**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 11 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF SALVATION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*

*Hebrews 2:3*

THERE ARE MOODS AND TENSES IN THE PRACTICAL CONJUGATION of the verb to live in which this may be said to be the central and supreme question of the New Testament. They are the moods in which the soul is acute in its consciousness of spiritual things, and they are the times in which it stands between the appeal and aspiration of salvation on the one hand and the lure and lust of meaner things on the other.

Indeed, so incisively arresting is the question that to read it, or to hear it, is, for the moment at least, to be compelled to think of life in the imperative, and to apply to the present tense the values of the future.

There are three quantities in the question which combine to create this arresting power. Two of these are immediately recognized; the third is, I am inclined to think, not so obvious, but when it is once discovered it becomes the most potent of the three.

The two to which I refer are those of the salvation which is referred to, and the neglect which is suggested. The salvation is described as "so great salvation," and the term in its very simplicity is eloquent of the sublimity of the theme. It is smitten through and through with the glory of the grace of God. It is of the highest height, for it comes from the heaven of heavens. It is profound, for it descends to the lowest depths. It is so vast, so wonderful, that the only final adverb possible for the illumination of its greatness is "so," "so great salvation," the "so" which laughs at logic, defies mathematical exactness, and finds its own best explanation in the equally comprehensive declaration that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." When we can place our final measurement on the "so loved the world" we shall be able to express in final terms the greatness of the "so great salvation."

This conception of the greatness of the salvation gives urgency to the conception of neglect. To neglect is not to deny, it is hardly to ignore; it is rather to recognize, but to postpone; or to know, and to fail to do; or, yet again, to admit, and to fail to administer.

The third quantity is discovered by emphasizing the personal pronouns, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Without any doubt that was the mental emphasis of the writer, for he was comparing the responsibilities of Christian believers with those of the Hebrews under the Mosaic economy.

We may omit that particular comparison as irrelevant to our case, but we cannot escape the fact that the question in its first application is not asked of sinful men, but of Christian men.

That is the quantity in the text which is not obvious, but which being recognized gives startling, searching power to the question. If we, who are subsequently described as "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling," neglect so great salvation, which is already ours in the provision of grace and through faith, then how shall we escape?

In considering the inquiry as addressed to Christian souls we shall first consider the implication of the question as to the responsibility of saved men in regard to their own salvation, and, second, the suggestion of the inquiry as to the peril of neglecting that responsibility.

First, then, as to this matter of the responsibility of such as are saved with regard to their own salvation, let us first of all inquire, What is the spiritual content of the word "salvation"? What does it represent? This word "salvation" is amongst the most familiar that pass the lips of Christian men and women. It is, indeed, central to Christianity. It has a dark background, its presupposition being that of peril, danger, lack of safety. It is a word which, save with reference to such a world as this, and to such men as I am, is without meaning; it would have no place in the language of the heavenly dwellings. The word "salvation" is rich in meaning in the presence of human sin and failure and degradation. Therefore it is the central word of the Church. The mission of Christ in the world was not that of presenting an ideal to perfect men, copying which they might maintain their perfection. If that may seem a dogmatic statement, it is but an attempted interpretation of the truth which found far more emphatic and dogmatic statement in the word of Jesus Himself, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." The presupposition of the word "salvation" is of a race of men and women who have failed, who have not realized the meaning of their own life, who have come short of their own glory. When once that presupposition is recognized, then we may pass to the inquiry, What does the word represent positively?

The New Testament is the literature of perfected salvation. It tells the story of the One through Whom salvation came. It reveals the conditions on which salvation may be obtained. It lays down instructions for such as having obtained salvation are now walking in its power until that salvation be completed, in the glory of the Advent.

This salvation originates in God. Its sources are the love of God, and the wisdom of God, and the power of God. Therein at once is stated that which is peculiar to the Christian religion, that which differentiates it from all other religions. However high and noble they may be in certain respects, they stand distinct from it in this regard. All other religions, the highest and noblest of them, having in them light, walking in which men will surely be acceptable to God, all of them are attempts by man to find God, humanity climbing toward Him. The Christian religion declares that God has come to find man, that He bows and stoops toward man, offering him not an ideal of life to which if he shall conform he shall be admitted to the dwellings of light; but bringing to him salvation, recognizing his degradation and failure, from whatsoever cause arising, and offering him everything he needs in order that he may realize his own life. The teaching of the New Testament is that this salvation has its origin in the love of God, it has been provided by the wisdom of God, that it is operative in the power of God. It was this conviction that made the great Apostle to the Gentiles, the pioneer missionary of the Cross, declare in his letter to the Romans, "I am not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." It was this that made him declare that the Cross is the wisdom of God and the power of God, these operating under the impulse of the love of God. It is, indeed, "so great salvation," for it is of God, proceeding from His love, conceived in His wisdom, and operating in His power.

