

# SPIRITUAL CASTAWAYS

THE BAPTIST HOUR

July 28, 1957

Scripture: I Corinthians 9:27

In the school of Christianity neither pupil nor teacher is exempt from final examination. Preacher and layman must stand in single file before God in the judgment day. Knowing that timeless lesson the Apostle Paul spoke a word of personal testimony which I bring to you today. He said, "I deal myself the knock-out blow . . . lest having preached to others I myself become a castaway." No anticipation in life is more frightful than that of flunking the final examination of life . . . of coming up with "F" on the report card of conduct. This man of God was much like ourselves . . . like passions, and the way he stood his examination and passed it will help you and me if we fight with equal vigor.

## THE BODY AS A BATTLEFIELD

The language he used more accurately says, "I beat my body black and blue to bring my passions under control, lest while I have preached to others about controlling the body, I myself fail and fall under the same indictment." Why start with the body? Is flesh man's biggest enemy? History's oldest battle is that tension set up between flesh and spirit. To understand how much of us belongs to one realm and how much to the other has been the pastime of poets and philosophers, medicine men and theologians.

One attitude says that the flesh is inherently evil and has been from the beginning—interpreting the account in Eden as the forerunner of all evil flesh, right on down until this present day. Read all the words we have preserved by the Apostle Paul on the subject, and one will come out with a strangely mystical attitude toward flesh and blood. He says it should be mortified, that is, put to death.

Out of fairness to this man of God we must admit that if we had all his words and letters, they doubtless would throw additional light on what he meant. His

strange words about a man not touching a woman needs fuller interpretation. In effect he says to kill the wild horses . . . that the passions that surge through us somehow or other belong to the nether land of man's unregenerate nature, and the only hope of successful spiritual emancipation is to be out of the flesh. The more one is able to do this, the better Christian he becomes . . . at least goes the reasoning. Twenty centuries have seen this attitude put into practice, and what are the results?

## AN ASCETIC APPROACH

Well, religion took an ascetic approach, and the results were monasteries, convents, cloisters, walls of separation from the outer world, eunuchs, perverts and unwholesome personalities. Not that all who lived the secluded life were unbalanced . . . not that at all, but Jesus said nothing about life's being disassociated from other life in order to be superlative living.

Read the dusty literature of the dark ages when this interpretation was the law of life, and one finds just as much schizophrenia of attitude, just as much travail in spirit, all the hours of prayer and meditation notwithstanding, as he finds in this day that finds it hard to take five minutes for meditation.

Obviously, this is among the worst things that one can do with his flesh . . . to regard it as an enemy of evil. The very opposite is true. The body of man is one of God's finest creations. The Old Testament records say that God looked on all that He made and saw that it was good . . . including the flesh. It is when a good thing is put to an evil purpose that the purposes of God are thwarted.

## MODERATION—AND GOD'S HELP

Last week I visited a home for unwed mothers in one large city. Among the mothers were 29 high school girls . . .

girls with faces too old for their teen years, girls who evidently reasoned that since the flesh is mine, and I am young but once, I must live it up and hence: the shame and guilt. Now what is one to do with the flesh? Must he represent either of these two extremes? Not at all! He can say that though the flesh is dated for dust, it is a good thing indeed. He can say that muscle, corpuscles, veins, and arteries have no spare parts, therefore, in temperance, recreation, proper diet, etc. I will regard this house of life with intelligent moderation.

But also, that a good thing can be put to an evil purpose, and therein he fights off the infection of sin. Remembering that Jesus, too, was tempted in the flesh, those who call themselves by His name, must fight in the strength of God as He fought. Right here reveals what Paul really meant: that the nature of resistance to temptation must take on the likeness of knockout blows. Who would rise now to admit that he hadn't been in that type situation?

Paul isn't talking about shadow boxing. He knows that unless he fights with skilled precision he will be knocked out and laid aside.

Jesus spoke words of similar import. He made it clear that man should not flirt with evil. Said He, "If your eye offend you, pluck it out . . . if your hand is the offending member, cut it off." You think He really meant man to do that? Why, of course. Not that He wants us to be a generation of sightless people and maimed arms . . . but He would rather we stumble into heaven like blind men than not get there at all. Rather we would crutch into that heavenly city than to enter hell with the physique of a Charles Atlas. That is the point! Severity of action, right on the spot at the scene of temptation, is to be the disposition of Christians. He meant to put the flesh in the flesh's place.

#### LEVEL OF FINE SENSES

Tennyson called living in the flesh, "the province of the brute." That is a phrase we should recapture, "the province of the brute." He meant by it that it is altogether possible to live down on the level of the

five senses; that when the stomach calls, man always responds, when palate and tongue plead for satiation, man is always accommodating. The sex lusts for its own, man in unheeding blindness rushes in where angels fear to tread.

It has been half a year now since many of you made New Year's resolutions—resolutions to stop doing this or that, points wherein you steadfastly decided to undertake new habits. But after a few weeks or months the good intentions degenerated into moderation, then the old habits crept back in and you embraced them with a welcomed urge. Now. What happened? Were you not sincere on New Year's day? I think you were. The answer is simple: you did not honestly fight! The enemy waged its flanking attack, and you thought he would attack from the front.

Did you ever hear someone say, "I can't stop drinking or smoking?" Or, "I just can't continue doing this or that?" Isn't that actually admitting that one has given himself over to a victimizing habit. I am not here to tell you what is right or wrong for you, but to tell you something more important; namely, that anything that pulls you down to a level whereon you should never stand, anything that injures your health, is not right either in the sight of God or common sense.

It is so easy to rationalize that it doesn't harm you, or that you are always in control and can stop any kind of habit at will. So said the drunken bum, too, down to his last penny with sclerosis of liver and disgustitus of personality. He could stop, he said, but he didn't; and it is very questionable now as to whether he can or not. The fact is that one must often deal himself the knockout blow in resistance lest he fall prey to some victimizing habit. It is a sad sight to see a horse riding a man!