

## Table of Contents

### **An Appeal**

1. Take Heavenly Ground
2. Take the Ground of the Cross

### **At the Crossroads**

"Stand". "Ask". "Walk". "Find rest"

### **An Appeal**

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

In our Editorials we have referred much to the tragedy of spiritual conditions, particularly to the divided state of Christians. It is a matter which no one really concerned for God's glory can easily set aside, or fail to have as a constant burden. Reflection upon this whole matter leads to the prayerful desire to be able to do something toward what the Bible calls 'healing the hurt of My people'. This can be carried little or no further than an appeal, but in so far as this small instrumentality can affect the Lord's people, we venture to make such an appeal. As we see it, there are only two grounds of hope in this direction, but if they were taken we are certain that a wholly new and fruitful situation would arise.

The first part of the appeal, therefore, is that the people of God, and particularly those in responsibility among them, shall -

### **Take Heavenly Ground**

The best illustration of what this means is presented to us in considerable fulness in the New Testament, and particularly in Paul's letters. We can narrow these down to two - 'Corinthians' and 'Ephesians'. One is the earthly; the other is the heavenly.

What is meant by the earthly is clear in 1 Corinthians, especially - for our present point - in the early part. Implying that it is wrong for supposedly spiritual people to be or to act so, the Apostle uses the words: "Are ye not men?" (3:4). This clearly means, as the context shows, that spiritual and heavenly people are not allowed to proceed as the rest of men do. The immediate connection (although it applies to all the other things) is that of "divisions", and circles, bearing particular names and taking the character of natural preferences. This might be temperamental, doctrinal, emotional, intellectual, or 'spiritual' (?). Whatever the causes or occasions, Paul says this behaviour is "natural" and "carnal" - it is acting as "men". In a word, it is earthly. At best, he says, it is childish, or 'babyish'; it does not signify any spiritual stature. Looking at Christianity today by this standard, we cannot fail to be painfully impressed with how little the Church has grown up.

But that is the negative side. When we turn to 'Ephesians', we find ourselves in the presence, not only of the oft-repeated words, "the heavenlies", but of the realities and characteristics of that realm. Here is the "one body". Here is the "unity of the Spirit". Here is heavenly wealth, walk, warfare. Here is relatedness and inter-relatedness. The Apostle - nay, the Holy Spirit - has no restraint in giving out of the fulness, that it may lead again to the fulness of Christ. Here are the measureless dimensions of eternal thoughts, counsels, purpose, and love. Here is ascendancy over disappointment, frustration, discouragement, and earthly limitations. Here is grace transcendent and triumphant. Yes, truly we are on heavenly ground here, while all those things are bitterly true down below. To be "seated together with him (Christ) in the heavenlies" is no mere ideal, fantasy, illusion, beautiful

concept, or sublime teaching; it is real because of the literal counter-realities to which it is set in contrast.

This is as much the work of grace, to be apprehended by faith, as is our initial justification.

Would that the Church - believers, and their leaders - could first see it, in the way in which the prayers in this letter show that it should be seen: could then, by faith, take it: and henceforth positively and resolutely refuse to come down on to the earthly ground of Corinthian divisions, strife, pettiness, and *nature!*

But what is the way thither? How can it be?

This leads to the second part of our appeal: it is to -

### **Take the Ground of the Cross**

The Corinthians knew about the Cross. They were "in Christ", and there is no way into Christ but that of the Cross. Yes, but even so, the Apostle said that in visiting them it was his considered, resolute, and premeditated determination that he would 'know nothing among them, save Christ, and him crucified' (2:2). There was a knowledge of the Cross which either they did not possess, or else they were violating. In 'Ephesians', the death and resurrection 'togetherness' with Christ is foundational to all that fulness of heavenly position. In Corinth, the value of the Cross was in what it meant *for* them, rather than what it meant *in* them. There is undoubtedly a difference in these aspects, both as to position and as to results. The fuller aspect may have a deeper application to the natural life - but, again, both in one are presented to us for our apprehending by faith.

The Cross not only deals with our sins and our condemnation: it deals with all our earthliness, our natural ground, which is so fruitful in those works which bring dishonour to our Lord. We are especially thinking of this spirit which produces or ferments jealousies, rivalries, contentions, criticisms, and all that is not love.

If we would take heavenly ground and the ground of the Cross, the Holy Spirit would be able to cause the things which really do not matter to fade from their importance, and to give the Lord's people a loving concern for all who are His, just because they are His, and not 'ours' in any earthly way.

### **At the Crossroads**

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16).*

At some point - not quite easy to fix - a false current had entered the stream of the life of the Lord's people. Small at first, it had gathered momentum, until it had taken control and was carrying everything before it.

The effect was the almost total loss of a central and controlling, integrating authority; a loss of one uniting vision and objective. Out of this there arose confusion; no one knowing what *was* right or wrong. This confusion and uncertainty became wearing and wearisome, and futility took the heart out of them. The inevitable result of all this was division.

Some wearily accepted the situation and sought to neutralize it by compromise. Some, numbed and bewildered, stood with hand on hips (metaphorically) hoping that something would come round the corner and things would improve. Others were fearful and anxious as to where it would all lead to.

To this situation God spoke in the words quoted above. It was a pointer as to the way, and a challenge to courage, faithfulness, and humility.

"Stand in the ways and see", said the Lord.

The ways were the crossroads; the place of alternatives. Go back to where you made the wrong choice, took the wrong turning, and got off the way of blessing. In the light of the unhappy present, reconsider your decisions. Ask yourselves whether 'the old paths', with all their difficulties and conflicts, were not better than this present.

"Stand". Pause, reflect, consider, relax, break the spell.

The case with Israel seems definitely to come down on the side of "the old paths". There was then an authoritative voice; a throne overhead, a vision and purpose uniting, coordinating; a distinctive objective, and an impact upon peoples near and far. Those days of David and Solomon were such 'old paths'. They were days when Heaven was in evidence.

Then came that false current in the nature of tiring of the heavenly, they stooped to the earthly, the tangible, the present, the popular and less ostracized. So the realm and level began to change, until the situation in Jeremiah's time was the general. But people were weary of soul.

If it is thought that the diagnosis which we have given is strained or a mistake, look at the inclusive answer in chapter 17, verse twelve:

*"A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary".*

The rule of the heavenly is the sanctuary; the refuge and rest. It was the way of the opened Heaven, which is the way of God's satisfaction. Says the Lord: "And ye shall find rest for your souls". We seem to have heard words like those before.

The reconsideration at the crossroads must lead to action. Having stood, asked, and seen - "walk therein". Repent, return, decide, do! "Walk therein".

The open mind and heart. The submissive and humble will. The honest and courageous resolve and committal.

"Stand". "Ask". "Walk". "Find rest".