

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN FLESH AND SPIRIT

"Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." – Matt. 26:41.

THESE WORDS were uttered by our Lord to His disciples at the close of His earthly ministry, when the hour was fast approaching in which He would be betrayed and crucified. He knew of this trial that was so close at hand; He had repeatedly mentioned the matter to His disciples; but outward appearances were so contrary to this that they could not appreciate His words. He had often spoken in parables and dark sayings (which they did not fully understand until after His resurrection, though they indeed got many lessons from His sayings). So when He told them that He would be crucified, they thought that it was another dark saying – one of the deep, hidden things, just as when He said, "Unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you."

They did not understand these things. They saw no evidence that the Roman Government would take any hand in crucifying Him, and they knew that their own nation had no authority for crucifixion. While they knew that some of the Scribes and Pharisees were very indignant, yet they remembered how the people had cried, "Hosanna," and hailed Him as King.

The disciples had been discussing the Kingdom, and questioning as to who should be greatest in that Kingdom. Two of them had made special requests at that time for seats next to Himself. Thus evidently their minds were far from the things that were approaching. When finally He said that some one should betray Him, one after another asked, "Is it I?" And finally St. Peter said, "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, ...though all should deny Thee, yet will I not deny Thee." But Jesus said, "This night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice."

They thought that the Lord was acting strangely simply because they did not know what He knew of the things near at hand. So this night, in the garden, He said, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation"; He meant for them to be on the alert, for He knew the trying times just at hand for them. But they did not know the battle that was being waged between Christ, the Prince of Light, and Satan, the Prince of Darkness.

They did not understand this in the way we do. They had not yet received the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. The most that they could understand then was that there were temptations, and that they should be on the lookout, guarding themselves and being earnest of spirit – not drowsy nor frivolous, but on guard lest they should fall into some kind of temptation. They were not only to watch, but to pray. The praying would signify that they were watching, and that their own watching was not sufficient, but that they would need, additionally, Divine assistance. What they would be praying for they would be striving for. And the earnestness of the praying would help them in the watching.

The events for which they were to watch included not only our Lord's betrayal, trial and crucifixion, but also their experiences of the subsequent days when the disciples met within closed doors, and those which they were undergoing when Jesus appeared and explained to them that He was risen from the dead. In various ways He manifested Himself to them. If they were in the attitude of watchfulness, in the attitude of praying for wisdom from on High to help them to know the will of God, it would be a very great blessing to them, and the Lord knew this. He knew that they would need help during those days of trial. If they had not had strong faith, the events of the next few days might have overwhelmed them and their faith in the teachings of Jesus. But they were kept in that time of special trial and testing. Jesus prayed for them, and they came off victorious – but some of them with scars, as St. Peter and St. Thomas.

A SPECIAL SEASON OF TRIAL

This lesson is applicable to us as respects watching and praying. We live in this favored period since Pentecost, in which God's people are privileged to have the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit; therefore our watching and praying may be, and should be, still more earnest than that of the disciples at the time of our Lord. **[R5312 : page 280]** And as they were then entering into a time of special temptation, so we in the end of this Age are living in a time of special trial regarding all that we have learned in the School of Christ as New Creatures, along the lines of meekness, gentleness, brotherly-kindness and love. If we be found short in these, so far as the heart is concerned, we would not be counted worthy to be of the Kingdom class, and therefore would be separated in some way from those who were found worthy.

The Lord had temptations; and all of His faithful disciples must also have temptations. And the Apostle James assures us that the having of temptation and the resisting of temptation will bring us special blessing in our development of the character-likeness of Christ. The Lord, then, did not mean that by watching and praying we would not have temptations come to us, but that we would not fail in those temptations. We might even be ensnared, as St. Peter was, yet he wept bitterly and repented. We know not what his prayers were, but we may be sure that they were full of deep contrition that he had denied his Master.

"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." This cannot be understood to mean what it would mean in our own case. The disciples at this time were not New Creatures in Christ. They did not receive the begetting of the Spirit until Pentecost. It means more to us than it did at that time to them. To them it merely meant that they were willing in spirit, in mind, in intention. These intentions were to be good. They were to demonstrate that they were "Israelites indeed," and that they were not hypocritical, even though their flesh

was weak and had the depravity that had come down through the several thousand years since man fell into sin. Their intention was better than their ability to perform; consequently they needed specially to watch and to pray.

THE NATURE OF THE BATTLE

The same thing is true of the Church from Pentecost to the present time. We note, however, a special distinction between the spirit and the flesh. To the New Creature in Christ Jesus, old things have passed away and all things have become new. (2 Cor. 5:17.) But the New Creature is weak in one sense of the word, though strong in another sense. It must be strong in the sense that it is of strong determination to have no sympathy with sin or unrighteousness or evil-speaking.

