

All Things in Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks (March, 1943)

We take the Epistles and we think of them as having to do within the building of the Church and the churches, the superstructure of Christianity, and so we take the technique of the Acts and the Epistles as a technique, as a system of doctrine and a system of practice, a system of Christian order, and the Epistles become - and have become for so many and for Christianity in general - a crystallized system of practice, order, form, teaching; and the weakness in the whole position is just this, that that is something as in itself and the Lord Jesus has just been missed and lost. I wonder if you detect what I mean by that? You see, the Holy Spirit's way is to take Christ and open up Christ, to the heart, and show that Christ is a heavenly order; not that the Epistles set forth as a manual a heavenly order, but that Christ is that order, and everything in the matter of order has to be kept immediately in relation to the living Person. If it becomes some *thing*, then it becomes an earthly system; and you can make out of the Epistles a hundred different earthly systems all built upon the Epistles. They will support any number of different systems, different interpretations, represented by Christian orders here, and the reason is that they have been divorced from the Person.

You see, beloved, there are numerous things, numerous subjects, themes, teachings. There is "the kingdom of God", there is "sanctification", there is "eternal life", there is "the victorious life", "the overcomer" or "the overcoming life", there is "the second coming of Christ". These are but a few subjects, themes, truths, as they are called, which have been taken up and developed out of the Scriptures and become things with which people have become very much occupied, and in which they are very interested as things. So certain people hive off around a sanctification teaching, and they are the sanctificationists, and it becomes an "ism". Others hive off; and they are bounded by the hedge of Second Adventism, the Lord's coming, prophecy, and all that. So you get groups like that. I want to say that would be utterly impossible if the Person of the Lord Jesus was dominant.

What is the kingdom of God? It is Christ. If you get right inside of the Gospels, you will find that the kingdom of God is Jesus Christ. If you are living in Christ, you are in the kingdom, and you know, as the Holy Spirit teaches you Christ, what the kingdom is in every detail. The kingdom is not some thing, in the first place. The kingdom, when it becomes something universal, will simply be the expression and manifestation of Christ. That is all. You come to the kingdom in and through Christ; and the same is true of everything else.

What is sanctification? It is not a doctrine. It is not an 'it' at all. It is Christ. He is made unto us sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). If you are in Christ and if the Holy Spirit is teaching you Christ, then you are knowing all about sanctification; and if He is not, you may have a theory and doctrine of sanctification but it will separate you from other Christians, and will be bringing any number of Christians into difficulties. Probably the teaching of sanctification as a thing has brought more Christians into difficulty than any other particular doctrine, through making it a thing, instead of keeping Christ as our sanctification.

I am only saying this to try to explain... that it is in the School of Christ that we are to be found, where the Holy Spirit is not teaching us things; not Church doctrine, not sanctification, not adventism, not any *thing* or any number of things, but teaching us Christ. What is adventism? What is the coming of the Lord? Well, it is the coming of the Lord. And what is the coming of the Lord? Well, such a word as this will give us the key: He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed (2 Thess. 1:10). You see, it is the consummation of something that has been going on in an inward way. How then do I best know that the coming of the Lord draws nigh? Not best of all by prophetic signs, but by what is going on within the hearts of the Lord's people. That is the best sign of the times, namely, what the Spirit of God is doing in the people of God. But you are not interested in that. You would far sooner know what is going to happen between Germany and Russia, whether these two, after all, are going to make it up and become a great confederacy! How far does it get us? Where has all the talking about the revived Roman Empire got us? That is adventism as a thing. If only we keep close to Him Who is the sum of all truth, and move with Him and learn Him, we shall know the course of things. We shall know what is imminent. We shall have in our heart whisperings of preparation. The best Advent preparation is to know the Lord. I am not saying that there is nothing in prophecy; don't misunderstand me. But I do know that there are multitudes of people who are simply engrossed in prophecy as a thing whose spiritual life counts for nothing, who really have no deep inward walk with the Lord. We have seen it so often.

I shall never forget, on a visit to the United States, going into one of the big cities where I was to speak for a week. Everything was so arranged that my first message was timed to follow the last message of a man who had had a week before me, and he had been on prophecy for the whole week. I went into the last meeting where he gave his final message on the signs of the time. Notebooks were out, and they were taking it all down, fascinated. It was all external, all objective; such things as the Roman Empire revived and Palestine recovered. You know the sort of thing. Then he finished and they were waiting for some more, and the notebooks were ready. The Lord put it right into my heart that the first word was to be, "And every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3); to speak on the spiritual effect of that spiritual hope. They were not interested in that. The notebooks were closed, pencils put away; there was no interest as I sought in the Lord to be very faithful as to what all this should mean in an inward way, in adjustment to the Lord, and so on. They were only longing for the meeting to close. When I finished - they hardly waited for me to finish - they were up and out.

Christ - All, And In All

by T. Austin-Sparks

"And He is the Head of the body, the church: Who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18).

"Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11).

There has been a great deal done in recent days to bring the greater magnitudes of the universe within the intelligence of the ordinary man and woman. This means that many people are interested in the explanation of the universe, and, no doubt in particular, of the course of this earth and of the creation and history of man; but we believe that we have the positive and final answer to the inquiry. For us there is but one definite and conclusive explanation of the universe, and that explanation is a Person - the Lord Jesus Christ, with all that is eternally related to Him. However much we read and study we shall never get the explanation of the universe, in whole or in part, until we come to see the place of the Lord Jesus in the eternal appointment of God. The simple but all-embracing words, "Christ is all, and in all," sum up the whole matter from eternity, through all stages of time, unto eternity.

Firstly, then, that "Christ is all, and in all" is

1. The Explanation Of The Creation Itself

This letter to the Colossians makes that very statement in other words. It tells us that *"In Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through Him, and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (hold together)" (1:17).* That is a comprehensive statement, and it clearly shows that Christ being all, and in all, is the explanation of the whole creation. Why were all things created? Why did God through Him bring the universe into being? Why does this great universal system exist and continue? What is the explanation of the world? The answer is that Christ may be all, and in all.

The intention in the heart of God in bringing this universe into existence was that, ultimately, the whole creation should display the glory and supremacy of His Son, Jesus Christ; and this one little fragment, "and in Him all things hold together", says quite clearly that but for the Lord Jesus Christ the whole universe would disintegrate, fall apart; it would be without its uniting factor; it would cease to have a reason for being maintained as a complete and concrete whole. Its holding together, its failure to disintegrate and break up, is because of this: God has determined that the Lord Jesus shall be the centre, the governing centre, of this whole universe, and He - God's Son - is the explanation of creation. But for Him, there never would have been a creation. Take Him out, and creation loses its purpose and its object, and need not go on any longer. "Christ is all, and in all", was the thought, the ruling thought, in the mind of God in the creation of the universe.

That may leave you cold in some measure and not get you very far, but I venture to think that what I am now going to say will get you a little further and warm your hearts; for the prospect is this, that when God has things as in eternity past He determined to have them - and He is going to have them so - every atom of this whole universe will display the glory of Jesus Christ. You will not be able to look at anything or anyone without seeing Christ glorified. A blessed prospect!

It is a happy thing when, as a company of the Lord's children, we can be together for hours on end or even days on end; when we are occupied with the Lord as our one common interest and are all taken up with Him. When we have a time like that and go back into the world, what a different atmosphere we find! How chilled we feel! It is a fine thing to meet the Lord in His children and to be shut up to Him like that; but even then it is only in part. But the eternal day is coming when there will be no going back into the world on a Monday morning after a day in the courts of the Lord; when we shall be touching nothing else but the Lord Jesus, and the whole universe will be full of Him - "Christ all, and in all"! That is God's end. That is what He has determined; all displaying the Lord Jesus; all for Him.

We see much that is not the Lord Jesus in one another now; the day is coming when you will see nothing but the Lord Jesus in me, and I shall see nothing but the Lord Jesus in you; we shall be "conformed to the image of His Son": His moral glory will shine out and be displayed; Christ will be "all, and in all." God has determined it, and what God has determined, He will have. This, then, is the explanation of the creation, that Christ may be all, and in all, and among all have the pre-eminence.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul has a very remarkable statement in this connection:

"For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him Who subjected it, in hope, that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (8:19-22).

Note what this really says and implies. The creation is possessed by an earnest expectation. This expectation is with groaning as in travail, an expectation of hope - not of the dissolution of the universe, of which certain scientists say so much. Nevertheless the hope and the groaning "hereunto are deliberately put under a reign of vanity - made to be all in vain - until a fixed time and goal. That climax is in two parts: one, the revealing of the sons of God; the other - linked therewith - the deliverance of the creation from the enslavement to corruption.

All this is taken back to eternity past and linked with the Lord Jesus as the Son: *"For whom He did foreknow, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).*

In the former passage there is a definite statement and a clear implication. The statement is that the creation was subjected to vanity, and its state is the bondage of corruption. The implication clearly is that there was a definite time when, because of its corruption, the whole creation was brought into a condition in which it was caused to groan and travail unto an end that could not be reached.

It is in that connection that there is given room for the whole range and nature of the Satanic interference with the creation with a view to challenging the ultimate Divine purpose in the creation and to frustrating it by bringing in corruption.

So universal was that corruption that a sentence of vanity was pronounced upon "the whole creation". The effect of this was, and is, that the creation can never realize the object of its being, save on the ground of holiness and Divine likeness.

Here there comes in also the whole range of "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"; the universal work which He accomplished by His Cross in the destruction of the work of the Devil, and, potentially, of the Devil himself; with all the sin-destroying and corruption-destroying power of His sinless nature and life, the efficacy of His incorruptible Blood, and the providing of justification and sanctification for all who believe, these by regeneration becoming "a new creation in Christ Jesus" (I Cor. 5:17).

By this means alone can the creation be delivered. When these sons of God are manifested - their number complete - and all who have refused this salvation are dismissed from God's realm, then shall the creation be delivered and its original intention be realized, Christ being all, and in all.

2. The Explanation Of Man

Then, in the next place, as a central part of the creation, we have man. What is the explanation of man? What is the explanation of Adam as the first man? There is one little passage of Scripture which answers that. "Adam... who is a figure of Him that was to come", that is, Christ (Rom. 5: 14). A figure of Him that was to come; that is the explanation of man. God intended that every man entering this world should be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Multitudes will miss it, but there will be multitudes such as no man can number, out of every tribe and kindred and nation and tongue, who will realize it. What a high calling! What a different conception of man that is from that which is popularly held, and what a thing to be missed! And yet there are many who say complainingly that if they had had their way they would never have come into this world. There have been those who, in an hour of eclipse, cursed the day that they saw the light. Ah, but something has gone wrong there; that is not how the Lord meant it to be, and however much we may have blue days, when we wonder whether really it is worthwhile after all, let us come back to God's thought in our very being. It is our tremendous privilege, the highest honour that could ever have been conferred upon us from the Divine standpoint, that we should have been born.

We do not always feel or speak like that, but we are constantly compelled to bring ourselves back to God's point of view about this and to remember that His purpose is to have a universe peopled with such as are conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ, a people who are a universal manifestation of Christ glorified with the glory of the Father. That is a privilege, an honour, something to be born for! That is the explanation of man.

We can only touch many of these matters lightly, and pass on.

3. The Explanation Of Redemption

Further, this word, "Christ is all, and in all", is the explanation of redemption. Things of course went wrong: God's purpose was interfered with. It could never be finally thwarted, but there was another who did determine that, so far as it was in his power, that universal display of Jesus Christ - that 'all-in-all-ness' of the Lord Jesus - should never be; one who desired to have that for himself - that he should be universal lord of heaven and earth. That interference for a time has made a great deal of difference. It has interfered with man and made him other than God intended him to be. It has spoiled the image.

But there is redemption through the Cross of the Lord Jesus. What is the explanation of the Cross? What is the explanation, on the one hand, of all that atonement, that redemptive work of the Lord Jesus in dealing with sin, and having universal sin laid upon Him, and being made a curse for us, in our place?

And then, on the other hand, as the complement of that, what is the explanation of that Cross being wrought in the believer so that the believer becomes united with Him in the likeness of His death and burial as a spiritual experience? - all that application of Calvary which is so painful, so terrible to pass through: yes, the disintegrating of the "old man", the cutting off of the "body of the flesh", that inward knowledge of the power of the Cross, so terrible to the flesh. What is the explanation? Beloved, it is that Christ may be all, and in all.

Why are we broken? To make room for the Lord Jesus. Why are we brought down to the dust by the Holy Spirit as He works Calvary's death into us? In order that the Lord Jesus may take the place that we in the flesh have occupied. We get wrong sometimes about this application of the Cross. The enemy is always at our elbow to insinuate and suggest the unkindness of God to smash us, to humiliate us, to bring us to nothing, and to say that there is no end to this thing, seeking thus to get us down.

Beloved, the Cross was intended only to make the Lord Jesus all, and in all, for us; and is it not true that, because of the way that the Lord has dealt with us, the way in which He has applied the Cross, planting us into that death and burial, we know Him in a way in which we never knew Him before? Is it not by that way that He has become what He is to us, ever more and more dear to our hearts? The increase of the Lord Jesus in and to us is by the way of the Cross. We know quite well that our chief enemy is ourselves, our flesh. This flesh gives us no rest, no peace, no satisfaction; we have no joy in it. It obsesses, engrosses, constantly struts across our path to rob us of the very joy of living. What is to be done with it? Well, in and by the Cross we are delivered from ourselves; not only from our sins, but from ourselves; and being delivered from ourselves we are delivered into Christ, and Christ becomes far more than we.

