

Fulness

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All communications to:- 6 Roseacre Close, Canterbury, Kent, England.

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Fulness is designed and printed by Cairprint Ltd., 19 Briggate, Silsden, Keighley, Yorkshire.
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Editorial

by GRAHAM PERRINS

THERE IS an increasing desire for greater unity to be realised within the body of Christ. The basic unity already existing as a result of the creative activity of the Holy Spirit is seldom enjoyed by the people of God as a whole and even less expressed to the outside world.

There are a number of reasons for this lack of unity.

1. **The multiplicity of denominational barriers separating one group from another.** This is the result of an exclusive party spirit that sees truth only in one's own set-up and error only in others. It is a perpetuation of the 'I am of Paul, I am of Apollos' attitude so strongly condemned by Paul himself as the outcome of jealousy, strife and carnality. John Noble's book, reviewed in this issue, calls for repentance from God's people for perpetuating this sin. It can be seen in non-denominational fellowships as much as in orthodox circles. It is seen in the creating of an empire and defending it and its particular doctrines and practices against all comers.

2. **The desire to safeguard truth.** This is a more subtle tack than denominationalism, because its sin is not so easily recognizable. Under the guise of protecting God's Word we can separate ourselves from all and sundry, hacking this group and that to pieces with our sword of carnality, and yet, at the same time, giving to the undiscerning a wonderful display of zeal and faithfulness! Such a viewpoint fails to understand that love and not light is to be the basis of fellowship. It is not a question of how far does my brother's understanding

of truth extend, or of how much does he agree with my doctrines, but of how far does my love extend in patiently seeking to bring light to one of a different mind.

3. **Personality differences.** This is probably the most common cause of disunity. Many have become soured by the hurts, criticisms and difficulties that arise out of fellowship in depth with others. As a consequence, to avoid further disappointments, some tend to withdraw from all but a formal contact with others, or move only with those who are not likely to upset their equilibrium. This attitude, although understandable, is only a form of escapism. We must continue to follow the example of the Lord who kept on giving himself in the face of increasing opposition and rejection.

4. **Busyness.** This is difficult to expose. Sometimes we are so wrapped up in our own work and responsibilities that we become insular without even realizing it. Our attitude becomes parochial; our horizons narrow. It is not that we don't want to fellowship with others, and we may genuinely hold denominational allegiances lightly, but somehow, in practice, we remain restricted. To maintain a true perspective on our own work and calling, we shall need to move outside our immediate sphere — and this with some regularity.

The Ecumenical Movement has one answer to the problems of unity — organisation! Put the whole mess into one bowl, mix thoroughly, bake in hot air, and hope!

A more enduring recipe for success can be found in each believer examining his own approach to unity and in repenting when God sheds light on wrong attitudes. Then we shall need to take the Lord's burden for unity, as expressed in John 17, upon our own hearts, praying for a unity to be expressed, so that the world may believe.

This true unity cannot be organized: it is of the spirit rather than of intellect or personality. It is in the Spirit rather than in creed or organisation. It is to be sought after and preserved in the bond of peace. This may well require submitting one to another in the fear of God. It means going out to others as far as we can without breaking that bond of peace.

Without ignoring real differences, without compromising our own under-

standing of God's word and will, I am sure that there is much we can do by our own attitude and our prayers to further a greater understanding and harmony within the family of God.

Let us be alert to recognise how the Lord's prayer is being answered in our own generation and then make sure we play our part. □



'AM I my brother's keeper?' With this flippant reply to God's enquiry, Cain not only shrugged off his own guilt in murdering Abel, but set a trend that is far from being unfashionable in our own day.

Many of God's people still have an unwillingness to be involved with the world in which they live. Although we profess a concern for men and women, it finds such little practical expression that the world may surely be forgiven for doubting it. Oft times when there is a true concern it goes as far as 'saving souls' but then peters out into an embarrassed silence when it comes to any other kind of involvement. There appears to be in some an unholy fear of being contaminated. A

fear that perhaps holiness will not stand up to the strain of being challenged.

The Pharisee of old could not understand how Jesus could get alongside publicans and sinners without compromising himself or his mission. The modern Pharisee in his orthodox robes fails to see how one belonging to the same Jesus can get alongside a Catholic or an Anglican! I may be my brother's keeper but not that one! Jesus was even involved with some of the Pharisees! He did not allow their strict orthodoxy and exclusivism to smother the living truth to which he bore witness.

Involvement is Costly

Involvement with others, whether for their own sakes or for a common cause, is always – but always – costly. It does not mean acquiescence with wrong. It does mean constant spiritual and mental travail as to one's own position in ever changing circumstances. It may sometimes mean being a thorn in the flesh or a pain in the neck as far as others are concerned! There are many who have found the cost too great and have withdrawn into the cosy circle of like-minds and the security of sameness.

There are many however who would not shirk the cost if required, but who still do not get involved. Their problem goes deeper. It is often one of philosophy and outlook.

Barriers

Much teaching in the realm of 'the church' and 'prophecy' has succeeded in isolating the saint from the sinner. It has created a gulf between the church and the world that is almost impossible to bridge. It has fostered an outlook that exalts the word 'separation' and has given it a totally unbiblical meaning. In the realm of the church some saints may well be moving on into new realms and fresh pastures that take them in a different direction to some of their brethren, but fellowship between them can still be a reality and a blessed experience in the Lord. The philosophy I refer to however produces a 'we have it – you haven't' air and makes working alongside a brother who thinks differently a betrayal of truth.

In such a hot house, it is very easy to adopt the pharisaical attitude 'God I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men'. There can be little doubt that most of us at various times have given just this impression to those we would seek to win.

This is not a bible-study or a theological treatise, but I do want to examine some false notions and suggest some ideas that will pave the way for a willingness to be involved, and encourage deeper understanding of the function of the Church in this age.

The Church is Isolated ..

First of all the notion that God is calling out of the world a people for himself is often presented as an end in itself. This is incomplete and misleading. As it stands, it drives a wedge between the church and the world.

by a Wrong Emphasis...

One consequence of this teaching is that the distance between the church and the world has become so great that the only real link between them is the occasional excursion from one realm to the other for 'witness'. When the 'witness' has been faithfully given there is an unseemly scampering back into the safety of the fold. If perchance the proselytising has been successful the new disciple is made to feel uncomfortable in whatever setting he was found and in what he was doing, and encouraged to throw in his lot with the community. 'In the world, but not of it, and the sooner out of it the better' is the attitude of many. To which no doubt the world adds a hearty 'Amen'.

