

Watchman Nee:

THE WAY OF DELIVERANCE

ROMANS 6 LAYS THE FOUNDATION for the Christian's deliverance from sin. Such deliverance God provides for every believer; all may enter in. Moreover, let us be unmistakably clear that this liberation from the power of sin may be experienced the very hour a sinner accepts the Lord Jesus as Savior and is born anew. He need not be a long-time believer and undergo numerous defeats before he can receive this gospel. Delay in accepting the gospel according to Romans 6 is due either to the incomplete gospel he has heard or to his unwillingness in wholly accepting and fully yielding to it. Whereas actually this blessing should be the common possession of all the newly born.

134 THE SPIRITUAL MAN

Chapter 6 begins with a call to reminisce, not to anticipate. It directs our attention to the past, to what is already ours: "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with him, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin" (v.6 Darby). In this single verse we find three major elements--

- (1) "sin" (singular in number);
- (2) "old man"; and
- (3) "body" (the body of sin).

These three are vastly different in nature and play unique roles in the act of sinning. Sin here is that which commonly is called the root of sin. The Bible informs us that we were formerly slaves of sin. Sin had been the master. First of all therefore, we need to recognize that sin possesses power, for it enslaves us. It emits this power incessantly to draw us into obedience to its old man so that we might sin. The old man represents the sum total of everything we inherit from Adam. We can recognize the old man by knowing what the new man is, because whatever is not of the new man must belong to the old. Our new man embraces everything which flows newly from the Lord at our regeneration. Hence the old man betokens everything in our personality which is outside the new-our old personality and all which belongs to the old nature. We sin because this old man loves sin and is under its power. Now the body of sin refers to this body of ours. This corporeal part of man has become the inevitable puppet in all our sinning. It is labeled the body of sin because it likewise is subject to the power of sin, fully laden with the lusts and desires of sin. And it is through this body that sin manages to express itself, else it will be merely an invisible power.

To recapitulate then, sin is the power which pulls us to do sin. Old man is the non-corporeal part of what we inherit from Adam. The body of sin is the corporeal element we inherit from him.

The process of sinning follows this order: first, sin; next, the old man; lastly, the body. Sin exudes its power to attract man and force him to sin. Since the old man delights in sin, he condones sin and bends to it, instigating the body to sin. Wherefore the body serves as the puppet and actually practices sin. It is through the joint enterprise of these three elements that sin is committed. Present always are the compulsion of sin's power, the inclination of the old man, and the practice of the body.

Now how can a man be delivered from sin? Some theorize that since sin is the first cause we must annihilate it in order to attain victory; accordingly they advocate "the eradication of sin." Once the root of sin is pulled out, think these, we never shall sin again and are obviously sanctified. Others argue that we must subdue our body if we desire to overcome sin, for is it not our body, they ask, which practices sin? So there arises in Christendom a group of people who promote asceticism. They use many techniques to suppress themselves for they anticipate that once they overcome the demands of their bodies they shall be holy. None of these is God's way. Romans 6.6 is transparent as to His way. He neither eradicates the root of sin- within nor suppresses the body without. Rather, God deals with the old man in between.

GOD'S FACT

The Lord Jesus in going to the cross took with Him not only our sins but also our beings. Paul enunciates this fact by proclaiming "that our old man has been crucified with him." The verb "crucified" in the original is in the aorist tense, connoting that our old man was once and forever crucified with Him. As the cross of Christ is a

fact accomplished, so our being crucified with Him is additionally an accomplished fact. Whoever questions the reality of the crucifixion of Christ? Why, then, should we doubt the reality of the crucifixion of our old man?

Many saints, upon hearing the truth of co-death, immediately assume that they ought to die, and so they try their best to crucify themselves. Either lack of God's revelation or lack

of faith accounts for this attitude. They not only do this themselves;

they teach others so to do as well. The results are too obvious: no

power is theirs to be freed from sin and their old man they feel will not

die.