It is a painful process, but it is a blessed issue; and those amongst us who may have had the greatest agony along this line would, I believe, testify that what it has brought to us of the knowledge and riches of the Lord Jesus has made all the suffering worth while. So the work of the Lord for us and the work of the Lord in us, by the Cross, is only intended in the Divine thought to make room for the Lord Jesus.

The brazen altar of the Tabernacle, as that of the Temple, was a very big altar. You could get all the other furniture of the whole Tabernacle inside it. Yes, the altar has to be a big one; there has to be a big place for Christ Crucified. He is to fill all things and He is to be the fulness of all things, and there is going to be no room for us in the end. Does that strike you with dismay? Surely not. So the Cross, the work of redemption through that Cross, has for its explanation just this, that Christ may be all, and in all; that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.

This, then, is the explanation of our experiences - why the Lord deals with us as He does; why believers go through the experiences that they do go through; why they go through things that no one else seems called upon to go through; why sometimes they almost envy unbelievers the easy time that so many of them have. This explains the Lord's dealings with Israel in the wilderness. Even after their deliverance from Egypt's bondage and tyranny, there was heart-break and agony. Why this chastening? In the wilderness, they still hark back to Egypt. The work the Lord is doing in them is in order that He may be everything in and to them. If He cuts off their natural supplies, it is only to show what their heavenly supplies are. If He cuts off their natural power, it is that they may come to know the power of the heavens. Whatever He may take them out of or lead them into, is with a view to taking them out of themselves and that He Himself may be all, and in all.

This is the explanation of our difficulties. The Lord knows how best to deal with each one of us, and He does not use standardized methods. He deals with you in one way and with me in another. He knows how to lead us into experiences which are most calculated to bring us to where the Lord is all, and in all.

4. The Explanation Of Christian Growth

What is spiritual growth? What is spiritual maturity? What is it to go on in the Lord? I fear we have got mixed ideas about this. Many think that spiritual maturity is a more comprehensive knowledge of Christian doctrine, a larger grasp of scriptural truth, a wider expanse of the knowledge of the things of God; and many such features are recorded as marks of growth, development, spiritual maturity. Beloved, it is nothing of the kind. The hallmark of true spiritual development and maturity is this, that we have grown so much less and the Lord Jesus has grown so much more. The mature soul is one who is small in his or her own eyes, but in whose eyes the Lord Jesus is great. That is growth. We may know a very great deal, have a wonderful grasp of doctrine, of teaching, of truth, even of the Scriptures, and yet be spiritually very small, very immature, very childish. (There is all the difference between being childish and child-like.) Real spiritual growth is just this: I decrease, He increases. It is the Lord Jesus becoming more. You can test spiritual growth by that.

Then again this word is

5. The Explanation Of All Service

What is Christian service according to the mind of God? It is not necessarily our having a very full programme of Christian activities. It is not that we are always busy in what we call 'things of the Lord'. It is not the measure and amount of our activity and business, not the degree of our energy and enthusiasm in the things of the kingdom of God. It is not our schemes, our enterprises for the Lord.

Beloved, the test of all service is its *motive*. Is the motive, from start to finish, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence, that Christ may be all, and in all?

You know the temptations and the fascination of Christian service; the fascination of being busy, of being occupied with many things; having your programme, schemes, enterprises; being in it, and always at it. There is a peril there which has caught multitudes of the Lord's servants. The peril is that it brings them into prominence, it makes the work theirs; it is *their work, their interests*, and the more they govern the thing and run it the more pleased they are.

No, there is a difference between going the round of the clock in Christian service as the mere enjoyment of activity, with the fascination of it and all the advantages and facilities it provides for ourselves, and its gratification to our flesh - there is a great difference between that and this, "Christ all, and in all". Sometimes this latter is achieved by our being put out of action; and then is the test, as to whether we are, or are not, quite satisfied to be altogether put out of work if only the Lord can be the more glorified thereby. If only He can come into His own, it does not matter a scrap whether we are seen or heard. We are getting somewhere, in the grace of God, when we are quite content to be put up in a corner, unseen and unnoticed, if thereby the Lord Jesus can come into His own more speedily and fully.

Somehow we have got caught up into this thing and think the Lord can only come into His own if we are the instrument. The rivalry on platform and in pulpit; sensitiveness because one is put before another, because the address of one is given more attention than that of another; the favourable remarks all made in one direction, etc! I know all about it. After all, what are we after? Are we seeking to impress our audience by our cleverness or to make known our Lord? A great difference! Sometimes the Lord gets more out of our bad times than we think, and it may be that when we have had good times He has not got the most. Therein is the necessity for our being set aside, kept weak and humble, *that He might have the pre-eminence*.

The challenge of service according to God's thought is just this - What are we doing it for? Do we want to be in the work, because we like to be busy? Or is it utterly and only that, by any means, He may come into His own, that God's end may be realized? If He can be all, and in all, by our death as well as by our life, have we come to the place where we truly desire "that... Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death"? (Phil. 1:20). That is the explanation of service from God's standpoint.

Of course, this is the explanation of many other things. It is

6. The Explanation Of The Whole Of The Old Testament

We will not tarry to examine in detail how this is so, but just indicate and pass on. What is the old Testament? It is all gathered up in great representations of Jesus Christ. Take the two main ones, the Tabernacle and the Temple. These are comprehensive representations of the Lord Jesus both in His person and in His work, and these occupy, as such, the central place in the life of a chosen people, whose life is bound up with them. The two are one, and while that elect people are in right relationship to that central object, the Tabernacle or Temple: while they give it its place of honour and reverence, and maintain it in its place of highest holiness: while

they are true to its spirit, and its laws, and its testimony: though they are amongst all the peoples of the earth the least capable, naturally, of looking after their interests, yet they are the supreme people of the earth; there is not a nation or a people in the earth able to stand before them. They have never been trained in the art of war, they have no long history behind them of arms and military strategy, and are in themselves a defenseless people: yet they take the ascendancy not only over individual nations greater and mightier than themselves, but over a combination of nations; and though all unite against them, while true to that central object they are supreme. That central object is a representation of the Lord Jesus in His person and work. The spiritual interpretation of it is that when the Lord Jesus has His place there is supremacy; there is absolute supremacy when He in all things has the pre-eminence in and through and by His people. "Christ is all, and in all." When that is true in His people there are no forces capable of withstanding them. The secret of absolute supremacy and sovereignty is the Lord Jesus having His place in the lives and in the hearts, in all the affairs and relationships, of His own people; and the gates of Hades cannot prevail then.

Further, it is

7. The Explanation Of The New Testament

And the New Testament brings in little companies, small among the peoples of the earth, despised, cast out, hardly allowed to speak without being bitterly molested, and upon whom eventually comes the organized wrath and hatred of the nations of this world until all the resources of a great iron empire are exploited and put into operation to blot out the remembrance of these humble, despised people. The story is just this, that the empires have broken, the world powers have ceased to be. We go round the world now looking at the relics and ruins of those great empires; but where is that people of the Way of the despised Nazarene? A great multitude that no man can number! Heaven is full of them, and here on earth there are tens of thousands who know and love the Lord Jesus, who are of this Way. The explanation is that God determined that His Son should be all, and in all things should have the pre-eminence. Come into living relationship with God's Son, and men and hell may do what they will - God will reach His end and such a people will be triumphant.

One word more. This is

8. The Explanation Of The Church

What is the Church? God's thought is not Christianity; it is not churches as organized centres of Christianity; it is not the propagation of Christian teaching and enterprise. God's thought is to have a people in the earth in whom, and in the midst of whom, Christ is all, and in all. That is the Church. We have got to revise our ideas. In the thought of God the Church begins and ends with this - the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ: and what God is always after is to get together those of His people who will most fully realize that thought of His, and be unto Him the satisfaction of His own eternal desire, the Lord Jesus in all things having the pre-eminence, and being all, and in all. He passes by the great institution, the so-called 'Church' and He is with those who in themselves are of a humble and contrite spirit and who tremble at His word, and with whom the Lord Jesus is the one and only object of worship and adoration. Such satisfy the heart of God. Such, for Him, are the answer to His eternal quest.

You notice the word of God says that. Look at it again in Col.3:11: "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond-man, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all." There they have "put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created Him." Look closely into that and you will find this is the corporate man, the Church, the Body of Christ, "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23), and there, in that corporate man, there cannot be Greek and Jew. Note the words. It does not say, where Greek and Jew come together in blessed fellowship. No, you have not got nationalities in the Church; you have got rid of all nationalities, and you have now one spiritual new man, a new creation, where there cannot be Greek, Jew, bondman, freeman. All earthly distinctions have gone for ever - it is one new man. The right arm is not a Jew and the left arm a Greek!

No, they have gone out. In *that* Church there is one new man - not a combination where Anglicans, Wesleyans, Baptists, Congregationalists and all the rest come together and sink their differences for the time being; that is not the Church. In the Church these differences are not merely covered up for the time being; they do not exist; there is *one* Body, *one* Spirit. The Church is this, "Christ is all, and in all". Get that, and you have the Church. Call anything else the Church and let it be without that, and it is a contradiction. Test it by that.

If it is true that the Christian life according to the thought and mind of God is just this, "Christ all, and in all" are you and I true Christians? For we have seen that by the Cross we went out to make room for the Lord Jesus. Now, if we profess to have come by way of Calvary to the Lord, the implication is that we have gone out by that Cross, that Christ may be all, and in all.

What about this? Do we want a little bit of the world? Do we still voluntarily cling to this thing and that thing outside the Lord, because the Lord Jesus has not wholly satisfied us and we must have a make-weight? A worldly Christian is a contradiction in title. To have a little bit of something outside Christ is to deny Calvary and to stand right in opposition to the eternal intention of God concerning Christ. Will you take that responsibility? God determined this from all eternity concerning His Son; and can we profess to belong to the Lord Jesus and yet at the same time it is not true that He is all, and in all to us? If so, there is something wrong, there is a denial, a contradiction. We are opposed to God's thought and purpose. Is it true that He is all, and in all? He will be that if we will go all the way.

Oh! those subtle suggestions that are ever being whispered in our ears, that if we give up this and that we are going to lose, and life is going to be poorer, and we are going to be narrowed down until we have nothing left. It is a lie! That is the thing that is countering God's great thought for us. God's thought for us is that one, no less than His Son, Jesus Christ, in Whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form, should be our fulness. All the fulness of God in Christ for us! You never attain to that by rejecting Him. Life must be much less than it need be if you are not going all the way with the Lord; and what obtains in the matter of our consecration to the Lord, our entire and complete abandonment to Him in our life and our complete cut with all that is not of the Lord, obtains in the realm of service. This flesh loves to sport itself in Christian work, and tells us that if we are going to be dependent upon the Lord we are going to have an anxious time. But a life of dependence upon God can be a life of continual romance. It is there that we make discoveries which are a constant wonder.

You may be nearly dead one minute and in the next the Lord gives you something to do and you are very much alive, dependent upon Him for every breath you breathe. But thus you come to know the Lord. Then after that experience you are just as helpless and dead again for a while, but you remember that the Lord did something. Then He does it again; and so life becomes a romance; yet no one would ever guess you were depending on the Lord for your very breath. It is a very blessed thing to know the Lord is doing it, when you could not do it at all; it is, humanly, naturally, impossible, but the Lord is doing it!

Follow on, beloved, in the matter of the Church. Apply the test. I am not speaking judgmentally, censoriously, nor do I intend to be discriminating in a wrong sense, but let me be faithful - for us, our fellowship must be where the Lord Jesus is most honoured. Our fellowship must be where God gets His own most fully, where Christ is all, and in all. We must not be tied by traditions, by things which make the claim and take the name. Where the Lord is most honoured, that is where our hearts must be; where everything else is made subservient to this one thing, Jesus Christ all, and in all. That is God's thought of the Church, and that must be the place where for us is the gravitating of our hearts. The place where God is going to register His testimony and bring the impact of that testimony upon others will be found where the Lord Jesus is most honoured; and you may take it that where there are hungry ones you will not be at a loss for an opportunity of ministry if you are fully in accord with God's purpose concerning His Son.

Everything Living

Remember that everything in relation to the Christian is experimental. Everything in relation to the Lord Jesus is essentially experimental. It is not only doctrinal. This is not a matter of creed. It is not that we accept certain statements of doctrine or creed, and by that fact alone are brought into relationship to the Lord Jesus. We are not made Christians by the acceptance of doctrinal statements or orthodox creeds, or things about the Lord Jesus. The Church is not constituted on that ground at all, though the Church stands for certain things. Experience has to be wrought in the life and you have to become a part of it and it has to become a part of you. It is not sufficient to believe that Christ died on the Cross. That has got to come down here into our lives and become an experience, a mighty, operating force and factor in our beings. The Church is not set up on a basis of doctrinal statements. You cannot gather people together and say this is perfectly sound, we will constitute our Church upon this basis. You cannot do it.