This same view has produced an unhealthy approach towards evangelism, either by reducing it to the level of a rescue operation, or by making it the beginning and end of all existence. I have seen many a saint struggle with a guilt complex because they haven't got a 'burden for souls' and because they aren't 'witnessing' in orthodox ways. A burden for the church or for the world is made to seem a mere triviality by comparison. The fact that a child of God spends his life for his brethren or in involvement with his society is almost disregarded.

... in Evangelism

Evangelism is not unimportant, it is a vital first step, but there must be others ready to follow on the work of the soul-winner with the even deeper and more costly burden of seeing that those who are saved become all that God wants them to be. Anyone who has been involved in an apostolic work will know where the real burden and cost of ministry lies. It is not in the saving of souls for that is a real joy, but it is in the travail to see Christ formed in those saved.

Evangelism and the calling out of a people are not to be seen as ends in themselves. We are called out of the world, only to be sent straight back into the world with a ministry of life. In John 15 Jesus told the disciples that he had chosen them out of the world. He also stated that he had chosen them to go and bear fruit. Go where? Back into that same world that would now hate them even as it had hated him. That hatred was no excuse for withdrawal. They would be persecuted but those who had kept Christ's word would keep theirs also.

We are Sent ...

In John 17 which deals with the saint and his relationship to the world, we twice have the affirmation 'they are not of the world'. The context is important. It is precisely because they are not of the world that they are sent into it. 'As thou didst send me into the world, even so send I them into this world - that the world may believe, that the world may know.'

... into the World

Some have used their heavenly citizenship as an excuse to avoid involvement with society. In fact we are sent back into this world not merely to perform another series of rescue operations but to make a radical impact upon our society, to turn the world upside down. As citizens of the heavenly kingdom we are to function here as God's advance party, penetrating every part of this world's order with a brand new order of life, even though this will often involve our rejection and suffering. We are revolutionaries indeed against all self-centredness, lawlessness, immorality, indifference and apathy. We

are to bear witness to the coming kingdom, to release something of God's new world into this sick society.

... as Salt and Light

According to the terms of the Sermon on the Mount, we are in this world as salt to fight and check its corruption, as light to expel this world's darkness. If we are not doing these things we are good for nothing else. Every verse of this basic message shows the believer rubbing shoulders with the common man in the hubbub of everyday life. This is not so much preaching or tracting, but being salt, being light, being all that Jesus is, in our homes, offices, factories and schools. We are to witness not only on the street corner, but in the midst of our national and social life.

Involvement does not mean worldliness. We are not to love the world or the things that are in the world. We recognise that the world lies in the Devil's hands. Worldliness is a spirit, an attitude that can grip the heart of one who has never played bingo or smoked cigarettes. The child of God is not taken up with the externals of the world, or with the externals of a legalized religion. He will not be able to satisfy the demands of his brethren, for if he eats and drinks he is a wine-bibber and if he fasts he has a demon. He is however gripped by the Spirit of Christ that involves him with his fellow men, that gives him to understand that the salvation of the world somehow depends upon what God can do through him.

His desire is to see pockets of this new realm established. He may at times feel woefully inadequate, but he can never cease to release the life of God into his society. He is strengthened by the fact that one day Christ will return to finish the work and cover the whole earth with his knowledge and glory.

The Church is Demoralised ..

Secondly, the theory that the church is waiting to be raptured 'at any moment'; will miss the climax of this age when God deals with Israel and the Gentile nations; will be absent when the Anti-Christ is raging amongst men; that instead she will be in some vague heavenly suspension, is utterly miserable and demoralising. It robs the saint of

that sense of deep involvement in the here and now that is vital if the church is really to be the expression of God's kingdom to this world.

by the Doctrine of ...

We shall always be a little half-hearted in our involvement if the back door of an imminent rapture is kept open. No sir! God has firmly shut that door and will keep it shut until the church has done its job! The climax of this age is not going to see the church having Sunday tea in Paradise but being God's instrument to both Jew and Gentile in a glorious finale that sees the church coming into its own!

... an Imminent Rapture

The task which the church has to accomplish before Christ comes is many sided. One aspect of it is seen in the need to come into the fulness of the stature of Christ. Only thus will God be able to adequately demonstrate his answer to the developing Anti-Christ. This fulness is to be reached in the here and now and not by any rapture. God has given the ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher to ensure that this is brought to pass. The world may well wax worse and worse but God has decreed that his church should wax bigger and better!

We must come to ...

This fulness of stature is linked with the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit in this age. When the church begins to fully express Christ in this way, Israel will be provoked to jealousy and will return to her true position in the Olive tree of God. This in turn will bring about the restoration of all things. The rapture and resurrection of the church will not be the means to fulness but will be the final expression of it. The rapture will be no escape route for a church fleeing the tribulations of a dying world, but it will be the climax of its growth into Christ.

... Full Stature

God has involved us with humanity in the same way as Christ was

involved with it, identifying himself in its death and then identifying it in his resurrection. This is a theology of involvement. We shall be concerned with what is going on around us. Particularly and primarily with what God is doing in the church. We dare not lag behind. Who would want to remain stunted when such growth into God is going on? The church is the key to what God is going to do in the world. The repercussions of God's dealings with his people will reach out into the whole world, embracing both Israel and the nations.

In this country we are now experiencing a further wave of God's movings amongst us. First of all countless numbers experienced the baptism in the Spirit. Then came the phenomenon of the house church. This aspect still baffles our brethren in the establishment, but I trust they will heed the advice of Gamaliel and not be found fighting God. Yet our God moves on. The Festival of Light saw a spontaneous expression of unity and involvement which pray God will become a yet deeper flow of kingdom life into our nation. It is not the baptism in the Spirit, the house church or the Festival of Light in and of themselves that constitute the important factors, but it is what God has been saying and doing through them that counts. There is a rise of spiritual life, a growing into the purposes of God that needs to be fed and nurtured until full growth is attained.

The Church is Cheated ..

Thirdly there has been, particularly in the prophetic realm, an emphasising of the church as the heavenly people that has driven the wedge between church and world even deeper. Supposedly it is only after the church has been raptured into its heavenly sanctuary that God will be able to get on with the real job of dealing with Jew and Gentile. The belief that during the millenium Israel will be the key to world evangelism and renewal helps to further this policy of estrangement. The church twiddles its thumbs in the skies whilst Israel gets the job done down below. True it is that with such notions the church becomes so heavenly it is of no earthly use.

of its true Inheritance ...

