

THE EXPERIENCE OF SOULISH BELIEVERS

THE LIVING OF THE SOULISH BELIEVERS

The living of the soulish believers cannot be the same for everyone, due to individual differences. Each man in the world has his own personality. When one believes in the Lord and is regenerated (unto eternity), his personality is not annihilated. Otherwise, eternity future would not be interesting at all! Therefore, the soulish living of the believers differs with individuals. For this reason, we can speak only in general terms, mentioning those matters which are more prominent in the soulish living and describing briefly the experiences of different aspects in order that the children of God may compare their own experiences with these.

Soulish believers have a characteristic of being curious. They study biblical prophecies to know the things of the future that they may have the ideal information to satisfy their curious mind. Their apparel, speech, and conduct indicate that they have an attitude of being different and superior. They seek to achieve startling, instant success with many of their activities. Even before they believe in the Lord, they already have such an inclination, and afterwards it is still hard for them to overcome their natural life. They are not like spiritual believers who do not seek to understand any matter inquisitively. Soulish believers do not seek to reconcile their experiences with God's teaching, but pay attention mostly to the understanding in their mind; that is, they like to reason. What saddens them the most is not that their experience fails to catch up with their ideals, but rather that they cannot understand with their ideals and their mind the spiritual experience they lack. Having the error of some kind of self-deception, they think that whatever they understand mentally is what they have experienced. Actually, this is a great error.

Soulish believers often have an attitude of self-righteousness, though sometimes it cannot be detected easily from the outside. They are very stubborn with their trivial opinions. We should hold fast to the major truths recorded in the Bible, but we certainly can let others have the liberty concerning minor points. Although we think our understanding is very clear and that what we believe is without any mistake, to strain out a gnat and swallow a camel displeases the Lord. We should lay aside differences on small points and pursue the oneness on major points.

The mind of soulish believers is often disturbed by evil spirits so that their thoughts become confused, mixed up, and sometimes defiled. In their conversation they answer what is not questioned, and their mind travels at high speed, changing topics every so often and proving how scattered their thoughts are. Even when they pray and read the Bible, their body is present, but their mind is far away. In their deeds, either dealing with men or matters, they do not think—they act without forethought. Yet when others speak to them about their conduct and how one should conduct himself, they can select similar incidents from their deeds to illustrate how carefully they consider and act according to principle. Occasionally, they indeed think before they act. The conduct of the soulish believers is often very fickle.

Soulish believers are touched easily. Sometimes they are very excited and happy, while other times they are very depressed and sad. When they are happy, it seems the world is too small to hold them, and they want to fly away to heaven. But when they are sad, it seems they are superfluous in the world. Sometimes they are

extremely happy and stirred in their emotion, as if a fire were burning or a treasure had been found. Sometimes when their heart is not burning, they suddenly have a feeling of loss and become dejected and unhappy. Their joy and their dejection depend on their feelings. They do not have a living which is steady and unchanging. Their joy and their grief govern their living.

Most soulish believers are over-sensitive. They are very difficult to deal with because they think everything around them is directed at them. If they are slightly neglected, they become angry. They readily suspect that others' attitude toward them has changed; thus they become sorrowful, sad, and resentful. They can easily become intimate with others. They live in human affection to the extent that it becomes difficult for them to separate from others. If there is a slight change in such a relationship, it causes an unspeakable pain in their soul. Nevertheless, they think this is to suffer for the Lord.

God knows the weakness of the soulish believers—they often are self-centered, thinking that they are very special when they have some spiritual progress. Therefore, He often gives them special grace to enable them to have many extraordinary experiences, such as the feeling of joy and the feeling that the Lord is very near, very real, and touchable, in order that they may humble themselves and draw near to God who has given them the grace. However, these believers do not act according to God's desire. They do not give glory to God and draw near to Him simply because He has given them grace. On the contrary, they utilize the grace of God as the basis of their own boasting. They think that they have received such grace simply because they are stronger than others and that since they have such experiences they are therefore more spiritual than others. Soulsh believers mostly have sensuous joy and special experiences. All these cause them to think that they are more spiritual than others. Little do they know that actually these are the evidences of their being soulsh. The spiritual ones are those who live by faith and not by feelings.

Sometimes it is not the feeling that causes the soulsh believers to change. Oftentimes their heart is divided by external affairs. People, things, and affairs in the world often invade their inner man, causing them to lose the peace in their spirit. If you place a soulsh believer in a joyful environment, he will be joyful, but if you place him in a difficult situation, he will be sorrowful. He lacks the power to create his own environment. He becomes red when he is close to vermilion, and he becomes black when he is close to ink.

