

THE SIN OF BEING ORDINARY

"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men." I Corinthians 3:3. (KJV).

"For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?" (RSV).

"For you are still of the flesh -- under the control of ordinary impulses. For as long as (there are) envying and jealousy and wrangling and factions among you, are you not unspiritual and of the flesh, behaving yourselves after a human standard and like mere (unchanged) men?" (Amplified New Testament).

Paul addressed the Corinthians as "brethren" and then referred to them as "babies." They were Christians, but they had not made any progress toward spiritual maturity. They were in a state of spiritual infancy. Paul declared that when he was with them they were not strong enough for the solid food he was prepared to give them, and their condition had not changed at the time when he wrote them. Instead of being able to consume solid food, they were weak, anaemic, milk-drinking infants. They were still unable to be fed with meat. Every church today has some of the Lord's babies in it.

What are some of the characteristics of the Lord's babies? They are basically selfish. They are jealous. They demand attention. They have to be coaxed to do things. They want to have their own way. They require amusement. They are governed by their feelings. They tattle on one another.

When Paul focused his camera on the carnal Christians at Corinth, he caught them fussing and quarreling over their leaders in the church. They were divided over preachers -- Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ.

Paul inquired of them if they were not behaving just like the commonplace, ordinary run of men and women about them. Christ taught that a man who follows Him must not be ordinary, but that he must be extraordinary. It is not a matter of talents, or gifts, or genius, or ability; it is simply a matter of living in a way that is higher and better than the world's way. The Christian way of life is superior. Christ challenged men to live in such a way that it would stand out and reveal itself as the sun is seen because of what it is and where it is. The reason that Christ attracted attention everywhere was due to the fact that He was not like anybody else. Because He did not speak like other people, or behave like other people, He attracted attention wherever He went, and people said, "We never saw it on this fashion," "No man spake like this man," and "No man acted like this man." The life of our Lord excited wonder in all the people who saw Him. This extraordinary Christ still calls for extraordinary Christians. It is a sin to live like ordinary men when we have such an extraordinary Christ, and when a genuine, extraordinary Christian life could have such power for God and for good. The reason why many of the early followers of Christ were so effective in His service was that they were separated from the world, and dedicated unto the Lord. Unfortunately, many present-day professing Christians are just mediocre.

"Mediocre" is defined as "of only middle quality," "having only a moderate degree of excellence," "ordinary." In speaking of Amos Barton, George Eliot said something which is descriptive of many today: "It was not in his nature to be superlative in anything, unless, indeed, he was superlatively middling, the quintessential extract of mediocrity." Mediocrity is the usage of only forty strings on a harp of one thousand strings. It is reaping four rows when ten are ready for reaping. It is what you see when a stenographer uses three fingers and one eye in typing letters -- what you see and hear when an organist uses only a few of the keys on the keyboard. It is a man with locomotive power doing pushcart work; a man with incandescent light talents working and making sputtering candle

light for God. It is a man with eagle wings fluttering about like a sparrow instead of soaring. It is a man with pipe organ abilities making wheezy saxophone music for God. It is somebody with steam shovel talents doing teaspoon work -- with diamond and ruby talents worth as little to God's cause through the church as a punctured Japanese nickel in a Chinese bazaar. It is an artist using his ability to paint landscapes in doing nothing but whitewashing backyard fences. Phillips Brooks knew something of the menace of mediocrity when he said to a Boston audience: "It is time for Boston to get out of the peck measure into the bushel measure."

Much of the world's misery is caused by childish adults. "Whether you speak of marital unhappiness or family disagreement or contention between management and labor or strife between nations, the unmistakable characteristics of childishness -- self-consciousness, self-importance, and unwillingness to accept responsibility -- are present to throw sand in the wheels of progress and growth."

Watkinson expressed something of the tragedy of being ordinary when he wrote: "Large areas of our inheritance are unsown, unreaped; all kinds of beginnings abide sorrowfully incomplete. We live in the strange world of the undone." It was a great compliment which was paid to Gladstone when of him a man wrote: "He would not compromise with mediocrity." The menace of occasional mediocrity as an evil was set forth when someone wrote of Wordsworth: "He often made his poetic eagle do the work of a clucking hen." Surely the sin of being ordinary must have been in mind of Disraeli when he said: "It is a wretched thing to be gratified with mediocrity when the excellent lies before us."

Vance Havner spoke of the sin of being ordinary as manifesting itself in light-hearted unconcern and shameful shirking of duty when he said: "Salvation has become a nightcap instead of a helmet. We have those in our churches who have plenty of sentiment but make no sacrifice; who sing lustily in the choir on Sunday but live lustfully in the world all week; the kind of people who, when a piano is to be moved, escape by carrying the bench." One, who bears in his body scars from wounds received in the bloody terrors of war, recently said: "The old system of life is being shaken to its very foundation. The economic structure is crashing, the political life of nations is threatened; the social standards of right and righteousness are being challenged, yet no one seems to know why. And the remedies that are proposed are remedies of little minds, little men." Dr. Wade Bryant wrote: "One of the critical hours of history has come, and the churches are not ready for it in vision ... in compassion ... in the spirit of sacrifice ... in witnessing ... in Christian living."

