

Quietness of Soul

There is such a thing as quietness of soul. We don't hear much about it today. This is because many Christians don't experience it. It is not part and parcel of their daily lives. This being so, it is little wonder that so many of the Lord's people, particularly pastors and full-time Christians workers, are stressed, uptight and finding it difficult to cope.

It is true that we, as believers, are constantly agonized by the sin which is still in us. It is true that the path of every child of God is one of temptation, combat, difficulty, pain and disappointment. It is true that Christian workers are weighed down every day by their 'deep concern for all the churches' (2 Corinthians 11:28). But it is not true that we have to go through life without quietness of soul.

The yoke of Christ is easy. His burden is light. His legacy to us is peace (John 14:27). It is his own peace that he gives us, and he does not give it sparingly. It is a peace which surpasses all understanding. It is the privilege of every Christian to be able to face the worst scenario with an untroubled heart.

Praying ourselves empty

We enter into this peace by praying ourselves empty. After all, what is prayer? It is approaching God through Christ and telling him everything which we have on our heart at the moment. We go over it again and again until we have nothing left to say. We pour out our hearts until words fail us. We hold nothing back. We tell him all. When this has been done, further words simply seem out of place.

Real prayer ends in silence. In that silence, what peace invades the soul! With tear-stained cheeks we have confessed every sin we know about, and all our foolishness. What a sense of pardon we now have! We have told the Lord about every mistake, every worry, every fear, every ache and pain, every difficult decision. We have talked to him about everyone we love, the sin of the world and the state of the churches. We have cast all our care on him. We have thanked him for every blessing we see. We have rejoiced in his being, his Word and his works. There is nothing to say which we have not said. We have prayed until we have fallen silent. In that silence, he bathes our hearts in a peace which we cannot define (Philippians 4:6-7). We feel the Father's embrace. We breathe the atmosphere of the Spirit. We find that Christ has never been so precious to us as now. It seems to us that we have everything — because we have him.

Silence

The sustained silence which consummates real prayer is not the mere absence of words. The waves and billows have been stilled in our own heart. Something has happened inside us which will not leave us as we re-enter the noisy world. We have quietness of soul and have been inwardly changed.

One of the effects of quietness of soul is that we place a new value on silence in our daily lives. We speak less. We realize that most human speech is superfluous; the greater part of it is an exercise in self-justification. Silences in company no longer embarrass us. We engage in 'small talk' when it is helpful to the person in front of us but, overall, our words are fewer

and fuller. We pause to reflect before we reply. Our own souls have been changed by the silence of God and we instinctively know that people are not helped by needless chatter.

Quietness of soul convinces most of us that we are living too fast. We see that to hurry is to be superficial. So, whenever possible, we no longer go straight from one task to another, but punctuate our lives with soul-refreshing pauses. We stop, are completely still, and absolutely silent. Having collected ourselves and gathered our thoughts, we remember that God is God (Psalm 46:10). We then go to our next task aware of his presence and conscious of his help. We do it as an offering to him. And so life becomes worship and is tinged with glory.

Quietness of soul loves silence. It knows that it is by silence that any moment is deepened. For example, when the Word has been preached, it needs to be thought about. Five minutes' silence at the end of the service are worth far more than thirty minutes, conversation on the church steps. It is in silence that the infallible Word percolates down into our souls.

And what an experience a walk in the park or country becomes! Only in unbroken silence can you hear the full music of God's creation. It ravishes the soul more than any human symphony. The unspeaking believer becomes attentive to the song of every bird and the sound of every insect. He hears distinct applause as the wind rustles the leaves of the branches and understands what it is for all the trees of the field to clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12). His other senses, too, are sharpened. He sees every colour as either more vivid or subtle. He learns to admire each species of flower and to feel the texture of each plant. God's world is scented with fragrances he never knew were there. 'The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord' (Psalm 33:5).

Opening the door

Quietness of soul is not a blessing reserved for a privileged élite. It is God's gift to every believer who will accept it from his hand. It can certainly be experienced where there is noise, hurry and crowds, but it can't be received there. God's hand gives it to us in the secret place.

To open the door to that place we have to close the door on human company, human timetables and human expectations. We have to get alone with God, and stay alone with him until his hand has reached down into the depths of our being and opened itself in our very soul.

Only a closed door is an open door to him. Only the way of solitude will lead us to his company. Only where we shut out the clamour of our soul will we know his quietness. Only by stopping will we manage to keep going.

Stuart Olyott