Soulsh believers often live a kind of emotional life. Before the believers become spiritual, the Lord often enables them to feel His presence. Soulsh believers delight in this kind of feeling the most. When they have such a feeling, they think that they have reached the supreme state and have made great strides on the way to spirituality. Although there are times that the Lord does not give them such a feeling, because they have not reached a complete life of faith, very often the Lord gives them the feeling of His presence in order to gradually train them not to rely on feelings but to depend on faith alone. However, they do not understand the intention of the Lord. They think that when they have such a feeling, their spiritual condition is at the highest point; otherwise, they think it is at the lowest.

A very common mark of soulish believers is talkativeness. It is not that they do not know that they should be taciturn, but when they are emotionally excited, they have a great urge to get into endless speaking. Once they talk, they lack the power of self-control. Their mind seems to lose control when their mouth opens, pouring out endless words like an avalanche. It is not that they have not considered what to speak but rather that once they speak they cannot restrain themselves. Whatever they speak proceeds out from the thoughts which they have been thinking all day long. They know that they should not be garrulous, but once they indulge in speaking, they cannot withdraw. However, when other people talk too much, they realize that it is inappropriate, and they criticize secretly in their heart. Since their words are many, offense is unavoidable. They lose either harmony with others because of arguments or love because of criticism, or they even lose control of their heart because of talkativeness. Since soulish believers are talkative, sudden thoughts surely come to them in their conversation, causing them to change topics or expand the thought in their conversation.

Although soulish believers know that saints should be godly and should not speak words of jesting, they always like to speak and to hear jokes when conversing with others. They like to hear any kind of lively or youthful talk, or whatever talk can cheer their mood. Jestings is indispensable to soulish believers. Yet this is not absolutely true, because sometimes they abhor ungodly talk, except that they cannot do so consistently. Whenever their emotion is stirred, inevitably they follow the way of merriment to pursue pleasure.

Soulish believers are fond of "pleasant looks" and have a concept of aesthetics. They like to follow the artistic view of the worldly people and change their own taste accordingly. They do not have the attitude of being dead toward the human concept of beauty. Therefore, it is unavoidable that they are often proud of having the view of an artist.

Soulish believers often act in extreme ways. They go either to one extreme or the other. They may either admire art extremely or not care for beauty at all. Even their shabby clothes may not bother them. Instead, they consider this as their suffering with the Lord. Little do they know that believers should pursue cleanliness (not beauty).

Soulish believers who are intellectual express their being soulish by assuming themselves to be "Bohemians." When there is a breezy morning or a moonlit night, they will invariably chant in a heroic or mournful tone. Oftentimes they grumble about their lives and even shed tears of anguish uncontrollably. They love literature and admire its beauty. They also like to hum and intone as if by reciting some poems they have the marvelous feeling of transcending the worldly. They also enjoy traveling and the sights of mountains and rivers to thus be closer to nature. Very often they have the thought of escaping from the world and living in seclusion because they see the worsening condition of the world. While they are pondering such thoughts, they think how transcendent and how noble they are! It seems that all the other believers are defiled and unbearably vulgar. Such believers often consider themselves very spiritual, not realizing how utterly soulish they are! Furthermore, it is very difficult for such soulish ones to enter into a wholly spiritual realm. They are

completely controlled by their emotion. Their danger is that they are complacent and do not realize their peril.

After soulish believers have learned the doctrine concerning the differentiation between the spirit and the soul, they can easily understand such a teaching with their natural mind. Spontaneously they can find many soulish activities in other people's lives and easily understand other's soulish acts and thoughts, but they do not realize that they are as soulish as the ones whom they accuse of being soulish and that they are actually no less soulish than others.

Most soulish believers have a great deal of spiritual knowledge, but their experiences can never match what they know. Because they know much, they also condemn much in their eyes. Thus, criticizing others becomes a common characteristic of soulish believers. They receive grace to have knowledge, but unlike spiritual believers, they do not receive grace to have humility. Therefore, there is a certain hardness in their dealings with people. To those who are closely associated with them, they give the impression of having a certain "stiffness," a hard shell. They are not like spiritual believers whose outer shell has been broken so that they are approachable and kind to others.

Regardless how much soulish believers give credit to the grace of God and give glory to God outwardly, all their thoughts are always centered on "self." Whether they consider themselves good or bad, their thoughts can never depart from themselves. They have not yet lost themselves in God.