This is a grievous misjudgment. The Bible never instructs us to crucify ourselves. Precisely the opposite are we told. We are taught that when Christ went to Calvary He took us there and had us crucified. We are not instructed to begin crucifying ourselves now; instead the Scriptures assure us that our old man was dealt with at the time Christ went to the cross. Romans 6.6 alone is sufficient to substantiate this. There is not the remotest idea conveyed of desiring to crucify ourselves, nor does the Word in the slightest sense imply that our crucifixion awaits realization. The verse in Romans 6 permits no room for doubt when it categorically pronounces that we were crucified with Christ, a fact already accomplished. This is truly the effect of the most precious phrase in the Bible-"in Christ." It is because we are in Him and are united with Him that we can say that when Christ went to the cross we went there. in Him, that when Christ was crucified we too were crucified in Him. What a wonderful reality that we are in Christ!

Mere mental assimilation of these truths cannot withstand

temptation, however. The revelation of God is positively essential. The

Spirit of God must reveal how we are in Christ and how we are united

with Him in one. He must also show us distinctly how our old man

was crucified with Christ for the simple reason that we are in Christ.

This cannot be simply a mental comprehension; it must be a disclosure

of the Holy Spirit. When a truth is unfolded by God it most naturally

becomes a power in man, who then finds himself able to believe.

Faith comes through revelation. Without the latter the former is

impossible. This explains why many do not have faith,

for though they mentally understand they do not have God's

revelation. Therefore, brethren, pray until God gives us revelation so

that "knowing this" in our spirit we may truly confess "that our old

man has been crucified with him."

What is the consequence of the crucifixion of our old man? Again the answer comes to us unequivocally-"that the body of sin might be annulled." "Annulled" should be rendered "withered" or "unemployed." Beforehand when sin stirred, our old man responded and consequently the body practiced sin. With the crucifixion of the old man and its replacement by the new man, sin may still stir within and attempt to exert its pressure, but it fails to find the consent of the old man in driving the body to sin. Sin can no longer tempt the believer for he is a new man; the old has died. The body's occupation was formerly that of sinning but this body of sin is now unemployed because the old man was set aside. It is not able to sin and hence has been denied its job. Praise the Lord, this is what He has furnished us.

Why does God crucify our old man with Christ and render

our body jobless? His purpose is that "we should no longer serve sin." What God has done in this regard makes it possible for us not to yield thereafter to the pressure of sin nor to be bound by its power. Sin will exercise no dominion over us. Hallelujah! We must praise God for this deliverance.

THE TWO ESSENTIALS

How shall we enter into such blessing? Two elements are indispensable. First, "reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6.11 Darby). This is the essential of faith. When God avows that our old man was crucified with Christ we believe His Word and "reckon ourselves as dead." How then do we die? "We reckon ourselves as dead to sin." When God affirms that we are resurrected with Christ we again trust His Word and "reckon ourselves as alive." How then do we live? "We reckon ourselves as alive to God." This reckoning is none other than believing God according to His Word, When God says our old man was crucified, we account ourselves dead; when He insists we are made alive, we reckon ourselves as alive. The failure of many lies in the desire to feel, to see and to experience this crucifixion and resurrection before trusting in the Word of God.

These do not realize God has done it already in Christ and that if only they would believe His Word by reckoning that what He has done is true, His Holy Spirit would give them the experience. His Spirit would communicate to them what is in Christ.

Second, "neither yield your members instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but yield yourselves to God as alive from among the dead and your members instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom. 6.13 Darby). This is the essential of consecration. If we persist in holding on to something which God wants us to relinquish, sin shall have dominion over us, and our reckoning shall be futile. If we fail to yield our members as godly instruments of righteousness to speak and do what He desires and go where He directs, should we be surprised we are not yet delivered from sin? Whenever we refuse to relinquish or we offer resistance to God, sin shall return to its dominion. Under such circumstances we naturally lose the power to reckon, that is, to believe God's Word. In our ceasing to exercise faith and to reckon, can we still be said to be positionally in Christ? Yes, but we are living no longer in Him according to the sense of the "abide in me" of John 15. Accordingly we are unqualified to experience what is factual in Christ, even our crucifixion.

Now we may infer from any defeat of ours that it is due either to lack of faith or failure to obey. No other reason can suffice. Conceivably a defeat could flow from both these reasons; if not from both, then from one or the other. We ought to learn how to live in Christ by faith, never seeing or thinking of ourselves outside of Him. Learn to believe daily that we are in Christ and that whatever is true of Him is true of us. Likewise, through the power of God we must learn daily to keep our consecration unspotted. Count all things as refuse, for there is nothing in the world we cannot relinquish for the Lord and nothing that we should want to keep for ourselves. Let us be disposed to respond positively to God's demands, however difficult or contrary to the flesh they may be. For God no cost is too high. Anything can be sacrificed if only we may please Him. Let us daily learn to be obedient children.