These viewpoints nullify our involvement in the world. They cheat the church and Israel of their true inheritance. They encourage a 'we

can leave it to them' mentality. How tragic that such ideas have held sway for so long and even today when God is blowing away the cobwebs, it is easy to see something of its basic attitude remaining, particularly when we view the responsibility of the church to the world in which we live.

...by Prophetic Policies

The rapture and resurrection of the church is not to remove it to another realm. Far from it. Its purpose is to equip the church in order that it may minister to the world the very fullness it has received from Christ. The resurrection body will be the ultimate expression of the fullness of the church. God will through this resurrection community demonstrate in the very sphere of his rejection the exceeding riches of his grace. He and his people will be vindicated before all. It is not just the angels who are going to gaze upon this fullness. This will be no exclusive showing. The whole universe is even now waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. Their travail will be satisfied. The return of Christ will be the curtain-raiser to a new act of divine glory. The curtain of the flesh will be drawn aside and God's sons will display the manifold wisdom of his eternal purpose.

We shall Reign ...

This people will reign with him. They shall reign upon the earth. They receive authority over the nations. In this age God is setting the stage for the final drama. What God would do with us now is not unrelated to what follows, but is a preparation for it. How can we be adequately prepared for the divine government of the universe in a coming age if we opt out of involvement with mankind in this?

... upon the Earth

True, the emphasis now is on the spiritual struggles that are going on behind the scenes, but does this mean that there are no actors on the stage? The spiritual warfare in the heavens is being manifested in the visible realm of daily life. Here before our eyes is the evidence of victory or defeat. Is corruption being checked, is light being dispelled? If not we are losing the back-stage battle and showing how unfitted we are for the far more important tasks that lie ahead.

If society feels no impact, if the world is no longer turned upside down, then so much for our heavenly warfare and our on high calling.

We may well be a heavenly people but for God's sake let's keep our feet on terra-firma. Let's get the job done. Let's get involved! □

Forgive Us Our Denominations / John Noble

Review by GEORGE TARLETON

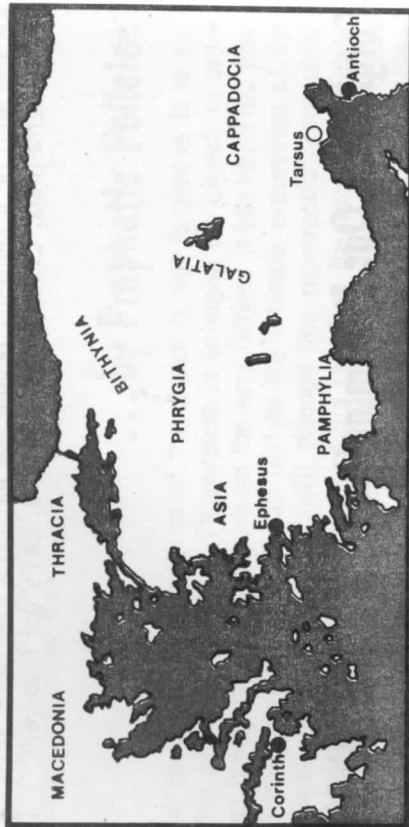
WHEN ASKED by a leading evangelical what my message would be if I were given the opportunity to preach to all the evangelicals in this nation, without any hesitation I said, 'Repent of our unbelief!'. However, having read this booklet, I feel that a call to repent of our sin of party spirit would have been much more appropriate. I hit out at the tree whereas John Noble has struck at the very root of our problem.

'Forgive Us Our Denominations' maintains that rare balance of truth spoken in love. After demolishing the basis of denominationalism and confronting us with the need for genuine repentance, the author then has a section entitled '.... As We Forgive Those Who Denomination Against Us'. Here he not only warns of the danger of becoming a non-sectarian sect, but also stresses the need to love and forgive others who have not had this grievous sin revealed to them by the Spirit.

There is something prophetic about this little book. It is a publication that I believe every member of the body of Christ should read for themselves, for I am convinced that this is what the Spirit is saying to the churches NOW.

FORGIVE US OUR DENOMINATIONS is available free of charge from the author, 24 Wilton Drive, Collier Row, Romford, Essex. □

New Testament Churches



In his second article DAVID LILLIE continues to look at the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

AS FAR as Luke's account informs us, the first period in Paul's post-conversion career ends when 'the brethren (at Jerusalem) ... brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus' — in other words sent him home! The context suggests that this was a security measure, perhaps in the interests both of Paul and of these whom he left, for his bold preaching in Jerusalem during his short stay there undoubtedly provided strong provocation to the Jews.

No doubt Saul had much to learn; he was still a comparatively young man, and young in the faith. For a number of years he drops out of the picture whilst Luke focuses attention on Peter's ministry. Presumably Saul remained for some time in and around his home town of Tarsus, preaching Christ there. We shall never know why in his subsequent missionary itinerations there is no record of further visits to his home town for ministry there. Perhaps this is a case of 'a prophet is not without honour save in his own house'.

Meanwhile at Antioch in Cilicia about 100 miles away, a remarkable movement of the Spirit of God was under way. Some of the brethren

who had been obliged to leave their homes in Jerusalem following the 'tribulation that arose about Stephen' had found their way to this principal city (the third largest in the world), preaching the Lord Jesus to the Greeks. 'And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number that believed turned unto the Lord'. News of this came to the ears of the elders at Jerusalem, perhaps causing them some apprehension, for as yet they had by no means thrown off their Jewish prejudices.

So they sent Barnabas to Antioch; 'who, when he was come, and had seen the grace of God, was glad'. Good for Barnabas! And good for the eager, hungry-hearted new converts there, who responded so well and testified so freely that 'much people was added unto the Lord'. So much so that Barnabas found he could not cope with the situation single-handed. He must have help, and his thoughts turned to his old friend Saul.

When Saul was found at Tarsus he returned with Barnabas to Antioch. This brings us to the beginning of Saul's second period, the period of the great missionary journeys.

It would be impossible in a short article to touch on more than a few of the highlights in this remarkable 'success story'. We shall concentrate on the events surrounding the planting of the churches in Antioch, Corinth and Ephesus, and endeavour to deduce from them some of the basic principles which they may suggest.

Luke presents the story of a man who, as we have said, had the heart of an evangelist. We see him in action: determined, fearless, undeterred by opposition, confident and at least satisfied in the knowledge that his mission has been accomplished. It cannot but be profitable to note the methods which emerged in the development of the apostle's ministry. In some instances we have to use a bit of sanctified imagination to see how such methods may need to be adapted to the different conditions and circumstances prevailing today. What matters essentially is that we share Paul's vision, his passion, his devotion to his Lord, his utter selflessness in the pursuance of his call.

