

## PAUL'S THREE MEN

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the Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard, was referring when he said:

"People try to persuade us that the objections to Christianity spring from doubt. That is a complete misunderstanding. The objections to Christianity spring from insubordination, the dislike of obedience, rebellion against all authority. As a result people have been beating the air in their struggle against objections, because they have fought intellectually against doubt instead of fighting morally against rebellion."

Wise words, those, from a wise thinker. As their echo dies away I hear, across the span of the centuries, a still wise Teacher, saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

## II.

Consider our second proposition, in connection with St. Paul's three men: If the "natural" man stands for life lived on the level of instinct, moderated by conscience and environment, the "carnal" man stands for life on the level of faith, mixed with selfishness.

Fix your attention now on the words of Chapter 3, verse 1: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ." "Babes in Christ!" Mark that. They were men and women of faith. They were no longer aliens and strangers to the kingdom of God, with its righteousness, its peace, and its joy. They had been quickened by the Spirit of God; the new life was in them.

Nevertheless, they were not in Paul's category of the "spiritual" man. The apostle declares that they were "carnal," which literally interpreted, means "fleshly." The word translated "flesh" has a peculiar meaning in Paul's writings, as all careful Bible students recognize. In such a discussion as the one before us, it doesn't mean the body as such, or any physical part of it. It means rather, as Thayer puts it, "mere human nature . . . apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God."

## "Babes in Christ"

That is "flesh," or carnality, in essence. But mark you, Paul does not say of these Christians, "Ye are yet flesh." If they were altogether "carnal," they would be altogether without the Spirit of God; which obviously they were not, since he declares them to be "babes in Christ." What Paul does say is, "Ye are yet fleshly"—a modification of the word "flesh."

If I speak of the earth, that is one thing; if I speak of something that is earthy, my meaning is different. If I tell you that a certain piece of terrain is stone, you understand me to mean one thing; if I tell you, however, that it is stony, you understand me to mean something different. Stony soil is mixed; it is not rock, but it has rocky ingredients.

Now if you will take his word "flesh," and as Dr. F. B. Meyer used to suggest, drop the "h" (which is certainly an appropriate suggestion for an Englishman) and then spell it backwards, you will have that little troublemaker of a word called "self." From there, I think, the going, while it is painful, is nevertheless clear—and true to life. What is a carnal Christian? He is a Christian in whom the life of faith is mixed with survivals, here and there, of the old selfishness. Self has had its back broken, but it is still able to kick. It

has not been yielded up fully to that death with Christ in which His mind and His Spirit consistently and victoriously prevail.

Paul got out his candid camera one day and took some shots of these carnalities that flared up among the Corinthian Christians. He focused his camera on them at one angle, and caught them crawling around in a pitiable, prolonged, needless spiritual infancy. "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat," he complains reproachfully, "for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." Christ dying for you on the Cross to give you escape from hell and peace with God—that is the milk you love. But Christ living in you to give you purity and power and to make you spiritually productive—that is the "solid meat" that gags you. I might as well tell you the truth, says the apostle, you are still wearing bibs and creepers.

Paul then changed his angle a bit and took another view of these carnal Christians. He caught them fussing among themselves because of petty jealousies and resentments: "Ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (v. 3). Envy in the heart does its first work like a termite—very secretly. Some fellow Christian is blessed with success or honor. Instead of your being grateful for it, it makes you uneasy and unhappy. Then, at the first or second opening, you say or do something to belittle that fellow Christian. And soon the stage is all set for friction and strife—and perhaps separation. The whole thing is first class evidence of carnal discipleship.

From still another angle Paul focused his camera on these carnal Christians, and this time he caught them making pets out of certain leaders in the church. "For while one saith I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" (v. 4). What is being rebuked here is not the preference that a Christian may have for the ministry of a certain man, but rather the childish way in which such a preference is expressed and the lengths to which we carry it. Even if it should divide the church, we still must have our man. The result of this juvenile behavior was that the Corinthian congregation was split up into cliques and factions.

Meanwhile they were quite forgetting that Paul and Apollos and Cephas were only water boys in the garden of Christ's Church, and that God alone, who makes use of all types of ministry, can give success and fruitage to the Christian enterprise.

All of which reminds one of the little girl's prayer: "Lord, make the bad people good; and please Lord, make the good people nice." Carnal Christians are good, in the sense that they have faith in Christ and the root of discipleship is in them, but, so often, as in the community of believers in Corinth, they do not act the "nice" part of Christ-mindedness.

## III.

And this brings us to the concluding proposition: If the "natural" man stands for life lived on the level of instinct, moderated by conscience and environment; if the "carnal" man stands for life on the level of faith, mixed with selfishness; then the "spiritual" man stands for life on the level of love, under the mastery of the Holy Spirit. This is well expressed in the Goodspeed New Testament, chapter 2, verse 15, "The spiritual man is alive to all true values, but his own true value no unspiritual man can see."

"Alive to all true values!" What a magnifi-

cent expression that is! Every part and every power of his yielded being is sensitive and responsive to the Holy Spirit. This is the Christian who not only has the fact of the indwelling of the Spirit of God, but who also experiences the fullness of that indwelling.

What place is there for envy and resentment in a heart that is "alive" to the value of brotherly love and honor? What place is there for a cooing contentment with a spiritual "milk diet" in a heart that is hungry for the "solid meat" of full surrender, of Christian holiness, or close guidedness in daily living and of adventurous helpfulness to society?

What room is there for a petty factionalism and "cliquishness" in a heart that is "alive" to the value of unity and solidarity in the ranks of Christ's followers?

"Alive to all true values!" Yes, it is a superb phase. And for its richest fulfillment it carries one on to the thirteenth chapter of this Epistle (R. V.) where, after painting the deathless splendors of the life of love, the apostle concludes, "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Is there some one who asks for the secret of such a life—some one who longs above all to cease from being a "carnal" Christian and to rise to the level of the "spiritual?" If so, it is to you that I want to speak the good news; this change and this release of soul will come to you as God's gift. And you will listen—won't you?—as I tell you that one can give a gift only to a willing receiver, to some one with his hands outstretched.

That means the surrender of your carnalities and the crucifixion of the self-life. It means that you let go! It means the Holy Spirit takes over! Who will complete the transaction—right now?

## PRAYER

## The Power That Projects The Gospel

Judson impressed an empire for Christ and laid the foundations of God's kingdom with imperishable granite in the heart of Burmah. He was one of the few men who mightily impressed the world for Christ. Many men of greater gift and genius than he have made no such impression. Their religious work is like footsteps in the sands. But he has engraven his work on the adamant. The secret of Judson's profundity is found in the fact that he gave much time to prayer. He kept the iron red-hot with prayer and God's skill fashioned it with enduring power.

"Arrange thy affairs, if possible," is Judson's counsel, "so that thou canst leisurely devote two or three hours every day not merely to devotional exercises but to the very act of secret prayer and communion with God. Endeavor seven times a day to withdraw from business and company and lift thy soul to God in private retirement.

"Begin the day by rising after midnight and devoting some time amid the silence and darkness of the night to this sacred work. Let the hour of opening dawn find thee at the same work. Let the hours of nine, twelve, three, six and nine at night witness the same. Be resolute in His cause. Make all practicable sacrifices to maintain it. Consider that thy time is short, and that business and company must not be allowed to rob thee of thy God."

—Bounds.