Had we so reckoned and so yielded, we would now be enjoying what the Word of God has manifestly declared: "sin will have no dominion over you."

THE RELATION BETWEEN SIN AND THE BODY

A Christian enters a decidedly hazardous period of his life upon coming to know the truth of co-death and experiencing something of freedom from sin. If at this juncture he receives good instruction and permits the Holy Spirit to apply the cross to himself in a deeper way, he eventually will reach spiritual maturity. But if the believer is content to view his experience of victorious life over sin as the apogee of attainment and forbids the cross to contravene his soul life then he will abide in the soulical realm and mistake his soulical

experience for a spiritual one. In spite of the fact his old man was dealt with, the believer's soul life remains untouched by the cross. The will, mind and emotion will therefore continue to function without any check; and the result: his experience is confined to the realm of the soul.

What we need to know is how far such deliverance from

sin actually has affected our being--what it has touched but

also what it has not yet touched which should be. More especially must we understand that sin has a very particular relationship to our body. Unlike many philosophers we do not consider the body intrinsically evil, but we do confess that the body is the province of sin's domination. In Romans 6.6 we find the Holy Spirit describing our body as "the body of sin," for it is nothing but that before we experience the treatment of the cross and yield our members to God as instruments of righteousness. Sin had seized our body and forced it into servitude. It became sin's fortress, instrument and garrison. Wherefore no designation is more fitting than that of "the body of sin."

A careful reading of Romans 6 through 8, which tell of deliverance from sin, will uncover not only what is the relation

of the body to sin but also what is God's perfect salvation in releasing our body completely from serving sin into serving Him.

In Romans 6 the Apostle sets forth these statements:

"the sinful body might be destroyed" (v.6)

"let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions" (v. 12)

"do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness" (v.1.3)

"yield ... your members to God as instruments of righteousness" (v.13)

In Romans 7 God uses Paul to speak of the body in the following terms:

"at work in our members" (v.5)

"I see in my members another law" (v.23)

"making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members" (v.23)

" who will deliver me from this body of death?" (v.24)

In Romans 8 the pronouncements of the Holy Spirit through Paul are very plain:

"your bodies are dead because of sin" (v.10)

"will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which

dwells in you" (v.11)

"if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live" (v. 13)

"the redemption of our bodies" (v.23)

From these passages we can begin to discern God's particular concern towards our body. God is aware that the body is sin's special sphere of operation. Man has become a slave to sin because his body is sin's puppet. But the moment his body is disemployed from sin the person ceases to be its slave. A man thus freed from sin actually experiences the liberation of his body from its power and influence.

The purpose in crucifying the old man is to release the body from the dominion of sin. With the old man, sin's partner, crucified and the new man taking its place, sin's power over the body is broken, because without the cooperation of the old man sin cannot directly use the body.

It must be emphasized that to be delivered from the power of sin merely means to have our body liberated. (Of course our perfect redemption which also includes the deliverance from the presence of sin lies in the future). Not yet dealt with is the life of the soul upon which we lean. If we consider victory over sin as life on the highest plateau then we are most foolish. We are accepting the "annulling" or "withering" of the body as life supreme but ignoring the fact that over and above the body of sin stands the natural soul which requires as much dealing as does the body. A believer's spiritual odyssey is bound to be shallow if he only knows the body unemployed (wonderful as that may be) but fails to experience the soul life denied.

Mention was made earlier of the active self or soul engaged in the work of God. The body may be "Withered" but the soul remains quite active. It may express itself in many different ways yet it invariably centers upon self. Believers who live in the soul incline towards either will or mind or emotion. They may even shift in their inclinations. But though outward appearances may differ, the inward clinging to the soul characterizes them all. Those who are disposed towards volition will walk according to their own delight and refuse the will of God. Those whose propensity is towards mind will order their way according to their own wisdom and neglect to receive with quietness the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their intuition. While those whose natural disposition is emotional will seek for pleasures in their feelings. Whatever one's bent, each will view his tendency as life supreme. No matter the direction of the inclination, one thing is common to all such people: all live in themselves: all live in what they naturally possessed before believing the Lord-whether talent, ability, eloquence, cleverness, attractiveness, zealouslyness, or whatever. In principle, soul life is natural strength; in manifestation, its expression is either by stubborn unyielding or by self-conceit or by pleasureseeking. If therefore a believer lives by his soul he will draw naturally upon his reservoir of strengths and will exhibit a particular strength in one or

more of these ways. Unless the believer offers his soul life to death, he shall cultivate that life, incur the displeasure of God, and miss the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