Paul's ministry then, was not the end product resulting from the app-

lication of certain basic 'principles', but the fulfilment of a divine call to bear the Name of Christ to the Gentiles and kings and children of Israel. In the fulfilment of that call, certain principles emerged.

The Church at Antioch

After the return of Barnabas and Saul to Antioch, Luke tells us that: 'for a whole year they were gathered together with the church, and taught much people; and that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch' (Acts 11:26).

Christians who ..

So the name 'Christian' was originally attached to the believers by their Gentile neighbours. It would of course have been quite unacceptable to orthodox Jews to apply the messianic Name to these followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Evidently it soon became a designation acceptable to the believers themselves. Neither do we find that they assumed any other name, except the purely descriptive term 'The Way' which appears to have been used at times. It would be well if this designation sufficed for the followers of Christ in our own day. Yet one has known occasions when to confess to being 'a Christian' appears to have been regarded more as an evasion than a confession of faith!

.. Gave Willingly

During that year the church at Antioch is visited by a party of men from Jerusalem described as prophets, one of whom, Agabus by name, signified by the Spirit that a great famine would shortly take place. Josephus mentions that severe famine hit that area around AD 46 and this helps us to fix this period of Saul's ministry as shortly before that date. Attention is then drawn to the plight of the poor brethren in the church in Jerusalem which would be aggravated further by this predicted disaster. It is interesting to note the apparently spontaneous and whole hearted decision of the Antioch church to send relief to the brethren in Judaea. Such readiness to give of their substance is the first known outcome of the teaching which they received from Barnabas and Saul. The ministry of giving was to figure prominently in the subsequent ministry of the Apostle Paul, and is deserving of much higher priority in the thinking and ministry of the churches today.

.. and Matured Quickly

The responsibility of taking the collection to the elders at Jerusalem was entrusted to Barnabas and Saul. That both of them could be spared at the same time is an indication of solid development in the spiritual character of this church. It speaks well for the wisdom of Barnabas and Saul that they were able to recognize that the time had come when their withdrawal would be for the benefit of the saints. Their absence must have covered a period of many months and, when they eventually returned, Luke gives no indication of any problems which needed to be straightened out, but simply states: 'Now there were at Antioch in the church that was there, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, and Symeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manen the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul'.

This is an interesting list. Barnabas and Saul are both included, but with no suggestion that either of them held any office above that of the other three local men. Even the order in which the names are listed seems to be deliberately haphazard, with Barnabas named first and Saul last. They have become integrated into the church at Antioch as two among five prophets and teachers. The church had grown up; and the time had come for it to stand on its own feet, and allow Barnabas and Saul to move on. 'And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them'.

Thus began a period of ten or so years during which Saul (now to be known as Paul) would be engaged in almost continuous evangelism throughout the Four Provinces, with marked success. Although Antioch was to continue to be his home church to which he would return from time to time, neither he nor Barnabas would again settle there permanently.

The Church at Corinth

Paul came to Corinth during his second missionary tour. He was alone having left his companions Silas and Timothy behind in Macedonia, though later they were to join him. Paul was never by choice a lone wolf, and it was providential that almost immediately on arrival in the city he seems to have met a fine Christian couple by name Aquila and

Priscilla who had recently arrived from Rome (whence they had been expelled by Claudius). Luke's account of this meeting is worth quoting in full: 'and he came unto them, and because he was of the same trade, he abode with them, and they wrought; for by their trade they were tentmakers'.

A Tentmaker but not ..

This is instructive. It reveals clearly that Paul never assumed that his call (and it was a very special call) carried with it any obligation to relinquish secular work. His Pharisaical background would have encouraged him in this connection, for it was obligatory for Pharisees to earn their living by some trade. And it appears that Paul as he moved around in the fulfilment of the divine call would look for opportunity to pursue his craft as a normal part of the pattern of life. Not only did it provide him with a means of livelihood, but it gave him a point of contact with the common man, and placed him above suspicion of being in the service of Christ for material ends. When parting with the Ephesian elders some years later towards the end of his third and final tour he was able to say to them: 'I coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities and to those that were with me'.

.. .. a Professional Preacher!

One may not deduce from this a rigid principle, for Paul himself teaches that the labourer in the gospel is worthy of his hire, and recognized the necessity for some of the Lord's servants in certain circumstances to live off the gospel. Yet his own example is worthy of note. He took up his craft and wrought gladly and gainfully whenever circumstances indicated that he should do so. With equal readiness he would lay it aside when the demands of his heavenly calling so required. Separated unto the gospel of Jesus Christ he might be, but professional preacher — never! Professionalism has eaten its way into the heart of many Christian institutions in our days. It can find no precedent in the life and ministry of Paul.

Into the Synagogue ..

At Corinth, Paul made the synagogue his first preaching centre. The

gospel was to the Jew first, and Paul loved his own people and longed for them. And so the synagogue was his first call, to be followed almost invariably by his early rejection. Yet sometimes a few would believe, and here at Corinth it must have been cause for great rejoicing that Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, 'believed in the Lord with all his house'. It also seems probable that Sosthenes — his successor in office — was later to follow him, for in writing his first epistle to the Corinthians at a later date, Paul is joined in the salutation by a man of this name (1 Cor. 1:1).

Paul's policy with regard to the synagogues may be worthy of consideration in relation to the question of the attitude we should adopt today towards 'the establishment'. It seems that Paul credited the Jews with sincerity until proved otherwise, and persisted in offering Christ to them in spite of repeated rebuffs. Ought we not to adopt a similar attitude in these days towards the churches of Christendom and, where opportunity is given, bring to them the message of life?

.. .. and Out Again!

In this connection it should however be noted that when Paul preached in the synagogues, he evidently felt no obligation to withhold any part of the message to which they might take exception. Indeed he urged on the Jews again and again the total claims of Jesus Christ, whose death at their hands and resurrection were, taken together, the pivot on which his message invariably hung. The outcome at Corinth was fairly typical: 'And when they (the Jews) opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook out his raiment, and said unto them; I am clean; your blood be upon your own heads; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles'. Although many Jews believed and turned to Christ as a result of these 'synagogue campaigns' there is no record of any Christian community being established within a synagogue. The opportunity was given to them, but it was invariably rejected.

Into the Homes ..

