**VOLUME 6; CHAPTER 18 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**GODLINESS AND GAIN by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Supposing that godliness is a way of gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain.*

*1 Timothy 6:5,6*

THE ARRESTING WORD OF THE TEXT IS "GODLINESS," FOR IT IS twice repeated. The word becomes more arresting when this letter is read through in close relation and connection, and it is discovered that it occurs therein no less than ten times.

What is godliness? is a question preliminary to our meditation. The word "godliness" in my text and throughout the whole of the letter to Timothy is not really a translation of the Greek word, but it is a fine interpretation of the value of that word. Yet I think we cannot rightly understand its value save as we take a little time to consider the word of which it is a translation. The Greek word, literally translated into our common speech, would be good reverence. One is immediately conscious of the insufficiency of that translation to convey any particularly illuminative idea to our minds. It comes from a word meaning well reverent, and that again comes from a root which means to revere, to worship. In our word godliness the first syllable is our supreme word for the Almighty, God, That particular word is not suggested by any part of the Greek word, but it is suggested by the whole fact of the Greek word, for it describes that attitude of reverence which is born of the consciousness of God. The godly man is the reverent man, the revering man, the worshiping man. Godliness is that poise of the spirit, that attitude of the soul which is the true outcome of a perpetual recognition of God, and realization of His presence.

There are those, then, who suppose that the attitude of reverence toward God is a way of gain. That it not so, it is a heresy, it is a false conception. Nevertheless, reverence toward God in the true, deep sense of the word is in itself a gain that makes man independent of all other gain or loss. We brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Having food and raiment, let us there-with be content. So much for the word itself, and the general thought it conveys.

The letter to Timothy was written to him during the period in which, in obedience to apostolic instruction, he was exercising the oversight of the church in Ephesus. We have to remember the condition of Ephesus at this time; it was the center of abounding commerce; its citizens were mastered by a passion for wealth. The supreme ambition in the activities of the city was that of getting gain. There was, moreover, a strange religious aspect of all this, using the word religious in its lowest sense, speaking not of the Christian fact within the city, but of the pagan fact. It was the place where the temple of Diana stood, and that temple had become to the merchantmen of the city both sanctuary and bank; it was the place of their worship, and it was the place where they deposited their gains. Thus, the worship of Diana not merely permitted, but had become in itself the very essence of devotion to the getting of gain. Ephesus was in the grip of what today we would describe as the lust for gold. In that city of Ephesus there was a church of Christ. You will remember how, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, a letter written some time before this one to Timothy, a letter written during his first imprisonment, as this was written during the period of his last imprisonment, he charged the Christian people in Ephesus that they should buy up the opportunities, seeing that the days were evil, and in that description of the days he revealed the fact that the spirit of Ephesus was a peril to the church of God in the city. We find constantly in these apostolic writings that Christian men and women in the Greek cities were affected by the spirit of the age, and were therefore in peril. The church of God is always in peril when it allows itself to be affected by the spirit of the age. There is no heresy more subtle and dangerous than the somewhat widespread one which charges us that the church of God should catch the spirit of the age. The business of the church is not to catch the spirit of the age; but to correct the spirit of the age, and bring the spirit of the age into harmony with the mind and will of God. It is quite evident as we read carefully this letter written to Timothy exercising the oversight of this church that the peril to which I have referred had affected certain teachers of the Christian religion as well as members of the church. It is with this fact that Paul was dealing in this particular paragraph. "If any man teacheth a different doctrine, and consenteth not to sound words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is puffed up, knowing nothing, but doting about questionings and disputes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, wranglings of men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth." He then touched on the inspiration of such false teaching in the case of the men of Ephesus, "supposing that godliness is a way of gain." It is a very severe paragraph, a terrible indictment, an awful condemnation of the men who were in the mind of the Apostle as he wrote to Timothy. They were teaching some other doctrine than the form of sound words, the words of Jesus Christ, and there was biting satire as he described them as "doting about questionings and disputes of words"; he then described the effect produced, disputations, "wranglings of men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth"; finally, he touched the inner secret of the whole thing, "supposing that godliness is a way of gain," and immediately proceeded to correct their heresy by enunciating the truth that godliness in itself with contentment is great gain. So much for the word, and so much for its setting.

Now I leave the context and the peculiar application which Paul made to the Christian teacher, in order that we may consider together the proposition involved in our text, and make the broader application which it warrants.

First of all, I shall ask you to think with me of the atmosphere in which a warning such as this and a declaration such as this became necessary. Our text presupposes that the main passion characterizing the age was a desire for gain. I shall ask you, in the second place, to consider with me the heresy which is suggested by my text, "Godliness is a way of gain." Finally, we shall observe the truth declared in my text, that godliness in itself with contentment is great gain.

