme Truth. Every man's will is dominated by his intellect and his emotion. No man's will is finally free. A free will is evidence of fitness for a lunatic asylum. Man's will is never free so long as he is rational. It must be dominated by reason. You cannot cross the road without saying or thinking, "I will cross the road," but you never say, "I will cross the road," without meaning "I will cross the road because …" Back of the will is a reason, and your will is dominated by something behind. No man ever exercises his will save under the impulse of intellect or emotion. The impulse that controlled the will of Jesus was an intellect homed in eternal principles, an emotion impulsed by infinite love. That is eternal life. Eternal life is not narrow, not of long continuation merely. It is as broad as it is long, as deep as it is high, as magnificent and splendid as it is severe and straight.

Let us briefly notice the relative consequences of this eternal life in the case of Jesus. Seeing God, He used the world. He was no ascetic; He never did violence to Himself, He never took a whip of cords to lacerate His flesh. Whoever imagines he is spiritual because he is bruising himself with cross or cords or hair shirt is sensual, not spiritual, Jesus "was bruised for our iniquities." In the mystery of eternal life, He handed Himself over to bruising by His enemies, but He never bruised Himself. He lived a life so perfectly natural and artless that men said of Him, He was a wine bibber. Instead of retiring from them, He sat down with publicans and sinners, and ate bread with them, until the alarmed Pharisees and Sadducees said, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." He lived His life amongst men, loved flowers, birds, and little children; He was perfectly simple, perfectly artless, perfectly natural. He took His place in the God-filled natural order; seeing God everywhere, recognizing that all things were of God and for God, He took them as God's great sacramental gifts.

Being God-indwelt, He loved infinitely, and so with a searching severity against sin and an infinite tenderness toward the sinner. These are the two notes of real love, of eternal love. It is temporal love that never says a severe thing. Eternal love is severe. Listen to Jesus Christ, and watch Him. How scathingly He dealt with sin! "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Ye whitewash the tombs of the prophets, ye yourself are whited sepulchres, but within ye are dead men's bones." Never language was so white-hot and scorching as the language of Jesus against sin. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses, even while for a pretence ye make long prayers." If you are a hypocrite, He scorches you with His glance. You will not dare to stand in the purity of His presence, for you will find the fire of His glance the very consuming fire of perdition. And all that was born of love. It is only love that can be severe. Why was He severe? Because He saw these men were injuring other men, ruining their own lives, spoiling the Divine order, bringing discord where harmony ought to be. Out of His love came the fire of His wrath. It was out of His consciousness of the eternal that He spoke such withering words of scorn to the men who in the temporal were violating eternal principles.

Yet, again, the eternal dominating the will was proof against all merely temporal impulses. I have looked at my Lord, and I have wondered at His victory over temptations, subtle, insidious, that swept on Him like a hurricane in the moment of His weakness, that came whispering to Him through the voices of His friends, temptations unmasked in all their fierceness in the wilderness, temptations coming disguised again and again, and yet He was always victorious. How was it? Because the voices of temptation were for Him voices that spoke in the language of the temporal, the small voices had asked Him to act as though this moment were all. Temptation never dare take eternity into account. How was it that He overcame? Because He thought, loved, and willed in relation to infinite things.

Let one illustration suffice. High on the mountain the arch enemy of mankind flung before Him in panoramic vision the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. He said in effect to Christ, "Do something now, get something now. Fall down before me now, and I will give Thee the kingdoms of the world now." What was the answer of the Man who lived eternal life? "It is written, Thou shalt worship God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Do you see the measurement He put on the present moment? Jesus knew that to take those kingdoms in the temporal now, and have them as temporal kingdoms now, was to lose them in the hereafter. In effect, He said, I will take the way of God to the kingdoms, though it be the way of the Cross, of shame and blood, and I will come into the kingdoms by the way of God's appointing along the line of the spiritual and the eternal.

Are you face to face with some temptation in the now? If you are haunted by a suggestion that you should do something dishonorable now; if you are haunted by a face luring you to do something now, for pleasure now, I beseech you to remember that the only way to deal with the now is to flash on it the light of eternity. Every moment winging its way past you is offspring of the ages, and what you do now, stands related to the eternities. Feel the searching fires of eternity in your life, and you will be able to overcome. It is this bringing to bear of the eternal on the now, of the infinite on the small, that is the secret of victory. Eternal life is life that takes account of eternity, refuses to set the horizon at any moment where sky kisses ocean; but sees out beyond the horizon the infinite, the spacious, the unending. I am only child of dust in material life for a little while; but I am off-spring of God in my essential being. What I am, I am by the fact of the inbreathing of God, and my life must be conditioned by infinite things.

