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**INDIVIDUALITY IN RELIGION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Behold, all souls are Mine.*

*Ezekiel 18:4*

THE BIBLE IS UNIFIED BY THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES WHICH IT reveals. Every great principle of religion finds explicit statement somewhere in the Sacred Writings. Elsewhere that particular principle is always implicit, and has occasional manifestation in some special application. In the words of this text I find the central Biblical statement of the fact which demonstrates the supreme importance of individuality in religion, and that, of course, means the supreme importance of individuality everywhere. The words were uttered by the prophet in correction of the mischievous suggestion of an entirely false and untrue proverb, which, by the way, is still current in common speech notwithstanding its absolute falseness. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." These people were blaming their fathers for their sufferings in exile; the inclusive answer to the false proverb is in the text, "All souls are Mine"; the particular application of it to the heresy embodied in the proverb is found in the chapter.

My present purpose is to examine the truth contained in the text, not in this particular application, but in the very broadest way. We shall consider, first, the explicit statement of the text, "All souls are Mine," and then one or two relative truths which must be borne in mind lest we misapply the teaching of the statement itself.

Still by way of introduction, let us note the two principal terms of the text: the word "souls" and the personal pronoun "Mine." The Hebrew word here translated "souls" is a very common one in the Old Testament. There are occasions on which it is used concerning the beasts, but the occasions are few. There are occasions on which it is used in reference to the spiritual nature of men; these occasions are more, but by no means in the majority. There are occasions on which the word is used concerning personality in its entirety, and these far outweigh all other uses in the Old Testament. All souls, that is, all persons, all individuals, are Mine. The possessive pronoun "Mine" is related to the title immediately preceding it, "As I live, saith the Lord God," that is, the sovereign Lord, Who is in Himself the essential One, of unlimited might. The double title suggests the might of God, and the fact that He is sovereign in His Lordship.

From that explicit statement we make three deductions which seem to me to be supreme, and inclusive. If this indeed be true, then every individual soul has personal relation with God; every individual soul has personal rights in God; and it follows by a sequence from which there can be no escape that every individual soul has personal responsibilities to God. These are the facts which the text suggests, and the recognition of which - if that recognition produce a corresponding attitude of mind, will, and heart - will issue, first, in revolutionizing the life of the individual who yields to the truth, and ultimately in reconstructing society as a whole and realizing the great Divine purpose in humanity.

First, every individual has personal relation to God. I do not say may have, but that every individual has a personal relation with God. That personal relation consists, first, in the fact of being; second, in the potentialities resident in the being; and, third, in the peculiarities that mark off the individual from all other individuals.

I am what I am, not by my own choice, not by the choice of my parents after the flesh, but by the choice and election of God. That is fundamentally true of human nature. I am speaking of human nature essentially, not as we know experientially, but of what it is in itself. In the deep, essential fact of human nature there is intimate first-hand relationship to God. The underlying fact of every human life, the spirit, has an immediate relationship with God, which is independent of everything that has gone before. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, "We had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" I have nothing to do now with his question, or this argument; I have something to do with the essential conception of humanity which there finds incidental expression. It is that the individual has had a parentage on this earth which is of the flesh; but that the individual in the deepest, essential fact of his or her personality has but one Father, who is God. In an infinite mystery, God has united Himself with the human race in the process of its procreation, so that wherever a child is begotten, God acts, and creates its spirit-life. It is equally true that each human being has relationship with God in capacity. The capacity of the individual is partial, but it also is definite. Every man has something that he is qualified to do naturally; every woman has something she is qualified to do naturally. Happy is the man or woman who has discovered the one thing he or she can do, and is doing that one thing well. It does not matter whether it is working in a carpenter's shop, or preaching the everlasting Gospel, or sewing with deft fingers - the great thing is to know the capacity, and remember that it is a Divinely bestowed gift.

All human beings have relationship with God in being and capacity, which implies relationship with God in potentiality. Potentiality is more than capacity. It is the force in capacity that makes it, not dynamic merely, but kinetic, that makes it do the thing it is able to do. That living force in his nature which enables the individual to do the thing for which he is fitted is also a Divine bestowal. The supreme, final heinousness of sin, therefore, is not that men do what they like with their own, but that they prostitute Divine gifts to base and terrible uses.

