

"NO LITTLE PEOPLE, NO LITTLE PLACES"

(Francis Schaeffer)

As a Christian considers the possibility of being the Christian glorified (a topic I have discussed in True Spirituality), often his reaction is, "I am so limited. Surely it does not matter much whether I am walking as a creature glorified or not." Or, to put it another way, "It is wonderful to be a Christian, but I am such a small person, so limited in talents—or energy or psychological strength or knowledge—that what I do is not really important."

The Bible, however, has quite a different emphasis: With God there are no little people.

Moses' Rod

One thing that has encouraged me, as I have wrestled with such questions in my own life, is the way God used Moses' rod, a stick of wood. Many years ago, when I was a young pastor just out of seminary, this study of the use of Moses' rod, which I called "God so used a stick of wood," was a crucial factor in giving me the courage to press on.

The story of Moses' rod began when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, telling him to go challenge Egypt, the greatest power of his day. Moses reacted, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exod 3:11), and he raised several specific objections: "They will not believe me, nor harken unto my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.' And the Lord said unto him, 'What is that in thine hand?' And he said, 'A rod'" (Exod 4:1-2). God directed Moses' attention to the simplest thing imaginable—the staff in his own hand, a shepherd's rod, a stick of wood somewhere between three and six feet long.

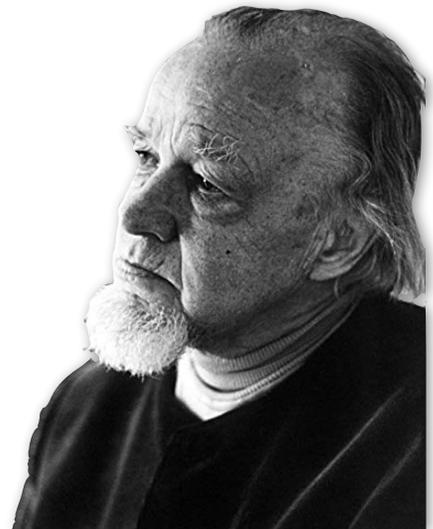
Shepherds are notorious for hanging onto their staves as long as they can, just as some of us enjoy keeping walking sticks. Moses probably had carried this same staff for years. Since he had been a shepherd in the wilderness for forty years, it is entirely possible that this wood had been dead that long. Just a stick of wood— but when Moses obeyed God's command to toss it on the ground, it became a serpent, and Moses himself fled from it. God next ordered him to take it by the tail and, when he did so, it became a rod again. Then God told him to go and confront the power of Egypt and meet Pharaoh face to face with this rod in his hand.

Exodus 4:20 tells us the secret of all that followed: The rod of Moses had become the rod of God.

Standing in front of Pharaoh, Aaron cast down this rod and it became a serpent. As God spoke to Moses and Aaron was the spokesman of Moses (Exod 4:16), so it would seem that Aaron used the rod of Moses which had become the rod of God. The wizards of Egypt, performing real magic through the power of the devil not just a stage trick through sleight of hand, matched this. Here was demonic power. But the rod of God swallowed up the other rods. This was not merely a victory of Moses over Pharaoh but of Moses' God over Pharaoh's god and the power of the devil behind that god.

This rod appeared frequently in the ensuing events:

Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river's brink against he come; and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou take in thine hand. And thou shalt say unto him, "The Lord God of the



Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, 'Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness: and, behold, hitherto thou wouldst not hear. Thus saith the Lord, in this thou shalt know that I am the Lord: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in my hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood'" (Exod 7:15-17).

The rod of God indeed was in Aaron's hand (Exod 7:17, 19-20) and the water was putrefied, an amazing use for a mere stick of wood. In the days that followed, Moses "stretched forth his rod" and successive plagues came upon the land; after the waters no longer were blood, after seven days, there came frogs, then lice, then thunder and hail and great balls of ball lightning running along the ground, and then locusts (Exod 8:1-10:15). Watch the destruction of judgment, which came from a dead stick of wood that had become the rod of God.

