

A FULLY SOULISH MAN

Watchman Nee:

The Bible has many things to say about a soulish man. What it says often coincides with the human experience. First Corinthians 2:14 says, "But a soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are discerned spiritually." The "soulish man" here refers to an unregenerated man. Whatever a soulish man may be, this verse clearly points out to us his deficiency. Although this refers to an unregenerated soulish man, the regenerated soulish believer has the same kind of experience. The soulish man is controlled by the soul and is suppressed in his spirit, just the opposite of the spiritual man. Although such people may be very intelligent and thoughtful and can propose wonderful theories and ideas, they are completely at a loss concerning the things of the Holy Spirit of God. The soulish Christian lacks the spiritual discernment; he is completely ignorant of the Word of God. Even when he knows something, what he knows is but book knowledge, something obtained through his own mental power. He is not able to search all things through the Holy Spirit, nor does he have any power of discernment; he cannot differentiate between right and wrong. His knowledge comes either from his memory of what others have said or from his own conjectures. He is not able to receive direct revelation from the Holy Spirit. How different this assessment is from the concept of the world! The world thinks that man's intelligence and intellect are almighty, that every truth in the world can be grasped with the brain. However, according to the record of the Scriptures, these things are vain. It is regrettable that many Christians have tried to seek after the deep things of God recorded in the Bible using the faculties of their mind. They may understand something in their mind, but God says, "A soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God"!

James 3:15 also speaks of a soulish wisdom. "This wisdom is not that which descends from above, but is earthly, soulish, demonic." This soulish wisdom comes from the soulish believer. It seeks to expound God's truth with the intelligence of the soul. After a believer is regenerated, he will see by his new knowledge his own extreme ignorance concerning the Word of God, the Bible. Yet, most are not willing to wait patiently for God to give to them "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" to guide them into all truths. At such times, believers tend to be hastened by their own foolishness to exercise their own mental power, trying diligently to understand the teachings of God. Even those who have been believers for many years may not be free from this kind of practice. This kind of wisdom is soulish because it is secured through the power of the soul. This soulish wisdom serves mainly as a basis for criticizing and condemning others. Therefore, the apostle said that soulish wisdom causes one's heart to have "bitter jealousy and selfish ambition" (v. 14). On the contrary, spiritual wisdom is "wisdom from above" and is "first pure, then peaceable, forbearing, compliant, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, without hypocrisy" (v. 17). The wisdom given to us by the Holy Spirit in our spirit is pure in motive; it has no improper design. In practice it is peaceable; there is no rivalry. The nature of this kind of wisdom is forbearing, compliant, and merciful. In content, it is impartial and without hypocrisy. In result, it bears much good fruit. How different is this from the soulish wisdom! Yet, the disputes causing many denominations and the divisions causing many sects are advanced in the name of "bearing testimony for the truth"! The soulish Christian often exaggerates differences, creating a disparity of opinions, resulting in divisions in the church of God.

Jude testified of the same thing: "These are those who make divisions, soulish, having no spirit" (v. 19). This word refers to unregenerated people. However, the fact that soulish men cause separations is seen among believers also. The characteristic of a soulish believer is that he is often the instigator of separations and rivalry. We are not saying that everyone has to believe the same thing. But the distinction between a spiritual believer and a soulish one is that while the former realizes his differences with others, he will not separate himself from other children of God just because of these differences. But with the latter, a little incompatibility will cause him to separate himself and to reject others.