

THE DANGERS OF SOULISH LIVING

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SOUL-LIFE

We have mentioned before how the soul-life is manifested. Now let me sum it up in the following sentence. The manifestation of the soul-life can very generally be classified into four categories: (1) using one's own natural ability; (2) being obstinate, stubborn, and disobedient to God; (3) pretending to be wise, having many opinions and plans; and (4) seeking spiritual experience through feelings. This is because (1) the soul-life itself is the natural ability, and the organ of the soul is divided into (2) the will, (3) the mind, and (4) the emotion.

Because the main parts of the soul are the mind, the emotion, and the will, many Christians, even though they are all soulish, have experiences that are quite different from one another. Some are inclined toward the mind, some lean toward the emotion, and some are bent toward the will. Although these aspects of living are totally different, they all are soulish living. Perhaps a believer who has an inclination toward the mind may discern another who inclines toward the emotion as being soulish, and in the meantime the one having an inclination toward the emotion may, in return, discern the mind-inclined one as being soulish. Actually these two persons are both soulish. The most important thing for believers to do is apply the light revealed by God to illuminate their true condition so that the truth might set them free, instead of using their new knowledge as the yardstick to criticize others. If the children of God are willing to apply God's light to illuminate themselves, their spiritual life will not be as it is today.

The seeking of the mind and its receiving and spreading of truth are the main manifestations of one's being soulish. Even the most spiritual experience and the highest truth merely become a cultivation of the mind. Although one's life is not unaffected, his original goal is to satisfy the mind. When believers are soulish and are controlled by the mind, their mind is full of spiritual desires. But they rely on their own thought more than on God's revelation. What they plan with their mind is more than their prayer and dependence on God.

The experiences that are most often misunderstood as being spiritual relate to the emotion. A believer who is soulish and inclined toward the emotion is always seeking for feelings in his life. He wants to feel the presence of God in his heart or in his bodily organs, to feel the burning of "love-fire," to feel happy, to feel a high spirit, and to feel the work moving smoothly. The truly spiritual believer sometimes has these kinds of feelings also, but he does not depend on these kinds of feelings to go on and to be glad. The emotional believer can serve the Lord only when he has these kinds of feelings. When he does not have such feelings, he will not go on even one step further.

The will is a common manifestation of the soulish life. The will is the organ of one's self-governing. Thus, through the will a soulish believer makes "self" the focal point of all his thoughts, words, acts, and living. What he wants to understand is for himself. What he desires to feel is for his own enjoyment. The work he does is according to his own plan. The goal of his behaving is to glorify himself. His focal point is himself.

We have already seen that in the Bible the word soul is translated as living thing and animal. Therefore, the meaning of this word in the original language was "the animal life." This makes us understand what the manifestation of the soul-life really is. We may use one very fitting sentence to demonstrate the life and work of a soulish believer: they are nothing but "animal activities" or "animal liveliness." He makes many plans, he does much work, his mind is busy, and his emotion is distracted—his whole being within and without is full of restlessness and confusion. When his emotion is stirred up, the other parts of his being are surely excited. But when his emotion is cooled down, even though his feelings may become cooler, he is still very bewildered in his mind and in his will. The soulish believer's living is full of activity all day long. He is active either in his body, or in his mind and emotion. This kind of life is nothing but a life full of "animal liveliness," far away from the spiritual life of God as the Lord of everything.

In conclusion, the work of the soul is to cause the believer to live by his own natural life; to work and to serve God by his own ability and will; to seek to know the Lord, draw close to the Lord, and know the Lord's presence by his feelings; and to use the ability of his mind to understand the Word of God, to calculate, to plan, and to infer.