THE SOUL AS LIFE

When we say the soul is the natural life of man we mean it is the power which preserves us alive in the flesh. Our soul is our life. The original word employed in Genesis 1.21,24 for "living creature(s)" is "soul" because this soul is the life human beings and other living creatures share in common. This is the power we naturally possess and by which we live before our, regeneration; it is the life which every man has. The Greek lexicon gives the original meaning of psuche as " animal life"; so that soul life is what makes man a living creature. It belongs to the natural. Though the soul life may not necessarily be evil-since many sins have been overcome by believers through their old man being crucified with Christ-yet it remains natural. It is the life of man; hence it is most human. It makes man a perfectly human being. Perhaps it is good, loving and humble. Nonetheless it is but human.

This life is entirely distinct from the new life the Holy Spirit gives us at new birth. What the Holy Spirit imparts is God's uncreated life; this other is but man's created life. The Holy Spirit grants us a supernatural power; this other is merely the natural. The Holy Spirit gives the zoe; this other is the psuche.

Life is that power within a man which animates every member of his body. Hence this inward soulful power finds expression through the outward physical activity. The outer activity is but the effect of the inner power. What therefore lies unseen behind the activity is the substance of life. All we naturally "are" is included in that life. This is our soul life.

SOUL AND SIN

Soul life supplies the energy for executing whatever is commanded. If the spirit rules, the soul will be directed by the spirit to exercise its volition to decide or to do on behalf

of the spirit's desire; if however sin reigns in the body, the soul will be enticed by sin into using its volition to decide or to do what sin desires. The soul works according to its master, for its function is the execution of orders. Prior to man's fall it committed its power to the spirit's direction; but after the fall it responded completely to sin's coercion. Because man turned into a fleshly being this sin which afterwards reigned in the body became man's nature, enslaving the soul and the life of man and compelling him to walk after sin. In this way sin became man's nature while soul became man's life.

We often treat life and nature as synonymous and co-significant. Strictly speaking they are different. Life it would appear is much broader than nature. Each life possesses its special nature which, being the natural principle of existence, includes life's disposition and desire. While we are yet sinners our life is our soul and our nature is sin. By the soul we live and the disposition and desire of our life are according to sin. To put it another way, what decides our walk is sin but what supplies the strength to walk in that fashion (sinfully) is the soul. The nature of sin initiates while the life of the soul energizes. Sin originates, soul executes. Such is the condition of an unbeliever.

When a believer accepts the grace of our Lord Jesus in being his substitute on the cross, although he may remain woefully ignorant of his being crucified with Christ he is given God's life nonetheless and has his spirit quickened. This imparted new life brings with it a new nature as well. Hence there now exists both two lives and two natures in the believer: the soul life and the spirit life on the one side, the sin nature and God's nature on the other.

These two natures--old and new, sinful and godly--are fundamentally unlike, irreconcilable and unmixable. The new and the old daily strive for authority over the whole man. During this initial stage the Christian is a babe in Christ because he is yet fleshly. Most variable and most painful are his experiences, punctuated by both successes and failures. Later on he comes to know the deliverance of the cross and learns how to exercise faith in reckoning the old man as

crucified with Christ. He is thereby freed from that sin which has paralyzed the body. With his old man crucified the believer is empowered to overcome and enjoys in actual experience the promise that ... sin will have no dominion over you."