In my introductory words I have referred to Ephesus, and by so doing I believe have brought this congregation face to face with the fact that the conditions in the midst of which we live are very similar to those that obtained at Ephesus. While there is a very remarkable contrast between all that was merely local and incidental in Ephesus and in our own cities and our own age, the essential matters, the attitudes of mind, and the master inspirations of human life are identical. I think that the man must be willfully and blindly optimistic who will deny that the master passion of our own age, in this our own land, is a passion for possession, I am prepared to admit every exception that may suggest itself to your minds at the moment, and yet admitting all the exceptions, I affirm that the great inspiration of activity in our age is not that of conquest, is not that of discovery, is not that of learning, but that of gain. We can look back in the history of our own land, to hours in which the master passion of the people was conquest. I am not discussing its worthiness or unworthiness. But that is not so today. There was a time when the spirit of the age, expressing itself, not in the voice of the multitude, but in the sympathy of the multitude with certain outstanding men, was a passion for discovery. There was a wonderful period, short though perhaps it was, in the history of our own people in the last century, when a consuming passion for learning took possession of the nation. But I very much fear that in the day in which we live these things master men only as they may contribute to that more subtle passion for gain. I find that policies and governments are inspired by markets. I discover that even until this hour we are still as a nation in the presence of great national and international complications because of revenue. You hardly need that I illustrate. If I do, I shall give you the old illustration which has passed my lips so often in this place: we are still dallying with opium because of revenue. If I read that there is some kind of threatened international crisis which I do not profess to understand, and the interpretation of which I decline to take from yellow journalism, I nevertheless find, whatever paper I read, that the main thing involved is the protection of interests, and when I analyze the revealing words I find that the interests are those of markets, methods of getting gain. We are appallingly mastered to-day by the passion for gain. I should not mention these things if I had not higher business on hand, that of reminding you that subtly, yet surely, this master passion has commandeered religion, and that today there are many people - I will not say teachers, I am not dealing with teachers, I am making the broader application - living and acting under the impulse suggested by these apostolic words, "supposing that godliness is a way of gain."

I pass from that attempt to speak of the atmosphere which makes the warning necessary, to the warning itself. What is this mental attitude which the Apostle describes in the words, "Supposing that godliness is a way of gain"? Here, let me say in parenthesis, is one of the supreme cases in which the Revised Version has delivered us from one of the most serious blunders, I pray you, mark carefully this translation and the way in which the word is put. "Supposing that gain is godliness" is the old form. No man ever imagined that gain is godliness; that is not the trouble, the peril, the heresy, but something far subtler. "Supposing that godliness is a way of gain." I sometimes think an idea like this is best illustrated by a concrete case. You will at this point understand my reason for taking you back to Genesis, and reading that very brief paragraph in the history of the dealing of Laban with Jacob, in which, in passionate protests Jacob referred to the methods of Laban for twenty years. I am not going back to the paragraph. In returning to the story I am trusting to your perfect familiarity with it, for, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, Laban stands out as a man who looked on godliness as a way of gain. Laban was perfectly willing to use Jacob because of Jacob's godliness, to make use of him because of his belief in the God of Abraham and of Isaac, to squeeze out of him everything to his own advantage and then to fling him away. That is the supreme concrete illustration I find in the Old Testament. I am not going to deal with Laban, but I ask you to consider this type of character as it exists in our midst to-day. This is not the man who despises religion, and sets himself in opposition to religion. This man will never try to undermine the faith of another man. This is the man who appreciates to the full the social values of Christianity, who is perfectly well aware that the Christian, the truly godly man, is a true man, a temperate man, faithful in all his duties and in the fulfilment of his obligations. The man to whom I am referring is the man who will carefully select those with whom transactions are to be had upon the basis of their religion. He will be very eager to know that the man he appoints to a place of trust in his office is a godly man. He is not himself a godly man, in any sense of the word, sees no good in prayer, worships never, in his inner soul he may even scoff at the thought of godliness, but he knows the moral, social, commercial value of godliness, and he will be very careful, so far as possible, to realize on the godliness of others.

