

Note I invited David Sheppard to speak as I knew he had become a Christian (see * below) and that he would be popular amongst the boys knowing his cricket prowess.

Ivan Sharman

* It was a November day in 1949 when Collins, a theology student, first met David Sheppard, a freshman, in a game of squash. Sheppard had arrived in Cambridge with a county cricket cap and England caps not far ahead. He was also churchgoing, and by the time of the Barnhouse meetings Collins knew him well enough to invite him to attend. But for that he would never have thought of going. He assumed he was on the religious road already. 'The idea that I might not be on the road at all never occurred to me. It needed a blunt preacher from the United States to jolt me into thinking. He aroused strong feelings. . . .

'But on the first night that I listened I realized that I was facing God himself, was judged by his standards and that I desperately needed to be forgiven . . . because I had turned my back on God and gone my own way. Again and again Barnhouse returned to his great theme that no-one can climb up to God by his own efforts to be kind, neighbourly or religious. Only by the totally undeserved grace of Jesus Christ can anyone be accepted.'

As the two friends talked, it was brought home to David Sheppard that his idea of trying to get to God by following Christ's example did not tally with the Bible. 'Once I had come this far I listened with quite new urgency to what John told me about Jesus. Numbering himself with sinners, deliberately walking to a criminal's death, going out as far as the furthest sinner is from God, he tasted the blackest moment of the sinner's experience, as he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

'I understood the force of the words I had heard many times in the communion service, "He made there a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice . . . for the sins of the whole world." If Jesus Christ had taken our place on the cross he has made it possible for us to be forgiven and for us to be sure about it. . . . The Christian's claim that he can be sure that God has forgiven him is not boastful, because it is a matter of accepting something we can never deserve. We accept it, or better, we accept him. That evening in Cambridge I heard a verse from the Bible for the first time, which in picture language seemed to make this all so clear - Revelation 3:20.

'I walked back to my rooms in Trinity Hall that night knowing it was more important than anything else in the world that I should become right with God. . . . I asked Christ to come into my life. Perhaps the first difference was to think rather worse of myself than I had before. Some weeks later I joined a Christian houseparty. I said to myself, "I didn't know there were people like this." I did not mean they were perfect: they were ordinary men of my own age trying to work out the friendship of Christ for every day. Discussing the problems of Christian living and simply sharing a common life with other Christians, particularly those in the CU, made the idea of the church as the family of God come alive.'

From 'Lord of the years' ¹¹⁰ Gerard Fildes IVP.