

# Signs of the Times

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*The sermon discusses the two movements outside the church - materialism and the revolt against materialism - and the corresponding movements within the church, highlighting the importance of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the lives of believers.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 8:20, John 14:26, Romans 8:5-6, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 1:13-14, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, James 3:15, 1 John 4:1

**Topics:** "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit", "Materialism vs. Spirituality"

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## Description

G. Campbell Morgan addresses the contrasting movements in society regarding materialism and the search for spirituality, highlighting how materialistic views have permeated life outside the Church, leading many to live in practical atheism. He notes a significant revolt against materialism, evidenced by the rise of spiritualism and theosophy, yet warns against the extremes of denying matter altogether. Within the Church, a wave of rationalism threatens spiritual vitality, but there is also a revival of interest in the Holy Spirit's ministry, which is essential for true transformation. Morgan emphasizes the importance of grounding spiritual truths in Scripture to avoid the pitfalls of legalism and misinterpretation. He calls for a return to the Word of God as the ultimate guide to understanding the Spirit's work and the spiritual realm.

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## Transcript

DURING recent years two movements have been noticeable in the thought of men outside the Christian Church. First there has been the development of materialism. The teachings of Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, and Spencer have tended to the denial of the spiritual in man. Thousands of people who have never read their books have been influenced by their outlook upon life. Moreover, a great many of their first positions have been accepted and taught, and are held until this moment, without any due allowance being made for subsequent statements, which have proved that their teaching consisted in the suggestion of hypotheses, rather than the declaration of ascertained facts. According to such teachers all the phenomena of human life are to be accounted for wholly within the range of matter. It is admitted by them that matter is in itself indestructible; but it is affirmed that the rearrangement of it that takes place at death destroys the identity of human beings. In a more cultured and refined form, and with gleams of hope in the form of doubts, men have been gradually drifting towards materialism; and the effect of this has been seen in the average human life apart from the influence and teaching of Christianity. Earthly, sensual, devilish, are words which fitly describe the vast mass of life apart from God. Some of the old forms of fleshly life have indeed ceased, and there is in the minds of men a new respect for personal character, as a result of

the presence of Christianity in the world. A correct view of the condition of the masses of the race would reveal the fact that for the most part life is being lived in the realm of the fleshly, the material, the perishing. Thousands of men, while professing to hold the orthodox creed, are yet living in a practical atheism, and a consequent denial of their own spiritual nature.

The second movement outside the Church has taken the form of a revolt against materialism, and has found its expression in attempts to discover the spiritual--to unfold its laws, and to declare its activities. Spiritualism and theosophy are witnesses to this movement. Mrs. Annie Besant is one of the most remarkable instances of it in individual life. There was a time when she--sickened, alas! by the inconsistencies with which she came into contact within what was called, and falsely called, Christianity--turned her back upon the faith of her early years. She found refuge in denial of high and sacred things; and lived wholly, to all appearance, outside the realm of the spiritual. For her to have found her way back to the acknowledgment of the spiritual in any form is a gain. It is, however, a remarkable fact that one who might have been spoken of as the high-priestess of materialism, in a rebound from that position, has taken a leap into the realm of credulity. Belief in a Mahatma, somewhere amid Himalayan heights, who has never been seen, requires a stretch of credence far greater than a belief in the living Christ of God, Whose presence on the earth nineteen hundred years ago is an indisputable historical fact, and Whose abiding presence is witnessed by innumerable transformations of character during the centuries.

This change of front on the part of so gifted a woman is a startling illustration of the tact that, side by side with the materialistic movement that has characterized the past half-century, there has also been a marked revolt against that movement. Indeed, the revolt against materialism has carried a certain section of the community into the opposite extreme. They are declaring that matter is not, and only mind really exists. The tendency of the past was to deny spirit. That has been proved to be absolutely untenable, and now it is the fashion to deny matter. This is evidenced by the vagaries of Christian science falsely so called.

This groping in the darkness without, has had its counterpart within the churches. A wave of rationalism, originating largely in Germany, has been sweeping over the religious world. Its effect has been the swamping of spiritual ideas and the extinguishing of the fires of Christian zeal. There are churches utterly devoid of the true spiritual tokens of men and women converted to God, and transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Such churches, being destitute of the compassion of the Christ for the needs of men, all too sadly prove that the materialistic element, has crept within their borders, in the form of rationalistic theology, the canker-worm of spiritual life.