Let me be concrete; he will let his house to godly people rather than to ungodly people. Why? Because he knows they are far more likely to care for his property than ungodly people. A man who looks on godliness as a way of gain is, in municipal and parliamentary matters, Christian in sentiment, he will take his stand on the side of everything that is in the nature of truth and righteousness; but when you touch the personal note, when you come to deal with the man himself, when you come to see the man under the awful searchlight of the Divine thought of him, or see him weighed in the infinitely just balances of the sanctuary, you will find that his godliness is nothing more than something which he practices in the hope of gain. This apostolic description is the most searching and the most appalling to be found in the whole revelation of the New Testament. The peril described is at once the most subtle and the most blighting and blasting of any. That man is almost beyond hope who will maintain external rites, and traffic with the principles and practices of godliness while the motive is gain. That is the heresy of all heresies the most terrible. A man who will employ the language of the sanctuary, wear the livery of the temple, pronounce the creeds of the church, to maintain a position in society and commercial life that will enable him to satisfy his lust for gain is of all men most hopeless.

I turn from that consideration to the corrective truth, for after all is said and done, there is an element of truth in the idea that godliness is a way of gain. There is an element of truth in it, while it is a heresy. Just as there is an element of truth in that phrase that some of us remember having seen at the head of our copybooks when we were learning to write, "Honesty is the best policy." The man, however, who is honest only because it is the best policy is a rogue. That is the very heart and center of this business. The man who is godly only because godliness is a way of gain is ungodly at his heart, and is rejected of heaven.

Yet, in order that we may understand the subtlety of this peril it is necessary that we should dwell for a few moments on the truth. We notice with what immediateness the apostle proceeded from graphic description of the peril to enunciation of positive truth, "godliness with contentment is great gain."

Now, the ultimate definition of godliness is found in the first great chant or anthem of the Christian Church, which the Apostle either wrote for the first time, or which he quoted.

"Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."

According to that revelation, godliness with contentment is indeed great gain. "Great is the mystery of godliness," which I understand to mean: Great is the mystery which is the final inspiration of godliness. Then that mystery is described: "He Who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory." We are at once conscious that the Apostle had in his mind the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Leaving the descriptive phrases, and speaking only of the Person Who was described by the Apostle, let us put the statement thus: Great is the mystery of Him, Who in Himself was the incarnation of godliness, and Who in the fulfilment of His mission is the inspiration of true godliness in others. We immediately see the reason for another passage, which we read as lesson, the one in Colossians, that great passage in which this same Apostle deals with the mystery. There he first spoke of the mystery of the Church, further on of the mystery which lies within the mystery of the Church, "Christ in you the hope of glory," and still a little further on, of the final mystery, which is Christ Himself. As in that Colossian epistle he traced the secret back into its innermost marvel, let us take it in the other order: the first mystery is Christ; the consequent mystery is Christ formed, fashioned, in the life of a man; the final mystery is the whole Church, consisting of all such as are indwelt by this Christ. Great is the mystery of that Christ and all those in whom He is formed, and ultimately of that Church in which the glory of the revelation shall be included and revealed.

This seems to wander a great way from the text! Not a hairsbreadth. In this light the unworthiness of the former conception is immediately seen, "supposing that godliness," the attitude and externality of reverence, "is a way of gain." "But godliness" - and we must still think of the spaciousness of godliness - let it be understood according to the interpretation of the sacred writings, let it be recognized in its marvel, in its light, love, life, liberty, glory; godliness, as revealed in the incarnation of the Son, as realized in the soul, of a man who has been brought into relationship with Christ; that godliness which is infinitely more than a pose or attitude of external reverence; that godliness which is the perpetual attitude of external life, after the pattern of spiritual worship, that godliness is great gain.

Mark carefully the juxtaposition of the terms, "Godliness with contentment." Contentment is an essential concomitant of godliness. Where there is real godliness, the attitude of the life well reverent, there is perpetual contentment. I venture with reverence, and may I say with some reticence, to appeal again to the supreme example of godliness received in the revelation of Jesus Christ. According to the New Testament revelation of Him, do you know of a more radiant revelation of perfect contentment than that of Jesus Christ, perfectly at peace, perfectly quiet and at rest, never disturbed, always calm and dignified? Why? Because His spirit was adjusted to the will of God, the poise of His life was well reverent toward God, meeting the stress and strain, even of the last darkling hours of the final tragedy, in a calm, contented manner.

The man who makes godliness an appearance of his life in order to gain, is forevermore characterized by lack of peace and by unrest. The man who has seen the vision, and whose soul has answered it; the man who has found God, and who has forevermore a sense of His glory, and is submissive to the call of His will, that man is quiet. "He that believeth shall not make haste."

