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SERMON FROM FIRST CORINTHIANS 3

By Charles J. Fowler

**Preached At The General Holiness Assembly
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Text: I Cor. iii. I hope that we will remember that the objective end of this afternoon service is not the sermon, but that it is soul salvation that is all-important. The sermon I expect will be related to that, but your prayers and attention will be very essential.

The passage I have selected as a text is Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Third Chapter. (Reading of Chapter.)

1 Corinthians 3 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. 3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? 5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? 6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. 8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. 9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. 16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the

temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. 20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. 21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; 22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; 23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

Christian experience is life -- soul life. "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." And this, life is spiritual, -- effected, sealed and controlled by the Holy Spirit of God; born of the Spirit. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

This spirituality, this life, is fruitful. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Our initial experience then is divine, and, for a time is profoundly satisfactory, but only for a time. This leads me to say that, usually, Christian experience is contradictory. One is not only conscious of the presence of the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, etc., but he becomes conscious of the presence of the opposite of these in his heart. While he knows love is there, he is conscious of the presence of envy; while he knows joy is there, yet there is a tormenting fear; while peace is there, there is an inner conflict while there is long-suffering, yet there is impatience while there is gentleness, there is something of self will while there is goodness, there is a mixture of pride; while there is meekness, there is anger; while there is faith there is a condition of unbelief; and while there is temperance there is something of inordinate desire. While the fruits of the Spirit are there, there is something of the opposites.

I have said that, usually, Christian experience is contradictory. I do not mean to say that there is no exception. John Wesley said that often in conversion the "old man" got such a blow between the eyes that he didn't rally for awhile, but it is only a question of time and a very limited time before the regenerated heart will awaken to the consciousness of these untoward things. This is so real as to suggest doubt that he ever came into the light. So real is this as to suggest inquiry on his part as to the why of it and the how of it. He says: "Why if I am converted, do I feel this thing? Why do I have these untoward things in me?" Right here is laid the foundation that may wreck that soul; or here is laid the foundation of truth on which that soul can build a structure that will stand forever. Let that soul go to a religious teacher and raise this question: "Is a man that feels pride, unbelief, self-will and anger unconverted? Or does it mean the absence of spiritual life?" The answer may effect the condition of that soul forever.

To say to that person "You are not converted. Converted people never feel anger, pride, unbelief or self-will." To tell him that, is liable to discourage him forever. But say to that person: Yes, you may have been converted. The presence of those things is not evidence that you have not been. You want to thank God for the things He has done for you. You must remember that this is not a normal condition. God has something better yet for you. He not only can convert you He proposes to cleanse this away.

I have just read that which has to do with this contradiction of experience. These people addressed by the apostle are "brethren," -- evidently not unconverted sinners, but brethren in

Christ, You will note he calls them "babes in Christ." It is true they were babes in Christ. The babe is in the human family, coming through the doorway of natural birth, just as much as the mother that holds it. These babes were in Christ, and were brethren in Christ. They are spoken of as Gods husbandry. They are Gods tilled land; Gods productive soil. And they were Gods building. Building carries the idea of ownership and occupancy. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." And He says they are holy. Every Christian is holy. Not that every Christian is unmixedly holy. Before you and I were converted, we were unholy. The power of unholiness possessed and guided us. When we were born again, the principle of holiness was put in us and guided us. In that sense, every Christian is holy. I say, to be a Christian at all is to have a principle of genuine divine holiness within you. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Now the will of God is enthroned in that soul, and that soul says "yes" to the divine will; but when we are first converted, we don't always say "yes," without a protest.

The apostle in the text is giving a large place to conversion, regeneration or justification. He says: "Brethren," "Babes in Christ;" Gods productive land, holy and belonging to Christ, showing clearly a condition as being children of God, and yet he said he could not speak unto them as spiritual, but as carnal. And that distinguished minister and reformer of New York has scriptural basis for his phrasing when he says "Carnal Christians." When one says there is no such thing as a carnal Christian, he breaks with Paul. Paul says they are "Babes in Christ," but are carnal.

I want to ask your attention to the popular and usual method of dealing with carnality. There are two great systems of theology, with which we are pretty familiar. I refer to Calvinism on the one hand and Arminianism on the other. Both of these great systems teach that which I am trying to emphasize. I would like to read you something that may interest you from the Calvinistic Catechism:

"Question. From whom does God defend his people?

"Answer: From all their enemies.

"Question: Who are their enemies?

"Answer: Sin, Satan, the world and death; the worst of which is indwelling sin.

"Question: How does Christ defend believers from sin?

"Answer: By keeping alive the spark of grace in an ocean of corruption.