The Church is that in which the truth has been wrought, in which it has been made experimental. Creeds cannot hold you together when hell rises to split you. No, the most ultra-fundamental creed has not succeeded in holding people together. The unity of the Spirit is a thing inwrought. Unless that is so there is nothing that can stand against the divisive, schismatic spirits that are abroad. Everything must be experimental, not merely doctrinal, not credal. Now that is where you get to God's reality. It is one thing to sing hymns about Christ being all, and in all, to look at it as an objective thing and agree with it; but it is another thing to be brought experimentally to the place where the truth actually works. There are many who will say today 'yes, that is right, Christ is all, and in all', and tomorrow morning, when you touch them upon some trifling thing where their preferences are involved, you find that Christ is not all, and in all. We have to come to it through experience. *May the Lord give us grace for that.*

The final appeal I make is that we all should seek anew the enthronement of the Lord Jesus as supreme Lord in our hearts, in every part of our life, in all our relationships; that if there is anything we have been holding back, we should let go; if we have had any reserves, we should break now; if we have been less than wholly committed to Him, from now this should be no more, but He should be all, and in all, from this time. That should be our understanding, our undertaking with the Lord. Will you do it? Ask the Lord to break even every tender tie that is in the way of His being all, and in all. Are we prepared for that? *The Lord give us grace.*

Christ Our Life

by T Austin-Sparks

"When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested..." (Colossians 3:4)

One of the main objects of the Holy Spirit is to get believers really identified with Christ as the risen and exalted Lord, and to make His risen life real in their experience. As the age moves toward its consummation - the manifestation of Christ - two features will become increasingly evident. On the one hand *things*, men, movements, institutions, organizations, etc., will predominate and draw multitudes after them, and will attach the crowds to themselves. On the other hand, with a growing disappointment and disillusionment over these, a minority will turn to the Lord Himself to find Him alone as their life.

Three elements will inhere in all this. One is the unmistakable development of the principle of Anti-christ; that which will definitely supplant Christ, or intend to do so. The second is the alternative to the *whole* Christ in man-made Christianity, an imitation life born and carried on by its own momentum. The third, a deep and genuine quest for reality, truth, and *inward* knowledge of the Lord Himself. In the first case it will be naked worship of man in human power: a tremendous overflow of humanism, the wonder and glory of man. The third will be Christ altogether as the life.

If the Christian is attached to some *thing*, such as a teaching, a tradition, an institution, a movement, or person, the end will certainly be a limitation of life and eventually confusion and disappointment, perhaps worse. The New Testament makes it unmistakably clear and emphatic that the destiny of all is to be "Christ all and in all." We *must* learn that a true work of the Spirit of God is to attach everything to Christ Himself. He, Christ, must be the life of our spirit, the "inner man," so that we are strong *in the Lord*: not in ourselves, nor in others, nor in things. We shall have to survive adversity by His strength within alone.

Christ will have to be the life of our mind. Perplexity will find us without the power to explain and understand, but the Spirit will teach and lead.

Christ will need to be life for our bodies. There is such a thing as Divine life for the physical body. Not always does the Lord choose to heal the body, but He does *always* want to be its life, even in suffering, to fulfill His purpose.

It is the Lord Himself, and for this to be so, it often has to be against a background of natural inability. The power of His resurrection is the law of union with Christ from beginning to end. Days of terrific pressure are upon the Lord's people. Their enemy is taking very little off-time. The only sufficiency is in the Lord Himself as our life.

Barnabas exhorted the believers at the beginning that "with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). There is an utterness about this that will be pressed upon us until the time "when Christ who *is* our life, shall be manifested."

God's Eternal Thought of Sonship

by T Austin-Sparks (May, 1947)

Ultimately it is sonship which represents and embodies all God's thought. So the one thing that is constantly reiterated about Solomon is sonship. "Solomon thy son shall build My house and My courts; for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father" (I Chron. 28:6). "Thy son.....My son." David said, "Of all my sons (for the Lord hath given me many sons) He hath chosen Solomon my son" (I Chron. 28:5) - the inclusiveness of sonship, and in a certain sense the exclusiveness also. It is this word "son" that rules where Solomon is concerned. And when we come over to Christ, to the greater Son of David, we find that everything heads up to, and takes its character and its meaning from, His Sonship.

We find that in this matter John and Paul are the great exponents. John presents Christ preeminently as the Son. He sums up all his Gospel in a statement that everything written therein was with one object, that the readers might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the **Son** of God, and that believing they might have life in His Name (John 20:31). John, then, presents Christ as the Son. It is the Person that John has in view.

Paul also represents Christ as the Son, but he goes further. What I mean is this: Paul goes on to open up the content of sonship and to show that there is an aspect of it which is a related matter. By the Holy Spirit we are sons. Christ a first one, the Firstborn; and (leaving out the factor of deity) sonship as a relationship is something into which we are called; and that is Paul's great theme, the meaning of sonship: the content, the explanation, the relatedness, the inclusiveness of it.

I think it is quite patent that the things said by God to and concerning Solomon were not meant to be fulfilled in their entirety and fullness in him. The Lord was speaking with a further thought, with a mind beyond Solomon. He was really, in His own mind, speaking about the Lord Jesus. Solomon would be but a temporary, partial fulfillment of what God said about sonship, and about the kingdom and the house. God was thinking further on. "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son"; "I will establish his kingdom" - these words were spoken of Solomon, but it is not difficult to see that in the case of the Lord Jesus there is an infinite transcendence. There is something here in connection with Him which goes far beyond anything that was possible in the case of Solomon .

What I am stressing in the first place is this: John and Paul bring Christ into view as Son on the principle of eternity. You know how John seeks to press that home in his Gospel in a number of very impressive ways. He opens, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God", clearly intending to emphasize the eternity of this sonship; for he very soon comes into time - "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us"; that is the time aspect, the Now, the other is timeless.

But Paul not only brings Christ in in His eternity; he begins to build the Church upon that eternity. In the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians which are in my mind just now, we have Christ in His eternity, and then: "He chose *us* in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). From that eternal election and foreordination and predestination Paul builds the Church.

He says, This is no thing of time or of earth; this is a thing that has its roots and its foundation away back in eternity, and it goes on unto the ages of the ages. Time is a mere fragment in this thing. Paul is building upon the eternity of Christ. What has that to say to us? Well, of course, it bears out our first and all-governing point, the transcendence of Christ over Solomon. This greater than Solomon that is here, this Son, how infinitely more He is than that son!

What is sonship? In accordance with God's full thought, not His partial thought in Solomon; that is only representation and type and figure and shadow; but in reality, it is something which takes its rise out of eternity and goes on when time shall be no more. That is sonship in God's thought.

We have said before that emancipation from all our difficulties and problems will be along the line of spiritual enlargement, and spiritual enlargement will be by way of a new and far greater apprehension of Christ; and here it is. Look at Him! What is the object of telling us all this about Christ? Do we just want information that Christ is God's Son and that He was one with the Father in eternity and will be forever and ever? I am quite reverent in asking that question and in saying that as a purely objective matter somewhere out in God's universe it does not matter to me very much. But when you say that God has revealed this to men, then I want to know why. What is in the Divine mind in revealing it? And the answer is here: you and I are concerned in it, we were chosen in relation to it before the world was, in Him we are bound up with it. Oh, then, receiving eternal life, age-binding life, being linked with the eternal Son of God, what an immense thing it is! Sonship goes beyond anything that is merely temporary and transient. Our union with Christ brings us right into the roots of His eternity, not only in duration but in character, in nature; for eternal life is not merely endless duration, it is the glory of God in nature, in essence.

So Paul builds everything upon this fact of eternity and brings us in. What a wonderful revelation! As a mere presentation of truth it is fascinating, captivating, bewildering. But brought home by the Holy Spirit, how transforming it can be, how establishing, how emancipating! Oh, if only the Church lived in the good of that, how all these petty, temporary factors would go out! After all, what does this and that matter? It is only for time and for this world at most; but the thing that matters is what God is doing above and beyond this world altogether.

God's Higher Order of Man

By T. Austin-Sparks

"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (I Corinthians 15:45-49).

I think there are a lot of Christian people who have the idea that what God is seeking to do through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus in atonement for sin - in the salvation and recovery of man from his lost state - is to get him back to the place where Adam was before the fall. Now do you have that idea? Is that your idea of redemption - that you just undo everything that went wrong in and through Adam and restore things to that unfallen state in which Adam was before he fell?

If that is so, you are entirely wrong. God is not seeking to do any such thing. He is not conforming to the first Adam at all, not even to an unfallen first Adam. He has gone immeasurably beyond an unfallen first Adam. He has left him behind altogether... and has One who is an entirely different order of being from the unfallen Adam. The first Adam was a living soul; the last Adam was a Life-giving spirit. The first man was of the earth, earthy; the last is of heaven, heavenly. Therefore, "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

This heavenly Man, this last Adam, this Life-giving spirit is of an entirely different order from unfallen Adam - of a higher order altogether. God has something transcendentally greater than unfallen first Adam. His last Adam, His second Man, is of a heavenly order - a spiritual order; and blessed be God, an order which cannot know death. So do not let us drop down on to the poor level of an unfallen first Adam. It might be a great deal better than our present natural condition, but it is not good enough for God; and it should not be good enough for us. Therefore, let us "bear the image of the heavenly."

That brings clearly into view what God's objective is. Having made the Lord Jesus the Head of His new creation - His new race - His objective is to conform the race to the likeness of its Head. Christ then becomes the one object in the eye of God concerning which and unto which He is doing all His works.

And the Lord is now working in the new creation - in you and me - to conform us to the image of His Son. We may take it that God has no other work on hand. God has only one work on hand, and that is His work. That is to be taken account of when we realize the Lord is trying to do something. The Lord is at work. We may not be able to see what He is doing at this time; but if we ask the one general, all governing question, "What is it that the Lord is seeking to do?" The answer is one... and comprehends everything - every method of God, every means of God, every interest of God. It is reduced to one single, comprehensive thing... He is seeking to reproduce His Son in us - to conform us to the image of His Son.

From eternity God has been governed by a desire to express Himself... and all creation is God's way of seeking to express Himself. Now, when we look at the Lord Jesus, we see God's realizing His desire; and then, when we look at His activity with us, we see God's seeking in this yet more fully extended way - beyond the individual Person of the Lord Jesus - to reproduce Himself in the Church, which is Christ's Body; that is, to make it Christ in expression. That is very simple and very elementary; but this heavenly order of which Christ is the Head is what God is seeking to bring about in a new race.

Then the next thing is this: the last Adam is a Life-giving spirit. Thank God for that! You see, Adam could only produce after his kind, and his kind was an earthly order - a soul order of man. He could not produce after the full, complete, and final thought of God. It was not in him to reproduce himself in an order above his own level. Even as unfallen, he could not do that.

The Lord Jesus is bound by the same law, but the difference is that as a Life-giving spirit, producing after His own kind, He has power to accomplish the Divine purpose by bringing in the heavenly - this spiritual - order. You have, then, a new race in view, set forth in its Head and, in union with Him - as one with Him - the Spirit with the Son, a Life-giving spirit, becoming the energy by which the end shall be reached. The Lord Jesus in us - the Holy Spirit in us - is the energy and power to produce, or reproduce, after His own kind. That makes a heavenly order possible.

On Knowing the Lord

by T. Austin-Sparks

"That I may know....." - Phil. 3:10.

"Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me." - John 14:9; (A.S.V.).
Phil. 1:10; Heb. 8:11; I John 2:20, 27.

It is of the greatest importance for the Lord's children to recognize fully that, above all other things, His object is that they should know Him. This is the all-governing end of all His dealings with us. This is the greatest of all our needs.

It is the secret of strength, steadfastness, and service. It determines the measure of our usefulness to Him. It was the one passion of the life of the apostle Paul for himself. It was the cause of his unceasing striving for the saints. It is the heart and pivot of the whole letter to the Hebrews. It was the secret of the life, service, endurance, confidence of the Lord Jesus as Son of Man.

All these facts need looking at more closely. We begin always with the Lord Jesus as God's representative, the Man after His own mind. In His life on earth there was no part or aspect which did not have its strength and ability rooted in, and drawn from, His inward knowledge of His Father, God. We must never forget that His was a life of utter dependence upon God, voluntarily accepted. He attributed everything to the Father: word, wisdom, and works. The miracles were made just as possible through His apostles as through Himself. This does not put the apostles on the same personal level as Himself. His Deity remains. He is God manifest in the flesh; but He has accepted from the human and manward standpoint the limitations and dependence of man so that God might *be* God manifested. There is a subjection here because of which He is able to do nothing of Himself (John 5:19, etc.). The principle of His entire life in every phase and detail was His knowledge of God. He knows the Father in the matter of the words He speaks, the works He does, the men and women with whom He has to do; with regard to the *times* of speaking, acting, going, staying, surrendering, refusing, silence; with regard to the motives, pretensions, professions, enquiries, suggestions, of men and of Satan. He knows when He may not, and when He may, give His life. Yes, everything here is governed by that inward knowledge of God. There are numerous evidences in the "Acts" as the practical, and in the Epistles as the doctrinal, revelation of God's mind, that this principle is intended by God to be maintained as the basic law of the life of the Lord's people through this age. This knowledge in the case of the Lord Jesus was the secret of His complete ascendancy and of His absolute authority.

Masters in Israel will seek Him out and the issue which will precipitate their seeking will be that of knowing. "Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?" (John 3:10). Nicodemus has come to One Who knows, and Whose authority is superior to that of the scribes, not merely in degree but in kind.

Toward the end of the Gospel of John, which especially brings into view this very matter, "to know" occurs some fifty-five times. Our Lord makes the statement that "this is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him, Whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." (John 17:3). This does not mean merely that eternal life is given on the basis of this knowledge. There can be life with very limited knowledge. But life *in fulness* is closely related to that knowledge, and the increasing knowledge of Him manifests itself in increasing life. It works both ways; knowledge unto life and life unto knowledge.