Pharaoh's grip on the Hebrews was shaken loose, and he let the people go. But then he changed his mind and ordered his armies to pursue them. When the armies came upon them, the Hebrews were caught in a narrow place with mountains on one side of them and the sea on the other. And God said to Moses, "Lift thou up thy rod" (Exod 14:16). What good is it to lift up a rod when one is caught in a cul-de-sac between mountains and a great body of water with the mightiest army in the world at his heels? Much good, if the rod is the rod of God. The waters divided and the people passed through. Up to this point, the rod had been used for judgment and destruction, but now it was a rod of healing for the Jews, as it was the rod of judgment for the Egyptians. That which is in the hand of God can be used in either way.

Later, the rod of judgment also became a rod of supply. In Rephidim the people desperately needed water.

And the Lord said unto Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb: and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel (Exod 17:5-6).

It must have been an amazing sight to stand before a great rock (not a small pebble but a face of rock such as we see here in Switzerland in the mountains) and to see a rod struck against it, and then to watch torrents of life-giving water flow out to satisfy thousands upon thousands of people and their livestock. The giver of judgment became the giver of life. It was not magic. There was nothing in the rod itself. The rod of Moses had simply become the rod of God. We too are not only to speak a word of judgment to our lost world, but are also to be a source of life.

The rod also brought military victory as it was held up. It was more powerful than the swords of either the Jews or their enemy (Exod 17:9). In a much later incident the people revolted against Moses, and a test was established to see whom God had indeed chosen. The rod was placed before God and it budded (Num 17:8). Incidentally, we find out what kind of tree it had come from so long ago because it now brought forth almond blossoms.

The final use of the rod occurred when the wilderness wandering was almost over. Moses' sister Miriam had already died. Forty years had passed since the people had left Egypt, so now the rod may have been almost eighty years old. The people again needed water, and, though they were now in a different place, the desert of Zin, they were still murmuring against God. So God told Moses,

Take the rod and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him (Num 20:8-9).

Moses took the rod (which verse 9 with 17:10 shows was the same one which had been kept with the arc since it had budded) and he struck the rock twice. He should have done what God had told him and only spoken with the rod in his hand, but that is another study. In spite of this, however, "water came out abundantly" (Num 20:11).

Consider the mighty ways in which God used a dead stick of wood. "God so used a stick of wood" can be a banner cry for each of us. Though we are limited and weak in talent, physical energy and psychological strength, we are not less than a stick of wood. But as the rod of Moses had to become the rod of God, so that which is me must become the me of God. Then, I can become useful in God's hands. The Scripture emphasizes that much can come from little if the little is truly consecrated to God. There are no little people and no big people in the true spiritual sense, but only consecrated and unconsecrated people. The problem for each of us is applying this truth to ourselves: Is Francis Schaeffer the Francis Schaeffer of God?

No Little Places

But if a Christian is consecrated, does this mean he will be in a big place instead of a little place? The answer, the next step, is very important: As there are no little people in God's sight, so there are no little places. To be wholly committed to God in the place where God wants him—this is the creature glorified. In my writing and lecturing I put much emphasis on God's being the infinite reference point which integrates the intellectual problems of life. He is to be this, but he must be the reference point not only in our thinking but in our living. This means being what he wants me to be, where he wants me to be.

Nowhere more than in America are Christians caught in the twentieth-century syndrome of size. Size will show success. If I am consecrated, there will necessarily be large quantities of people, dollars, etc. This is not so. Not only does God not say that size and spiritual power go together, but he even reverses this (especially in the teaching of Jesus) and tells us to be deliberately careful not to choose a place too big for us. We all tend to emphasize big works and big places, but all such emphasis is of the flesh. To think in such terms is simply to hearken back to the old, unconverted, egoist, self-centered Me. This attitude, taken from the world, is more dangerous to the Christian than fleshly amusement or practice. It is the flesh.

People in the world naturally want to boss others. Imagine a boy beginning work with a firm. He has a lowly place and is ordered around by everyone: Do this! Do that! Every dirty job is his. He is the last man on the totem pole, merely one of Rabbit's friends-and-relations, in Christopher Robin's terms. So one day when the boss is out, he enters the boss's office, looks around carefully to see that no one is there and then sits down in the boss's big chair., "Someday," he says, "I'll say 'run' and they'll run." This is man. And let us say with tears that a person does not automatically abandon this mentality when he becomes a Christian. In every one of us there remains a seed of wanting to be boss, of wanting to be in control and have the word of power over our fellows.