With sin under his feet and all lusts and passions of the flesh behind his back, the believer now enters a new realm. He may picture himself wholly spiritual. When he turns to eye those others who remain entangled in sin he cannot but feel elated and wonder how he has reached the summit of spiritual life. Little does this one realize that far from being completely spiritual he still remains partially carnal; he is yet- - -

A SOULISH OR CARNAL CHRISTIAN

Why is this so? For we see that the soul life continues though the cross has dealt with the believer's sinful nature. It is true that every sin erupts from that sinful nature, with the soul simply a willing servant; nevertheless the soul as inherited from Adam cannot avoid being infected with Adam's fall. It may not be entirely defiled; however, it is natural and quite unlike God's life. The corrupted old man in the believer has died but his soul remains the power behind his walk. On the one hand the sinful nature has been drastically touched but on the other hand the self life still persists and therefore cannot escape being soulish. Although the old man may cease to direct the soul, the latter continues to energize the daily walk of man. Since God's nature has replaced his sinful nature all man's inclinations, desires and wishes are naturally good, so unlike his former unclean state. It must not be overlooked, however, that what executes these new desires and wishes continues to be the old soul power.

To depend upon the soul life to carry out the wish of the spirit is to use natural (or human) force to accomplish supernatural (or divine) goodness. This is simply trying to fulfill God's demand with self-strength. In such a condition the believer is still weak in positively doing right, even though negatively he has overcome sin. Few are those disposed honestly to acknowledge their weakness and incapability and to lean utterly upon God. Who will confess his uselessness if he has not been humbled by the grace of God? Man takes pride in his prowess. For this reason he can hardly entertain the thought of trusting the Holy Spirit for doing right but is sure to

correct and improve his former behavior by his soul power. The danger for him is in attempting to please God with his own power instead of learning to be strengthened with might in his spirit life through the Holy Spirit so that he may follow the dictates of his new nature. In point of fact his spiritual life is still in its infancy, not having grown yet to that maturity wherein he is able to manifest every virtue of God's nature. If the believer fails to wait humbly and to rely entirely upon God he inevitably employs his natural, soulful vitality to meet God's requirements placed upon His children. He does not understand that however good to the human outlook his efforts may appear to be, they can never please God. Because by so doing, he is mingling what is of God with what is of man, expressing heavenly desire by means of earthly power. And the consequence? He fails miserably to be spiritual and continues to abide in the soul.

Man does not know what soul life is. Simply put, it is what we customarily term self life. It is a serious mistake not to distinguish between sin and self. Many of the Lord's people view these two as one and the same entity. What they do not recognize is that both in Biblical teaching and in spiritual experience they are distinctive. Sin is what defiles, is against God and is totally wicked; self may not necessarily be so. On the contrary, it can at times be very respectable, helpful and lovely. Take, for example, the soul in relation to Bible reading, certainly a most commendable activity. Attempting to understand the Holy Bible with one's native talent or ability is not considered sinful; yet approaching the Bible in this way is undeniably the work of self. Soul-winning, too, if accompanied by methods that accord merely with one's own thought, will be full of self. And how often pursuit after spiritual growth originates in the natural self perhaps only

because we cannot bear the thought of falling behind or because we seek some personal gain. Bluntly stated, the doing of good is not sin but the manner, methods, or motive in such good-doing may be surfeited with our self. Its source is man's natural goodness, not that supernatural kind given by the Holy Spirit through regeneration. Many are innately merciful, patient, and tender. Now for these to show mercy or patience or tenderness is not committing sin; but because these "good" traits belong to their natural life and are the work of the self they cannot be accepted by God as something spiritual. These acts are performed not by complete reliance upon God's Spirit but by trusting in self strength.

These few examples illustrate how sin and self do differ from each other. As we proceed in our spiritual walk we shall discover many more instances of how sin may be absent but self fully present. It almost seems inevitable that self will creep into the most holy work and the noblest spiritual walk.

Having long been bound by sin the child of God easily construes freedom from its power to be life par excellence. Just here lurks the greatest danger in the days ahead for this one who now concludes that all pernicious elements within him have been rooted out. He is unaware that even if the old man has died to sin and the body of sin is withered, "sin" nevertheless has not died. It merely has become an unseated sovereign which if given the opportunity will put forth its best effort to regain its throne. The believer's experience of being delivered from sin may even continue but he is not thereby rendered perfect. He has yet to deal unremittingly with his "self."

How deplorable it is should Christians look upon themselves as wholly sanctified when, having sought sanctification, they experienced deliverance. They are ignorant of the truth that liberation from sin is only the first step in overcoming life. It is but the initial victory given by God as an assurance to them of the many more victories that are to follow. Triumph over sin is like a door: One step taken and you are in; triumph over self is like a pathway: you walk and walk for the rest of your days. Upon overthrowing sin we are called next to overcome ourselves-even the best of self, the zealous and religious self-daily.