"Question: What is meant by dying to sin?

"Answer: Ceasing more and more from the love and practice of it.

"Question: "Do not the remains of sin in our old man oppose this death?

"Answer: Yes. Most vigorously.

"Question: How do they oppose it?

"Answer: By secret lusting and violent fighting against grace in our hearts.

"Question; Does indwelling sin ever prevail against grace?

"Answer: Yes. Very often ..."

There is a clear statement, strong enough to show that what I am undertaking to convey is scriptural from the standpoint of Calvinistic doctrine.

I next quote you from the Arminian doctrine:.

"Original sin is the corruption of the nature of every man, whereby man is, in his own nature inclined to evil and that continually. And, this infection of nature does remain in them that are regenerate, and, although there is no condemnation to them that believe, yet this lust has, in itself, the nature of sin."

The position taken in these statements is not peculiar to the Methodist, Baptist or any other denominational credal statement.

Now, when you come to the Arminian statement and ask when sanctification is to be complete, the answer is: It may be before death. How? There ought to be uniformity of answers here. All who claim to be adherents to Arminian theories sought to agree, but they do not. You know there is a double answer. Some say you get deliverance by growth in grace, -- a long drawn out process. (Cries of "No.") Others say you get it by faith, a sudden and instantaneous process. Let me give you a statement that is clear and interesting. A writer, very prominent in Methodist circles is writing concerning what Methodists believe. He says:

"Some believe and even assert that it is a matter of personal experience, that following regeneration by a special and separate act of the Holy Ghost in answer to prayer and faith that claims it, the soul may immediately and consciously be raised to a state in which all evil tendencies will be eradicated. Others believe that, by continuous growth it may ultimately come into this state while yet in the body."

For a few moments I want to consider this last thought; growth in grace as a method of getting sanctification, -- as a process of eliminating this old man, carnality, and becoming every whit whole. Some say, "but you do not believe in growth in grace." We do believe in it, and we think as nobody else believes in it. Why we allow, brethren, that a baby that has pronounced consumptive tendencies will grow, but a baby that has no unhealthy tendencies at all will grow much better. We believe an apple with a worm hole in it can grow, but an apple without the worm hole will grow better. We are not denying growth in grace, but we are insisting on it and insisting upon the right conditions unto growth in grace. What do people mean by growth in grace as a way of getting rid of the old man? May I put it in this way: What is the philosophy of it? There is a philosophy of salvation. The Bible is full of the philosophy of salvation.

I confess that I do not know what this "grow in grace" means. I have no way of knowing. Nobody has ever told me. I have never read it in any book, or heard it in any sermon or testimony. I do not know what these dear men and women mean by growth in grace as a method of getting sanctified and getting rid of the old man. I can only imagine. If I accepted this idea, I would have a theory. I am not an advocate, or believer in it. I want to suggest that growth in grace as a means of getting rid of the old man and being sanctified wholly is unreasonable for me to believe and inequitable for God to require. Here is a man converted when twenty years of age. He dies when he is eighty.

Sixty years to grow out carnality. Another is converted at twenty and dies at forty years of age, and the distance is twenty years. Another is converted at the age of twenty and dies at the age of twenty-one, and the distance is twelve months. Still another is converted at twenty years of age and dies within a week. His opportunity to get sanctified by growth or any other method is limited to one week. To tell me that God would allow it, to say nothing of requiring one man to wait twenty years for what another gets in a week is unreasonable. Things are exactly equal here. For God to allow one man to struggle up across the years with this thing, to the end, and let another man get it in six days or one day would be unequal. It is also a misnomer. People who say we get sanctified by growth in grace do not mean what they say.

Here is a man present this afternoon, eighty years of age, -- an old man, tottering and feeble it may be. One of you holiness workers has talked with him. That dear man says he was converted away back sixty years ago. He says: "I don't understand what you are saying about getting sanctified. I had not been a Christian long before I noticed them, these wrong things in my heart and I am just as conscious of the presence of them in my heart now." Now it is four o'clock, I will say, when you have this conversation with that venerable Christian brother. In going down yonder steps he slips and falls and breaks his neck. Five minutes after you were talking to him he was in eternity. His opportunity to get rid of those things which existed in his heart was just five minutes. His opportunity to outgrow that condition was five minutes. The sixty years absolutely counted for nothing in getting rid of the old man. We do not say that he does not get rid of his carnal nature in the five minutes, but we do insist that he does not get rid of it by growth in grace. ("Amen.")