Peculiarity also marks Divine relationship. By that I mean that the very partial nature of the individual which speaks of incompleteness, nevertheless speaks of relativity, and, therefore, is Divinely arranged. I am incomplete; there are things I cannot do; but there are things I can do. My friend who stands by my side cannot do what I can do; but he can do things that I cannot do. Both what he can do and what I can do are necessary in doing some greater thing. Peculiarity is a Divine gift, and lest I forget it when I come to the application, let me now say, no man should allow himself to be laughed out of his peculiarity; it is his glory; it creates the possibility of his contributing something to the general good.

The individual soul, then, has personal relationship with God in being, in potentiality, and in peculiarity.

Every individual has also personal rights in God. This is of His grace. So far as human thought can go - and it goes a very little way unilluminated by revelation - it is conceivable that such a God as is revealed in the Bible, a God of might and wisdom, might have created individuals in His own likeness, having capacity, potentiality, and peculiarity, and then have left them to themselves. The Biblical revelation, however, declares that what God has created He has not abandoned, that He retains His relationship, and gives to all human souls rights in Himself. These rights may be described in three ways. The individual has the right of access to God, the right to all the resources in God, and - in view of the condition in which men are living today - the right to redemption in God.

Every individual has the right of access to God, and that by the grace of creation. God's grace did not begin with sin, it antedated sin. In the presence of sin it took on a new form, that marvelous form that wrought redemption. But grace existed before sin, and in the grace of creation God put Himself at the disposal of all souls, so that every soul has the right of direct, immediate access to Him, that is, access without mediation. He is to be found of them that seek after Him. He has placed Himself at the disposal of the individual. While it is an almost vulgarly awkward way to put it, it is still true that I have God all to myself when I need to have Him so. Indeed, I never really find Him until I find Him so. He is so infinitely and beautifully jealous in His love of the lonely one that He will brook no interference of any other if He is to reveal Himself in His glory to the one who is seeking Him.

Every soul has this right of access, and this includes the fact that every soul has a right to the resources in God. Here grace is seen in government. All the wisdom and all the strength of God are at the disposal of each individual life, that it may find itself, realize itself, and contribute its part and portion to the great whole which is included in the mind of God. All the wisdom of God is at our disposal; then we need not blunder. All the strength of God is at our disposal; then we need not stumble. All the resources of God are at our disposal; then it becomes base iniquity, arrant blasphemy to blame our earthly fathers because our teeth are set on edge. Nearer and closer than any earthly relationship is that of the God Who places His unfathomable wisdom at our disposal, and also the resources of His inexhaustible strength.

So far, I can conceive that in the heart of some Christian people who are thinking theologically, and also in the heart of some who are not Christian people, but who are thinking out of the agony of their own souls, there is protest against what I am saying. The protest is that men do not find their way to God, do not avail themselves of the wisdom and might of God, nor can they. They are right in the protest insofar as we have gone, but do not forget that there is another fact. God has provided and placed at the disposal of all sinning, failing souls what I cannot more adequately or better describe than by a phrase of the Biblical revelation, "plenteous redemption." Every individual has the right to the redemption provided for Him in God and by God. Through the appropriation of that redemption he passes into the place where he may avail himself of the resources in God, and, finding that the veil is rent, may have access immediately to the presence of God.

These two things involve a third - every individual has personal responsibilities to God. We have intellectual responsibilities to God; we have emotional responsibilities to God; and, finally, we have volitional responsibilities to God.