In the experience of men this salvation has negative and positive values. The negative values are found in the fact that salvation comes to man in his sin, and deals with the whole fact and experience of sin. It brings man forgiveness of sin, cleansing from sin, and power over sin.

Salvation creates within the soul of man a consciousness of forgiveness, which expresses itself in a new passion against sin and a new endeavor to master that which hitherto has mastered. Forgiveness of sins in the Biblical sense of the word is not merely the passing over of sin, declaring that it shall be mentioned no more; it is loosing from sin, setting free from sin. The man who is forgiven, in the Biblical sense of the word, is the man who is set free from sin; he walks out from it, and escapes from it as to penalty and as to pollution and as to power. Not as to penalty alone, for I do affirm out of my own consciousness, and I believe I express the deep conviction of all who have pondered this subject, that if forgiveness is merely salvation from hell it is not enough; if it is merely that I am loosed from some penalty while I am still left polluted and in the power and grip of sin it does not meet my profoundest need. The more I ponder this question of the spiritual life in the light of Holy Scripture and in the light of my own experience, the more I come to this profound conviction, that the horror of all horrors to the human soul is the pollution of sin. Not the stroke caused by sin that falls on me, but the pollution that remains with me, contaminating me, that, when the spirit has once waked to the consciousness of it, is the final agony of sin. Conviction of sin is not fear that I am going to be punished. There are awful moments in the experience of the soul conscious of sin when the fires of perdition would be welcome if but the soul might hope that they were purgatorial fires, that so it might be cleansed from pollution. This salvation deals with the whole fact of the human consciousness of sin. It proclaims forgiveness, a loosing from the sin of the past; and in that forgiveness a cleansing from pollution and the communication of power in which sin is no longer dominant.

Yet these are but the negative values of salvation; they are but initial values. We pass, therefore, to the consideration of the positive values. These may be inclusively described as a spiritual rebirth, a new beginning of conscious spiritual life, new spiritual intellectual enlightenment, new spiritual emotional inspiration, new spiritual volitional freedom. Salvation brings to man a new birth of spirit, in which he comes to new intellectual apprehension of God, an intellectual apprehension which never comes to man but by this rebirth of his spirit. On the ordinary plane of our human life a man may be cultured, intellectual, and yet never know God; he may live and move and have his being in God; he may walk up and down in this world of ours, among its flowers and its fruits, its beauties and its glories, and never find God. It is the pure in heart who see God, discovering Him everywhere, in all the beauties of nature, and in all human life. In all the apparently chaotic movements of the time God is seen by men who come to new intellectual apprehension of Him by way of the spiritual rebirth that comes to them in this salvation.

There comes to them also a new spiritual emotional inspiration; a love never known before springs within the heart of the new-born man. The first evidence of new birth is the love that drives the soul out on some sacrificial service. The first movement of spiritual life in the soul of a man is a missionary movement. We should read out of the word "missionary" all ideas suggested by the word "foreign." There is no foreigner before the throne of God or to the true Christly soul. In salvation the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, not love for God, but the love of God. The soul new-born of the Spirit is immediately mastered by God's love; the very compassion of Deity touches it to new inspiration and new aspiration, and suggests the pathway of sacrificial service.

Salvation also brings volitional freedom. Is not a man volitionally free before he is born again? In certain senses, yes; in certain senses, no. In what senses no? Let the writer of the Roman letter answer the inquiry. "When I would do good," that is volition, "evil is present with me," that is volition hindered. That is the difference between the unregenerate man and the regenerate man. The unregenerate man admires goodness and even would be good, and makes the attempt but fails; his volitional power is not set free. He is free to choose, but he cannot do the thing he chooses, and so his choosing reacts on him and fills him with despair. When the soul is reborn from above through this great salvation, then not only is it present with that soul to will, but it is present with that soul to do. The thing I choose I can do in the power of the new life communicate.