Seeing, then, that the Lord Jesus Himself, as Man, represents man according to God, we are well prepared to see that

The Dominating Objective Of The Divine Dealings With Us

is that we may know the Lord.

This explains all our experiences, trials, sufferings, perplexities, weakness, predicaments, tight corners, bafflings, pressures. While the refining of spirit, the development of the graces, the removing of the dross, are all purposes of the fires, yet above and through all is the one object - that we may know the Lord. There is only one way of really getting to know the Lord, and that is experimentally.

Our minds are so often occupied with service and work; we think that doing things for the Lord is the chief object of life. We are concerned about our lifework, our ministry. We think of equipment for it in terms of study and knowledge of *things*. Soul-winning, or teaching believers, or setting people to work, are so much in the foreground. Bible study and knowledge of the Scriptures, with efficiency in the matter of leading in Christian service as the end in view, are matters of pressing importance with all. All well and good, for these are important matters; but, back of everything the Lord is more concerned about our knowing Him than about anything else. It is very possible to have a wonderful grasp of the Scriptures, a comprehensive and intimate familiarity with doctrine; to stand for cardinal verities of the faith; to be an unceasing worker in Christian service; to have a great devotion to the salvation of men, and yet, alas, to have a very inadequate and limited personal knowledge of God within. So often the Lord has to take away our work that we may discover Him. The ultimate value of everything is not the information which we give, not the soundness of our doctrine, not the amount of work that we do, not the measure of truth that we possess, but just the fact that we know the Lord in a deep and mighty way.

This is the one thing that will remain when all else passes. It is this that will make for the permanence of our ministry after we are gone. While we may help others in many ways and by many means so far as their earthly life is concerned, our *real* service to them is based upon our knowledge of the Lord.

The greatest of the problems of the Christian life is

The Problem Of Guidance

How much has been said and written upon this subject! The last word for so many is, "Pray about it, commit it to God, do the thing that seems right, and trust God to see that it turns out all right." This to us seems weak and inadequate. We make no claim to ability to lay down the comprehensive and conclusive basis of guidance, but we are strongly of the conviction that it is one thing to get direction for the events, incidents, and contingencies of life, and quite another thing to have an abiding, personal, inward knowledge of the Lord. It is one thing to call upon a friend in emergency or at special times for advice as to a course to be taken; it is another thing to live with that friend so that there is derived a sense of his mind in general that will govern in particular matters.

We want instructions and commands, *the Lord* wants us to have a 'mind.' "Have this *mind* in you," "We have the *mind* of Christ." Christ has a consciousness, and by the Holy Spirit He would give and develop in us that consciousness. The inspired statement is that "His anointing teacheth you concerning all things." We are not servants, we are sons. Commands - as such - are for servants, a mind is for sons.

There is an appalling state of things amongst the Lord's people to-day. So many of them have their life almost entirely in that which is external to themselves - in their counsel and guidance, their sustenance and support, their knowledge, their means of grace. Personal, inward, spiritual intelligence is a very rare thing. No wonder that the enemy has such a successful line in delusions, counterfeits, and false representations. Our greatest safeguard against such will be a deep knowledge of the Lord through discipline.

To know the Lord in a real way means steadfastness when others are being carried away - steadfastness through times of fiery trial. Those who know the Lord do not put forth their own hand and try to bring things about. Such are full of love and patience, and do not lose their poise when everything seems to be going to pieces. Confidence is an essential and inevitable fruit of this knowledge, and in those who know Him there is a quiet restful strength which speaks of a great depth of life.

To close let me point out that in Christ "are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden," and the Lord's will for us is to come to an ever-growing realization and personal appreciation of Him in Whom all the fulness dwells.

We have only stated facts as to the Lord's will for all His own, and their greatest need.

The absence of this real knowledge of the Lord has proved to be the most tragic factor in the Church's history.

Every fresh uprising of an abnormal condition has disclosed the appalling weakness amongst Christian people because of this lack. Waves of error; the swing of the pendulum to some fresh popular acceptance; a great war with its horrors and many-sided tests of faith; all these have swept away multitudes and left them in spiritual ruin.

These things are ever near at hand, and we have written this message to urge upon the Lord's people to have very definite dealings with Him that He will take every measure with them that they might know Him.

The Centrality and Supremacy of Christ

by T Austin-Sparks

"It pleased God... to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him" (Gal.1:15,16)

1. Everything Tested by Inwardness

Since Paul's day so very much of Christian activity has been the furthering of a movement, the propagating of a teaching, and the furthering of the interests of an institution. It is not a movement, nor to establish a movement in the Earth and to get followers, adherents, members, support. It is not an institution, even though we might call that institution the church. The church has no existence in the thought of God apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ, and it is judged according to the measure in which Christ the Son of God's love is in evidence by its existence. It is not a testimony, if by that you mean a specific form of teaching, a systematized doctrine. No, it is not a testimony. Let us be careful what we mean when we speak about "the testimony". We may have in our minds some arrangement of truth, and that truth couched in certain phraseology, form of words, and thus speak about "the testimony"; it is not the testimony in that sense. It is not a denomination, and it is not a "non-denomination", and it is not an "inter-denomination". It is not Christianity. It is not "the work" – oh, we are always talking about "the work": "How is the work getting on?" – we are giving ourselves to the work, we are interested in the work, we are out in the work. It is not a mission. It is Christ! "...That I might preach Him." If that had remained central and preeminent all these horrible disintegrating jealousies would never have had a chance. All the wretched mess that exists in the organization of Christianity today would never have come about. It is because something specific in itself, a movement, a mission, a teaching, a testimony, a fellowship, has taken the place of Christ. People have gone out to further that, to project that, to establish that. It would not be confessed; nevertheless it is true, that today it is not so much Christ that is our work.

Now beloved, an inward revelation is the cure of all that. Am I saying too hard a thing, too sweeping a thing? The existence of all that represents the absence of an adequate inward revelation of Christ. If Christ the Son of God's love is central and supreme in the heart of the believer so much else goes down, it must go down. Controversies with God will divide, but those artificial things, those things resultant from man's activity and his projecting of himself, insinuating of himself into the interests of God, those things cannot abide where there is an adequate inward revelation of the Lord Jesus; they cannot be. These two things are before us: one, because of the revelation of Jesus Christ in our hearts we have a passion for Him; on the other hand, because of the absence of a sufficient revelation of Christ in our hearts we are out for other things which we would say are in His interests, and for Him, but which can never, never satisfy God's heart. It is the satisfaction of the heart of the Father, which is in view.

Beloved I am speaking about the individual. I am not justified, and you are not justified, in claiming to be Christians except in the measure in which Christ is manifested in me, in you; and all the force and weight and ingenuity of hell is out against that. Believers have far more to provoke them to un-Christ-likeness than anyone else in the world. Believers have far more assaults to churn them up and to make them betray Christ than anyone else. Hell is dead set against the revelation of Jesus Christ. Everything begins with this, the revelation of Jesus Christ within.

2. Christ - The Unifying Center and Object

As I have said before, if we have any other interest that we are trying to further, something that we call a testimony, perhaps meaning by that a system of teaching, or a fellowship, or a denomination, or the contrary, the opposite, any of these things, well, the history will still be more divisions, it is bound to be. If it is Christ, only Christ, central and supreme, we have the answer to the Devil; we have the secret of victory, we have the secret of fellowship, we have the power of His resurrection. Oh, how important it is for us to see that the body represents His victory. The body is His victory in the sense that it is the reversing of all independence, and that independence of spirit or action is a violation not only of the truth of the body of Christ, but of the power of His resurrection.

3. Our Place in Christ's Supremacy

It is necessary to carry the work of the cross to the full issue of Christ's absolute victory in the realm of all principality and power, in the realm of the authority of darkness. Forgiveness of sins is a great blessing, the atonement for our sins is a great blessing, and to be saved from hell at last and go to heaven is a great blessing. We would not minimize them for a moment or take from the greatness and grandeur of those things because of the infinite cost with which they were purchased for us, but I say again, it is necessary for us to carry the work of Christ through to its full issue, and its full issue lies in the realm of principalities and powers. It lies in the realm of the authority of darkness, the jurisdiction of darkness. That is important for the sinner to know, that it is not only a matter of being forgiven his sins and saved from sin, but that the sinner should know that in salvation all the authority, the jurisdiction of principalities and powers, of the adversary, Satan himself, has been destroyed and broken, and out of that jurisdiction, that authority, that rightful hold of Satan, they have been rescued – rescued by Christ in His cross. It means that Satan has no more power because he has no more right. His power depends on his right, and his right is based upon the state of things in our hearts, and the cross deals with the state of things in our hearts and destroys or removes the ground of his right, and breaks his power.

Carry it right through. Now all that is in Christ for us. Christ in Himself embodies His supremacy over the adversary because in Him there is no one of that ground that that adversary must have upon which to encamp and construct his rightful authority to hold in bondage. In Christ there is no such ground; Christ is in us when we believe and the authority of Satan is broken because Christ is in us. Christ being in us there is no ground for the jurisdiction of Satan. To be delivered not only from sin (let me say it again) but also from the authority of Satan is a tremendous thing. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen..." (Rom.8:33,34). What is the value of that? The accuser comes along and tries to lay a charge against us. What is our ground of answer? Oh, our ground of answer is this: "It is Christ that died, and is also risen." That is the way to answer the accusation of the enemy. Christ has triumphed over sin and over all the ground of Satan's authority. You and I can never meet the enemy in ourselves. He would win the argument every time. But if we present him with Christ, what can he do? "The prince of this world comes, and has nothing in Me" (John 14:30). These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. What power does the devil have? In Christ's death and resurrection all his power has been destroyed.

"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (Rom.8:33).

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col.1:27). Do you follow that? That is the provision God has made, and if only we had a fuller, readier apprehension of Christ we should find that to be the way of victory. What is it that the Holy Spirit works upon in order to make the victory in us actual? It is not our struggles to be better. The Holy Spirit never helps us in a struggle to be better. We may struggle on forever, and die struggling, and the Holy Spirit will not help us if that is the way in which we think we are going to be either saved or sanctified. What is it with which the Holy Spirit will cooperate? It is our faith apprehension and appropriation of Christ as our perfection, as our salvation. "Oh," you say, "yes, but we are sinful and there is so much wrong about us; are we to close our eyes to our own faults and sins?" You are to open your eyes to Christ. Stop looking at yourself and your own sin and get your eyes fixed upon the Lord Jesus as perfection for you to God, and from God to you, and as you take Him by faith - "Not what I am, O Lord, but what thou art" - "I in myself am bad. In me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing, but Lord, You are my salvation, You are my righteousness, You are my holiness, You are my sanctification, I hold on to You for all that" - the Holy Spirit makes that good to us. It is our appreciation of Christ that is the Holy Spirit's ground of activity; that is the way of deliverance.

The Meaning of Christ

by T Austin-Sparks (September, 1946)

God has something to say right into our hearts by bringing His Son here into this world from infancy onward and having that life here in a world like this for thirty-three years. He is working out something, is doing something, and He is doing that in the spiritual realm; and He wants to repeat that in the Church and in the members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

One thing is particularly and jealously guarded by God in the case of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus. It is this, that whatever Christ was it was spiritual; there was nothing from cradle to grave which made Him anything naturally or temporally. It could have been otherwise, and men were looking for it to be otherwise, and were offended that it was not so. "...born King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:2), a king born in a stable and cradled in a manger - shut out, excluded, not given room! And from cradle to grave it was like that: nothing, nothing that could be taken hold of naturally and temporally to credit Him with particular value and importance, but everything to the contrary; and God jealously guarded that, would not allow it to be otherwise, kept Him at that level.

Why? For this reason and because of this principle which abides. That whatever Christ is in value, it is spiritual. It is the spiritual value of Christ that God has safeguarded, not allowing men and the world to take Him up and say, Here is some great One; look at this and that and the other thing about Him! No, you can say nothing like that about Jesus of Nazareth, nothing at all. He is to the Jews a stumbling-block, to the Greeks foolishness, but to us who believe, Christ is the wisdom of God and the power of God (I Cor. 1:23), but a hidden wisdom, not of this world nor of the rulers of this world. Do you realize that it is the spiritual value of Christ that God has so jealously safeguarded by the conditions of the incarnation and of His life while here on this earth; and that is what we want to seek to work out, to recognize?

Christ has become so much other in Christianity, and thereby He has lost His impact, He has been stripped of His dynamic, embellished with an embellishment that God never countenanced. The only embellishment of Christ, if we dare use that word, the only true glorifying, the only true exalting of Christ is that of the spirit, of the heart, and therefore it is only possible for the redeemed, who know that they are redeemed, to glorify Christ truly.

The Lord repudiates all the garlands laid upon Him which are temporal in this dispensation; He will not have them. What He wants is a spirit that appreciates and values, a heart that goes out in grateful worship. You notice how, through His life, that was always the thing upon which He put His seal. Any recognition of His spiritual value, and a humble brokenness at His feet - ah, there He found what His heart wanted..... A heart appreciation of Christ is the only true one.

So we have to see the spiritual value of Christ during those thirty-three years, and to come to two things about Him which are of abiding meaning, not only in Him personally, but as John says, "which thing is true in Him and in you" (I John 2:8).