Our intellectual responsibilities toward God are perfect honesty and yielded obedience to whatever of the essential light of truth shall break in on our lives. Perfect honesty intellectually is the first responsibility. The one type of mind against which God Almighty has set Himself, as the revelation proves, whether in the old or in the new covenant, and supremely in the Person of Jesus, is the hypocritical. We have but to remember the burning, scorching, blasting words of Jesus to recognize that they were all spoken against hypocrites, people who act, who play a part, who dissemble, who try to keep up an appearance which is false to the inward fact of their personality; people who profess to believe something that they do not believe. With the hot and angry protest of honest agnosticism God is never angry; but against the calm, canting profession of belief by a man whose heart is away from his lips, God makes His protest. The first responsibility of the soul toward God may be expressed in other words: God requireth truth in the inward parts, which means intellectual honesty in dealing with Him. Then He also requires ready obedience to whatever light or truth may break out in the individual soul. God does not ask you to walk in the light He has given me. God does not require of me that I shall walk in the light you have received. God does require of me and of you that each of us shall follow the gleam the moment it breaks on our souls as the result of our honesty in seeking to know His mind and His will.

Our responsibility is not intellectual alone, it is also emotional. We are responsible for surrendering ourselves to this God in the proportion in which we discover Him, and for having our surrender take the true form, adoring worship. Someone may say, Surely that is a condition which is not essential. That is the mistake we have made too long. We have treated worship, adoration, and prayer, as though they were nonessential things. Perhaps we have been willing to admit that in certain circumstances, and in certain places, they do add something of beauty to the life. Yet, really, these are the essential things of life. No man has found the real meaning of his own life until he has yielded to God in adoring worship. The soul prostrate before God is never prostrate anywhere else. The man who knows what emotional surrender to God is - prostration, true worship, and absolute adoration - comes out from the presence chamber erect, strong against all the forces that insult God and blast humanity. Our responsibility, therefore, is emotional.

Centrally, and finally, it is immediately admitted, and therefore not argued, that our responsibility is volitional; and this expresses itself in appropriating our rights in Him, choosing His redemption in order that we may take hold of His resources, and that in order that we may practice the presence of God and find constant access to Him.

The whole point of the discourse and declaration is that every individual is to say for himself or for herself, The Lord Almighty has said, "All souls are Mine"; then I have relation with Him, I have rights in Him, I have responsibilities toward Him.

In conclusion, and as briefly as we may, let us attempt to group the related truths. Let us endeavor to encompass the Divine thought, not only as it is here in the text, but as it is interpreted by the Biblical surrounding. "All souls are Mine." Every unit is related to the unity. All souls are God's; but He has not made a mass of individuals who live alone, or are intended to live alone. Trench says that the phrase, "the solidarity of humanity," came into current coinage after the French Revolution. That may be so, as it was so; but the idea behind the phrase was not born then. If the idea behind the phrase had been realized by humanity, there would have been no French Revolution. If the idea behind the phrase had been realized by humanity, there would have been no war at the present moment. The solidarity of humanity means that in the Divine economy every individual soul is related to the whole race. That great, wonderful word, too often almost sneeringly employed today, the commonwealth, has within it this thought of the interrelationship of souls. Every soul, having individual relation to God, rights in God, responsibilities to God, is, nevertheless, incomplete; and for the completion of the individual life the lives of all others are necessary. The capacities within me are not for me, they are for you, for others. The capacities resident within others are not for those who possess them, but for me. God's outlook on humanity is not on an aggregate of individuals, but on a great corporate whole, a race, a family, in which, if one member suffers a tremor, the pain reaches to the extremity of the commonwealth; in which if one member rejoices, the ripple of the merriment spreads over all the faces. Every unit is related to the unity in the Divine creation.

Consequently, the law that God imposes on me is not merely for the perfecting of my personality, it is in order that I may fit into the body corporate and fulfil the meaning of my life in right relationship with my fellow men. There at once we touch the whole question of the limitation of individual liberty. There is no such thing as individual liberty if by that we mean enslaving other people, and wronging other people. I am free, always provided that my freedom does not mean the harming of my brother man. I repeat, therefore, the law of the unit is in the interests of the unity. Of course, it is for the realization of individual fulness that God imposes His law on me. By law here, I mean not merely the Decalogue, but that law which is immediate, the light that shines on me that you cannot see, that you are not intended to see, and have no right to see; that inner word of God to my own individual spirit that meets me, halts me, checks me, encourages me. God deals with me in law, that I may realize all my own life, and that in order that I may fit in with all the other lives, until from the whole realization of humanity there shall come the possibility of the expression of the whole fact of Deity.

