

The Most Excellent Way

“Carnal Or Spiritual?”

Chapter 3 ~ “The Deeper Christian Life”

By Rev. Andrew Murray

“And Peter went out and wept bitterly.” Luke 22:62.

These words indicate the turning point in the life of Peter — a crisis. There is often a question about the life of holiness. Do you grow into it? Or do you come into it by a crisis suddenly?

Peter has been growing for three years under the training of Christ, but he had grown terribly downward, for the end of his growing was, he denied Jesus. And then there came a crisis. After the crisis he was a changed man, and then he began to grow aright. We must indeed grow in grace, but before we can grow in grace we must be put right.

You know what the two halves of the life of Peter were. In God’s Word we read very often about the difference between the carnal and the spiritual Christian. The word “carnal” comes from the Latin word for flesh. In Romans 8, and in Galatians 5, we are taught that the flesh and the Spirit of God are the two opposing powers by which we are dominated or ruled, and we are taught that a true believer may allow himself to be ruled by the flesh. That is what Paul writes to the Corinthians. In the third chapter, the first four verses, he says, four times to them, “You are carnal, and not spiritual.” And just so a believer can allow the flesh to have so much power over him that becomes “carnal.”

Every object is named according to its most prominent characteristic. If a man is a babe in Christ and has a little of the Holy Spirit and a great deal of the flesh, he is called carnal, for the flesh is his chief mark. If he gives way, as the Corinthians did, to strife, temper, division, and envy, he is a carnal Christian. He is a Christian, but a carnal one. But if he gives himself over entirely to the Holy Spirit so that He (the Holy Spirit) can deliver him from the temper, the envy, and the strife, by breathing a heavenly disposition — and can mortify the deeds of the body — then God’s Word calls him a “spiritual” man, a true spiritual Christian.

Now, these two styles are remarkably illustrated in the life of Peter. The text is the crisis and turning point at which he begins to pass over from the one side to the other.

The message that I want to bring to you is this: That the great majority of Christians, alas, are not spiritual men, and that they may become spiritual men by the grace of God.

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I want to come to all who are perhaps hungering and longing for the better life, and asking what is wrong that you are without it, to point out that what is wrong is just one thing: allowing the flesh to rule in you, and trusting in the power of the flesh to make you good.

There is a better life, a life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then, I want to tell you a third thing. The first thing is important, take care of the carnal life, and confess if you are in it. The second truth is very blessed, there is a spiritual life – believe that it is a possibility. But the third truth is the most important: You can be one step out of the carnal into the spiritual state. May God reveal it to you now through the story of the Apostle Peter!

Look at him, first of all, in the carnal state. What are the marks of the carnal state in him? Self-will, self-pleasing, self-confidence. Just remember, when Christ said to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, "The Son of Man must be crucified," Peter said to Him, "Lord, that can never be!" And Christ had to say to him, "Get thee behind Me, Satan!" Dear reader, what an awful thing for Peter! He could not understand what a suffering Christ was. And Peter was so self-willed and self-confident that he dared to contradict and to rebuke Christ! Just think of it!

Then, you remember, how Peter and the other disciples, were more than once quarrelling as to who was to be the chief. Self-exaltation. Self-pleasing. Every one wanted the chief seat in the Kingdom of God.

Then again, remember the last night, when Christ warned Peter that Satan had desired to sift him and that he would deny Him, and Peter said twice over, "Lord, if they all deny Thee, I am ready to go to prison and to death." What self-confidence! He was sure that his heart was right. He loved Jesus, but he trusted himself. "I will never deny my Lord! "

Don't you see the whole of that life of Peter is carnal confidence in himself. In his carnal pride, in his carnal unlovingness, in the carnal liberty he took in contradicting Jesus, it was all just the life of the flesh.

Peter loved Jesus. God had by the Holy Spirit, taught him. Christ had said, "*Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.*" God had taught him that Christ was the Son of God, but with all that, Peter was just under the power of the flesh. That is why Christ said at Gethsemane, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." "You are under the power of the flesh, you cannot watch with Me."

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Dear reader, what did it all lead to? The flesh led not only to the sins I have mentioned, but last of all to the saddest of things, to Peter's actual denial of Jesus. Three times over he told the lie, and once with an oath, "I know not the man." He denied his blessed Lord. That is what it comes to with the life of the flesh. That is Peter.

Now, look in the second place at Peter after he became a spiritual man. Christ had taught Peter a great deal. I think, if you count carefully, you will find some seven or eight times, Christ had spoken to the disciples about humility. He had taken a little child and set him in the midst of them. He had said, "He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." He had said that three or four times. At the last supper, He had washed their feet. But all had not taught Peter humility. All Christ's instructions were in vain.