If one knows only emancipation from sin but has had no experience of self-denial or loss of soul life, he places himself inescapably in the position of resorting to his natural soulful strength to accomplish God's will in his walk. He does not realize that, sin apart, two other powers reside within him, spirit power and soul power. Spirit power is God's power received spiritually at regeneration, while soul power is his own granted him naturally at birth.

Whether one is to be a spiritual man or not largely hinges upon how he handles these two forces within him. The believer enters the ranks of the spiritual by drawing upon the spiritual power to the exclusion of that of his soul. Should he use his soul power or even a combination of the two, the result inevitably shall be a soulful or carnal Christian. God's way is plain. We must deny everything originating in ourselves-what we are, what we have, what we can do-and move entirely by Him, daily apprehending the life of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Failure to understand or to obey leaves us no other alternative but to live hereafter by the power of the soul. A spiritual Christian therefore is one whose spirit is led by God's Spirit. He draws the power for his daily walk from the life given by the Holy Spirit Who indwells his spirit. He does not abide on earth seeking his own will

but the will of God. He does not trust in his cleverness to plan and to perform service towards God. The rule of his walk is to dwell quietly in the spirit, no further influenced or controlled by the outer man.

The soulish Christian is eminently different. Though he is in possession of a spirit power he does not draw upon it for his life. In his daily experience he persists in making the soul his life and continues to lean upon his self power. He follows the dictates of his pleasure and delight because he has failed to learn to obey God. To God's work he brings his natural wisdom, devising many ingenious arrangements. His

everyday existence is governed and affected by the outer man.

To recapitulate what has been said, the problem of the two natures has been answered but the problem of the two lives remains unsolved. The spirit life and the soul life coexist within us. While the first is in itself exceedingly strong, the second manages to control the entire being because it is so deeply rooted in man. Unless one is disposed to deny his soul life and permit his spirit life to grasp the reins, the latter has little chance to develop. This is abhorrent to the Father for the child of God deprives himself of spiritual growth. He must be instructed that overcoming sin, blessed though it surely is, is but the bare minimum of a believer's experience. There is nothing astonishing in it. Not to overcome sin is what ought to astonish us. Does not the Scripture legitimately ask: "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6.2) For to believe that the Lord Jesus died for us as our substitute is inseparable from believing that we have died with Him (Rom. 6.6). What should amaze us then is not the cessation of sinning in those who have died to sin but the continuance of that phenomenon in them as though yet alive. The first condition is quite normal; the second, altogether abnormal.

To be freed from sin is not a difficult task when viewed in the light of the finished, perfect and complete salvation of God. A believer must proceed to learn the more advanced and perhaps more formidable and deeper lesson of abhorring his life. Not only must we hate the sinful nature which comes from Adam but also the natural vitality upon which we now rely for our living. We must be willing to deny the good which is produced by the flesh as well as the evil of the flesh. Do not merely forsake all sins; in addition, deliver up this life of sin to death. A walk in the Holy Spirit is not only not committing sin but also not allowing self to abide. The Holy Spirit can manifest His power solely in those who live by Him. Whoever walks by his natural strength cannot expect to witness the mighty realities of the Holy Spirit. We need to be released from everything natural as well as from everything sinful. If we insist upon walking according to man, not just the sinful, but the allinclusive natural, man we reject the rule of the Holy Spirit in our lives. How can He exhibit His power if we are set free from sin and yet continue to think as "men" think, desire as "men" desire, live and work as "men" do? We are not leaning entirely upon the Holy Spirit of God to work in us. If we genuinely desire His fullness we first must break the all-pervasive influence of the soul.

THE EXPERIENCE OF A MIXED SOUL AND SPIRIT

We do not mean to imply that soulish believers experience nothing except what belongs to the soul; though saints of this type are plentiful. Soulish ones do enjoy some spiritual experiences. Those however are rather mixed with the soulical mingling with the spiritual. These believers are acquainted with the outline of a spiritual walk because the Holy Spirit has led them so to do. But due to many hindrances they frequently fall back upon natural energy to supply strength for their living, expecting to fulfill the holy requirements of God by their flesh. These follow their desires and ideas and seek sensual pleasure and mental wisdom. While they may be spiritual in knowledge, in point of fact they are soulish. The Holy Spirit genuinely dwells in their spirit and has accorded them the experience of conquering sin through the operation of the cross. But He is not allowed to lead their lives. While some may be ignorant of the law of the Spirit many others may love their soul life just too much to give it up.