After their withdrawal from the synagogue, Paul and his companions were received into the home of Titus Justus. Titus lived 'hard to' the synagogue, so the situation must have been a highly explosive one. The Jews were an unpopular minority in this pagan city, and Roman

law gave religious liberty to Christians, so they had little to worry about – especially after Gallio had summarily dismissed the charge levelled against them by the Jews. So here the new church in Corinth met. Titus presumably had a large room, or one capable of being enlarged, for the two epistles Paul subsequently wrote to this church confirm the fulfilment of the Lord's own words to Paul: 'I have much people in this city'. Other homes no doubt opened up in due course. Erastus the city treasurer is mentioned along with Gaius in Romans 16:23, and of course Crispus. Paul's first epistle to this church gives valuable information about the internal life of this Christian community, and, whatever problems may have confronted them, Paul saw them collectively as God's building, a temple of God indwelt by his Spirit. (1 Cor. 3:9,16).

The Church at Ephesus

Paul's first visit to this great city in the province of Asia was brief. He had been away from 'home' (Antioch) for a long time and was anxious to return. Leaving Corinth by ship in the company of Priscilla and Aquila, they came to Ephesus where Paul's companions would stay. It afforded an opportunity for Paul to get the feel of this place and of the surrounding province which he had not been permitted of the Holy Ghost to visit. Calling at the local synagogue as was his custom, he was well received, and promised, if God will, to return to them again after he had fulfilled his immediate plans.

In due course he returned, and this time he was to stay in Ephesus for approximately two and a half years.

Disciples ..

Between Paul's first and second visit to Ephesus, a devout and learned Jew named Apollos had come to the city. 'He spoke and taught carefully the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John, and he began to speak boldly in the synagogue'. He came under the influence of Priscilla and Aquila who 'took him unto them and expounded unto him the way of God more carefully'. He then appears to have moved on to Corinth, but when Paul returned to Ephesus he found there certain disciples who had presumably been under instruction from Apollos but had not received the enlightenment which their teacher

had later received. Paul immediately gives his attention to this little group who, although recognized as 'believers', were evidently lacking in spiritual experience. Paul immediately draws attention to this in asking them point-blank: 'Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?' His misgivings were well-founded. They had not so much as heard that the Holy Ghost was given.

They had received their spiritual initiation under the ministry of John the Baptist and, somehow, had been unaware of the pentecostal outpouring – perhaps, indeed, even of the resurrection of Christ. Yet, according to their light, they 'believed' and were recognized as 'disciples'. A salutary lesson this as to how we should receive devout people who may hitherto have been denied access to vital truth which we have been privileged to receive. After some instruction he baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then he laid his hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost, speaking with tongues and prophesying.

.. Filled with the Spirit

The whole incident underlines the fact that there is an experience of the Holy Ghost 'coming upon' a believer which is distinct from, and may be subsequent to, regeneration. These people had been baptized by Paul in the name of the Lord Jesus before hands were laid upon them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. It is important to note that Paul evidently regarded such an experience as being normal for believers.

Fulfilling his earlier promise Paul soon entered the synagogue 'and spoke boldly for the space of three months reasoning and persuading as to the things concerning the kingdom of God'. No half measures, we may be sure, and a minimum of tact! Within three months, having overstayed his welcome, 'he departed from them, and separated the disciples'.

A Teacher ..

Paul soon finds a new base at the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Presumably acceptable arrangements were made with this man for the use of his premises daily during hours when he did not normally use them. This

neutral ground seems to have served Paul and his colleagues admirably, for here they continued for two years 'so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks'. It marked one of the most fruitful periods in Paul's ministry. Ephesus, cultural centre and flourishing seaport as it was, proved an ideal base from which to evangelize the whole of the well-populated province of Asia. And, from that lecture hall, the gospel was carried to, and planted in, many other cities. John the apostle settled in this area and later, from exile on Patmos, wrote the letters to the seven churches in this province which are recorded in Revelation 2 and 3. No doubt it was the teaching in Tyrannus's lecture hall which provided the source of the original Asian awakening.

.. .. who Worked Miracles

It was at this period in his ministry that 'God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul' — miracles both of physical healing and exorcism. It is particularly interesting that these accompanying signs should appear not simply to authenticate the ministry of a man newly commissioned, but that of a well-established servant of the Lord. So the signs which the Risen Lord had promised should follow them that believe, were not given only at the beginning of the new age, or at the beginning of a new ministry. They might recur at any time when it should serve his interests to bestow them.

Churches Built

In this article we have only touched on some of the main features which characterized the ministry of Paul in the planting of three churches. There is nothing stereotyped about the ways of the Lord, but there are guiding principles. Some of these emerge quite clearly in the life and ministry of Paul. They are recorded for our instruction.

In a later article we will summarise some of these principles in the context of our contemporary situation.

.. .. According to Plan!

That Paul was conscious that he was working according to the divine plan is only too evident from Luke's record and Paul's own writings.

Paul saw the church as the key to the fulfilment of Christ's kingdom plans (Eph. 3:10,11), and the planting of local churches as the practical outworking of that vision. He was not disobedient to that heavenly vision, so that, 'by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Ghost from Jerusalem and round about even unto Illyricum', as he was able to write to the Romans, he had 'fully preached the gospel of Christ', so that he had 'no more any place in these regions'. Mission accomplished! □

Prison to Praise/Merlin Carothers/ by Ken Rose

CRASH!!! ON the kitchen floor the casserole lies broken in pieces, its macaroni cheese contents, fresh from the oven, scattered on the floor, up the wall, everywhere. The children's lunch – and they are waiting for it! But instead of anger and despair a housewife roars with laughter – 'Praise the Lord', 'Thank you, Father'.

That was the difference Merlin Carothers' book made to our household just two days after its first appearance! For the most part, this little book by an American Army chaplain is the kind of testimony we have come to expect, but one hopes not to take for granted, in these days. Conversion from a life of crime and futility; baptism in the Holy Spirit; power in witness and a ministry of miracles – we have read it many times before and we hope, in the Lord's goodness, to encounter it more and more. It is thrilling. But it is not particularly distinctive, except perhaps for one incident where the author has a vision of Jesus kneeling before him. The Lord says 'I don't want to use you, I want you to use me'. Perhaps there is a liberating freshness in this thought: his power, himself, is available for us to use!