In his book, The Lordship of Christ, Dr. E. Y. Mullins wrote: "The chief difficulty is that God's people have been content to think in terms of conventional Christianity, comfortable and smug, without a sense of conquest or ambition for great things. Jesus did not set out to catch sparrows or subdue rabbits."

Can we avoid the sin of being ordinary? Yes. How? By becoming mature Christians. Some people may be overgrown. But, be that as it may, we know our churches are needing people of clear vision and full dedication who can lead others out of complacency and mediocrity into life into the do-much attitude and life -- people who weigh sixteen ounces to the pound for God, who measure thirty-six inches to the yard for God, and who strike twelve for God.

There are stunted Christians who should be growing Christians, little Christians who should be great and big Christians, feeble believers who should be rugged and strong, puny folks who should be powerful. To them life is a plaything with no big meaning. There are Christians who are content with a corner when continents await their conquest. Boreham said: "The soul grows fat only on immensities, infinities, eternities; and life clothes itself in most vigorous realities in altitudes, magnitudes, infinities." Paul had immature people in mind when he wrote: "And I brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual,

but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 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." Babies pout -- so do many grown folks today. Babies get offended -- so do many adults today. Babies imagine things -- so do many advanced in years. Babies seek first place for themselves -- so do many grown-ups today.

If we would overcome the temptation to be ordinary, we must seek to be always and everywhere not midget men, but mighty men; not minimum men, but maximum men. In his quaint wisdom Will Rogers revealed the tragedy of the mediocre when, in the midst of a financial depression, he said, "The trouble with our financial giants was that they did not giant."

It was known of Caleb on earth, and recorded of him in the Bible, that "he wholly followed the Lord God." He was a maximum servant of God. Even when he was eighty years of age he proved that he did not have a desire to be mediocre or ordinary for he said, "Give me this mountain." Christ said: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." "If any man compel you to go one mile with him, go with him two." What did He mean? He meant for us to do more than the bare stint of requirements. When the tabernacle was built, the people did maximum service. After Earl Sande rode the great horse Man O' War to victory in the Kentucky Derby, he remarked about the magnificence of that horse by saying, "It was like being on a runaway locomotive." There wasn't anything ordinary or mediocre about that horse. Yet, many in God's work run like limping, stubborn mules, who actually have Man O' War abilities. I like to think of that famous baseball player, Ty Cobb, who had a batting average of .367 for twenty-four years. When he was a lad in college he remarked, "I enjoy being my best." What a difference there would be in our church if all our members enjoyed being and doing their best!

We need to be maximum men and women no matter how many Goliaths challenge; in forbearance no matter how many Shimeis curse; in prayer no matter how many prophets of Baal mock; in faith no matter how many laugh at the shaking of Satan's spears; in service no matter how many jealous Sauls seek to hurt. We need to be Daniels in refusal to conform to this world, no matter if lions of ridicule roar. We need to be maximum people in loyalty, no matter how many there are who like Demas forsake, "having loved this present world."

One who is maximum for God does not pray a little, but much; does not love a little, but much; does not serve a little, but much; does not forgive a little, but much; does not show a little loyalty, but much; does not read the Bible a little, but much; does not attend church occasionally, but often. Maximum people show a vital interest in the great stretches of the unattained.

If he would honor God, every person must master an individual. That person is himself or herself. The one who gives you the most trouble is self. And one of your great tasks in life is to see that self weighs what God wants you to weigh, and shines as brightly as God wants you to shine. When Oliver Cromwell's soldiers went to arrest the members of Parliament, the members had disappeared. The soldiers seized the old speaker of Parliament and demanded of him where the members were. The old man replied: "Gentlemen, I have no eyes to see and no ears to hear and no mouth to speak save as directed by Parliament." Oh, what wonders of service and spiritual achievements for the glory of God would be ours if we would say to the world, the flesh, and the devil, that we have no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no mouth to speak, and no feet to walk, and no hands to work save as directed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

When God's children are truly mastered by Christ they become great. When people are mastered by Him, the Great Unlike, they are not ordinary people. Superior to the world, He challenged it to show that He had sinned. Dignified, He simply adorned the doctrine

of God in all things, wearing ever the white flowers of a sinless life in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Economical, but never miserly, He taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Domestic in His tastes, but never having a home of His own, He had the power to prepare a place in the Father's House wherein the many mansions are. His mastery and power on this earth are the highest in a Christ-mastered and fully-yielded life. Instead of behaving like ordinary men, let those of us who are Christians live as Christ would have us live.