

## The Economy of God – Chapter 13 (part 2): THE CROSS AND THE SOUL-LIFE

### THE CROSS DEALING WITH THE SOUL

After we have been regenerated, we should not live and walk and do things by our self anymore. As long as we live by our self, we will be under the bondage of Satan. Perhaps you may say, “I don’t think that I live or do things by my self.” Here is the need to discern the spirit from the soul; then you will see how much you are in the soul. You say that you are not living or doing things by your self, but I would ask, By what are you living? By the flesh? Probably you will answer, “No, no, I am not living by the flesh.” Then, are you living by the spirit? You say, “Well, I doubt it.” If you are living neither by the flesh nor by the spirit, by what are you living? The answer is that you are living merely by the soul. You say, “I don’t like to commit any sin; I don’t like to be fleshly; I don’t like to cooperate with Satan. I love God. I like to follow the Lord and walk in the Lord’s way. I like, I like, I like...” You are still in the soul. Tell the Lord where you are. You yourself doubt very much that you are in the spirit. If you are not in the flesh or in the spirit, you are in the soul. Praise the Lord, you are not in Egypt, for you have experienced the Passover. You have been delivered out of Egypt, but you have not yet entered into the good land of Canaan. You are still wandering in the wilderness of the soul.

#### Human Love

Now we come to this issue: How can we discern the spirit from the soul? How can we know when we are in the spirit or in the soul, and how can we divide the spirit from the soul? We must look into the Word of the Lord.

He who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter above Me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his soul-life shall lose it, and he who loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it. (Matt. 10:37-39)

*Soul-life* here in the Greek text is the same word as that for *soul*. The taking up of the cross in these verses refers to our human love for our dear ones. Human love is something in our soul, and it must be dealt with by the cross. How much do we love our dear ones? If we want to know how to discern the spirit and the soul, we should check our love. How do we love our children, our mother, or our father? How do we love our brother or our sister? This is not man’s word but the Word of the Lord. Discernment of the spirit from the soul is only reached when we have checked our human and natural love. Our natural love has to be dealt with by the cross. In the New Testament Epistles the Holy Spirit tells us that husbands must love their wives, wives must submit to their husbands, parents must take care of their children, and children must honor and respect their parents. But all this must be in the resurrection life. Natural affection, natural love, and natural relationships have to be cut off by the cross. After being dealt with by the cross, we will be in the spirit, which means that we will be in the resurrection life. We will live in the resurrection life—not in the natural life but in the spiritual life. One test of how much our soul has been broken is how much the cross has dealt with our natural love and affection. When the natural love has been cut off by the cross, we will lose our soul.

#### The Love of the World

He said to them all, If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake, this one shall save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world but loses or forfeits himself? (9:23-25)

Remember Lot’s wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his soul-life shall lose it, but whoever loses it will preserve it alive. (17:32-33)

In all of these verses, *soul-life* again in the Greek text is the same word as that for *soul*. These passages show that the soul is much involved with the love of the world. To give up the love of the world and worldly things means that we have to deal with our soul. When the soul is cut off, the love of the world is given up. Therefore, these two things, the love of the world and the soul, are related to each other.

“Remember Lot’s wife.” This is a wife, not a husband, and it is the story of a wife who loved the worldly things. The Lord says to be careful. If we love the world, we will lose our soul. If we love the things of the world, we will lose our soul in the bad sense, but if we give up the love of the world, we will lose our soul in the good sense. Brothers and sisters, the love of the world is a proof of where our soul is.

### **The Natural Life**

Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his soul-life loses it; and he who hates his soul-life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life. (John 12:24-25)

Here *soul-life* again means “soul.” By reading and considering these two verses carefully and deeply, we will see that the soul has much to do with the natural life and the natural strength. Our natural life and strength have to be dealt with by losing the soul. When our natural life and strength are put to death, our soul will then be broken. How does one discern the spirit from the soul? It is simply by taking the cross to the self-life and by putting our self under death. The soul is deceived because it does not appear to be sinful. Therefore, we must always learn to check the soul by putting the cross on the self.

Suppose we are fellowshiping with a brother. How can we discern whether our fellowship is of the spirit or of the soul? By putting the cross on our self, we will clearly know whether we are in the spirit or in the soul. I should not say, “I am not doing something evil. I am doing something good when I fellowship with a brother.” Fellowship is good, but such a fellowship may be entirely in the soul. When the cross is applied to our self, we will immediately be clear whether our fellowship is in the spirit or in the soul. We should never check the soul or the spirit by the discernment of good or evil. This kind of checking will only put us in darkness. There is no other way to check the soul and spirit but by the cross. The only way to determine whether we are in the soul or in the spirit is by checking whether we are now on the cross. Do I have any element of my own interest, or am I self-centered in my activities? Has the cross been put on my self-interest and self-centeredness? We need to check ourselves in this way. All decisions and all activities must be checked by the cross, not by the standard of good and evil. In every subject of conversation, has the self been crossed out? Do not analyze by considering, “Am I in the spirit, or am I in the soul? Let me consider for a moment to see how deep my feeling is. If it is not so deep, I must be in the soul. But if it seems to be deep, I might be in the spirit.” If we analyze in this way, we will really be troubled. Simply by one check, we can be made very clear: Have we been put on the cross? In other words, have we denied the self, taken up the cross, and followed the Lord in the spirit? When we deny the self by taking up the cross, the Lord Christ will have the full ground in us, and it will be easy to go along with Him.

The New Testament teaching gives some place to chastisement, but the cross occupies a much greater place. Many times God’s chastisement works together with the cross. But do not wait for God’s chastisement. All the time we must learn to take up the cross, since we know that we have been crucified with Christ. Day by day we must learn the lesson to deny the self, to take up the cross and not to give any ground to the soul. If we do this, we will actually be one with the Lord in the spirit, and the Lord will take the ground to possess us and to saturate us with Himself.