Remember that. A man who is not spiritual — though he may read his Bible, though he may study God's Word, cannot conquer sin — because he is not living the life of the Holy Spirit. God has so ordered it: man cannot live a right Christian life unless he is full of the Holy Ghost. Do you wonder at what I say?

Have you been accustomed to think, "Full of the Holy Ghost, that is what the Apostles had to be on the day of Pentecost — that is what the martyrs and the ministers had to be — but for every man to be full of the Holy Ghost, that is too high"? I tell you solemnly, unless you believe that, you will never become [committed] Christians. I must be full of the Holy Spirit if I am to be a whole-hearted Christian.

Then, note what change took place in Peter. The Lord Jesus led him up to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came from heaven upon him, and what took place? The old Peter was gone, and he was a new Peter. Just read his epistle, and note the keynote of the epistle. "Through suffering to glory." Peter, who had said, "Of course, Lord, you never can suffer, or be crucified;" Peter — who, to save himself suffering or shame, had denied Christ — becomes so changed that when he writes his epistle the chief thought is the very thought of Christ; "Suffering is the way to glory." Do you not see that the Holy Spirit had changed Peter?

And look at other aspects. Look at Peter. He was so weak that a woman could frighten him into denying Christ; but when the Holy Spirit came he was bold, bold, bold to confess his Lord at any cost, was ready to go to prison and to death, for Christ's sake. The Holy Spirit had changed the man. Look at his views of Divine truth. He could not understand what Christ taught him, he could not take it in. It was impossible before the death of Christ; but on the day of Pentecost how he is able to expound the word of God as a spiritual man!

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I tell you, beloved, when the Holy Ghost comes upon a man he becomes a spiritual man, and instead of denying his Lord he denies himself, just remember that. In the sixteenth chapter of Matthew when Peter had said, *“Lord, be it far from Thee, this shall never happen that Thou shalt be crucified,”* Christ said to Him: *“Peter, not only will I be crucified, but you will have to be crucified too. If any man is to be My disciple, let him take up his cross to die upon it, let him deny himself, and let him follow Me.”*

How did Peter obey that command? He went and denied Jesus! As long as a man, a Christian, is under the power of the flesh, he is continually denying Jesus. You always must do one of the two, you must deny self or you must deny Jesus, and, alas, Peter denied his Lord rather than deny himself. On the other hand, when the Holy Spirit came upon him, he could not deny his Lord, but he could deny himself, and he praised God for the privilege of suffering for Christ.

Now, how did the change come about? The words of my text tell us, *“And Peter went out and wept bitterly.”* What does that mean? It means this, that the Lord led Peter to come to the end of himself, to see what was in his heart, and with his self-confidence to fall into the very deepest sin that a child of God could be guilty of — publicly, with an oath, to deny his Lord Jesus!

When Peter stood there in that great sin, the loving Jesus looked upon him, and that look, full of loving reproach, loving pity, pierced like an arrow through the heart of Peter, and he went out and wept bitterly. Praise God, that was the end of self-confident Peter! Praise God, that was the turning point of his life! He went out with a shame that no tongue can express. He woke up as out of a dream to the terrible reality *“I have helped to crucify the blessed Son of God.”*

No man can fathom what Peter must have passed through that Friday, Saturday and Sunday morning. But, blessed be God, on that Sunday Jesus revealed Himself to Peter. We know not how, but *“He was seen of Simon;”* and then in the evening He came to him with the other disciples and breathed peace, and the Holy Spirit upon him.

Then, later on, you know how the Lord asked him, *“Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?”* three times, until Peter was sorrowful, and said, *“Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.”* What was it that wrought the transition from the love of the flesh to the love of the Spirit? I tell you, that was the beginning — *“Peter went out and wept bitterly,”* with a broken heart, with a heart that would give anything to show its love to Jesus. With a heart that had learned to give up all self-confidence, Peter was prepared for the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

And, now, you can easily see the application of this story. Are there not many just

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living the life of Peter, of the self-confident Peter as he was? Are there not many who are mourning under the consciousness, "I am so unfaithful to my Lord, I have no power against the flesh, I cannot conquer my temper, I give way just like Peter to the fear of man, of company, for people can influence me and make me do things I do not want to do, and I have no power to resist them? Circumstances get the mastery over me, and I then say and do things that I am ashamed of."?