Now spirit and soul are easy to distinguish in experience. Spiritual life is maintained simply by heeding the direction of the spirit's intuition. If a believer walks according to God's Spirit he will not originate or regulate anything; he will instead wait quietly for the voice of the Holy Spirit to be heard in his spirit intuitively and assume for himself the position of a subordinate. Upon hearing the inner voice he rises up to work, obeying the direction of intuition. By so

walking the believer remains a steadfast follower. The Holy Spirit alone is the Originator. Moreover he is not self-dependent. He does not employ his prowess in executing God's will. Whenever action is required the believer approaches God intently-fully conscious of his weakness-and petitions God to give him a promise. Having received God's promise he then acts, counting the power of the Holy Spirit as his. In an attitude such as this God will surely grant power according to His Word.

Precisely the opposite is the soulish life. Self is the center here. When a Christian is said to be soulish he is walking according to self. Everything originates from himself. He is governed not by the voice of the Holy Spirit in the inner man but rather by the thoughts, decisions and desires of his outer man. Even his feeling of joy arises from having his own wishes satisfied. It will be recalled that the body was said to be the shell of the soul, which in turn forms the sheath of the spirit. As the Holy Place is outside the Holy of Holies so the soul is outside the spirit. In such intimate proximity how easy it is for the spirit to be influenced by the soul. The soul has indeed been delivered from the tyranny of the body; it is controlled no longer by the lusts of the flesh; but a similar separation of the spirit from the control of the soul has not yet occurred in the soulish Christian. Before the believer had overcome his fleshly lusts his soul had been joint-partner with his body. They together constituted one enormous life, the other nature. As it was with soul and body so is it now with his spirit and his soul. The spirit is merged with the soul. The former provides the power while the latter gives the idea, with the result that his spirit is too often affected by his soul.

Because it is surrounded by the soul (even buried therein), the spirit is stimulated easily by the mind. A born again person ought to possess unspeakable peace in the spirit. Unfortunately this tranquillity is disturbed by the stimulating lust from the soul with its numerous independent desires and thoughts. Sometimes the joy which floods the soul overflows into the spirit, inducing the believer to think he is the happiest person in the world; at other times sorrow pervades and he becomes the most unhappy person. A soulish Christian frequently encounters such experiences. This is because the spirit and the soul remain undivided. They need to be split asunder.

When such believers bear some teaching on the division of spirit and soul, they would like very much to know where their spirit is. They may search diligently, but they are unable to sense the presence of their spirit. Without any real experience there, they naturally are at a loss how to distinguish their spirits from their souls. Since these two are so closely linked it is common for them to treat soulish experiences (such as joy, vision, love, etc.) as superlative spiritual ones.

Before a saint arrives at the stage of spirituality he is sure to be dwelling in a mixed condition. Not content with a quietude in his spirit, he will seek a joyous feeling. In his daily living the believer sometimes will follow the leading of intuitive knowledge and sometimes his thought, sensation or wish. Such a mixture of spirit and soul reveals that two antithetical sources reside in the believer: one belongs to God, one belongs to man: one is of the Spirit, the other is of himself: one is intuitive, the other rational: one is supernatural, the other natural: one belongs to the spirit, the other belongs to the soul. If the child of God carefully examines himself beneath the beam of God's light, he will perceive the two kinds of power within him. He likewise will recognize that sometimes he lives by the one life and at other times by the other. On the one hand he knows he must walk in faith by trusting in the Holy Spirit; on the other hand, he reverts to walking according to himself on the basis of what he terms spiritual feelings. He lives far more in the soul than in the spirit. The degree of his soulishness varies according to (1) his understanding of the spirit life with its principle of cooperating with God and (2) his actual yielding to the soul life. He can live entirely in an emotional, idea

ideational or activist world, or he can even live alternately by his soul and by his spirit. Unless he is instructed by God through the revelation of the Holy Spirit in his spirit, he shall be unable to abhor the soulish life and to love the spirit life. Whichever life he chooses determines the path he shall follow.