One, that He was constituted by the Spirit for life. He was begotten of the Holy Ghost, He was born of the Spirit; the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, was there at birth. You will see what I am after in a moment. We mention the fact that at thirty years of age the Spirit came upon Him. What is the difference? If He was filled with the Spirit from His birth, if He was born of the Spirit, why should the Spirit come upon Him thirty years later? You have to explain that. To begin with, the answer is this - He was constituted by the Spirit for life - to live His life by the Spirit, "which thing is true in Him and in you." We cannot live the life of children of God, much less as (mature) sons of God, unless we are constituted to do so by the Holy Spirit. It was for life; and here you are going to have thirty-three years with a mighty climax of what it means to live by the Spirit, and everything in that life for those years is the working out of the Spirit dwelling within.

Constituted to live, just to live, that is the point. For thirty years you know very little about Him, and what you do know is that He was not doing specifically and immediately the ultimate thing for which He came. You know that for thirty years He was more or less a private person living a private life, doing the work which many other men did - an ordinary trade, probably looking after a widowed mother and helping to look after and support a large family, and learning privation and how to make ends meet, so that later He knew the cost of two sparrows in the market and the fact that if you could buy two farthings' worth you would get an extra bird thrown in. How did He know that? He had probably lived it through. But through all that, He was living His life by the Spirit, and God was causing a man to live on the basis of the new creation by constituting him by the indwelling Spirit. Perhaps my way of saying it may be open to correction, but you see what I am after.

And, dear friends, in this new creation in Christ Jesus, we are called to live here not romantic lives at all, not lives of great public attraction and interest, but ordinary lives; to do our job, learn our lessons, experience adversities, carry responsibilities, do the thousand and one things which belong to the ordinary person's life, but to live on a higher level than the ordinary person. And that cannot be done unless we are constituted to do it by the Holy Spirit. But it can be if we are.

And one aspect or one side of the Holy Spirit's purpose in coming is to enable men and women to live the life of men and women in this world, on this earth, but on another level. Do believe that. So many people think that immediately they become Christians and are interested in the Lord's work, they have to come out of the ordinary realm of daily life and become something special, that the Holy Spirit being within them, of course they must give up their day job and go and find some other kind of work for the Lord. Don't you believe it! I do not believe that the Lord does that sort of thing with anybody until He has made them live a life on a higher level in spheres where everybody has to live. If you cannot do that, give up hope of being sent by the Lord into some other kind of sphere or work. If you try it by direct means or back doors, you will find that the Lord is never got over in that way. We have to be brought back here to live on the new creation level in this old creation world by being so constituted of the Holy Spirit.

Is there any impact in that? I am sure there is challenge in it. So face your situation and understand why the Lord holds you in it and does not let you out. You have got to live there by the Holy Spirit before the Lord will make a change. So for thirty years He lived an ordinary life in an extraordinary way.

He was constituted from birth by the Holy Spirit to live in the realm of the new creation while still moving in the realm of the old. We are constituted from new birth for that very purpose. That is one thing.

Then we come to this matter of the anointing at thirty years of age. What is this? Ah, this is a new phase. He was anointed of the Holy Ghost for specific work, for that supreme thing for which He had come and been chosen of God, anointed of God for the remaining three and a half years and all that that meant. I want to get inside of that. You see, the Lord Jesus had a spirit in Him, His own human spirit, and in His case His human spirit was sinless; and yet it was necessary that the Spirit of God should utterly dominate that human spirit and hold entire government over it. When it came to working out the great purpose of God, not only living a life but now working out something very much more serious and grim than that, the great purpose of God - it was necessary that the spirit of God should utterly dominate Him for this reason - to hold everything unto God, that everything should be out from God, not even out from His own spirit. This whole work of God had to be held very strongly into God so that it was wholly and utterly of God.

You get back into the Old Testament, you have it in type and representation. You know how, again and again, the Spirit of the Lord came upon this one and that one, men represented as being already consecrated to the Lord. In all the typical sense, they were sanctified people. Bezaleel and Aholiab were consecrated men, separated unto the Lord. In the type, they were sanctified men, but the Spirit of God came upon them. You see, even consecrated men are not to be left to themselves, not to have ability in themselves and act out from themselves. Taking Bezaleel and Aholiab as examples, the Spirit of God came upon them. Why? Because there is a Divine pattern to be meticulously followed and carried out, and it is not going to be left even to people who are most devoted to the Lord to do the Lord's work out from themselves.

Only the Spirit of God knows what and how and when, and that is very important to God. Not what we, in most earnest devotion, think should be done for the Lord. He does not accept that. Not how we, with all the best motive in the world and the heart most real in its desire for the Lord's glory, think it should be done; and not when or where we, though given to the Lord, think or feel it should be. Not a bit of it!

Paul was a very consecrated man, out and out for God. There is no doubt about him, about his true zeal for God (I am speaking of his post-conversion zeal). He is a man who knows the Lord, whose spirit has been quickened, and whose spirit is indwelt by the Holy Spirit; and yet he will essay to go into Bithynia and to preach the word in Asia, but the Spirit of Jesus will suffer him not (Acts 16:7). He will be forbidden of the Holy Ghost to go in the way on which he set out. You see the point.

Now I am not saying that Jesus and Paul are identical, but I am saying that the Lord Jesus is a representation here on this earth of a man living in this world on the new creation basis and principle. I am not leaving out His Deity. I am talking in the realm of God bringing here an example, a perfect example or representation of a new creation man, and the principles of the life of such. To live that new creation life he must be constituted by the Holy Spirit. To fulfill the work of God he must be anointed, because everything has to be held to God - held for God, come out from God - and only so can there be the effect and the impact; and it is an impact when the Holy Ghost gets hold of us and moves us in His direction.

Because the Lord Jesus lived on that basis and principle of a life lived in and by the Spirit and a work carried out under the government of the Spirit, His earthly life here was a constant registration, both amongst men and in the spiritual realm. If there is one thing patent about His life here on earth, it is this: wherever He went something started up, nothing just lay dormant. People and demons were stirred; His presence meant that. The presence of the Lord Jesus in the house of Zacchaeus will cause Zacchaeus to confess his miserable, contemptible sin and wrongdoing. That results from the Lord's presence. And the very demons cried out, "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art - the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). What is the matter with them? He is there under the Anointing, in the power of the Spirit; something is going to happen, it must happen.

Here is the meaning of Christ's life on the earth: it was to show what a life in the new creation is like, and what its effect is, how it is first constituted and then governed by the Spirit. And, by all the teaching of the New Testament, this is intended to be true of us, true of the church and of believers.

O God, make it more true! That must be our prayer. This is where we must have our response, our reaction.

It is not enough merely to accept the tale of the life of Jesus, the story of His birth and of His going about doing good: but what is the effect of this in the realm of things spiritual? What is the abiding value, as far as you and I are concerned, and the Lord's people? It must touch a realm beyond this earthly one and stir to the depths the realm of evil spiritual intelligence. His life was a mighty challenge in every realm because the Spirit of God was upon Him.

He did not move on the ground of His personal devotion to the Father. He moved by intimation and direction of the Spirit of God. You can see why the Church has lost its impact. It is because it has concluded that once you have consecrated your life to the Lord you can do anything you like, arrange for the Lord, plan, scheme, do all sorts of things *for* the Lord. The Church has been doing that for a long time: it is doing it now. Their argument is that it is for the Lord. How far is it getting? What is the comparative value of it? I leave you to answer that. It was not like that at the beginning, in the case of the Lord Jesus, in the first days of the Church when the Spirit by the Anointing really did govern. In a very short time far, far more was achieved than was done in a very, very long time afterwards.

No, we are consecrated to the Lord, but we have to have the Lord's direction for every movement and not conclude that because we are out for the Lord we must just do all we can. Let us get it from the Lord, and only so will it be effective. It is not easy, perhaps, or it does not seem easy, but it is something to which the Lord calls us and it is the way back to effectiveness.

At any rate, let us put it like this: there is going to be nothing unless it is under the Anointing, and the Anointing means full charge of all life and all activity. Here is the place for repentance, repentance that there has been so much of ourselves and so little of the Lord. Here is the place for submission, that He shall be Lord in the power and reality of the Anointing. The Lord grant it.

The Meaning of the Anointing

by T Austin-Sparks (May, 1943)

What is the meaning of the anointing of the Holy Spirit? It is nothing less and nothing other than the Holy Spirit taking His place as absolute Lord. The anointing carries with it the absolute Lordship of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit as Lord. That means that all other lordships have been deposed and set aside: the lordship of our own lives, the lordship of our own minds, our own wills, our own desires, the lordship of others. The lordship of every interest and every influence is regarded as having given place to the undivided and unreserved Lordship of the Holy Spirit, and the anointing can never be known, enjoyed, unless that has taken place.

That is why the Lord Jesus went down into Jordan's waters, into death and burial, in type, taking the place of man in representation, from that moment not to be under the government of His own life in any respect as He worked out the will of God, but to be wholly and utterly subject to the Spirit of God in every detail. Jordan's grave set forth the setting aside of every independent lordship - every other lordship, every other influence - and if you will read the spiritual life of Christ in the Gospels, you will see that it was to that position that He was every moment adhering. Many and powerful were the influences that were brought to bear upon Him to affect Him and govern His movements. Sometimes it was the full force of Satan's open assault, to the effect that it was necessary that He should do certain things for His cause, or for His very continuation in life physically. Sometimes it was Satan clothing himself with the arguments and persuasions of beloved associates in their seeking to hold Him back from certain courses or to influence Him to prolong His life by sparing Himself certain sufferings. In various ways influences were brought to bear upon Him from all directions, and many of the counsels were seemingly so wise and good.

For example, with regard to His going up to the feast, it was urged, in effect: It is the thing that everybody is doing; if you do not go up you will prejudice your cause. If you really want to further this cause, you must fall into line with the accepted thing religiously, and you only stand to lose if you do not do that; you will curtail your influence, you will narrow your sphere of usefulness. And what an appeal that is if you have something very much at heart, some cause for God at heart, the success of which is of the greatest importance.

Such then were the influences that were beating upon Him. But whether it were Satan coming in all the directness of his cunning, his wit, his insinuation, or whether it be through beloved and most intimate disciples and associates, whatever the kind of argument, you cannot cause that Man to deflect a hair's-breadth from His principle. "I am under the anointing; I am committed to the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, and I cannot move, whatever it costs. Cost it My life, cost it My influence, cost it My reputation, cost it everything that I hold dear, I cannot move unless I know from the Holy Spirit that that is God's mind and not another mind - God's will and not another will - that this thing comes from God."

Thus He put back everything until He knew in His spirit what the Spirit of God witnessed. He lived up to this law, this principle, of the absolute authority, government, lordship of the anointing, and it was for that that the anointing had come. That is the meaning of the anointing. Do you ask for the anointing of the Holy Spirit? Why do you ask for the anointing of the Holy Spirit? Is the anointing something that you crave? To what end?

That you may be used, may have power, may have influence, may be able to do a lot of wonderful things? Beloved, the first and preeminent thing the anointing means is that we can do nothing but what the anointing teaches and leads to do. The anointing takes everything out of our hands. The anointing takes charge of the reputation. The anointing takes charge of the very purpose of God. The anointing takes complete control of everything and all is from that moment in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and we must remember that if we are going to learn Christ, that learning Christ is by the Holy Spirit's dealing with us; and that means that we have to go exactly the same way as Christ went in principle and in law.

The Measure Of Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

"Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col.1:27). Read the whole verse carefully, fragment by fragment, to get the full import of its wonderful truth: "God was pleased to make known - what is the riches of the glory - of this mystery... which is, Christ in you." The riches of the glory, *Christ* in you!

"Know ye not as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you?" (2 Cor. 13:5). That interrogation of the Apostle is not without point, "Know ye not as to *your own selves*" - *know* ye not that Christ is in you? Do you not know this wonderful thing?

"My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). "Till Christ be formed in you"; this is a step on.

"Whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). Marvellous words! No man would dare to say this; they are here by revelation of the Holy Spirit.

"Unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ... till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God... unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:7, 13; ARV). "The measure... of the fulness of Christ."

We want immediately to focus everything in and upon the Lord Jesus Christ for it is He who is in view. What we have before us is not teaching or truth; that is, to be possessed of more knowledge of truth; it is not service; but it is the Lord Himself.

The object of the Father from first to last is that the Son, the Lord Jesus, shall fill all things, and all things shall be filled with Christ. *The value of everything in the eyes of God is according to the measure of the manifestation of Christ in it.* It is from that standpoint God determines the importance of everything.

If we become focussed there, it will make a great difference, much will have to go because it is not manifesting the Lord Jesus. We must understand that the Father has set the Lord Jesus before His eyes, and the Father's eyes are full of only one object, that is the Beloved, His Son; and in the eyes of God the value of everything is determined by the measure in which His Son is manifested and glorified; that is His end and that is His object.

The All-Inclusiveness of Christ

Spiritual service, vision, vocation, glorification, have no existence apart from Christ; they are not things as things, and cannot be had except in the Person of the Lord Jesus.

To many salvation is as a thing. It is detached and regarded as something by itself; to be given by itself, for the good of those who receive it. Sanctification is wrapped up in the same way. So often we think of salvation and sanctification in relation to the persons in view, and so *some thing* for them, but it is Christ Himself who is salvation, He is sanctification, and He is within as these.