If, then, we have received this "so great salvation" experimentally we have immediately entered upon grave responsibilities. If the sources of salvation are the love of God, the wisdom of God, the power of God, then we are responsible for the streams of the great river of salvation. They may thus be summarized: the fear born of love must become the law of the life of the man who is saved by love; the consciousness of folly that seeks for the Divine wisdom must be ever present in the man who realizes that he has been brought into salvation by the infinite wisdom of God; the consciousness of the frailty that depends entirely on God must always be present in the man who realizes that the great salvation has been brought to him by the energy of the might of the working of God.

Perfect love casteth out fear. That is true. But perfect love generates fear. That also is true, Perfect love casteth out the fear that is cowardly, but perfect love generates the fear that is in itself love. Until a man is brought into right relationship with God he is afraid lest God harm him; but when a man is brought into right relationship with God he is afraid lest he hurt the heart of God, lest he cause sorrow to the Holy Spirit. That is the true safeguard of life to the man who is saved, and we are responsible for the maintenance of that relationship with God in which fear abides with us as a sentinel, forever watching lest we sin against Him and grieve His heart.

The condition for the maintenance of right relationship with God is the abiding consciousness of our own folly and consequent dependence for all things on the infinite wisdom which wrought for our salvation.

The condition of victory in life is ever dependence on God's might in the consciousness of our own weakness. "When I am weak then am I strong" is the apostolic word. As we become forgetful of our weakness and cease to depend on God we are in grave peril, for we are neglecting the responsibility of salvation.

To put the question of our responsibility in another form. In view of the negative values of salvation we have responsibilities. The first of these has to do with the forgiveness of sins. The responsibility of the Christian man toward that initial fact is abiding recollection thereof. Does that sound obscure? Let me illuminate it by quotation from the sacred writings. Peter, writing his second letter, grouped the graces which every man is responsible for developing in faith, and then said: "He that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from the old sins." To make that more pertinent, practical, immediate, let me say that we are always in danger of forgetting that we are forgiven men and women. One sentence spoken at the Mundesley Bible Conference last year by my friend John Hutton burned itself into my own life. He said, "Christian men should never lose the look of forgiven men." We ale always in grave peril when we allow our spiritual attainments to become the foundations of our confidence. We are in danger when we allow ourselves to imagine that because we have run well, and have rendered service to God, we are accepted. As at last, when the day's work is over, we shall expect to enter into light, saying,

Nothing in our hands we bring,

Simply to Thy Cross we cling,

so we are to live each day. That day is always lacking in some measure of strength that does not begin at the Cross and with the memory of the fact that we are forgiven men. He that lacketh Christian graces is blind, seeing only what is near, and one element of his failure is that he has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his old sins.

With regard to our cleansing from sin, our responsibility is that of perpetual appropriation of that selfsame cleansing. Here let me quote from the writings of John: "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." That Christian man is in grave peril who imagines he has arrived at such a state of sanctity that he needs no cleansing at nightfall, who in foolish arrogance declares that he no longer prays the Lord's prayer because he does not need to ask for forgiveness. Such a man has never really stood in the awful light of the Divine holiness. The man who stands there meekly assents to the word of Jesus concerning high Christian service, that all servants must say to Him, At best we are unprofitable servants. In the light of the holiness of God, that God Who chargeth the very angels with folly and in Whose sight the heavens are unclean, we are always conscious of the need of cleansing.

There is no breath of prayer that crosses my lips but that needs the intermediation of the Priest Who beareth the iniquity of our holy things. The doctrine of holiness that lifts Christian experience to a plane on which it has no need of cleansing is a doctrine that degrades the holiness of God and has no conception of its awful solemnity. We need perpetual appropriation of cleansing. Again, if the negative value of salvation is that we have power over sin the perpetual responsibility is that we employ that power in unyielding, unflinching, unceasing conflict with sin. I am not safe for half an hour save as I put on the whole armor of God and take up the whole armor of God.

Let us pass from these negative values of salvation in order to consider the responsibilities that arise from the positive. If the first positive value is intellectual enlightenment and consciousness our responsibility is to seek the light in all the things of life. If we know God and have become conscious of Him our perpetual business is to seek His face in order that we may know His will.