But now, two thirds of the way through, at chapter seven, the crunch comes. 'Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you' (1 Thess. 5:16-18). Rejoice evermore. In everything (even the lost macaroni cheese lunches) give thanks. THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD FOR YOU! Chaplain Carothers goes on to testify to the revolution made in his life and ministry as he learned to praise God in every circumstance, every trial, every event, every problem. More, not just to praise him, but to THANK him for it. Sometimes it costs. There is after all such a thing as a 'sacrifice of praise'. And it is still true that the 'joy of the Lord is our strength'. Now, having read this little but dynamic book, we are beginning to see it work out in practice. We know it is God's will because surely it remains true that he ever seeks to form a people for himself, that they might declare his praise. (Isaiah 43:21).

PRISON TO PRAISE is published as a paperback by Hodder and Stoughton and is available from most book shops. □

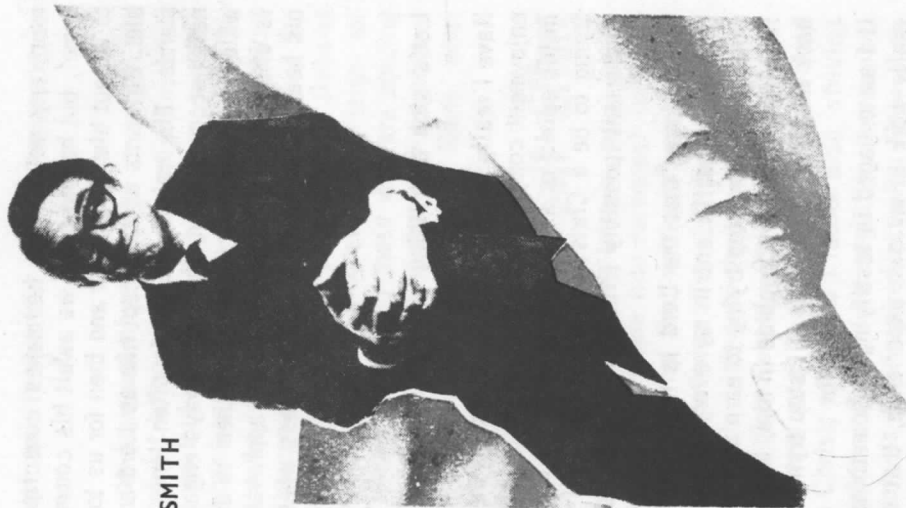
Be at Rest

by MAURICE SMITH

WE DON'T start to make any real progress in the Christian life until we are at rest. It's the very opposite of the natural sphere, where we rest when the work is over. The Christian life starts with us 'seated in Christ' and our first great need is to realize what a great and wonderful thing Jesus did on Calvary. There he took away our sin and united us to himself, causing us to be raised with him to highest heaven. We may have to 'strive to enter into that rest', but once we have 'ceased from our own labours' we shall enter in.

Too much Rush ..

Anything done in our natural energy will not go through. Our blessed Lord Jesus did not rush around the Middle East of his day. He didn't cover many square miles and yet he accomplished more in three years of ministry than anyone else in a lifetime. During his ministry he said: 'As the Father has sent me, even so send I you'. Much of the current haste to evangelise the world is often no more than unbelief. 'He that believes shall not make haste'. There is a prevalent idea that I must meet the need. Let me say gently, but firmly, that God doesn't



want any volunteers, he makes conscripts. 'Who-so-ever will may come', but having come we await his commands. He does not want us to accept him as Saviour and then for us to set out in fervour to serve him. He wants us to accept him as Lord and to move only as he commands. The training period is often long, but vital. Some Christians never seem to learn, they are always engaged in some hectic activity which the Lord has never asked them to do. A tiny touch of blessing is often seen as a sign of God's approval, whereas the truth is that his heart is so big that he will bless whatever and whenever he can.

.. .. Let's take Stock

Let's stop everything we're doing and consider for just a moment:

Have I really found an absolute rest in the good news? Is my rest and enjoyment completely dependent on my abiding in Christ and walking in his spirit, or am I walking after my own natural-religious ways ... trying to be a Christian and to fulfil all the imperatives of the New Testament (possibly with a bit of outside help from Jesus).

We all know that the Lord is really sufficient, but is he being experientially sufficient in my everyday life? He will be if I will stop working for him: stop trying to earn my salvation by subtle self-effort. He will be if I learn to abide in him, that is to dwell and live and rest back into him. He will be if I stop trying to be a Christian.

If I am engaged in testifying to something that I have found does not really work in my own experience, that makes me guilty of exaggeration (to say the least). Jesus had the strongest things to say to religious people who made much of compliance with the outward letter of the law without having the inward spiritual reality of it. The same words are applicable to anyone seeking to fulfil a New Testament law with natural zeal.

Lord, Shake our

This is not an attempt to upset your Christianity — if it can be upset or shaken it's not the real thing. We don't have to worry about the real thing for it stands the test. These are days when everything that can be shaken will be shaken and if we have an activity which is not

of God then we need to watch out. It will fall away as leaves from a tree in the great shaking.

The world ridicules when an impotent church seeks to tell it the answer to life's problems, whilst being a visible contradiction of its own words. How often have we told others, 'All things work together for good' and then been an absolute denial of it in our own trials? We have failed to praise God for the 'good thing' which he has sent us in the form of a natural disappointment. 'Judgement begins at the house of God', and that explains much of the sifting in our lives at the present time. Our loving Father is shaking everything false, as he so desires truth in our inward parts. And those who are abiding and resting and bearing fruit, he is also pruning that they might bear more fruit. Oh, bless his wonderful and most glorious Name, what faithful hands he has.

.. .. Self-Effort

Suppose we find that blessed rest from our own labours, what do we do? Do we sit and watch the world cascade into darkness? Once we realize that in us dwells no good thing, that we have no ability to serve him, then there will open up a pathway of service chosen by God and with his own divine approval. Listen to the words of Apostle Paul: 'Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ; whereunto I labour also, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily'. I tell you, here is no self-effort, but here is God-inspired activity. Only such activity will stand the test of eternity.

So much self-motivated activity towards others is often an excuse for not having deep dealings with God ourselves. If he once stills us and gets our hearts in touch with his own great heart, then we really begin to care for other folk. It is his great love, and not my puny, vacillating love, that alone will accomplish his loving purposes.

Someone looking at an upright and respectable citizen once said to me, 'He'd make such a good Christian'. Excuse me, but that's nonsense. We're all made of the same stuff, 'For there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God'. He made us

and gave us attributes that he may well use when we have laid them down, but even that would not make us to be a 'good Christian'. It is the measure of Christ-likeness that determines that, and that blessed nature grows as we lie still in the Father's gracious pruning hand.