But just as outside the Church there has been a spirit of revolt, so within, contemporary with this rationalistic movement, there has been manifested a marked and wonderful revival of interest in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In 1856 William Arthur issued his Tongue of Fire. It was indeed a fiery message to the churches; but it was before its time. Not that it was out of place. Every great movement has its forerunner. Every great development of thought starts with some lonely watchman upon the mountain, who catches the first ray of coming day, and tells the dwellers in the valley of its approach. The book was, in that sense, a book before its time; yet men read it--our fathers tell us--on their knees. There followed a period of waiting, a time during which it appeared as though the book were dead. It was dead as the seed-corn dies, only to issue in a glorious harvest. During the last quarter of the century, men in all sections of the Christian Church have spoken and written upon this great theme of the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit. Dr. Scofield, of Northfield, says: More books, booklets, and tracts upon that subject have

issued from the press during the last twenty years than in all the time since the invention of printing. The truth thus proclaimed has resulted in new life within the churches; and everywhere eager souls are enquiring after fuller, more definite, more systematic knowledge of this great ministry of the Spirit. The ministries that are forceful in the accomplishment of definite results in the interests of the kingdom of God today, are the ministries of men who are putting the whole burden of their work upon the Holy Spirit of God,--of men who, however different the subjects with which they deal, and however different their theological outlook may be in certain respects, are nevertheless perpetually realizing that the Holy Spirit is to be thought and spoken of as a Person rather than an influence. Wherever the Spirit of God is being enthroned in preaching and in all Christian work, and having His rightful place as the Administrator of the things of Jesus Christ, apostolic results are seen to follow.

Here, however, as always in the history of fallen man, the Divine movement has had its counterfeit.

The devil has two methods of procedure with regard to the living truth of God. First, he seeks to hide the vision. When that is no longer possible, when truth with its inherent brilliance and beauty is driving away the mists, then the devil's procedure is that of patronage and falsification. Taking it out of its true proportion, he turns it into deadly error.

The Reformation, for which we still thank God, was a return on the part of men, to whom God gave vision, to the great fundamental truth of justification by faith. The central gospel fact, He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life was rediscovered. For long and weary years Satan had kept that truth out of sight; but when God raised up Martin Luther and others, the devil immediately adopted, adapted, and misapplied it. In the wake of the Reformation came the damnable heresy of antinomianism. Its teaching was, that if men are justified by faith, conduct is of no account; man sins perpetually, and nothing can alter the fact; but being justified by faith, the actual life and character are nothing. Thus a truth taken out of its proper setting, and stretched to undue proportions, became a heresy almost more fearful than that from which justification by faith was a deliverance.

Again, some years ago God raised up men to give renewed utterance to the truth of the premillennial coming of Jesus Christ. The effect produced was that of a purifying hope, and believers were recalled from worldliness and indifference, to the attitude of pilgrims girded for the King's business, and waiting for His appearing. Then immediately followed innumerable distortions of the truth by the powers of evil; and impertinent predictions of dates have almost brought it into general disrepute. Instead of the whole Church being purified, strengthened, and revived in prospect of events the time for which God Himself only knows, many are afraid to give any attention whatever to the subject, because it has been brought into disrepute by attempts to discover a date of which the Master said: Of that day . . . knoweth no one, . . . not even . . . the Son.

Just as it was in these instances, so has it been in regard to the subject of the work of the Holy Spirit. The greatest peril which threatens the truth of the Spirit's personal ministry to-day, arises from the advocacy of the truth by those who are not careful to discover the mind of the Spirit. With the revival of interest there have been launched a number of wholly unauthorized systems, which have brought bondage where the Spirit would have brought liberty. Men have been misapplying phrases connected with this subject. The baptism of the Spirit, the anointing of the Spirit, the indwelling of the Spirit, the sealing of the Spirit, the filling of the Spirit--all these, based upon Scripture, have been taken out of their setting, and made the current phraseology of a new system of thought, which is a new form of legalism.

It is asserted, for instance, that a man who is converted may be baptized of the Spirit, if--and then after the if comes the statement of certain conditions which constitute a legalism as disastrous as was that of the Judaizing teachers among the churches of Galatia. We are told that if a man will abandon this, that, and the other--and in many cases will cease to observe laws of life which are purely natural--he may be filled or baptized with the Spirit. All this is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. The baptism of the Spirit is always used in the New Testament with reference to regeneration, and never with what is often spoken of to-day as the second blessing.

The filling of the Spirit through the fuller faith of the believer is often, but not necessarily a second blessing. All that is necessary for fuller realization of the Divine life becomes the birthright and property of believers directly they are born again of the Spirit of God. Nothing is more to be deprecated than the habit of formulating systems upon disjointed Scripture phrases apart from their connection with the context.

There is one sure and infallible guide to truth, and therefore one, and only one, corrective for error, and that is the Word of God. That, in this series of studies, is the court of appeal. May the Holy Spirit, without Whom there is no understanding of the Word, grant a clearer comprehension of His Person, of His work, and of human relation thereto! In approaching the subject the mind should be disabused of all foregone conclusions and prejudices, and a stand taken upon the old prophetic dictum: To the law and to the testimony! if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them. There is no revelation of the activities of the Spirit of God, or of the spiritual world, save the revelation that comes through the Book.

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