

"A NEW CREATION"

Acts 9:1-20

4. A New Brotherhood.

"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul." Paul was cut off from all of his former companions. Because of his stand for Christ, he had forfeited the friendship of the Jews. "Brother Saul" spoke volumes of meaning to him. That tender and significant expression caused him to feel that at least one person in the world believed in him and cared for his company.

There are many brotherhoods in the world, but none compares with the Christian Brotherhood. The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, about which we hear so much in certain circles today, has no foundation in the scriptures. Those who talk so much about these things want all the benefits of the Christian Brotherhood without being willing to submit to the initiation, which is the new birth.

Two young ministerial students were standing by a bridge in England one day and talking about the things of God. One of them was the son of Gypsy Smith, the noted evangelist. The other said to him, "Look down to the water there, and see the pillars that make up the bridge! You cannot see all the pillars because they extend down underneath the water and are invisible. I would be willing to be one of those stones which hold up the bridge, although I were unseen and unsung by man, if the gospel of Christ could go out to the poor, lost souls in South America."

That youth had his wish. He went out as a missionary to South America. In less than a year he died, but the bridge carried over it the gospel message to those for whom he, as well as Christ, died.

The chief service of Ananias to his generation was that which he rendered to Paul, the new convert to the Christian faith, and the giant who was in need of a brother. He has become famous for the work which he did with Paul.

There was a task which needed to be done. Someone was needed to do it. The Master was looking for someone to perform the task. No depths of obscurity could hide Ananias from His gracious gaze. Ananias was just an ordinary disciple, who sought to glorify Christ by a consecrated life amid the unexciting usualness of customary Damascus' ways and doings. Ananias was the right man in the right place at the right time, and God used him in a marvelous way. The outcome of his life and work was incaluable blessing.

One must not imagine that it was an easy thing for Ananias to do what the Master said, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus." Ananias was a timid man and might easily have shrunk in fear from such an ordeal. But, without any delay, Ananias obeyed. He was willing to go just when and where the Lord directed, and to count on His faithfulness in seeing him through. We would do well to learn from him the lesson of yielding implicit obedience to our Master.

In the obedience of Ananias there shines a beautiful triple fidelity--that of Christian love, Christian loyalty, and Christian humility. His Christian love is seen in his attitude toward Saul. He approached the arch-persecutor with the eloquently affectionate greeting, "Brother Saul!". Moreover, "He put his hands on him," which was a very gracious act because Saul had come to lay the hand of violence upon Ananias, but Ananias laid the gentle hand of brotherliness on him. There is not a trace of resentment in the entire demeanor of Ananias. While his Christian love was revealed in his attitude toward Saul, his loyalty is seen in his attitude toward his Lord. He would not let his expression of brotherliness toward Saul cause him

to shrink from affirming the lordship of Christ, even though that was the very thing against which Saul had been fighting so madly.

Note also this man's humility. He did not obtrude himself into his message. The very opposite was the case. The only reference to himself was the one that was needful. "The Lord, even Jesus . . . hath sent me." He did not start explaining who or what he was. He was content to be the faithful messenger of his Master. This was the man God used; ready, willing, and faithful, yet just an ordinary, humble, obscure working-man. He carried to Paul a word of brotherhood, of human cheer, and an assurance of the loving-kindness and the good will of the Master, and of the high calling of his life. He baptized him. He brothered him. He gave him encouragement.

Perhaps no other man will ever be as great as Paul, but any man can be as brotherly as Ananias. Most of our names will never appear on a scroll or be listed among the heroes, but we can be of such service to them that we can earn a part of their honors. Few can be giants, but all can help the giants. The trouble is that so many want to be Pauls and so few want to be Ananiases. Be yourself, though you cannot be a giant, and do your own duty, though you cannot perform the duties of others. The longer I live, the more I perceive the power and value of those lives which, although they are never mentioned in newspaper columns, transmit the life and grace and love of Christ among neighbors and friends in the ordinary walks of life.

Publicity is not an essential aid to faithfulness or to true success. Service in secret has "house-top" results, even though the connection may not always be detected. We may feel out of sight, but we are never out of God's sight. He is watching to see whether, like Ananias, we are faithful in our present circumstances. He may have much wider fields of service for us in the future, but the determining factor is fidelity in the present. Live for Christ at your very best, just where you are, and a day at a time. By how we live, by what we do, by the words we speak, by looks and tones, by our actions and reactions, we may make a contribution to the eternal well-being of souls every hour that we live.