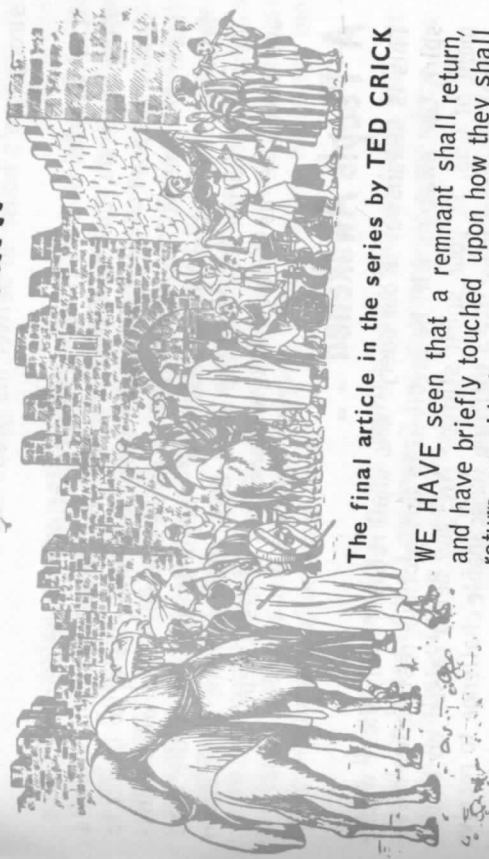
Are we Trying ..

So let's stop trying to save the world; let's take the heavy weight off our shoulders and accept our seat in Christ in Heaven. We do much better by praying from heaven, than by struggling to push people up there. We can hear what God says from there too, and go just where he tells us, at just the right moment! There is no place for self-will or self-effort in heaven, but, hallelujah!, the air is good there, — our minds fill with peace, our hearts with joy and our mouths with song. Why, if we remain here long enough we shall soon be ministering out of an overflow! and that's true ministry.

.. or Trusting

A dear aged friend of mine once watched me struggling to be a good Christian and being such a poor advertisement. He overtook me as I trudged the sea-front bearing the whole responsibility for God's work. Laying a gentle hand upon my shoulder he said, 'It's perfectly safe to trust the Lord, old boy' and so it is! □

A Remnant Shall Return



The final article in the series by TED CRICK

WE HAVE seen that a remnant shall return, and have briefly touched upon how they shall return, considering the factors of travail and leadership. Let us now see what light the scripture gives on the subject of who will comprise this returning remnant.

Who Will Return?

There was a phase in the history of Israel which corresponds with the position of the church today. It was the time of captivity in Babylon, right at the end of those predetermined seventy years of chastisement, when God was moving to fulfil His promise that a remnant would return. For this to be accomplished, the Lord, in glorious sovereignty, caused many changes to take place. First of all He overthrew Babylon, the empire which had taken His people captive. Secondly He replaced that regime with one of His own appointing, bringing Cyrus to power. One hundred and fifty years before the birth of Cyrus, Isaiah had named him by prophecy as the future deliverer of the Jewish remnant (Is.44:28; 45:1-4; 46:11). Cyrus means 'the sun' and is a direct type of the Lord Jesus of whom Malachi says: 'But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall' (Mal.4:2).

It was said of Cyrus that he would issue a decree commanding the release of the captives, the re-building of the city of Jerusalem and

of the temple of the Lord, and this all came to pass according to the word of the Lord. Cyrus is a picture of the One who broke into the strong man's house to deliver his goods and to release the captives.

It is recorded in Ezra 1:1 that 'the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia, that he made a proclamation,' and in verse five God's people respond — 'all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.' This word translated 'raised' means 'to be awakened', 'begin to see'. It is the word used in Zechariah 4:1, 'And the angel that talked with me came again and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep.'

A People Awakened

This is the answer to our query: 'Who shall return?'. Only those whose spirit God awakens will be involved in this glorious restoration movement of God. Is your spirit stirred? Are you being raised up to this end? It may seem to us like a thrilling inescapable challenge to receive such a proclamation and command, but what did it involve in actual reality?

When Israel first went into captivity they had been counselled by the Lord to build houses in Babylon, plant gardens, take wives, bear children, seek the welfare of the cities where they lived (Jer.29:4-8). They would have been thoroughly integrated in the spirit and ways of Babylon. Many would be prosperous business men, important citizens, property owners. Many would have succumbed to a self-indulgent Godless way of living. How many of these would respond to such a call?

Furthermore, the religious life of Babylon was intensely real and attractive to the outward man. Its forms and ceremonies probably surpassed today's religions in attraction and appearance of worship, satisfying and stupefying a whole nation and empire. How many Jews had embraced its tenets and mixed their religions together? Remember that only Daniel and his three friends stood out against this false worship at the beginning.

Today, Israel's leaders are pleading with thousands of their countrymen to return home to partake in the building and defence of their

native land — their God-given heritage. How many are prepared to have their lives disturbed, to leave all behind and return to certain conflict, trouble and possibly death?

Likewise, today, as the call goes out to the people of God by the Spirit: 'Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of Chaldea (Jer.50:8); Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues' (Rev.18:4); how many are prepared to abandon the great edifice of religious denominations built up by man, and walk the pathway back to Zion's pure city and habitation? How many see or understand that the vast religious set-up is one spiritual Babylon, enslaving and ensnaring the true people of God on every hand?

Who then is responding to the Spirit's call? Who will go? Who will build the house of the Lord today? Let us enumerate some of the positive qualities of such a remnant.

.. .. Envisioned

They must be a people of vision. 'The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran' (Acts 7:1). Abraham was completely given over to idolatry in Ur of the Chaldees when God, in sovereign mercy and grace, revealed himself. What a mighty moment lies behind a simple statement: 'The God of glory appeared'. Abraham had a vision of the glory of God as revolutionary and far-reaching as that which Saul received on the road to Damascus. That revelation of God's glory utterly won his heart and from that day he was a man who was 'looking for a city, whose builder and maker is God'. No more could he be at home serving other gods (Josh.24:2). He had to find out where this glorious God of gods lived, and be there with him, and make his home there. It was the vision of the glory of God that kept him on the move spiritually.

Vision given through revelation by the Holy Spirit is the first requisite of remnant saints. A vision clear enough, full enough, deep enough, to carry them through every obstacle, setback, failure, discouragement, and delay, until they arrive in glory.