It is the same with service and vocation; these are often seen only in regard to the persons themselves. "Saved to serve" is only part of the truth and is a dangerous slogan, for the motive, so often, is the service itself and not the Lord. You may be so driven with the service that He is left out. We have detached the thing from the Person, and we find we are gripped and wrapped in the claims of "service"; it becomes the *drive* of service, and in the end it breaks us. And again, when service becomes hard and difficult we say we will give it up, we will resign, thus showing we have separated service from the Person, and have been occupied, day in and day out, with it, the work, and not with the Lord Himself.

And so with glorification; yes, this stirs us, we love to sing hymns about our glorification; but God means it to begin now and it must begin now. What is glorification? It is the full manifestation of Jesus Christ in us. God regards salvation, sanctification, vocation, service, glorification, as related to His Son, and of no value apart from Him; He is salvation, He is sanctification, etc.

Salvation and sanctification are often held up to people as things to be received for their good; the object being for them to benefit from *something* received; often it is salvation for salvation's sake. God has not saved a single soul for salvation's sake. God is not after salvation as an end in itself, but for the sake of the Saviour, for the glory of His Son. It is not salvation that is in view, but the Saviour. If people are rejoicing in salvation merely as something received for their own benefit, the full end will be hidden by the first step. Is not this the cause of arrest and hold up?

The worker has to be brought, by the way of seeing no deep fulness of result from his work, to the place where he cries out, "I can do nothing." So he comes to see the true nature of salvation, and that to save another soul is utterly beyond him, and is the work of God. So he comes to see God's object in salvation, which is the glory of His Son. Salvation is not *something*, it is the mighty incoming of a *Person*; "He that hath the Son hath life"; (1 John 5:12). "To as many as received Him" (John 1:12).

This is also true in the matter of sanctification and service. Any service that is not fulfilled on the ground of the indwelling Christ as the Worker cannot effect the purpose of God, for only the Lord Jesus by His Spirit can do the work of God. Yes, you are called to be a servant in a service you can never fulfil! Service is the bringing of the Lord Jesus into view, and any service that does not do that is not the service of the Holy Spirit, but man's service which does not fulfil God's ends; it will be tested by the fire, and proved valueless.

Christianity is not a doctrine, not truth as truth, but the knowledge of a Person; it is knowing the Lord Jesus. You cannot be educated into being a Christian. Christianity is the knowledge within of a Person, knowing Him as dwelling within us.

The Universality Of Christ

God has singled out a Person, and gathered into that Person all the Divine perfections; everything is inseparably bound up with His Son; He has put all the fulness of eternity and of the universe into that Person, and bound up all the fulness in Him; not a fragment can be had apart from Him; that which is to characterize the new creation is in Him.

The predestined end of God is a full presentation of the fulness of Christ - "The church, His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23).

Every corner of the universe will speak audibly of Jesus Christ; so that we shall not be able to go into a place, or touch a life, without finding an expression of the Lord Jesus.

*"Christ in you, the hope of glory" - this is heaven. You walk in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Think of the whole universe like that; a universal expression of His Son in fulness. That is the end God has in view, that Christ shall fill all things; that, looking into everything, it shall be found to be *full of Christ*. All is made for Him, and in the new creation all will speak of His presence and show forth some characteristic of Him. Oh! the joy, even now, when you touch a life and find immediately that life is full of the Lord Jesus, and the Lord Jesus is the fulness of that life; what a benediction it is!*

God has singled out a Person and set Him forth to be seen of all - the Man Christ Jesus.

The Universality Of The Church

You cannot go outside of A and Z in the realm of literature; you box the compass of language with A and Z; likewise Christ Jesus is First and Last of God's new creation, and all that is in between; you cannot get outside of that. We must never think of anything as outside of Christ; He Is Salvation; He Is Sanctification; He Is Redemption, Justification, Peace; Wisdom, Love, Heaven. "Know ye not as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you," *this Christ* - in you! Do you see the possibilities and the tremendous reach of this?

God will transform His universe, not from without, but from within. How? By putting Jesus Christ within the believer by His Holy Spirit; and thence there will be a two-fold activity - being conformed to Him by His Spirit, and He being formed in the believer; thus He is going to make His new creation.

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1: 27). "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:11, 12).

"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9).

"The Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself" (Phil. 3:20b, 21; ARV).

"Put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created Him: where there cannot be Greek and Jew... but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:10, 11; ARV).

"The church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22b, 23).

Growing Up Into Him

The Christian life is not by effort, and not by struggle; not merely by trying to put into practice certain maxims, or by trying to attain to a certain measure; but from beginning to end, and all together, it is a matter of knowing the Lord Jesus *within*. Of course this implies response to Him, and a continual yieldedness to His working by His Spirit within, and so co-operating with Him in His purpose of conformity to His image.

We have all grown since we were born. How did we grow? Not by sitting down and considering that we ought to increase our stature; not by determining to grow so much to-day, and a little more to-morrow; not by painful efforts to increase our dimensions, and so on; but we "just grew!" - like Topsy. But while we "just grew", we had to respond to the laws of growth. So in the spiritual realm, we have to recognize the laws of growth, and where these are not responded to, or are violated, there can be no growth, but arrest, weakness and loss.

Why is spiritual growth so slow in some and so gloriously quick in others? Because some kick and question, or argue with God; go round and round the point asking, Does it mean this? Must I do this? Is it necessary? Can I, may I do this? and so on. Yet these very people are loudest in *saying* they want only the will of God; but their very affirmation often shows a struggle is going on, and their growth is fraught with a good deal of friction.

Others in a beautiful sincerity and purity of spirit are immediately letting go to the Lord, so He is able to lead them on, without waste of time in controversy with the will of God; and there is no weakness through there not being an utter abandonment and whole-hearted obedience and surrender to that will. There is a passion for the Lord Himself, and for Him to have His full way at whatever cost.

It all depends on our appreciation of the Lord Jesus. When we get a true value of Him, and see all that He is for us to the Father, and as by faith we appropriate Him, we quietly grow - "Beholding... the Lord, are changed (transformed from within) into the same image, from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18).

The hindrance to growth is the regarding things as apart from the Person, the Lord Jesus. We would never walk round the Scripture, as we sometimes do, debating whether we would or would not, if we had a full appreciation of Him, if our passion was for Him to get the fullest glory possible; we should instantly yield, that Christ might get more glory.

Is not the difficulty often in our regarding aspects of the Christian life as something in themselves?

An adequate appreciation of the Lord Jesus gets rid of all the strain of spiritual growth. Christ is most glorified where Christ is most in the heart. Growth is bound up with the Beloved One; and growth is the outcome of being occupied with Him, giving the Lord Jesus His place in everything; He the first, and He all, and in all. Conclusively it is a matter of the measure of Christ, we must see that *everything* is bound up with the Lord Jesus Himself.

Everything is a matter of knowing the Lord in our hearts, then the Lord has a clear way in us, and through us.

Get focused on Him, and see that He Himself is everything.

The Gospel of God is that we are saved to be conformed to the image of His Son; to come to the fulness of the "measure of Christ," "unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

The Nature Of Divine Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

"I came that they might have life" (John 10:10).

When we come to the Gospel by John, we see that this is the Gospel of spiritual education. The others are largely a matter of history – the history of the earthly life, work, and teaching of the Lord Jesus, but the Gospel by John is the spiritual life and interpretation of Christ in Person.

Do you notice how the Gospel begins? It begins with these words: *"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men"* (John 1:4). The main part of the Gospel ends with these words: *"Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name"* (John 20:30-31). (Notice that chapter 21 is something added afterward – it is quite clear that John intended to finish with what is chapter 20, and he really finished with these words.)

The Gospel begins with: "In Him was life." It ends with: "That you may have life." The main Gospel comprises 20 chapters, and halfway through 20 is ten. In chapter 10, verse 10, we have *"I came that they might have life."*

The beginning: "In Him was *life*;" the middle: "I came that they might have *life*;" the end: "Believing, you may have *life*." In that one word "life" we have the full answer to our question: "Why did Jesus Christ come into this world?"

Note one or two things: All the teaching and works of the Lord Jesus related to this thing that He called life. All His teaching and all His works were in relation to life.

The second thing to notice is this: Jesus demonstrated that to possess this life is a miracle, and He showed that it is impossible to have it without a miracle. To come to be possessed by this life is something supernatural.

The third thing we have to notice is: It is revealed by the Word of God that the possessing of this life is the basis of all God's works. He can do nothing in us until we have this life. He has to stand back and say: "I can do nothing until I have My life in you." His life in us is the basis of all His work.

So now we are going to look at this Gospel by John to instruct us in this matter of life.

Jesus' Teaching Of The Disciples

Notice again what it says in chapter 20: *"Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of His disciples."* Note – "in the presence of His disciples." John said, in effect: "All these signs that Jesus did, He did in the presence of His disciples." That was because it was His disciples whom He was teaching. They were the ones who had to learn the meaning of these things because they had to carry on His work.

So we can take it that Jesus never performed a miracle unless His disciples were there. If there was some great work to be done, He looked round to see if the disciples were there. He was not just doing these things for the benefit of the multitude, though they may have had some benefit, as in the case of the feeding of the 5,000, but these things were for the education of the disciples.

Jesus was most careful that they came to understand the meaning of what He was doing. We are going to see how important that is.

I do hope that when I use that word "disciple" you are not thinking back 2,000 years! I think the majority of the people reading this, if not all, are disciples – those who are learning Christ. Just as the chief business of the disciples in those days was to learn Christ, so it is our chief business today. The most important thing for Christians is to learn Christ.

We turn once more to those two verses at the end of chapter 20, and I want you to underline three words. In *"Many other signs did Jesus"* underline the word "signs." In *"These are written that you may believe"* underline the word "believe." And in *"that believing you may have life in His name"* underline the word "life." *Signs – believe – life.* The whole of this Gospel is summed up in those three words, and we are going to look at them now.

The Purpose of "Signs" In Jesus' Ministry

Firstly: *signs*. The whole of the teaching of the Gospel by John is gathered around seven signs, and they were seven especially selected signs. John says: *"Many other signs did Jesus do,"* and that if they were all written *"even the world itself would not contain the books"* (John 21:25). There must have been many more signs, but John has selected seven and has gathered the whole of this matter of learning Christ into them.

There are four words used for "miracles" in the New Testament. In some places they are called "wonders," and that conveys the idea of something quite unusual, or extraordinary, a wonderful thing. In other places they are called "powers," which conveys the idea of spiritual, supernatural energy. In other places they are called "paradoxes," which, as you know, is a contradiction. They were called "paradoxes" because they were something which contradicted the natural order of things. But the fourth word for "miracles" is this one which John always chose and is his favourite word for them.

He always called them "signs," which meant that these works indicated something more than themselves. The work was not just something in itself: there was a meaning behind it. It signified something. There was the actual work, but it had a spiritual meaning and was a sign of something more. That is John's word for "miracle."

We leave that for the moment – we are going to take it up again.

The True Nature Of "Believing"

The second word: *believe*. This is the key word to the whole of the Gospel by John and occurs 98 times in it. Everything in this Gospel gathers around that word: "*That you may believe.*" But what does the word "believe" mean?

It means two things, which are in the word itself. It means an acknowledgement of the truth, that is, the reaction which says, "That is true," or "He is true," "I believe He is true." But it means more than that. The word in the Greek means: "Believing that it is true, you commit yourself to the one who says it."

John puts that in another way in one place: "*As many as received Him*" (John 1:12). That is only another way of saying "They committed themselves to Him." Believing is not only a mental thing. It is the committing of the life to the one whom you believe.

I once heard Dr. Billy Graham put it in a very simple way. I was sitting on the platform just behind him, and, as you know, he is quite a big man physically. He could put his weight on to the platform where he stood. He said: "Now, when I come on to this platform I do not stand on the steps and say: 'I wonder if the platform will hold me or whether, if I get on to it, it will collapse and let me down.' I have such confidence in this platform that I walk right on to it and commit myself to it. I have no question about the platform. I put my full weight on to it." He went on to say: "That is what the New Testament means by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ." "That *believing*" ... that is, committing yourself to the Lord Jesus.

The Blessing Of Divine Life

Now our third word: *life*. This brings us to the main object of our consideration. The signs were the instruments used by the Lord Jesus; the believing was the reaction of men to the signs, and the life was the result of their reaction. They committed themselves and they received life.

Let us look at this life. What is it? What is its nature and what does it mean? I do not think it is necessary to remind you that this is a kind of life that no one has who does not possess the Lord Jesus. The very word that is used for life here is different from other words for life. This is not animal or human life, but divine life, the life that is in God alone.

It is a life that is different from every other kind of life because it has a different nature in it. Every kind of life has its own nature, and divine life has divine nature in it. Peter speaks about being made "*partakers of the divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4), and with this life the very nature of God is implanted in us. It is a different nature from our own nature. We are going to see how that is.

But, remember – "*In Him was life*" (John 1:4). Is He different in nature from other men? Everyone can see that He is different from other men in His very nature, and the difference is made by this life that is in Him. This life brings with it a new and different consciousness.

Look at the Lord Jesus! What was His real consciousness? This was a thing about which He was always speaking, and it was so very evident in His case. He said, *"I and the Father are one"* (John 10:30). *"I do always the things that are pleasing to Him [the Father]"* (John 8:29). *"The works that I do in my Father's name"* (John 10:25). Oh, this word "Father" in John's Gospel!