Is there not more than one, who, in answer to the question, "Are you living as a man filled with the Spirit, devoted to Jesus, following Him, fully giving up all for Him?" — must say with sorrow, "God knows I am not. Alas, my heart knows it."? You say it, and I come, and I press you with the question, "Is not your position, and your character, and your conduct, just like that of Peter?"

Like Peter, you love Jesus, like Peter you know He is the Christ of God, like Peter you are very zealous in working for Him. Peter had cast out devils in His name, and had preached the gospel, and had healed the sick. Like Peter you have tried to work for Jesus; but, oh! under it all, isn't there something that comes up continually? Oh, Christian, what is it?

I pray, and I try, and I do long to live a holy life, but the flesh is too strong, and sin gets the better of me. Continually I am pleasing self instead of denying it, and denying Jesus instead of pleasing Him. Come, all who are willing to make that confession, and let me ask you to look quietly at the other life that is possible for you.

Just as the Lord Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to Peter, He is willing to give the Holy Spirit to you. Are you willing to receive Him?

Are you willing to give up yourself entirely as an empty, helpless vessel, to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, to live, to dwell, and to work in you every day?

Dear believer, God has prepared such a beautiful and such a blessed life for every one of us, and God as a Father is waiting to see why you will not come to Him and let Him fill you with the Holy Ghost. Are you willing for it? I am sure some are. There are some who have said often, "O God, why can't I live that life?" — "Why can't I live every hour of unbroken fellowship with God?" "Why can't I enjoy what my Father has given me, all the riches of His grace?" "It is for me He gave it, and why can't I enjoy it?" There are those who say, "Why can't I abide in Christ every day, and every hour, and every moment?" "Why can't I have the light of my Father's love filling my heart all the day long? Tell me, servant of God, what can help me?"

I can tell you one thing that will help you. What helped Peter? **"Peter went out and**

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wept bitterly." It must come with us to a conviction of sin — it must come with us to a real downright earnest repentance, or we never can get into the better life. We must stop complaining and confessing, "Yes, my life is not what it should be, and I will try to do better." That won't help you.

What will help you? This: that you go down in despair to lie at the feet of Jesus, and that you begin with a very real and bitter shame to make confession, "Lord Jesus, have compassion upon me! For these many years I have been a Christian, but there are so many sins from which I have not cleansed myself, temper, pride, jealousy, envy, sharp words, unkind judgments, unforgiving thoughts, [worldliness]." One must say, "There is a friend whom I never have forgiven for what he has said." Another must say, "There is an enemy whom I dislike, I cannot say that I can love him." Another must say, "There are things in my business that I would not like brought out into the light of man." Another must say, "I am led captive by the law of sin and death."

Oh, Christians, come and make confession with shame and say, "I have been bought with the Blood, I have been washed with the Blood, but just think of what a life I have been living! I am ashamed of it." Bow before God and ask Him by the Holy Spirit to make you more deeply ashamed, and to work in you that Divine contrition.

I pray you take the step at once. "Peter went out and wept bitterly," and that was his salvation — yes, that was the turning point of his life. And shall we not fall upon our faces before God, and make confession, and get down on our knees under the burden of the terrible load, and say, "I know I am a believer, but I am not living as I should to the glory of my God. I am under the power of the flesh and all the self-confidence, and self-will, and self-pleasing that marks my life."

Dear Christians, do you not long to be brought nigh unto God? Would you not give anything to walk in close fellowship with Jesus every day? Would you not count it a pearl of great price to have the light and love of God shining in you all the day?

Oh, come and fall down and make confession of sin; and, if you will do it, Jesus will come and meet you and He will ask you, "Lovest thou Me?" And, if you say, "Yes, Lord," very quickly He will ask again, "Lovest thou Me?" And if you say, "Yes, Lord," again, He will ask a third time, "Lovest thou Me?" Your heart will be filled with an unutterable sadness, and your heart will get still more broken down and bruised by the question, and you will say, "Lord, I have not lived as I should, but still I love Thee and I give myself to Thee."

Oh, beloved may God give us grace now, that, with Peter, we may go out, and, if need be, weep bitterly. If we do not weep bitterly — we are not going to force tears — shall

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we not sigh very deeply, and bow very humbly, and cry very earnestly, “O God, reveal to me the carnal life in which I have been living — reveal to me what has been hindering me from having my life full of the Holy Ghost.”

Shall we not cry, “Lord, break my heart into utter self-despair, and, oh! bring me in helplessness to wait for the Divine power, for the power of the Holy Ghost, to take possession and to fill me with a new life given all to Jesus?”



From “The Deeper Christian Life” by Andrew Murray