The New Creature represents the power of God, so to speak, that has become identified with us. We have accepted God's will as our will, and have been begotten by His Holy Spirit to a new life. We are therefore styled New Creatures by this begetting. As New Creatures we are at first represented as babes. The difference between the New Creature and the old creature is that the New Creature expects to attain the Divine nature – glory, honor and immortality – while the old creature desires earthly things and comforts of the present life – honor of men, etc. – and is continually pulling toward the things which it desires and craves.

The New Creature must conquer the old creature and its desires, which more or less interfere with the New **[R5313 : page 280]** Creature's engagements in the Covenant of Sacrifice. Thus there is a conflict between the New Creature and the old creature. The New Creatures, who realize themselves to be at first but babes in Christ, must grow in grace – grow in the Lord and the power of His might – grow up into Him in all things. Thus gradually the New Creature becomes stronger and stronger.

But, alas, there is often difficulty here. Many of the Lord's people have not been fed on the strong meat; as the Apostle says, "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." (Heb. 5:12.) Many of these do not know what justification by faith means; many do not understand what consecration or sanctification means.

They do not understand that they are merely babes. They have taken the first step, and there is a tendency to believe the word of the ministers, priests and bishops who have told them that they are not to know these deep things, but that their elders and pastors are to know them, and to do the thinking for them. This condition is quite contrary to God's Word. He wishes all of His people to be qualified for telling forth His Truth to others as they have opportunity. Therefore the Apostle advises that we "henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine," but that we become New Creatures in the Lord and thus prepare ourselves for the glorious things to which we have been invited by the Divine promises. – Eph. 4:14,15.

The flesh is weak in that it is not up to the standard of righteousness. Father Adam was perfect, and his fleshly mind was a perfect mind, strong for righteousness. But as the fall brought our race lower and lower, mentally, morally and physically, this flesh gradually became weaker and weaker. Therefore all flesh is weak in its natural tendencies, the fallen nature strongly in the ascendancy. But we are strong in proportion as the New Creature overcomes these tendencies, so that the flesh is kept as a servant of the New Creature, that the New Creature may be ultimately developed into the character-likeness of the Master.

But people will say, "John ought to make a good business man; but he can talk or think of nothing but religion." Or in the social set,

they will say, "Mrs. So-and-so was once very attractive, but now she can talk only about religion." And so it will be with everything else pertaining to the world, if we are true men and true women – performing our Covenant vows unto the Lord, walking faithfully in Jesus' footsteps.

Yet every one is dissatisfied with those who are double-minded. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." Jesus tells us that before becoming His followers we should sit down and count the cost of discipleship – the cost of serving God. If we do so and make the right decision and continue to serve in harmony with it, we shall get not only the future reward of everlasting life and Divine favor, with glory and honor, but we shall also have the present reward of the Lord's favor, the Lord's care, and fellowship one with another.

LUKEWARMNESS UNDESIRABLE

If after counting the cost of service you decide to serve Mammon, selfishness, then try to be a millionaire. If you desire to enter politics, aspire to be president. If you intend to enter social life, go into it with all your might. A man who is wishy-washy, who does not know what he is doing, does not accomplish much of anything. The Lord says that he likes men to be either hot or cold.

If we are determined to be servants of the Heavenly Father, we are to recognize no other master. This does not mean that we are not to recognize *headship*. Some one may be master of much of our time. But the controller of our *time* is not master of our hearts, which are given to the Lord. We seek to use our time, energy and strength in the service of the great King.

A certain portion of our time is necessary for providing for our physical needs and for the needs of those [R5313 : page 281] dependent upon us. In thus caring for our own we do not lose allegiance to the great God; for we should refuse to become servants

of any earthly master if it would be in conflict with our service to the Heavenly Father. This would not interfere with the thought that in the Church of Christ there are varieties of service and activities, each department having its own organization and head. But the Body of Christ working together is to recognize Jesus as the Head over all things, and to seek to know each his own part in all the affairs of the Body.

We read, "One is your Master, even Christ." And yet Christ is not the one referred to here in our text – "No man can serve two masters"; these are God and Mammon. Jesus said, "I delight to do Thy will, O God." "I came not to do Mine own will, but the will of the Father who sent Me." So, then, in serving Jesus and recognizing Him as our Master, we are not ignoring the Father. Likewise in recognizing order in the Church we are not ignoring the Father or the Son. And in serving an earthly master, we are not to think of this service as conflicting with the service of our Heavenly Father and of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are to see that we have been directed to provide things honest and decent in the sight of all men. – Romans 12:17.

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