The consciousness of Jesus Christ every day was of His union with His Father, the oneness that existed between them: *"As you, Father, are in me, and I in you"* (John 17:21). The consciousness of the Lord Jesus was of the very closest union with God as His Father, and that was because the very life of God was in Him. His life was a God-conscious life; but God-consciousness in the sense of perfect oneness.

That is what it means to have this life. Man never had that. Jesus came to bring it in His own person – not to talk about union with God, but to live out a life of union with God and to bring His disciples into the same union. *"I came that they might have life"* – in other words, "I am come that they may have the same consciousness of God as Father that I have and that they may have the same divine nature in them as I have." (Not deity, but nature.)

Divine Life Must Grow

This life means another thing. Life must always *grow*. You know that very well! Whatever kind of life it is, if it is really life it must grow. You know that in your garden, and it is true in human beings. The law of life is constant development.

This was true of the Lord Jesus. It is said of Him that He was made *"perfect through sufferings"* (Hebrews 2:10) and that word "perfect" means "complete." He was made complete, full-grown, through sufferings. *"Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered"* (Hebrews 5:8). Jesus was growing by the power of this life in Him, and if we possess this life we should grow.

Paul says, *"That we may be no longer children ... but ... may grow up in all things"* (Ephesians 4:14-15). *"Till we all attain ... unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:13). So, to possess this life really means that we ought to be growing, and if we are not, there is something wrong with us.

Divine Life Is "Different"

Now notice these things: a different nature – a different consciousness – a different relationship – and a constant growth.

You see how these things are illustrated in this Gospel. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. Let us think of Nicodemus as being a perfectly honest man. A great many things have been said about him which are not to his credit, but I believe that he was a very sincere man. He came and he called Jesus "Teacher." *"We know that you are a teacher come from God"* (John 3:2).

What did he come to Jesus about? Evidently he had come to talk about the Kingdom of God, because the Lord Jesus read his thoughts. He knew that Nicodemus was interested in the Kingdom of God, but He said to him, in other words: "You will never get into the Kingdom of God unless you have God's life. You and I cannot even talk about the Kingdom of God because we have not the same life. How do you get this life? You must be born again, and if you have never been born you are not alive."

So it is quite clear that Nicodemus had not the nature of the Kingdom of God, because he had not the life. For any of us to get into the Kingdom of God we have to receive the life of God, which is His very nature.

Then we said it is a different consciousness. How beautifully this is illustrated by the woman of Samaria! Poor woman, she wanted to know the secret of life. She had missed it, had tried to find it but had never done so. Hers was only a poor existence! Jesus began to speak to her about life and said, in effect: "The water that I give you will be living water in you, springing up into eternal life. When you have the life that I can give you, or that is in Me, then you will find the secret of life."

What about this matter of a new consciousness? A whole section of John's Gospel is taken up with this. On one side stands Jesus alone; on the other are the Jewish leaders. They are in two different worlds and do not understand one another – at least, the Jewish leaders do not understand Jesus. How different they are!

Jesus puts His finger upon the very point of the difference. He speaks of God as His Father. He says to them: "You just do not know the Father" *"You are of your father the devil"* (John 8:44). "I came from above; God is My Father." He had the consciousness of God as His Father, and they had no such consciousness. The reason was that they had not this life in them.

Then what about this matter of constant development? There is a very beautiful illustration of this in John's Gospel, in chapter 12, where Jesus says, *"Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abides by itself alone"...* By itself alone ... *"But if it dies, it bears much fruit"* (John 12:24). The new life that comes in resurrection means that that seed is multiplied a hundred-fold. There is no end to the development of it once resurrection life comes into it. There is constant development by the power of this new life, and that is a law of life.

Dear friends, all these things are meant to be true of you and of me, for this is what it means to have this new life. I trust that what we have been able to say makes very real this wonderful thing that Jesus Christ came into the world to give to us.

In his first letter, John said, *"He that has the Son has the life"* (1 John 5:12). If we have the Lord Jesus, then we have this life, and what this life is in all these respects is supposed to be true of us. That is the miracle of eternal life. May it be true of every one of us! We have the Son and we have the life; we know that we have the life and that, as we said, we are having it more abundantly, meaning that the life has to grow forever.

T. Austin-Sparks (1965)

The New Age of the Holy Spirit by T Austin-Sparks (July-September, 1947)

The book which goes by the title "The Acts" is the book which introduces a new age; it marks the passing of certain days, age-days, and the arrival of a new day, a new age-day. But it not only marks that change; it sets forth the character of the new day. Among the many very important things which the Lord's people need to recognize anew is this, the real Divine nature of the new day which came in with that recorded in this book.

The established and accepted title of the book is limiting, and to some extent misleading. You must remember that the writer of the book never gave it that title. Luke, who wrote it, did not call it, "The Acts", nor "The Acts of the Apostles", nor "The Acts of the Holy Spirit". He did not give it a title. If it had a title at all, it is in his introduction, and that purely by inference. "The former treatise I made..... concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach", and the inference is that this is a further treatise of all that Jesus began to do and teach.

I say the established title, "The Acts", is limiting, and to some extent misleading, for this reason: it puts all the emphasis upon *activity*, and in so doing obscures the nature of the activity, the real character of what had been brought in, the very essence of things; that is, it very largely obscures the fact that this new dispensation is absolutely *spiritual* in every sense.

We know how "the baptism of the Spirit," "the filling of the Spirit", all that is meant by the use of the word "Pentecost", has been taken up by men and interpreted in terms of manifestations, things that can be outwardly noted, activities, works, done in a certain kind of heat and enthusiasm and strength and assertiveness. You know what the general mentality is when mention is made of being filled with the Spirit. At once our minds leap to certain forms of manifestation. But that is not the basic thing. The basic fact is that something has changed altogether, and there is a new character given to the new age; and that is, that for this age everything is essentially and absolutely spiritual.

I think Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, not with this object in view but under the same Spirit's direction and inspiration, has given a full summary of what this changeover really is. It occurs in a phrase in I Corinthians 15:46: "Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual." First that which is natural; afterward that which is spiritual. That is only saying, in other words, that the days which have gone were natural days, the days in which Divine things were manifested naturally, on natural grounds. They could all be grasped by natural apprehension, men could see, men could feel. All that realm of God's activity was possible of observation naturally; but now that has passed.

"And it shall come to pass afterward..."; "afterward that which is spiritual." That represents a Divine order and an established economy in the arrangement of this world's history. First that which is natural in everything; afterward that which is spiritual, and this book (we will use its accepted title, "The Acts") is the afterward that is spiritual. And one of the most wonderful things is that this book comprehends the Old Testament and changes it right over into the spiritual realm.

You go back to the opening chapters of Ezekiel and you find all the Divine intentions and thoughts are being projected; the counsels and purposes of God are in view - the wheels and the living ones and the spirit in the wheels: Divine counsels, the purposes of God in motion, and they are all under the government of this One Who is upon the Throne. All these Divine movements in relation to Divine intentions concerning a people for God are all under the government of that One upon the Throne; and they go straightforward, they turn not as they go; they are not deviating, they are not hindered; they go and they go straightforward because there is One Who is in the place of absolute sovereignty, and nothing, however it may seem otherwise, can really divert His purposes. So, in this book of "The Acts", whatever happens which seems to be a diversion or a subverting or a hindrance or a contradiction, and however much it seems to be out of the straight way, it is found in the end to be compelled by a governing hand ready to reach God's end and fulfill it, and not hinder it. He is going straight forward. It is because of the Man in the glory.

Yes, He is God's Son, very God, but it is the MAN ("I see the Son of man..."). As the Man He is the full embodiment of the perfection of God's thoughts concerning man that is ultimately to be, man that is eventually to occupy God's realm, and as Son of man He is installed, enthroned, established as the perfect model of how things are to be; and God is taking the straight course in the power of the Spirit to that end, to have things according to the Man in the glory.

Pentecost in its outworking, or the presence of the Holy Spirit here, will mean that those in whom the Spirit operates and has His way will never be able to rest short of God's full thought for themselves or for others; that what is there should be found here - that what is true of Christ, the Man in the glory, should be more fully expressed here in this new man, the Church, the Body. What is the place of glory where God will dwell? It is no place on this earth as geographically located or materially constructed. It is a spiritual sanctuary, a habitation of God through the Spirit. It is something which has been spiritually constructed, constituted, and perfected, and His dwelling and His habitation will be there; and it will be the place of His glory unto all ages for ever and ever.

What is it? In other words it is the realization in a people of that conformity to the image of His Son. God, by His Spirit, is working to make us a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, for His own habitation. "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God (Rev. 21:2-3, 10-11). This is none other than the corporate man in Christ perfected and glorified. That is a vision of Christ and what Christ means in the thought and intention of God. It is a revelation of that for which the Holy Spirit has come, and an explanation of what the Holy Spirit is doing to get rid of all in us which cannot be glorified! Having brought life and incorruption to light by the gospel, he is working unto that day when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, this mortal shall put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory; when the Church is a glorious Church, where God Himself is found without restraint and in which He is worshipped in His universe.

The Man in the glory, being at God's right hand exalted, established, settled, is the assured realization of God's end. He cannot be there without His members. He cannot go on there alone. All the meaning of the presence there of Christ, the Son of man, would be stripped from Him if His Church never came there, made like unto Him; there would be no meaning in it at all.

He is, after all, but the First-born among many brethren; He is bringing many sons to glory. The Spirit of sonship has come, not to try and do something, not with a hope that it may be; He has come in all the sovereignty of that One there, and it is going to be.

Settle your faith in this. However many questions you may have as to yourself, however often you may despair in yourself and be on the point of giving everything up, who that knows his own heart does not know the frequent temptation to do this? Yet there is no need for despair. There is another view; there is something else going on. The Spirit has come, He is within. He sees One at the right hand of God, and in spite of our despair about ourselves, in spite of the discouragement and impossibility that we find in ourselves, the Spirit of God is holding us to the Man in the glory and going on with this work; and it is not until we abandon faith in the omnipotence of the Spirit of God that hope departs and despair settles down. While we will believe that the Spirit of Christ has come in all that omnipotence of the exalted Son of man and is in us to do the work, hope springs eternal; there need be no despair. He is working in sovereignty.

I do believe that this book of "The Acts" says so loudly and clearly this one thing: out from heaven the Spirit of Almighty God has come in sovereignty to see things through. Let Herod do what he likes; let the kings and the nations have their confederacies; let all conditions work adversely; let Satan and all his forces operate; the Church goes on and these very things are drawn right into the train of Christ's triumph and made to serve the Divine ends. The things which befall work out for the furtherance of the Gospel, and the very things which look like disasters and calamities prove at long last to be complementary things under the sovereignty of the risen Lord. The spirit of God is in charge.

The Otherness of Christ

by T Austin-Sparks (September, 1943)

Dear friends, what is the Lord doing with us? That is what we want to know. What is He doing with you and me, and with those who are really in His hands? Is He not doing with us that which He has done with all who have come completely under His hands; that is, leading in a way and realm where human understanding and ability are completely confounded and exhausted, where it is totally impossible to cope mentally with His ways, or to explain Him? We cannot see, we cannot understand; neither is it in us to do, to achieve. We are learning that all our resources are of no avail and that everything depends upon the Lord Himself - His wisdom, His strength, His grace.

Well now, if it is your experience so far and at this time, understand that it is quite right, it is not all a mistake. True, it is very painful, it is testing. It is testing up to that point where your feet have to touch the very brink before you prove God. You have to come to an utter end of one way and to a beginning that is a beginning even to the point of lifting your feet to take a step to prove God, for God to come in. You say that is very utter. Yes, but it is this utterness of the difference between the Lord and ourselves that we have to learn, and that is going to set us over against the colossus of false doctrine, of the iniquitous lie which is being built upon this earth up to heaven, the lie of humanism.

That is the greatest lie that has been brought into this universe, that it is in man to be his own savior, that it is in man to rise to perfection, it is in man to be God; it is all in man, the roots are in himself. I say that is Satan's colossus of iniquitous untruth, and God is working out the contradiction of that in a company, in His Church. It is being wrought, worked out, in the unseen; and while it is so difficult to accept it in the day of suffering, weakness, and darkness and inability to understand, if we knew the truth the probability is that it is just this: God is doing with Satan in and through the Church what He did with Satan in and through Job, answering his challenge and his lie. Here is a broken, shattered, helpless little vessel of saints, bewildered, stripped, thrown back upon their God, unable to do or to understand, clinging to Him and seeking to prove Him, and through that the greatest iniquity in this universe is being assailed by God and answered.

The lie! There never was a time when that lie has reached greater proportion than it has today. But in you and in me, poor broken ones, God has His answer, and it does mean something to the Lord that we have been emptied out to the last drop, thrown back upon Him where He is our wisdom, He is our strength, He is our life, He is our very breath. That means something to Him.

Karl Barth has coined for us a phrase which has gained a great deal of strength and place, and it is a very useful one - "the altogether other-ness of Christ." Oh, that goes much further than we realize, certainly much further than most people are prepared to believe. Even yet in evangelical Christianity there is a clinging to the idea that we transfer everything to Christ and to Christianity when we are born again. We transfer all our faculties and our powers over to the interests of Christ and then, instead of using them for ourselves and for the world, we use them for Christ. That is the meaning of consecration, of surrender, as the terms are used so largely today in evangelical Christianity - the consecration of ourselves, our gifts, our faculties, our everything, to the Lord and to His service.