But the Word of God teaches us that we are to have a very different mentality:

But Jesus called them [his disciples] to him, and saith unto them, "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).

Every Christian, without exception, is called into the place where Jesus stood. To the extent that we are called to leadership, we are called to ministry, even costly ministry. The greater the leadership, the greater is to be the ministry. The word minister is not a title of power but a designation of servanthood. There is to be no Christian guru. We must reject this constantly and carefully. A minister, a man who is a leader in the

church of God (and never more needed than in a day like ours when the battle is so great) must make plain to the men, women, boys and girls who come to places of leadership that instead of lording their authority over others and allowing it to become an ego trip, they are to serve in humility.

Again, Jesus said, "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Matt 23:8). This does not mean there is to be no order in the church. It does mean that the basic relationship between Christians is not that of elder and people, or pastor and people, but that of brothers and sisters in Christ. This denotes that there is one Father in the family and that his offspring are equal. There are different jobs to be done, different offices to be filled, but we as Christians are equal before one Master. We are not to seek a great title; we are to have the places together as brethren.

When Jesus said, "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt 23:11), he was not speaking in hyperbole or uttering a romantic idiom. Jesus Christ is the realist of all realists, and when he says this to us, he is telling us something specific we are to do.

Our attitude toward all men should be that of equality because we are common creatures. We are of one blood and kind. As I look across all the world, I must see every man as a fellow creature and I must be careful to have a sense of our equality on the basis of this common status. We must be careful in our thinking not to try to stand in the place of God to other men. We are fellow creatures. And when I step from the creature-to-creature relationship into the brothers-and-sisters-in-Christ relationship within the church, how much more important to be a brother or sister to all who have the same Father. Orthodoxy, to be a Bible-believing Christian, always has two faces. It has a creedal face and a practicing face, and Christ emphasizes that that is to be the case here. Dead orthodoxy is always a contradiction in terms and clearly that is so here; to be a Bible-believing Christian demands humility regarding others in the body of Christ.

Jesus gave us a tremendous example:

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girdedYe call me Master and Lord:and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them (John 13:3-5, 13-17).

Note that Jesus says that if we do these things there will be happiness. It is not just knowing these things that brings happiness, it is doing them. Throughout Jesus' teaching these two words know and do occur constantly, and always in that order. We cannot do until we know, but we can know without doing. The house built on the rock is the house of the man who knows and does. The house built on the sand is the house of the man who knows but does not do.

Christ washed the disciples' feet and dried them with the towel with which he was girded, that is, with his own clothing. He intended this to be a practical example of the mentality and action that should be seen in the midst of the people of God.

Taking the Lowest Place

Yet another statement of Jesus bears on our discussion:

And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and

him come and say to thee, "Give this man place"; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bid- den, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, "Friend, go up higher": then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 14:7- 11).

Jesus commands Christians to seek consciously the lowest room. All of us— pastors, teachers, professional religious workers and non-professional included— are tempted to say, "I will take the larger place because it will give me more influence for Jesus Christ." Both individual Christians and Christian organizations fall prey to the temptation of rationalizing this way as we build bigger and bigger empires. But according to the Scripture this is backwards: We should consciously take the lowest place unless the Lord himself extrudes us into a greater one.

The word extrude is important here. To be extruded is to be forced out under pressure into a desired shape. Picture a huge press jamming soft metal at high pressure through a die so that the metal comes out in a certain shape. This is the way of the Christian: He should choose the lesser place until God extrudes him into a position of more responsibility and authority.

Let me suggest two reasons why we ought not grasp the larger place. First, we should seek the lowest place because there it is easier to be quiet before the face of the Lord. I did not say easy; in no place, no matter how small or humble, is it easy to be quiet before God. But it is certainly easier in some places than in others. And the little places, where I can more easily be close to God, should be my preference. I am not saying that it is impossible to be quiet before God in a greater place, but God must be allowed to choose when a Christian is ready to be extruded into such a place, for only he knows when a person will be able to have some quietness before him in the midst of increased pressure and responsibility.