If a believer does not receive God's revelation of Himself and thus serves God and does work for God through the ability of his created life, he will cause himself to suffer the greatest spiritual loss, and what he does will lack true spiritual fruit. A believer must be under God's revelation so that he can realize that it is very shameful before God for him to use the ability of the created animal life to please God and to do spiritual work. When we see an ambitious child having high self-esteem and being boastful and self-exalted, we feel shameful for him. This is the same way God looks at our "animal activities!" May we have more experiences of being in the ashes than of being preeminent before others.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF BELIEVERS

Many believers cannot perceive the damage of their soulish experiences. They only consider that to sin in doing "things of the flesh" could pollute the spirit, and this is the thing that should be truly rejected and eliminated. The soul-life is the common life of all people, and all animals have this life. Is it not reasonable for us to live by this life? We are not committing any sins, just living by the natural life. Is anything wrong with this? If a believer merely receives teachings in his mind, then no matter whether he opposes or agrees, he can never see in his heart the reason for the biblical teaching that the soul-life should be rejected. For instance, if he does transgress the law of God and sin against God, that, of course, is not right. But if he tries his best to do good and develop all the good virtues within him, what is wrong with this? As he is fervently doing work for God, even though he does not depend on God's power, he thinks he is doing God's work. Maybe there are many things which are really not God's will for him to do. However, what he is doing is not sinful but is the best. What can be wrong with this? Since God has given me many gifts and intelligence, why am I not allowed to work with these? While I work, is this not the right time for me to utilize my talents? If one does not have any talent, of course, there is nothing to say. But if one has talents, is this not a good opportunity for him to bring forth his talents and use them?

Furthermore, of course, it was wrong in the past that one did not pay attention to the Word of God. But now, how can it be wrong for him to use his mind most diligently to seek the meaning of the Bible? Can there be evil in reading the Bible? As there is much truth which I do not yet understand, if I did not exercise my mind to study it, would it not be the case that I have to wait for a long time before I have the opportunity to understand it? When God gave us a mind, did He not intend for us to use it? When we use our mind to plan God's work, we are not committing a sin. Rather, it is all for God's sake. Why can we not do this?

Furthermore, it is also out of our most sincere heart to seek the feeling of the presence of God. When my life has sometimes left me dry and my work became of no interest, God many times has caused me to have a feeling of the love of the Lord Jesus as though there were a warm fire burning in my heart, making me feel very happy. I could feel that He was with me as though I could have touched Him. Is this not the peak point of our spiritual life? Many times when I lost this kind of feeling, I felt that my life was very dry, tasteless, cold, and without merit. At such times, I would earnestly desire, seek, and pray in order to get back this kind of good feeling. How can this be wrong?

The above are the things which many believers may want to say in their hearts, for they cannot differentiate between what is spiritual and what is soulish. They have not yet received the personal revelation from the Holy Spirit that can make them aware of the evil of their natural life. They have to be before God more often and be willing to learn more, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to them how many evil things are in their own natural good lives. To do this, one must be honest, humble, and willing to eliminate what the Holy Spirit enlightens him to eliminate. Having done this, the Holy Spirit will at a suitable time show him how corrupt his own natural life is.

The Holy Spirit will let such a one realize that all his work and life are merely centered on and motivated by his "self," and that he does not allow the Lord to be Lord over all things. All the good deeds he has done are done according to himself. Many among them may be simply for his own glory. All the works he does are done not by the way of seeking God's will, not by being willing to submit to God, follow God's leading, and trust in God's power. He does nothing except what is according to his own will, having his own way in everything. Thus, all his outward prayer and seeking God's will are merely hypocritical. Although he applies the gift given to him by God, he only single-mindedly thinks and boasts of the gift he received, and he sets aside the Lord who gave the gift. Although he has many gifts, he simply uses these gifts and never cares for the will of the Lord who gave him the gifts. Although he zealously seeks the words of the Lord, he is not willing to wait for God's time. His asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to him and to make him understand is merely to seek for knowledge so as to satisfy the desire of his mind. Although he seeks God's presence, wanting to feel the Lord's love and closeness, this is not for the Lord. He simply wants to make himself happy. It is not because he loves the Lord, but it is because he loves that kind of feeling, for that feeling makes him feel refreshed, happy, and as having the glory of "the third heavens." All his living and work are only centered on himself, hoping to make himself happy.