If the second positive value of salvation is new spiritual, emotional inspiration our responsibility is that we answer that inspiration. We begin our Christian life, and the propulsion of God's love suggests that we should go and seek someone and help someone. Such suggestions must not be refused. Judas will always be somewhere on hand and ready to say, Why this waste? Let us, then, solemnly remember that when we stifle the impulse of the Divine compassion within us we are stultifying our very own life. This is such a common failure. When you began your Christian life, how eager you were to serve! Today you are content to attend one service, or perhaps two on Sunday, and you imagine therefore that you are religious. You are not! You have lost your religion if you have lost your love! That is the peril with all of us. The love of God is prodigal in its munificence. It pours itself out in service. When that love is in the human heart, the man possessed by it desires to spend and be spent for those who have not yet known the Saviour. But unless the call of love within the soul be answered the call becomes fainter and dies away. We are neglecting our salvation when we are indifferent and unresponsive to the love of God which suggests the pathway of sacrificial service.

If the third positive value is volitional freedom, the responsibility which that freedom creates is that we test our choices with God. Whenever we exercise that high function of human life, election, choosing, we must find our way into the Divine presence, that we may know whether our election is His election, whether our choosing is His choice; and that not merely in regard to those matters of Christian service which perhaps may be uppermost in our thinking now, but in all matters of life. If you are a Christian man you have no right to choose your profession without God, and if you are Christian men you have no business to elect to live in this or that neighborhood without God. The responsibility of volitional freedom, which is the benefit of salvation, is that all choices, all elections are remitted to God.

So it seems to me that, without very many words of mine, the second part of our meditation lies open and plain before us. If these are the responsibilities of the "so great salvation" the peril of neglect is perfectly patent. What is it to neglect? In hurried phrases in my introduction I attempted some definition. Let us come to closer quarters with the thought. This is a great word of ours, "neglect," meaning not to pick up, not to take hold of, not to gather, but just to let a matter lie, not to touch it. That is perfectly simple and most picturesque, but it is graphically arresting. The word of which it is a translation has in it, I think, even more of arresting power. It means without interest in, without concern. That is what it is to neglect. This is not a common word in the New Testament. It almost seems as though it were reserved for just such a solemn inquiry as this. If we are without concern about so great salvation, if our own salvation, that which is ours, that into which we have entered, no longer concerns us, how shall we escape? It is my very salvation, that which is mine in Christ, but does it concern me? It is there, it exists; but to treat it as something assured and positive which now may be relegated to some distance from the actuality of my life is to neglect it. The man who is so sure he is saved as to be careless whether he will be saved is in grave danger.

Again to attempt to illuminate the solemn word by the lines we have already followed. Neglect in the light of the positive values is indifference to the light that is granted, irresponsive to the call of love when it comes, inactivity in the presence of God in the matter of decisions, elections, choices. It is being without concern! It is the attitude of appalling triviality toward his own salvation of the man who does not carry it with him into every hour and every transaction.

Negatively to neglect salvation is to neglect in practice remembering the cleansing from first sins. It is to travel to such a distance from the first ecstatic hour when the soul knew itself cleansed that the memory is not a present power. It is neglect of the ordinance of confession and absolution, given and received in quiet loneliness with God. It is neglect of the whole armor and of the fight.

How is it that we begin to neglect salvation, that we do not add to the supply of virtues and graces by diligence? What are the alluring forces that prevent our realization and demonstration of the salvation that comes to us by grace? Our attention to things instead of God, our listening to self with all its demands instead of listening to the cry of need outside ourselves, our giving ourselves to license instead of to liberty.

What is the issue of such neglect? "How shall we escape?" How shall we flee if we neglect? The answer is found in the twelfth chapter of this epistle. There is no escape, and the word there is slightly changed; There is no fleeing. In the word there is the thought of imprisonment. The man who neglects the responsibilities of his salvation becomes imprisoned by the things he chooses and is excluded from all the virtues and the victories of that great salvation.

In view of this meditation a passage from the writing of Paul comes back to us with new meaning and force:

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure.

The working is mutual. Interdependent are these two things. I cannot work out anything save as He shall work in it; but if I fail to work out I stop the operation of His energy within.

Thus the final appeal of that passage from the Philippian letter, illuminating as it does the inquiry of the text, calls for caution on our part with regard to our salvation; we are to work it out with fear and trembling. But, thank God, it inspires with courage, "for it is God which worketh in."

Have we neglected our own salvation? Have we drifted away from these things in any measure? Then I thank God that in this same letter to the Hebrews there is one word capitalized; it is the word TODAY! It is a word that speaks of present salvation, and even though I have neglected, even though I have imprisoned myself, excluding myself from the very forces of life, and shutting myself up to the destructive things, yet even now a door is open, and I may turn back again to Him Who has brought so great salvation, and He will receive and restore me.