Now let us hear the Great Announcement. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life." I long for the return of the days when men believed as the Word was preached. Believe on Him now. Say I have heard for a long time; I will not make my judgment blind any longer. I know this Man of Nazareth, this Jesus Christ, can save me and give me eternal life. I believe on Him now. I will become His now.

Immediately He will give you eternal life. That is not a mere sentiment; it is a great fact. Eternal life in the present moment, eternal life positively possessed, this is God's declaration. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life,"

Or, again, in words almost more startling, and striking and beautiful, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that He hath borne witness concerning His Son," What is this witness of God? "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in Him: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar: because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning His Son. And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."

So I put the matter thus for myself - perhaps it is the best way to help others. God declares that if I will believe in His Son, if I will believe into His Son, if I will refuse any longer to make my judgment blind, and will abandon myself to Him, He gives me eternal life here and now.

It is this venturing on the Word of God that will bring a man into conscious possession of eternal life. "He that hath the Son hath the life." If you believe on Him He gives Himself to you. He in you will illuminate your intelligence with the light of eternal life; He will dominate your affection with the love of God; He in you will master your will, to do the will of God. That is eternal life. He will interpret to you the will of God, and so illumine your intelligence that you will go out, and tomorrow you will look again at the old scenes, the old facts of your life, but you will see them with new eyes. Christ's estimate will be put on everything.

Jesus living within by the power of His Holy Spirit, illuminating the intelligence, inspiring the emotion, and mastering the will; suddenly we shall know the horizon put back, the dark sky illumined, things that once were wild babel become resonant with the evangel of life, everything will be enlarged and corrected by the enlargement. This is the experience of eternal life - not a magnetic thrill, but a great spiritual consciousness that makes a man at last able to say, "I know I am born again - first, because God says it, and I believe it; but, second, because in me life moves to new impulses, new desires, new passions, new enterprises; and the things I loved I hate, and the things that mastered me like vipers have dropped off, and I am free who once was bound." Such is the consciousness of life, but it never comes to man until he believes in the Son of God.

Now, very reverently and solemnly, hear the final words of my text: "He that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." "Believeth not" it is in the Authorized Version; the word is changed in the Revised Version, because a different Greek word is used. Yet I am not at all sure that this word "obeyeth" covers all the ground. I give you this, not as translation, but as interpretation;, he that will not be persuaded, he that refuses conviction, he that declines to believe into, in obedience to a conviction, "he that obeyeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Mark the negative condition: "He that obeyeth not the Son," he that believeth not into the Son of his will, he that will not be persuaded. But all that goes back on our previous subject to those solemn words of Jesus, spoken in the parable in answer to the cry of the rich man in hell, "They have Moses and the prophets. If they will not hear them, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

There are men and women who refuse to be persuaded, who will not believe, who will not believe into and obey the Son of God. What of such? "They shall not see life." Here, first, is a reference to something they are hoping for - the life beyond; they shall not see it. But here, in a simpler way, as a profounder truth, is the declaration that such people have not begun to live at all, that the very life they now live is a living death.

That is not the last word, nor the most solemn word, and I have no more right to omit the last word than I have to omit the first. If the first word is a great evangel, so also is the last a great evangel. The first is the evangel of salvation made possible. The last is the evangel of solemn warning, and it is always an evangel when truth utters a warning, "The wrath of God," terrific word, terrible phrase, not occurring here only, but often in Scripture. I am here to preach the Word, and not to philosophize concerning it. This word wrath means anger, which includes the purpose to punish. There are other words used for wrath that have not that purpose, but this one has - the wrath of God, anger, which includes the purpose of punishment.

"The wrath of God abideth." It is not merely that men are coming into that wrath by-and-by; they are in it at this moment. If you have heard the evangel and have refused to obey, God is angry with you, angry with you, not on the basis of caprice, but by the very necessities of the case; angry with you as you would be with any man who might dwell on the heights of health, but who chose to dwell in the midst of putrefaction and disease; angry with you, first, because you ruin His fair work in yourself; angry with you because by living where you do, outside the life eternal, you spread the contagion of your moral leprosy and lead other men to ruin. Do not imagine when you refuse Christ that there is nothing round about you but the love and mercy of God. "The wrath of God abideth upon the children of disobedience." I am not entering into any argument concerning the attitude of God toward the men who do not know the Gospel. I am talking to people who know it. The Son is calling you into eternal life, and you know it. If you do not obey, you can neither see life, nor enter into life; but, instead, the wrath of God, the anger of God, that holds within itself the purpose of punishment, abideth on you.

And yet, thank God, He calls! He calls to mercy. He calls to life. "I call Heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live."