Soulish believers are very proud. Since their thoughts are always centered on themselves, they cannot help but be proud. What hurts them the most is being set aside either in work or in the evaluation of others. It is very unbearable to them when other people misunderstand them and talk about their shortcomings. They are not yet like their more spiritual brothers who gladly accept what God has arranged for them, whether exaltation or rejection. They are not willing to be despised by others, to appear inferior. Even when they have received more grace of God to know the actual condition of their natural life so that they realize how corrupt they are and humble themselves before God, even regarding themselves as the worst in the world, they think that they are more humble than others and boast in their humility! Pride is often in the deepest part of their heart, unknown to others or even to themselves.

THE WORKS OF SOULISH BELIEVERS

Soulish believers are not behind others in the matter of works. They are very active, zealous, and willing. However, this is not to say that they labor this way because of God's command. Rather, they do so as they like and according to their own enthusiasm. They think that it is always good to do God's work, but they do not know that it is really good only when they do the work which God gives them. They do not have a heart of trusting nor a time of quietness. They have not sincerely sought the will of God. They work according to their own ideas; their mind is full of plans and schemes because they labor in such a way that they consider themselves far more advanced than idle brothers. Little do they know that if they have obtained God's grace, it is easier for them to have a spiritual walk in life than zealous believers.

The works of soulish believers are mainly based upon feelings. They are able to work when they feel happy within; otherwise, they stop completely. When they have the sensation of a burning in their heart and are thrilled with an unspeakable joy, they can witness to people for hours without feeling weary. However, if they do not have such a feeling and instead feel a coldness in their heart and are not excited, even when facing the greatest need, such as someone dying, they simply speak a few words or even do not speak at all. Once they have the feeling, they can run a thousand miles; otherwise, they will not move even a step. They cannot ignore their feelings and talk to the Samaritan woman with an empty stomach or speak to Nicodemus with weary eyes.

Soulsh believers enjoy busy work. However, unlike spiritual believers, whenever there is much to do they cannot maintain the quietness in their spirit to accomplish God's command unhurriedly. Whenever there is much to do, their heart is greatly disturbed. When there is confusion in outward affairs, their hearts also become confused. Their heart is governed by external matters. "Drawn about with much serving" (Luke 10:40) and "troubled" in heart are the characteristics of the works of every soulsh believer.

Soulsh believers are easily discouraged in their works. They do not have a steadfast faith to trust God who is able to accomplish His own work. They do not understand God's "law of faith." They are regulated by their own feelings and the external environment. Whenever they feel they have failed, although this may not necessarily be true, they become discouraged. When they see the outward environment is gloomy, they faint. They have not yet rested in God.

Soulsh believers do not have long-range views; therefore, they are easily discouraged. What they see is merely in the present. The present victory causes them to rejoice, and the present defeat makes them sad. They have not yet learned to see the end of a matter with faith. They desire to have some momentary victory to comfort the longing of their heart. Without this, they cannot trust God in the dark and go on unwearily.

It is very easy for soulsh believers to find shortcomings in others although they are not necessarily stronger than others. They are apt to criticize others and rarely can forgive. They cannot follow others' original intentions. When they investigate and correct the shortcomings in others, they often have a sense of self-satisfaction, exaltation, and pride. Sometimes when they help people, what they do may be good and legitimate, but often their motive is not proper.

Soulsh believers are often hasty. They cannot wait on God. They always do things in a hurried, flustered, and urgent manner. Even in doing the works of God, they are pushed by their enthusiasm and ardor and simply cannot wait for God's clear directing, leading, and opening of the way.

The minds of soulsh believers are often completely occupied with their works. They consider, plan, deliberate, and anticipate. In their mind they often remember their work—the successes, the failures, or other results. Sometimes they envision the future of their works. When they think of the bright side, they are joyful beyond control. When they think of the dark side, they are overcome by sorrows. In either

case, they may even neglect their sleeping and eating. At any rate, their mind is fully occupied with their work. Do they think that much of their Lord? Many times this is not the case. They think more of their work than of their Lord. In their view, the work of the Lord is very important, but often they forget the Lord who gives him work. The work of the Lord becomes the center of everything, while the Lord of the work becomes secondary.

Since soulish believers lack real spiritual insight, their actions unconsciously follow the direction of the "sudden thoughts" of their mind. Hence, they often speak inappropriate words in their work. Their words do not meet others' need. Nevertheless, because they themselves presume that there "ought" to be such a need in people, they utter useless words in trying to help others. They may reproach when one needs sympathy; they may comfort when one should be admonished. This is because they lack spiritual understanding and depend too much on their own limited thoughts. Even after their words have proven to be futile, they still are not convinced.