It is after a revelation of the Holy Spirit that the believer realizes how abominable his own life is and understands the former foolishness of upholding his own soul-life. This kind of revelation does not come suddenly but gradually. It does not happen once for all, but occurs again and again. When the Holy Spirit shines on a believer with light for the first time, he repents in the light and is willing to put the soul-life to death. But since man's heart is very wicked, after a little while, perhaps just a few days, the heart of self-confidence, self-love, and self-amusement in the believer returns again. Therefore, this kind of revelation comes frequently so that the believer may be willing to renounce his soul-life. But the most pitiful situation is that there is hardly anyone who would automatically submit to the Lord and have the sight of the Lord in these matters. It is always after the Holy Spirit has allowed the believer to fall numerous times and experience many defeats that he becomes willing to renounce his soul-life. But even if he is willing, how incomplete the willingness is, and how easily the willingness is liable to change!

Believers should abandon foolishness. We should accept God's viewpoint and consider our life as truly unable to please God. We should have a heart without fear to let the Holy Spirit expose all the pitiful places of our soul-life one by one. We should by faith trust God's appraisal of our life and be willing to wait for the Holy Spirit to reveal our life to us through the Word. Only by this will He be able to lead us on the pathway of deliverance from our soul-life.

THE DANGER OF A BELIEVER'S BEING SOULISH

When believers have not reached or are not willing to reach what God wants them to reach, they are inevitably in danger. Since God's goal is for the believers to live in the spirit, not in the soul, neither in the body, if they do not live in the spirit, they will suffer loss. There are at least three kinds of danger:

A. The Danger of Being Suppressed in Spirit

All works of the Holy Spirit are done in the spirit of man. The order of God's working is first to have the Holy Spirit moving in the human spirit, then to shine as light in the mind (soul), and then to have His work being carried out by the body. This order is very important.

Since a believer is born of the Spirit, he should walk by the Spirit. Only in this way will he then be able to understand God's will, work with the Holy Spirit, and overcome all the schemes of the enemy. The spirit of a believer should be very living. Believers should know how to follow the activity of the spirit and not quench its action, thus letting the Holy Spirit carry out His work through the spirit. The Holy Spirit needs the cooperation of the human spirit so that He can make the believers victorious in their ordinary everyday living, always ready, able to work on command. (Before long, we will talk about the problem of the spirit.)

However, many believers do not understand the work of the spirit and cannot distinguish between what is spiritual and what is soulish. Sometimes they even misinterpret what is spiritual as soulish, and soulish as spiritual. Consequently, they greatly utilize much soulish ability to live and work, and even suppress the life of the spirit. They actually walk according to the soul, but they think that they walk according to the spirit. This kind of foolishness causes one's spirit to be unable to

work together with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this stops the work of the Holy Spirit on him.

When a believer lives in the soul, he always walks according to the thoughts, imaginations, plans, and visions of his mind. He seeks after all the happy feelings and walks according to those feelings. The end result is that if he often has the experience of these feelings, he will be happy. If he does not, then he will feel weighted down as if he can not even crawl. Therefore, this causes him to not live in his spiritual life but to live in his feelings, changing his living according to feelings. This is to say that a believer no longer acts and behaves according to the central point, the spirit within him, but is attracted to live in the feelings of his outward soul and body. Thus, the spiritual consciousness is overcome by the soul and body. This causes a believer to become very dull to the consciousness of the spirit. As a result, all the consciousness he has is that of the soul or of the body, thus causing him to lose the true consciousness of the spirit toward God. In this way, the cooperation of the spirit and God will be lost. The growth of the spiritual life will be suppressed and impeded. The spirit will be unable to work to make the believer obtain ability and guidance to fight the battle and to worship. If the spirit does not have the complete freedom to rule within a man, if a man does not draw out the power of the spirit and live a life in this world which lets the Spirit be the master of everything, he cannot grow into maturity. Since the consciousness of the spirit is very fine and delicate, unless a man learns how to follow and discern this sense, how will he be able to detect it, especially when there is an additional outside disturbance of the feelings of his soul-life, which are rough and tough? Not only will the feeling of the soul confuse the consciousness of the spirit, but it will also suppress it.