Every state of grace is clearly experimental. Every phase of spirituality has two sides, which for the sake of trying to make it plain, I shall designate as positive and negative. I can remember when I was awakened. I was not an infidel, nor an agnostic. I could have preached not a little truth before I was converted. There was a day when God spoke to me in my inner consciousness. It was the testimony of the Holy Ghost to my soul that I was a sinner and doomed to hell. There was the negative side and there was the positive. There was the consciousness of being a sinner and the divine testimony to my soul that I was a sinner.

If we get sanctified we know it. I am not saying now whether we get it by growth, or death, by purgatory, or how! I just as naturally found myself in with the world as does water run down hill, but the moment God spoke peace to my heart, Gods people were my people. ("Amen.") When I was sanctified, I just as naturally took to the holiness people.

You never heard of a case in your life where a man got the divine attestation of this thing we are speaking of, who said "I got it by growth." Here is a man that rises and says he was converted 20 years ago, out back of his good old fathers barn, about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. He hadn't been converted a great while before he found in his heart something that led him to do things he knew he ought not to do. He went to his class-leader and minister, and they told him that was the way we all felt, and that he mustn't conclude that he was not converted. They said to him: "You must read your Bible, be careful to attend Sunday School, and enjoy all the means of grace." He says: "I did. I read my Bible; I attended all the means of grace the best I could, and I found I was growing in grace, but these things that so distressed me were still there. I still kept on. I was very active in church and Sunday School. I was instrumental in doing much good, and by and by it all became clear and I was sanctified wholly, all through the growth of grace." You never heard that kind of testimony in your life. ("Never.") If this idea of growth in grace is correct, you ought to hear it every day.

Here is a man that gets up and says: "I was converted 20 years ago, back of my good old fathers red barn, about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I had not been converted a great while before I found these things in my soul. I went to people about it and they said we are glad you came. We have watched you with interest. We thought you were converted. We are glad you came to us with this. We want to tell you there is another work just as definite as this. (That begins to sound natural!) If you will go and ask God to sanctify you wholly, He will do it." I didn't know any better. I went right at it and said: "Come now and do this work in me, and God did it, just as definitely as I was converted out back of the barn, and I have had it all these years. Hallelujah!" You have heard that experience everywhere. ("Yes "Amen!") The next time somebody says the way to get it is through growth in grace, very courteously ask him if he got it in that way.

I want to bring two witnesses; two men, not from the common walks of life. I want to bring one of the greatest men Methodism has ever had, Wilbur Fisk. This man of God was twice elected bishop, once in the United States and once in Canada, but he declined the office, feeling, as he said, that he could do more good devoting himself to the education of the young. This marvelous man went down to Cape Cod in August, 1819, to attend a small tent camp meeting, among a few poke-bonnet old women; got down in the straw and asked God to sanctify him. He said he was instantaneously delivered from inbred sin and all doubts, and in after life he bore witness to what he got in the straw in that old Plymouth Camp Meeting on the shores of Cape God.

Take the next witness, Stephen Olin, whom the historian says stands forth with commanding prominence in the annals of the Methodist Church. That man, with broken health, went across the seas and visited the coast of Africa in the hopes of improving his condition. While standing one afternoon in the white sands by the Nile, looking up in the skies, with nobody about but the donkey boys and a few Arabs to look on, he received the witness and broke forth in shouts over the marvelous and magnificent life he got in the fullness of the gospel of Christ.

I was brought out from darkness into light as clear as day. I can say that I was never tempted from that minute to this to doubt that I was converted, that night in the old Methodist Church in the White Hills of New England. I got conversion in that little old church. I need not tell you; I could not tell you those heavenly sensations that accompanied it, and God has used me as an instrument to bring thousands of precious souls to Christ. On the occasion of my sanctification, I

went into a service and they were praying for somebody. I didn't know who. I knew it fitted me. I was pastor of a large church at the time. I went forward and Deacon Morse came and knelt by my side and began to pray. He said: "O, God, we are unworthy to pray for this preacher. He has been a successful preacher." I hate to say this, but this what he said: "He has been a successful preacher, a useful preacher. He is pastor of a commanding church. We are unworthy, etc." I knew that man wasn't working along Gods line. That prayer enhanced my suffering. He seemed to be conscious of this; He stopped to take breath and said: "God take the devil out of this fellow." Here I was, pastor of a large church, and here I was down on the floor, but I said: "If the devil is in me, I want that prayer answered. If he is not he must not come in now," and I stuck to it and God brought me in and I am in now.

My soul is on the stretch for victory here. Give us such a victory as shall be felt all over the world, that the angels in heaven may rejoice, and you and I have cause to shout hallelujahs for thousands of years without taking breath! O, that somebody might get deliverance!

When the invitation was given, about twenty-five seekers came forward and half the congregation crowded around the altar.

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THE END