5. A New Blessing.

"Be filled with the Holy Spirit." What does this mean? It is not something mystical and mysterious. The fulness of the Spirit is the possession and the mastery of the human spirit by the divine Spirit. It is the human personality brought under the domination and control of the Holy Spirit. One is filled with the Spirit when the Holy Spirit has absolute possession and control of his spirit. We are filled with the Spirit when we allow Him wholly to possess us and control us. When He comes in, He enlightens my mind so that I can comprehend divine truth; He purifies my affections and fixes them on Christ, because the ministry of the Spirit is always Christ-centric; and He reinforces my weak will, thus empowering and enabling me to do the will of God. We will never know the possibilities of our redeemed personalities unless we yield ourselves in glad, full and unreserved surrender to His control.

To be filled with the Spirit is to be possessed and controlled by Him. What is it that is possessed and controlled? It is the soul. How we think, feel, judge, and choose determines what we are, so that is why it is important that these faculties be under the proper control. So far as the Christian is concerned, the rival controls are the "flesh" and the "Spirit." These conflict with each other, and contend for the mastery, and they represent opposite types of life. The three controls of the soul are Sin, Self, and the Spirit. The unregenerate man is under the dominion of sin. The carnal or unsurrendered Christian is under the control of self. The spiritual man, fully yielded to Christ, is under the direction of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is in possession and control, our delights, discernments, and decisions conform to the will of God. But when the flesh is in possession and control, there cannot be any harmony, beauty or strength of life.

It is one thing to be indwelt by the Spirit; it is another thing to be filled with the Spirit. It is one thing to know that the Holy Spirit has come to live within me as a resident, but it is another thing to know Him as President. To be filled with the Spirit means that all the faculties and powers of one's personality are brought into living subjection to the Holy Spirit. It means that all of one's interests are under the direct supervision of the Holy Spirit. It means that the believer is completely filled, possessed, dominated, mastered, controlled, directed, and guided by the Holy Spirit. We certainly believe in a very definite yielding of the life to God, and in just as definite an infilling of that life with the Holy Spirit.

The fulness of the Spirit is not a sensation, nor an emotion, but rather the impact of the Spirit of God upon the human spirit, for the purpose of possessing it and controlling it. On the one hand, it is the yielding of one's whole self without reserve to God, and, on the other hand, it is God's appropriation for His own use of that yielded self. Either we are yielded to God, or we are not; either the Holy Spirit is in possession of us, or He is not; either He controls us, or He does not, and each of us may know which of these alternatives is true of us.

As to the fulness of the Holy Spirit, there is considerable doctrine lying under cover of grammar. This verb is in the present tense; therefore, this is a present blessing. It is not a blessing we are bidden to look back to. Nor is it something to look forward to. But it is a present blessing which we may experience now. It is the privilege of a child of God to keep on being filled with the Spirit, God continually pouring out His fulness into your heart, and you continually receiving that fulness, and transmitting it into your personality and character in life.

The verb is in the imperative mood, "Be filled." It is not a suggestion. It is not a proposition. It is not something laid before you that you might just take into consideration. It is not something that can wait. It is urgent. It is a command. It does not leave you any option in the matter. It is just as much God's command as any other command. It is just as imperative for the Christian to be filled with the Spirit as it is that he not get drunk.

This verb is in the passive voice. We are not bidden to fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit, but to "Be filled." We are dependent upon someone else. There must be a Filler. Being filled with the Spirit is not something you have to do, but it is something you have to let God do. And there is a difference between having the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Spirit. It is a difference of degree, and the reason for our stunted development is that we have not been willing to let God come into our lives and do in us that which we could not do for ourselves.

It is one thing to be indwelt by the Spirit; it is another thing to be filled with the Spirit. It is one thing to know that the Holy Spirit has come to live within me as a resident, but it is another thing to know Him as President.

This blessing of "Being filled with the Holy Spirit" is for all believers. It is not some special blessing which God has reserved for certain of His children only. He has no favorites. He would have all Christians to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We can become Spirit-filled Christians by wanting to be, by renouncing our sins, and by obeying Christ's orders.

6. A New Boldness. Acts 9:18-20.

This new boldness came about as a direct result of Paul's being filled with the Spirit. Immediately he preached Christ in the Jewish synagogue--the hardest place on earth in which to witness for the Saviour. He preached Christ, not politics, not current events, not philosophy, not book reviews, etc. He preached with a new power because he was possessed by a mighty Person.