Soulish believers make many plans and have many opinions. Therefore, it is very difficult for them to work with others. They have what they themselves presume to be right, so they expect others to fully agree with them. Their condition for working together with others is that others must absolutely agree with their views. To them, even a minor idea is crucially related to the truth once delivered to the saints. They cannot allow others to proceed to work if there is any difference in opinion. They know that there must be no opinion, but if any opinion needs to die, it is not theirs. They realize that sects are not scriptural, but it is not their particular sect that must die. Whatever they do not believe, they consider as heresy. However, those who are soulish as they are reject their belief. Not only so, affection is very important in their work. They love to have their own small clique, their own so-called inner circle. They are not able to work together with other children of God. They love to partition God's children according to their liking.

In preaching, soulish believers cannot depend completely on God. They rely either on their own illustrations, interpretations, and clever ideas or on their own persuasive power. Perhaps there are a few famous ones who rely completely on themselves—"Because I said so, people must listen." They may depend on God but also on themselves. Therefore, it is necessary for them to have very skillful preparations. The time they spend in prayer, in seeking God's will, in waiting for the power from above is less than the time they spend on preparing outlines, in gathering materials, and in hard and careful thinking. They memorize the entire message and simply recite it at the time of preaching. The mind occupies the primary place in such work.

Naturally, in such preaching, one relies on the message more than on the Lord. The entire heart of these believers depends on what they preach to move human hearts instead of on the Holy Spirit to reveal to men their need and the Lord's supply to fill up their lack. What they emphasize and trust is their own speaking, which may be entirely the truth. However, without the enlivening by the Holy Spirit, such truth is of no profit. To rely on the words instead of on the Holy Spirit produces very few spiritual results. People may welcome or accept such speaking, but it can only reach their mind.

Soulsh believers are fond of using sensational words in their preaching, whereas real spiritual believers can give very clear and lucid teaching which none may have ever conceived of before, because the Lord has given them much experience. Soulsh believers like to imitate this in their work because imitating is one of their characteristics. They think that only this kind of speaking will be fascinating to the listeners. In preaching they like to use strange imaginations. If some peculiar thoughts come upon them while walking, talking, eating, or sleeping, they will surely jot them down for future use, not questioning whether such thoughts are revealed in their spirit by the Holy Spirit and are experienced by them or are merely sudden thoughts which come to their mind.

Some soulsh believers delight in helping others, but because they themselves have not reached the state of maturity, in helping others they do not know how to dispense food in due season. This is not to say that they do not have knowledge; actually they have much knowledge. When they see anything wrong in others or are told of some difficulty, they pretend to be experienced believers trying to help. Based upon their limited insight and some ability of discernment which they have learned from more experienced believers, they speak fluently about biblical teachings and the experiences of the saints. In helping others, soulsh believers often tell all that they know and perhaps sometimes go beyond to tell what they do not know, which is merely their supposition. When they are helping others, they always pour forth everything which has been stored in their mind and exhibit one thing after another. They do not ask at all whether this is the particular illness of this particular person. Or, is this the need of this one? Or, is this one able to suddenly take in so many teachings? They are like Hezekiah who opened all his storehouses and showed all his treasures.

Sometimes it is not that there is someone drawing them out to speak, but they are stirred suddenly by their emotion, and they pour out so many spiritual doctrines, perhaps many of which are merely ideals. Sometimes such behavior is simply to show off their own knowledge.

However, this differs according to individuals. Some can be completely silent, not uttering a word. Even when there is a tremendous need, when they should speak to help others, they keep their mouth tightly closed. They are suppressed by their natural shyness and fear; therefore, they are not free. They can sit beside those talkative believers and criticize them in their heart, but their tacitness is not in any way less soulsh.

Because soulsh believers have not been deeply rooted in God and have not learned how to be hidden in God, they are often visible. Even when they are doing spiritual work, they always seek to occupy the conspicuous position. When they attend a meeting, they do not expect to hear others but rather to be heard by others. They are overjoyed when they are held in high esteem.

Soulsh believers love to learn to use spiritual terminology. They delight in learning all the terms, phrases, and special expressions. When there is an appropriate occasion, they will use them one after another. While working, they use spiritual words as the material for their speaking, although perhaps without their heart. This is also true in their praying.

Soulish believers are very ambitious, always desiring to stand out among men. They have a strong sense of vainglory in the Lord's work. They aspire to be powerful workers, greatly used by the Lord. What is the reason? They want to gain some position for themselves, that is some glory. They like to compare themselves with others—probably not so much with those whom they do not know, but with their co-workers and those they know. Such comparison and secret competition are very fierce. They look down at those who are behind them, regarding them as falling far too short. Compared with those who have higher and deeper spiritual experiences, they think they are in no way inferior. They always desire to be great and to be the head. They hope that their work will be prosperous and that it will be presentable. Naturally these things are deeply hidden in their heart, unknown to others. Of course, sometimes these thoughts are mingled with other purer thoughts. Nevertheless, the prevalence of such thoughts is a fact.