B. The Danger of Shrinking Back into the Sphere of the Body

Many of the things we see in Galatians 5 as "works of the flesh" are naturally the lusts which issue out of man's body. However, not a few of them are also the work of the soul. "Factions, divisions, sects" (v. 20), etc., clearly issue out of man's soul, that is, his personality. Because the believers have many different thoughts and opinions, these things result. But what we need to pay attention to is that these issues of the soul are ranked together with the sins of the body: "fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,...bouts of drunkenness, carousings"! This reminds us how deeply connected the soul and the body are. Actually speaking, there is no possibility that the soul and the body can be separated. This is because the body we now have is the "soulish body" (1 Cor. 15:44). Therefore, if a believer only seeks to overcome his sinful nature but does not seek to overcome his natural life, then, even though he might have the experience of temporarily overcoming his sins, it will not be too long before he again falls into the sphere of the body and of sin. Of course, he may not commit any filthy sins again, but the word sin is what he cannot get rid of.

We should know that the cross is the place and the means God uses to deal with the "old creation." The cross does not count how many items there are in us to be dealt with. Rather, it deals with the whole "old creation" in itself. A believer cannot come to the place of the cross only to receive the grace of the substitutive death without also receiving the deliverance of co-death. Once you receive the Lord as your Savior by faith, whether you understand only the aspect of the substitutive death or you

understand more, His Holy Spirit works continuously through the new life within, spontaneously making you hate sin and leading you to seek after the other aspect of experiencing the co-death. If you keep resisting the desire of this new life, although you will not lose the life, you will lose the enjoyment of the blessing of that life, that is, "the joy of your salvation." Likewise, if you know the power of the salvation of the cross which enables you to overcome the sinful nature, the Holy Spirit will keep leading you to go ahead and pursue the experience of overcoming the natural life. The cross will not leave its work half-done. The cross will not stop its work. Rather, it will work deeper time and time again. If the "old creation" has not been completely crucified in experience, the cross will never stop working. Its goal is to destroy completely that which is of Adam.

If a child of God has received grace and experienced deliverance from sins but does not go further and seek to overcome the natural life, and continues to live in his soul-life, he will see that his soul once again joins together with the body, leading him to go backward and causing him to again commit the sin from which he was once delivered. As with one sailing against the flow, if he does not advance, he will go backward. If the cross does not work deeper in us, then before long what has been accomplished by the cross will in effect become as though it had not been accomplished. This tells us why many believers, who have once had the experience of being delivered from sin, later experience backsliding. If the life of the old creation continues to exist in the believer, he will join together with the nature of the old creation before too long.

C. The Danger of Being Used by the Power of Darkness

The book of James was written to the believers. Verses 14 and 15 of chapter three say clearly what the relationship between the soul-life and the work of Satan is: "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which descends from above, but is earthly, soulish, demonic." We see here that there is a kind of wisdom which comes from Satan. This kind of wisdom is also from man's soul. This causes us to conclude that this kind of wisdom is the result of the work of Satan in man's soul. This is very clear. "The flesh" is the factory of the devil, but the work of Satan on the soul is no less than his work in the body. These two verses tell us that envying and strife occur due to the believer's seeking of knowledge. This is because the devil works in man's soul-life. A believer may only know that the enemy can tempt man to sin but may not know that he can also give thoughts to man. The fall of man was due to man's love of knowledge and love of wisdom. Even now Satan still uses this to cause a believer to keep his soul-life as a machine for his work.

Satan's plan is to preserve a believer's "old creation," and the more the better. If he cannot make a believer keep his sin, he will use the foolishness and unwillingness of the believer to preserve the believer's natural life. Otherwise, the armies of Hades would soon lose their jobs. If a believer would join with the Lord more in his spirit, the life of the Holy Spirit would flow more into his spirit, and the cross would daily work more deeply. Thus the believer would be delivered more from the "old creation," and the devil would have fewer places to work. We should know that all Satan's temptations, attacks, and work are in our "old creation." Our "new creation"

is the life of God Himself, upon which Satan will never waste his energy working. Therefore, Satan must devise a way to make a believer keep some of the "old creation," either sin or the good natural life, through which he can continue to do his work. Therefore, the enemy troubles the believer again and again and confuses the believer, letting him, although having hated sins, still love his own life.

