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"The Fruit of Conflict"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Out of the spoil won in battles did they dedicate to repair the house of the Lord" (1 Chron. 26:27). The margin gives a slight variation - "Out of the battles and the spoil did they dedicate to repair the house of the Lord."

The emphasis for this moment is not so much upon the battles as upon the one word here which is translated "repair." The word really means to strengthen, to make sound, to consolidate. There are battles connected with the building - we know something about that - but here they are not particularly related to the original building. When the building is done, it needs preserving, it needs its original splendour maintained, its first glory kept; there needs to be something that can maintain it according to God's first thought in it; and if this word is to be taken as it stands - repair, maintain, preserve, strengthen, consolidate (the Authorised Version does translate it "maintain") - then it is something which has to go on after the work of building. It looks like a reserve that they had against the building falling into disrepair. I think it is just there that the force of the whole verse rests. "Out of the battles and the spoil." or, if you prefer it, "Out of the spoil won in battles did they dedicate to maintain the house of the Lord."

Conflict Allowed by Divine Sovereignty

Well, the message in that is, I think, very apparent. It lies right on the surface. Divine wisdom working sovereignly *allows* conflict, as a way to keep things strong, pure and healthy. Battles seem to be necessities for the very purity of that which the Lord is seeking to have. Conflicts, in the Divine judgment are essential to maintenance. We do not always look upon them like that; indeed, it is very often difficult so to regard the terrific conflicts into which the Lord's people individually and collectively are so frequently thrown. We know something about the conflicts. It is not necessary for

me to tell you that there are such things. We know that they are increasing in their intensity, and sometimes they get almost, if not altogether, beyond our powers of endurance. It seems there is very little "let-up" in the number of battles that have to be fought. It is in the plural here - "Out of the battles..." You and I know a good deal about the battles, the real spiritual battles, the enemy coming in like a flood, the fury of the oppressor, the constant effort on his part to break and to destroy us. Our question often is as to why the Lord allows it. We are hardly out of one before we are in another; and there is no doubt about it, the Lord allows it. It may be that there are some things which could be cut short and put back, but on the whole, the Lord allows His people to know very much conflict and pressure; and as we enquire why, this little fragment does give us at least a part of the answer. When we examine the history of things, we can see it is quite true that any increase, any preservation, any maintaining, has come along the line of what we have gained from our deep experiences.

What the Church has secured by way of conflict, trial, pressure and adversity! If this were a literal building around which we could walk at the end of our days, we should be able to see quite a lot in it which we could relate to a definite experience of conflict and trial through which we went, and we could say, That came out of so-and-so, that was the result of that particular bad time that I had. Spiritually, it is like that. Even now we can see in our lives something like that, and it will be so at the end. If we use our imagination, the truth holds good (if it is not actually like this) that the Lord will be able to take us round His completed work and say, Do you see this and this? Do you remember what you went through? That is the result from it, the value of it, that is the good that came out of it. It was all built into the fabric, the great eternal edifice of God's own house. It was something secured through battles; it was the spoil that went to the house; it recovered something that was lost of original glory, purity, fullness. It safeguarded some breakdown. The Lord put you through something, and out of that He secured what was necessary to guard against a threatened loss of which He was aware.

The Enemy Used as God's Instrument

We will not let our imagination carry us too far, but we could take the enemy round and let him have a look at the result of his onslaughts - not to his great gratification. You see what you did! You meant it to destroy; it has worked the other way. Does this mean, then, that when the Lord is alive to some threatened loss or failure, some need for strengthening, a repairing, a recovering, when He sees that things are weakening, crumbling He lets the enemy in and allows him to make an onslaught? Does it mean that? It has proved like that. You can find much of it in the New Testament. It was not only connected with the securing of the house, with the winning of a way for the building of the churches and the Church, that there was conflict. But so often, after the Lord had established a church, the saints in it went through great conflicts, and you find that it was in that way that things were kept pure. We cannot keep the Lord's things pure by sound doctrine alone. A lot of people think we can - that we are bound to have a pure thing according to God's original thought if we have the doctrine right. It does not work out like that. It does not mean that the doctrine is a matter of little concern - of course, it must be right and sound - but there is something more than sound doctrine needed to keep things straight. You will never keep things wholly in a spiritual way according to God's mind by having only a perfect technique and perfectly orthodox teaching. They are kept living and pure only as we go through the fires with them, as we know the conflict which is associated with these things. Every bit of truth which we receive, if we receive it livingly, will take us into conflict and will be established through conflict. It will be worthless until there has been a battle over it. Take any position the Lord calls you to take, and, if you are taking it with Him, you are going through things in it, and there will be an element added by reason of the battle. You have taken a position - yes; but you have not *really* got it yet, the real value of it has not been proved. You have not come into the

real significance of it until there has been some sore conflict in relation to it. The enemy assails you. But, you say, where is Divine sovereignty at work? Can the enemy do just as he likes? No, he cannot. The Lord has allowed the assault, knowing quite well that by so doing you are going to get something as a result which you never would have got by just taking the position mechanically. It has to come to you, not technically, but spiritually. Out of the battles some extra factor will come. Do you not think that that is precisely the meaning of the Apostle's words, "We are more than conquerors..." (Rom. 8:37)? The Lord does not allow battles just to bring us to victory, simply to have a fight in order to win. To be more than conquerors means that there ought to be something out of the fight that is more than just being where you were before, a maintaining of your position; something out of it - the spoil of battle. You have not only beaten your foe, you have taken something from him of extra value.

That leads to another thought. Has the enemy got things which are of value to the Lord? Can he really yield values to what is of God which are only secured through this conflict? Well, it is true; he has much, very much, which, wrested from him, can beautify the house of the Lord and strengthen that which the enemy meant to destroy.

Well, it is out of the battles and the conflict that there is that dedicated to repair, strengthen, maintain, keep pure and healthy, the house of the Lord; and we have to seek this grace that, when we pass into conflict over some position we have taken in obedience to the Lord, some line that we are following which we know to be the Lord's way for us, and we find ourselves thrown into the vortex of a terrible conflict, we may remember that it is not loss that lies in that direction at all. It is something extra, it is spoil from the battle; the conflict is going to yield something for the house of the Lord. If we can only believe that and accept the pressure and the trial in that light! The Lord give us strength so to take hold of the conflict in faith that we really do believe that there is something coming out of it which is more than there was before, something very much for the Lord.