It is easy for soulish believers to become self-satisfied. If the Lord were to use them to save a person, they would be exceedingly happy. If they were to succeed once, they would be elated, considering themselves successful in the spiritual world. Should they know a little or learn a little, they think that they have reached a very profound stage. A common indication of soulish believers is that they, like a small vessel, are easily filled. They do not have the view of seeing how great the depth of the ocean is. As long as there is some water in their bucket, they are complacent. They have not yet lost themselves in God. Otherwise, whatever happens will be to them as if nothing has happened. Their eyes remain focused on their puny selves. Therefore, they are affected very easily by a small gain or loss. Such a capacity is the reason God cannot use them more. If they become so happy and boast to such an extent when ten persons are saved, what will happen if a thousand persons are saved?

After some successful work in their preaching, soulish believers always have a thought that they are very wonderful. Often they dwell upon their superiority and self-delight, thinking that they are different from others, "greater than the greatest apostle," to sum this up in one word—wonderful. Sometimes they are sad because others do not regard them so. They think that others treat them in this way simply because they are without eyes to recognize that they are the prophets from Nazareth. Sometimes they think that in their message there are several ideas which no one has ever discovered, and if the audience cannot appreciate the marvelous points, they become troubled. After some successful work, they will dwell in their self-satisfaction for a day or two, or at least they will feel self-contented for a few hours. Under such a condition they often think that soon the church of God will see a great evangelist, revivalist, or writer in them. If no one pays attention to them, how sorrowful they are!

Soulish believers are believers without principles. Their words and deeds do not follow definite principles. Their walk of life is according to their emotion and mind. However, they feel or think, they act, perhaps contrary to their usual conduct. Change can easily be noticed in soulish believers after they have done a work. They will become whatever they preach. If they preach a message on patience, they surely will be very patient for one or two days afterwards. If they exhort people to praise God, immediately afterwards they will continually praise God. But these do not last long. This is because they live according to their emotions. Their own words stir up their emotion so that they live in such a way. However, once the emotion has passed, everything is over.

A particular point with soulish believers is that they have many gifts. Believers who are bound by sins do not have so many gifts, and neither do spiritual believers. God gives soulish believers more gifts with the intention that they may voluntarily deliver all the gifts to death and regain them more gloriously in resurrection. However, these believers are not willing to deliver the gifts to death, but rather, exhaustively use them. The gifts originally given by God should have been used by God for His own glory. However, soulish believers consider the gifts to be their own, but the work they do to be of God. Therefore, they do not trust the Holy Spirit to lead and use them but instead act according to their own ideas. Furthermore, when the work is successful they render glory to themselves.

Of course, this kind of self-glorification, self-boasting, and self-admiration is done secretly. Regardless how humble they are and how much they render glory to God, they cannot help being self-centered in their thoughts: "The glory should be unto God, this is right, but unto God and me!"

Since they have many gifts, good thoughts, and rich emotions, they can easily arouse people's interest and stir their heart. Therefore, soulish believers are often very attractive. When they work, they are easily welcomed by common believers. Actually they lack spiritual power, not having the power of the Holy Spirit's flowing rivers of living water. What they have is limited to themselves. What people see is what they "have," and it stops there in them so that they cannot cause others to receive spiritual life. They outwardly appear very rich, but actually they are extremely dry.

We must add a few words here: believers do not have to wait to be fully delivered from the domination of sin to become soulish believers and have the above-mentioned experiences. According to the actual experience of the believers, many are, on the one hand, under the domination of the body to commit sins and, on the other hand, under the influence of the soul to live by themselves. If we look at this according to the teaching of the Bible, it is even clearer because both are of the "flesh." Sometimes they may commit sins, and at other times they may follow themselves. Sometimes they either follow the body or the soul. In fact, many believers are such. If a believer can commit sin on the one hand and be soulish on the other hand, then he can also be soulish on the one hand and have some spiritual experiences on the other hand. At any rate, the experience of a believer is a very complicated matter. This, of course, refers to the details, but the main point is the same in principle. The most important question to ask ourselves is whether we have been purged from those things of dishonor. If not, then we still belong to those things of dishonor. Even if we have spiritual experience, we are still not spiritual. It is only when we no longer have the experience of sin and self that we are spiritual. Therefore, a believer may have many marvelous feelings of the soul yet still have many lusts of the body. He can also have many spiritual experiences yet still have the feelings of the soul. Of course, there are some who are delivered from one realm and then enter into the other.