Quietness and peace before God are more important than any influence a position may seem to give, for we must stay in step with God to have the power of the Holy Spirit. If by taking a bigger place our quietness with God is lost, then to that extent our fellowship with him is broken and we are living in the flesh, and the final result will not be as great, no matter how important the larger place may look in the eyes of other men or in our own eyes. Always there will be a battle, always we will be less than perfect, but if a place is too big and too active for our present spiritual condition, then it is too big.

We see this happen over and over again and perhaps it has happened at some time to us: Someone whom God has been using marvelously in a certain place takes it upon himself to move into a larger place and loses his quietness with God. Ten years later he may have a huge organization, but the power has gone, and he is no longer a real part of the battle in his generation. The final result of not being quiet before God is that less will be done, not more—no matter how much Christendom may be beating its drums or playing its trumpets for a particular activity.

So we must not go out beyond our depth. Take the smaller place so you have quietness before God. I am not talking about laziness; let me make that clear. That is something else, something too which God hates. I am not talking about copping out or dropping out. God's people are to be active, not seeking, on account of some false mystical concept, to sit constantly in the shade of a rock. There is no monasticism in Christianity. We will not be lazy in our relationship with God, because when the Holy Spirit burns, a man is consumed. We can expect to become physically tired in the midst of battle for our King and Lord; we should not expect all of life to be a vacation. We are talking about quietness before God as we are in his place for us. The size of the place is not important but the consecration in that place is.

It must be noted that all these things which are true for an individual are true also for a group. A group can become activist and take on responsibilities God has not laid upon it. For both the individual and the

group the first reason we are not to grasp (and the emphasis is on grasp) the larger place is that we must not lose our quietness with God.

The second reason why we should not seek the larger place is that if we deliberately and egotistically lay hold on leadership, wanting the drums to beat and the trumpets to blow, then we are not qualified for Christian leadership. Why? Because we have forgotten that we are brothers and sisters in Christ with other Christians. I have said on occasion that there is only one good kind of fighter for Jesus Christ—the man who does not like to fight. The belligerent man is never the one to be belligerent for Jesus. And it is exactly the same with leadership. The Christian leader should be a quiet man of God who is extruded by God's grace into some place of leadership.

We all have egoistic pressures inside us. We may have substantial victories over them and we may grow, but we never completely escape them in this life. The pressure is always there deep in my heart and soul, needing to be faced with honesty. These pressures are evident in the smallest of things as well as the greatest. I have seen fights over who was going to be the president of a Sunday school class composed of three members. The temptation has nothing to do with size. It comes from a spirit, a mentality, inside us. The person in leadership for leadership's sake is returning to the way of the world, like the boy dusting off the boss's chair and saying, "Someday I'll sit in it, and I'll make people jump."

One of the loveliest incidents in the early church occurred when Barnabas concluded that Paul was the man of the hour and then had to seek him out because Paul had gone back to Tarsus, his own little place. Paul was not up there nominating himself; he was back in Tarsus, even out of communication as far as we can tell. When Paul called himself "the chief of sinners, . . . not meet to be an apostle" (1 Tim 1:15; 1 Cor 15:9), he was not speaking just for outward form's sake. From what he said elsewhere and from his actions we can see that this was Paul's mentality. Paul, the man of leadership for the whole Gentile world, was perfectly willing to be in Tarsus until God said to him, "This is the moment."

Being a Rod of God

The people who receive praise from the Lord Jesus will not in every case be the people who held leadership in this life. There will be many persons who were sticks of wood that stayed close to God and were quiet before him, and were used in power by him in a place which looks small to men.

Each Christian is to be a rod of God in the place of God for him. We must remember throughout our lives that in God's sight there are no little people and no little places. Only one thing is important: to be consecrated persons in God's place for us, at each moment. Those who think of themselves as little people in little places, if committed to Christ and living under his Lordship in the whole of life, may, by God's grace, change the flow of our generation. And as we get on a bit in our lives, knowing how weak we are, if we look back and see we have been somewhat used of God, then we should be the rod "surprised by joy."