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## An Appeal

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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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.