Abraham literally had to leave all and go. The remnant had to leave

all and go. We must leave all and go forth to him. Possessions, kindred, station in life, reputation among men, ecclesiastical titles and positions, religious traditions and prejudices. 'Get thee out' (Acts 7:2). Unless we are prepared to face up to this qualification we shall remain but visionaries of the worst type with great condemnation resting upon us for being 'disobedient to the heavenly vision'.

Abraham being 'called to go out - went out - not knowing whither he went' (Heb.11:8). Abraham saw the vision and he heard the voice of God. The vision and the voice constitute faith's foundation because faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Faith relates to the present, for we walk by faith (2 Cor.5:7), we work by faith (1 Thess.1:3), we live by faith (Rom.1:17), we fight by faith (1 Tim. 6:12), we overcome the world by faith (1 John 5:4). Faith has its foundations in the past, at Calvary, but its outworking is now.

.. .. and Rightly Related

A less obvious requirement, but an exceedingly important one, is a true relatedness to one another. There had to be oneness of vision, purpose, and faith for this divine task of rebuilding. The work was to be opposed by an adversary whose great cunning and strength lay in his ability to divide and destroy. He knew how to expose every weakness, how to turn the difference of a hair's breadth into a gulf that could not be bridged. 'Together' is one of the great words in the church-building epistle of Paul to the Ephesians.

True relatedness involves submission to the divinely appointed leadership; submission of brethren one to another; submission of one and all to the leading of the Holy Spirit. On no other ground can the remnant succeed in rebuilding the house at such troublous times.

God is pouring out his Spirit upon many prepared vessels today, not for their own pleasure or glory, but for his purpose to be accomplished. It is for those whom he has chosen and filled to give themselves wholeheartedly to the Spirit of God, that this final expression of God's glory in an earthly people should be made manifest. Wherever God is gathering such saints together, those who see these things and long to be partakers of them must earnestly seek his face for the outworking of his will.

How Will They Come?

There are certain scriptures which focus upon the subject of the return journey of the remnant, which give us valuable indications of the Lord's work in them while travelling back to Zion. It was evidently about four months journey under normal circumstances (Ezra 7:9) through difficult and dangerous country, with many enemies lying in wait along the way (Ezra 8:22).

In Jeremiah 50:4 it says: 'In those days and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping, they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten'.

In Penitence

This shows that they will return in thorough and complete penitence of heart concerning their past ways and doings, earnestly seeking the right way to Zion from the Lord and from those who can help them en route.

They will be a people of set determination, even as our Lord's face was set to go to Jerusalem - no side paths investigated, no unnecessary delays accepted - a people earnestly longing and prepared for complete union with their Lord in life and service.

'Set you up highway markers (back to Canaan, make yourselves guides, turn your thoughts and attentions to the way by which you went into exile) retrace your steps, O virgin Israel, return to your cities. How long will you waver and hesitate (to return) O you backsliding daughter? for the Lord has created a new thing in Israel' (Jer.31:21, 22. A.O.T.).

.. .. Holiness

'And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; - and the ransom of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and ever-

lasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away' (Is.35:8,10).

Which way did they go into exile? Along the path of unholiness, rebellion, disobedience, sin, deep sin. How shall they return? In the opposite direction, a pathway of holiness, penitent and humble obedience, thorough dealings with sin, complete cleansing through the Word. The holy way is the only way back to Zion's city. God desires to cleanse and purify our lives by his Spirit's working and our co-operation. Is this way planted in your heart?

.. .. and Joy!

As a result of this glorious work it becomes a singing way. Oh how wonderful when the Spirit can sing within us. There is no singing to compare with the songs of the Spirit sung by those on the return journey to Zion. What a glorious crescendo of praise and worship arises from such hearts!

What Will They Do?

The work of the remnant is a very important subject on its own, worthy of detailed study and prayer. The initial responsibility of the returned remnant, according to the decree of Cyrus, was to build a house at Jerusalem for the Lord. When we consider Haggai's word concerning this house – that the latter glory of the house would be greater than the former, and that the Lord would fill this house with his glory – we begin to see a little of the important place that the work of the remnant holds in God's purpose. That which is true of Judah's returned remnant is even more gloriously true of the remnant church today into whose hands the final issues of glory have been committed.

The work of the remnant as exemplified in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah and Ezekiel 40-48 is to recover the glory of the Lord by means of a restoration work upon and within the house of the Lord, the Holy city, and its walls and gates. Seen in its entirety this is an undertaking of vast proportions and implications, but if we remember that the end is arrived at by a necessary and logical step-by-step process and programme under divine direction, then, with the glorious objective ever in view, what we need to know for practical

purposes is where are we now? What is the next step? A prayerful consideration of Ezra and Nehemiah will throw much light upon what God is doing today.

Build God's House

It is important in this respect to realise that the first temple of Solomon had been completely destroyed even to its foundations by the Babylonian invaders. This meant that the returning remnant had to start from the very beginning in their work.

Let us make clear that the site of the temple was unchanged. From the day that Abraham offered Isaac on Mount Moriah, the site of God's dwelling place had been settled. David confirmed it according to many authorities when he purchased the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Joshua, the high priest of the returning remnant, again re-dedicated the site to the Lord, because his first act on returning to Jerusalem was to offer a burnt offering to God. Thus he established the unchanging ground of a substitutionary sacrifice as the one means whereby God and man can meet and fellowship together.

.. .. on Sure Foundations

So for all ages God has said: 'Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation (Is.28:16) and again: 'For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 3:11).

This foundation is laid and cannot be moved or altered, hallelujah! Calvary is the eternal foundation of God's house and its immense significance and glory still surpasses our understanding.

.. .. with Precious Stones!

When men try to build upon this foundation with works of wood, hay and stubble, God must eventually command the whole structure to be burned up and destroyed. Hebrews 12 warns us that everything must be tested in this way: 'This word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain'(v.27).

How very, very far we have strayed in the Christian world from this sure foundation. How much is the making and product of man. How few have built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

There is a great need today of foundational ministries – of apostles and prophets to lay true foundations in the people of God, to bring the people of God to the ground of first principles (Heb.6:1), to clear away the rubbish and accumulated traditions and religious notions of many generations.

There is a distance between Babylon and Zion and there should be multitudes of pilgrims covering that distance now as the Lord replaces our Babylonish garments of activity, our Babylonish thinking and ways, with those of true Zion origin and nature. 'Awake, Awake, put on thy strength O Zion, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem the Holy City – shake thyself from the dust; arise and sit down O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion' (Is.52:1,2). Oh may multitudes of the Lord's people hear and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches and respond to him in these days, that his purpose for his people and his house may be fulfilled. □

Volume four