I find in this same letter another statement: "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." I pray you do not minimize that, do not attempt to qualify it. Let it sing its own song in your heart, "Godliness is profitable for all things." Godliness is profitable for physical life. It is enough to say that surely, now; I need not argue it. Godliness is profitable for mental life; true godliness never blunts the intellect or stifles the voice of reason; it creates the atmosphere in which it is possible for a man to prosecute investigation; it gives him the right to ask questions, says to him in infinite wisdom, Secret things belong unto God, but revealed things are for you and your children; admits the right of inquiry, quickens the intellect, makes keen, alert, alive the mental powers. When I pass beyond the physical which I do not argue, and the mental on which I have uttered some few sentences, to the spiritual, again, argument is unnecessary.

Godliness is profitable in every human obligation, in social life, in political life, in all human interrelationships. Let two godly men deal with each other in business, it is a profitable transaction. Let a godly man stand by his godliness six days a week in the market place, it is a profitable thing. I am not so sure, you say. I have a business man listening to me who says, I am not so sure, I have attempted during the past week to live the life of godliness, and if I could have sacrificed it I would have been a wealthier man tonight! Would you? Would you change the wealth of a clear conscience for the gain of gold? You know you would not. Godliness is profitable for all commercial transactions.

Godliness is gain in wealth, for the man whose wealth has been gained in a godly fashion, and who is living a godly life, will always understand that he is but a steward of the God Who has prospered him, and he will make to himself friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it shall fail they will receive him into the everlasting habitations. Godliness is gain in poverty. I am not defending poverty. It is a very long time since I have been guilty of declaring that poverty is a blessing. God overrules it, and makes it a blessing; but poverty is outside the economy of God. It is not His will that a man or woman should feel in the rush of human life the grind of poverty. Let us understand that God in His provision for humanity has provided for humanity; if man has lost the key to the situation, and does not know how to manage the gifts of God, the blame is on man. While that is so, and while the conditions in which men live today are conditions which bring poverty to some, I still bring you to the poor man or woman in this city, fine in character, godly in poise of spirit, who is struggling for bread; and I will let you talk to that man or woman, and you will find that he or she knows the gain of godliness: all the sackcloth is transfigured, and loneliness is canceled, and the bare and frugal meal becomes a sacrament of heaven when the soul is truly godly.

"Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." I need not argue Paul's final words, the life which is to come, all the afterward of revelation, explanation, compensation; that richer life we are sure of if we are godly.

Make the comparison between these two things, One man says that godliness is a way of gain, and one man knows that godliness in itself is great gain. They use identical words when they are talking, they recite similar creeds, they are not like the people in the Old Testament, one party saying shibboleth and the other saying sibboleth. They both say shibboleth. You cannot tell the difference between these two men by looking at them or listening to them. How shall we find it? It is in one quantity; contentment, rest, quietness, peace. Are you making godliness a way of gain? It is revealed by the feverish unrest of your life that you are. Are you finding godliness gain? It is revealed by the quiet dignity of your life that you are. Let us try to feel our way into the heart of this. What is the supreme heresy in the first case? That this man puts gain first. What is the essential truth in the second case? That this other man puts godliness first. The master passion in the one case is gain, and godliness is looked on as a means to an end. That is heresy. The master passion in the other case is godliness at all costs, and that godliness is gain in itself. That is the way of God. Remember that to say that godliness is a way of gain is essential godlessness. Christ will not allow us to crown Him, because He feeds us with material bread. The multitudes would fain make Him King. Why? Because He had fed them. He would not take the crown on those conditions. Godliness is in itself essential wealth. Here were other men, who crowned Him, not because of gain, but because of the supreme necessity of the case, because He had captured them; then He became to them all they needed in things material and moral, and spiritual and eternal. That is infinite wealth!

Which is your conception? May I urge the question? Are you simply religious because it is respectable so to be, because by observing the externalities of religion you gain some advantage in society? That is, of all blasphemies, the worst. On the other hand, do you desire to be godly as the deepest passion of your life? Knowing, as you do, that you are full of failure, do you desire that you may be well reverent, submitted to this God, under His will? Then you are already possessed of undying wealth.

Let the last note of this message be that of the gain of godliness. Be right with God, and you will be right with every other personality in the universe, right with every other relationship of human life. Be right with God, and you will be right with the devil, you will master him, and be safe in the hour of temptation! Be right with God, and you will be right with your fellow man, loving him, and expressing your love in integrity, justice, honesty, mercy, benevolence. Be right with God, and you will be right with your possessions, you will not say that anything you have is your own, but that it is His, and you are His steward. Be right with God, and you will be right with the powers of your being; be they what they may, they will be realized, fulfilled. Be right with God, and you will be right with death, enabled to face the hour of dissolution with a song and a shout of triumph, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory."

Godliness is indeed great gain.