When a believer was still a sinner, he was "doing the desires of the flesh." This refers to sins, especially those which are related to the body. "And of the thoughts." This refers to the soul-life (Eph. 2:3). However, verse 2 tells us that these two are under the operation of the evil spirit. Our purpose is to let the believer understand that not only is the body the place wherein Satan works, but also the soul is what the enemy likes. What we would now emphasize is that the believer was saved to be delivered not only from his sins, but also from his natural life. Oh, may the Holy Spirit open our eyes to let us know how important this step is. If a believer is delivered from the power of sin and the soul-life, layer by layer, the work of the enemy will be a great failure.

Simply because a believer is soulish, not knowing how to guard his own mind, the evil spirit can very easily utilize man's natural wisdom to make his scheme a success. He can easily put misunderstanding and prejudice into man's mind unconsciously, causing man to have doubts toward God's truth and man's honesty. The work of the Holy Spirit within man is greatly frustrated by an evil spirit's occupation of man's own mind. Although man's intention may not be wrong, his thoughts are betrayed by his mind. These good ideas resist the work of the Holy Spirit just as the foolishness of the worldly people does. The work of an evil spirit is not only this. Sometimes an evil spirit can give a vision or other wonderful thoughts to a believer, making him think that since this is supernatural, it must be of God, thus deluding him to the uttermost. Before the soul-life is put to death, it is impossible for the mind of a believer to not be curious, exhibiting such phenomena as "wanting," "grabbing," and "searching." Thus, an evil spirit indeed has the opportunity to work.

The emotion part of the soul-life of a believer is also very likely to be pushed by the enemy into doing his work. Because a believer is eager to have a feeling of happiness and anxious to have feelings of the Holy Spirit, of the love of the Lord Jesus, and of the presence of God, the evil spirit lets him have many strange feelings, exciting him in his natural life. The evil spirit even lets the feeling organs of the body have many strange experiences. All this renders the small voice of the Holy Spirit and the delicate function of the intuition of man's spirit suppressed and unable to work. (The Lord willing, we will discuss these problems in detail in the latter part of this book.)

If a believer has not dealt with his soul-life, he will suffer great loss in the spiritual warfare. In Revelation 12:11 we see that not loving the soul-life even unto death is one of the great conditions for overcoming the devil. The heart of self-love and self-pity has to be turned over to the cross. Otherwise, one will fail before the enemy. Because a soldier of Christ often has a kind of sympathizing and caring for himself and has a deep love of his own life, he loses the victory. This kind of heart causes a believer to care for himself, to "self-examine" himself, and therefore, he will be impeded by the enemy. If the enemy can cause a believer's heart to be filled with anxiety for himself, the enemy will always be victorious.

Whenever we have a reservation about something, we show our weakness toward the enemy. The soul-life must be handed over to death. Then we will have the possibility of defeating the enemy. Satan can work through the unrestricted soul. He can also directly attack the soul which has not gone through the cross and cause the believer to fail. The soul-life is the inside help to the enemy in us. If a believer uses his own strength and refuses to be delivered from the domination of the soul-life, he will give the enemy the chance to take advantage of him. No matter how much a believer understands the truth or how zealous he is in warfare, the soul is always the dangerous spot. The worst thing is that when a believer becomes more spiritual, his soulish portion becomes much harder to detect. The less the proportion of the soul is, the harder it is to find a way to terminate it. Many times in spiritual living it is almost impossible to detect when there is a mixture of spirit with only a slight amount of soulish expression. Sometimes there seems to be not even the slightest difference between being soulish and being spiritual. If a believer is not watchful to resist the devil, he will fail greatly because of his soul-life.

It is outside of the believer's ordinary daily expectation that his soulish life is being affected by Satan's work and is being cheated and influenced by him. But here we must give a warning that in God's ordination we should reject all things we have received from Adam—our life and our nature. It is always dangerous to not be obedient to God.