Again, the claim God makes on all is for the sake of each. There we have the other side of the great ideal. The limitation of corporate freedom is found here. There is no such thing as corporate freedom which excludes the rights of the individual. No association of employers or union of employees is to be free to interfere with the individual conscience of individual employer or employee. I know this is a difficult thing to say; it is a problem in economics, but it is a Divine law. No nation in its corporate State-life has any right to say to an individual man, You must sacrifice your individuality, and give yourself up entirely to the will of the dominant power. There are limitations to corporate freedom in order that there may be realization of corporate fulness and beauty. God has set the bounds of the habitations of the nations of the world spiritually and mentally, as well as geographically; and in every national idea there is a contribution to international realization. We cannot, in the last analysis, do without anything that is other-national than our own. It may be an amusement for half an hour that you and I should sometimes laugh at the liveliness of a Frenchman, or that he should make merry over our dulness. When God has done His business with the race, He will need the glory of the mercurial temperament of the Frenchman as well as our own stolidity. Or, to take the narrower outlook, that peculiarity of a man's conscience that you are trying to destroy by your machine is needed in order that your machine may have in it the last touch of excellence and beauty. The claim on all is for the sake of each, as the claim on each is for the sake of all.

From that glance at the Divine thought I make one or two human deductions. In view of this belief no man can judge his brother. I do not believe there is a person who objects to that view as a view; but I wonder how many of us live by it. We are always judging each other, passing our condenmation on others, on the views they hold, the clothes they wear, their peculiarities. If we once grasp this Divine teaching, we shall forever be silent, we shall never again pass judgment on our brother. Every man will rather judge himself in the interest of his brother. Every man will sit in severe judgment on his choices, his actions, his deeds, in the interest of other men. All judgment is finally before the throne of God. I must not judge my brother, because we must all appear before the judgment seat of God; but I must judge myself, and it must be done before that judgment throne, for it is the only judgment throne.

This conception of life - so vast as to include the whole race, so intensive and particular as to grip the soul of every honest individual - is an everlasting condemnation of unjust attitudes towards others. In the fourteenth chapter of Romans there are very suggestive applications of this great principle. Paul there says that we are not to judge our brother because he eats meat and we are vegetarians. He says we are not to judge our brother because he is a vegetarian and we eat meat. He says we are not to judge our brother because he observes holy days - let me be modern - saints' days. Free Churchmen are not to object to the man who observes his saints' days, and those who observe saints' days are not to hold in contempt those who observe no particular days, because they observe all days. There is to be no contempt, no judging. Paul says of every man, "To his own Lord he standeth or falleth"; and then Paul utters the great word of his Christian confidence, "He shall be made to stand." We thought that man would surely fall because he is not a vegetarian. No, he will not fall; his Master will make him stand. We thought that man would surely fall because he was so particular to observe saints' days. It is not so. God fulfills Himself in many ways, and He fulfils human lives in a thousand different ways. Let us be done with unjust attitudes toward others.

There is one other thing we learn. From this vast conception of life so particular and intensive in its application, I learn the necessity for cultivating individuality, always remembering the larger relationship, and always leaving God to deal with others. The individual is to define and yield to the facts of relationship with God, to realize and use the resources that are in God, which may be done by appropriating the redemption that is provided for him in Christ Jesus. So may we enter into the spacious life to which men pass only by the narrow gate and the straitened way.

I address my last sentences to the peculiar person (whom nobody quite understands) whose spiritual apprehension is certainly strange to my thinking, whose mental attitude seems all at an angle. Dear heart - man, woman, youth, maiden - deal with God! Give Him His chance to fulfil Himself in you and you in Himself! Remember that all souls are His, and in your separate individuality respond to His government, claim His resources. As individuals do so; then, lo, without any acts of Parliament, and without any more strife, the strange chaos of aggregated individualities will merge into the cosmos of the Kingdom of our God.