But that falls short of something. It is not the transference and the consecration of everything that we are to the Lord to be used straightway as it is over on His side - for His interests instead of in the world. Christ is other yet, Christ is still different yet from consecrated natural life; oh, so other! Something has to happen, our entire mentality has to be changed, transformed. The mind has to be renewed; we have to have an altogether different kind of outlook, even about the things of God. It is a constitutional matter, not merely a directional one.

This is the meaning of the Lord's dealings with us; namely, to get a new mentality, a new conception; another, not our old one transferred, but another; and the distance is not the distance of time or geography necessarily, it is the distance of difference; and we make faster or slower progress spiritually according to how we learn this lesson. What is the secret of spiritual progress? It is the letting go of our own will and mind to the fact, to the truth, that after all, though Christians at our best, wanting to be a hundred per cent for the Lord, it is not in us either to be or do. Our will can never do it, our reason can never accomplish it, our impulses and desires can never get us there. We have to come to a brokenness and yieldedness where nature is laid low in the dust and all our treasure is with the stones of the brook and the Almighty becomes our treasure (Job 22:24-25); the Lord alone our wisdom, our strength and vision, our desire. Until you and I have learned the lesson of that utter brokenness and yieldedness and letting go to the Lord, spiritual progress is delayed.

May the Lord show us the great distance that lies between ourselves as Christians and Christ, and give us a heart that yields to the Spirit's work in teaching that lesson and making it good and bringing us more and more to the measure of His Son.

The Purpose of God

by T Austin-Sparks (March, 1943)

It is of immense help, in contemplating the manifold activities and energies of God, to be able to gather everything into one inclusive, comprehensive, and concrete issue. The Bible, from Genesis to the Revelation, covers a wide range and includes a vast amount of matter, but it has one all-governing and conclusive objective. The purpose of God is one, and only one. It is always referred to in the singular; "Called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). "According to the purpose...." (Eph. 1:11). "According to the eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11). "According to His purpose and grace" (2 Tim. 1:9). It is not a variety or number of things; it is just one.

And what is the one, single, comprehensive purpose? The answer is Christ! "His Son, Jesus Christ." And when we ask further, What about His Son? The answer is, to have Him fill all things and to have all things in Him. That this is so is made clear in the definite statements of Scripture; "In Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible... all things have been created through Him, and unto Him." "For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fullness dwell" (Col. 1:16,19). "Whom He appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He made the worlds (ages)" (Heb. 1:2).

So, then, in the counsels of God, all things must head up in Christ. God's occupation is with bringing Christ in, and bringing into Christ. If we would be "God's fellow-workers", this must be our single-eyed aim and business. This defines precisely the purpose of the Church.

The presence of the Church in this world is, firstly, to be a corporate expression of Christ here. The very designation "The Body of Christ" means Christ corporately present. The Church is not an institution, organization, society, or religious fraternity. It is, - in God's intention, the embodiment of His Son in a continuation of His life and work on this earth. In the next place, after the *being* of the Church, is its work. This is just one thing, and by the one result alone its work stands or falls. This work is to make for an increase of Christ in this world, and this is to be accomplished along two lines; namely, by *evangelism* and *building up*.

Evangelism is the bringing of Christ initially *into* lives. Every new instance of Christ coming into a life is an additional measure of Christ in the creation, making a new creation. It is of the utmost importance that there should be no stopping short at mere mental agreement, or emotional expression, or just an outward act of acceptance, but that Christ by His Spirit should really have taken up residence within. But our object is not to deal with evangelism, but to point out its object, which is *to bring in Christ and to bring into Christ*.

The other purpose of the Church is building up. In the most familiar versions of the New Testament the word in this connection is "edification". But "building up" is much better. The Church is to "build itself up". We are to "build one another up". Spiritual gifts and ministries are all meant for "building up". What is this "building up"? It is the increase of Christ. The New Testament repeatedly refers to "babes in Christ" and "full-grown men" in Christ; and there is a constant urge to "go on to full growth". Thus, by extensification and intensification, by increase outwardly and inwardly, it is Christ gaining an ever-increasing place. We repeat, by numerous ways and means God is governed by this one all-dominating objective - His Son.

But there is a point which needs very much to be emphasized and kept in view. These two things, evangelism and building up, are not two separate things; they must be kept together. If they are separated, or if either is given a greater place than the other an unbalanced condition will arise, and this will defeat God's full end. If evangelism is given a place greater than building up, or to the exclusion of the other, the result will be a great number of spiritual babes who remain such, no matter how long they live. There will then exist a preponderating number of Christians who are like those referred to by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews - "When by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles... and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food" (Heb. 5:12). By this and what immediately follows, the Apostle makes it quite clear that God can never be satisfied with just having so many, however many, "converts", born-again babes, but His end demands that these shall come to the spiritual position where they can take all that He has to give of spiritual strong meat, and have spiritual senses exercised, being "experienced in the word" and of spiritual intelligence. All this means what Paul called "the measure of Christ", and the end in view - "unto the measure... of the *fullness* of Christ."

If, on the other hand, building up is given a place out of all proportion to evangelism, we shall have another malformation. There will arise an ultra-spirituality that is divorced from what is practical. Truth will, sooner or later, take the place of Life. The mental will rule out the truly spiritual. The worst outcome will be that those involved will be found to have got into a false position which will not stand up to the tests of real life, the expression of Christ, among the people and conditions of this world. For the real proof of spiritual life is in its ability to express Christ in love, forbearance, patience, meekness, and self-forgetfulness, in an unsympathetic, ununderstanding, and unappreciative world. This does not mean that there should be a limiting of either evangelism or building up, but it does mean that there *must* be a close relationship between the two.

This is very strikingly manifested in the fact that the Apostles of the New Testament combined these two ministries in such fullness. They evangelized mightily; but what an immense building up ministry they fulfilled also! They brought Christ in almost everywhere they went, but they brought Him in in ever-increasing fullness wherever they *had* been. The point is the combination of the two. In the matter of ministry gifts to the Church, the Evangelist and the Pastor and Teacher are complementary ministries.

All this is surely very patent. But where are we now? We do not hesitate to say that the relationship between these two things has not by any means been preserved in equal proportions. The fact is that there is a preponderance of Christians who are, after many years, spiritual babes, sadly immature; without understanding in spiritual things; without capacity (and without appetite) for "strong meat". The result is that the impact and effect of Christ in this world is not at all commensurate with either the time that Christianity has been here, or the number of Christians on the earth. A few strong, healthy, and "experienced" people of God will count for a very great deal more than a vast number of Christians whose maturity is unduly delayed. There is therefore much to be done by way of removing this ill-balanced state and bringing the Lord's children to the state and position which should be theirs "by reason of the time".

This means that there is a real need and demand for a ministry of "the fullness of Christ" to the Christians of our time. The world's need is preeminently Christ in greater fullness, and this can only be in and by the Church, His chosen vehicle. But, we repeat, all such ministry must not stop with itself. It must result in stronger, richer, fuller evangelism. That is to say, the Christians must come through it to the position of having more of Christ to show and impart. This then is what is our sense of calling - "for the perfecting of the saints unto (that *they* may do) the work of ministering"; the word "perfecting" meaning making complete or full.

To sum up, God's end is the bringing in of His Son to fullness. This is the object and nature of the Church's being and work. The method is twofold: evangelism and building up. These two must be kept in close relationship as complementary, and the balance must be preserved in equality. This balance has *not* been preserved, and there are very many Christians whose spiritual maturity and capacity is very unduly delayed. There is therefore an altogether inadequate registration, impact, and effectiveness as to Christ, considering how long Christianity has been here and how many Christians there are. The need then is for a ministry by which *Christians* can be helped to the position that is God's desire and intention for them. Such a ministry must not end in people becoming interested in and taken up with teaching as something in itself, but rather in a richer and fuller representation of Christ to and among the peoples of this world. It is a misapprehension of truth if it results in less concern for the increase of Christ by the salvation of sinners and the mutual spiritual helpfulness of the saved. Truth should never turn us in on ourselves, but should make us conscious of being under a great debt to others.

Then we must realize that there are certain things which are basic to full spiritual development. One of these is the essential organic oneness of all who are "in Christ". No individual, or number of individuals, as such, can attain unto the full stature of Christ; that is only possible for "the whole Body". Any kind of division amongst Christians is a violation of Christ ("Is Christ divided?"--1 Cor. 1:13), and that must be contrary to the Holy Spirit, by whose work alone can we attain unto full growth. Therefore believers must abandon schismatic and divisive ground and occupy only the ground of **Christ**. In the beginning the Church was constituted by the acceptance of the absolute Lordship and Headship of Christ, and not just His Saviourhood. "We preach Christ Jesus as Lord." The Saviourhood was largely for *men's* good, but the Lordship was mainly for *His* place. This issue was the occasion of all the trouble.

This then is the ministry to which we feel the Lord has called us. Through deep and drastic ways He has formed it. We have not assumed it, and we can only give what He has given. We have sought much and always to be saved from mere theory, and we feel that in this the Lord has been faithful; but it has been costly.

And now, brethren, how can we gather up what we feel as our burden? Perhaps in no better way than in the Apostle's words: "Teaching every man, and admonishing every man, that we may present every man perfect (full grown) in Christ."

The Wonderful Balance in the Life of the Lord

by T Austin-Sparks (January, 1947)

How poised He was, how balanced! Take the matter of mind, heart and will, and you find in His case those three were perfectly balanced. We are very different naturally.

I suppose people as a whole can be divided up into three classes. Firstly, those who are more in the realm of their head than anywhere else. They are all head in one way or another. If they are not intellectual, they are of another kind of mentality - introspective, analyzing, going round things in the mind; all thinking, all puzzling, all reasoning, all working in that realm: that is the chief characteristic. You can see it almost in their faces. It is this trying to get through with the head that more or less characterizes people of a certain class.

Then you have another class, all heart, all feeling, all emotion. They simply live in their feelings, perhaps different forms, but still feelings. They are governed by their feelings, and just how things affect them in the realm of their emotional life. They are either up or they are down, you can never be sure, but you do know that whether they are up or down, it is their feelings that are ruling. If only they would think a little more and not move so much on impulse, they would be more balanced.

The third class - people governed by will, people of a drive, forceful, assertive. The will is unreasoning sometimes. They do not stop to think. They get a drive on but do not think of the damage they are doing to themselves or other people. Their will overrides feeling, very good sometimes to do that, but to be all will, all of that kind of strength, determination, grip, and force, oh, it is overbearing and does a lot of harm.

People are more or less divided into those classes naturally, but you cannot find anything like that with the Lord Jesus on earth. You can find will coming in at times very strong, and sometimes heart, and sometimes mind. Yes, mind could come in, and who could stand up against Him in that realm? Some of His answers silenced, paralyzed, those who were cleverest. Look at some of the answers He gives, some of the ways He deals with a problem. They think they have Him this time, there is no way out. A simple statement - and the whole thing collapses; they have not got Him at all!

But the point is this: while these things are there, they are balanced; there is never strength of will to the hurt of sensibility; there is never strength of emotion to the damage of rightful severity. He does not allow His heart to run away with His sense of judgment. He is perfectly balanced; and that is one of our needs. But that is why the Holy Spirit has come, and this is one of the things that has to take place in a Holy Spirit-ruled life. It has to become a balanced life, to be saved from being lopsided.

Anything over-weighted makes going very uneven. Draw a figure of a circle and divide it into three segments: "mind", "heart", "will". Then put a bump on "will" a little bigger than heart or mind and make your circle into a wheel, and see how evenly you go along, the unevenness of an unbalanced life. It makes going difficult, hard, and uncomfortable.

Take the even poise of our Lord's walk here on earth. Now what we need is that the Spirit of Christ should come in and bring about an adjustment to Him, reconstitute us so that we go along more evenly, not one day on the heights, the next day in the depths, variable, changeable, because our soul-life is so unbalanced. We have a long way to go in this, but conformity to His image means that, amongst many other things, the bringing of a poise into life and saving us from these terrible effects of straining, of living in one realm of our souls more than another. We do need that. We sometimes sing, "And let our ordered lives confess the beauty of Thy peace." I tell you, I covet that, that ordered life inwardly.

This is why the Word of God so often emphasizes that everything in the Church must be according to Christ. He personally is the new Man; the Church, His Body, is the "one new man". Now here in the Church the Holy Spirit wants to constitute corporately according to Christ, and if the old man comes into the Church with his state of unbalance, and some people or individuals in the Church move along one line and others along another line of natural life, mind, heart, or will, any particular old creation line, they destroy the Church; that is, they nullify its very conception.

In the Church all is to speak of Christ, and therefore in the Church what Christ is has steadily to grow and take ascendancy over all else; and that is why there must be in the Church utter subjection to Christ's Headship. Just as we live from our heads, and our character and nature and actions and speech are all controlled by the head, so the nature of the Church is taken from the nature of Christ; and what the Lord is seeking to get is a Church which does express what Christ is, this balance. Yes, His strength, but also His love; His truth and light, yes; but equally His life. Oh, we can have such a preponderance of light and truth, all head and little heart.

I have known, on the other hand, companies where all is heart, the people falling on one another's necks with effusive terms of so-called love, and yet they are not growing, not coming to a place of responsibility. It sounds and looks like love, but underneath there is something lacking. They need instruction; they need edifying.

When the Body is fitly framed and compacted, balanced, brought into proper articulation and harmony, taking its nature and its character from Christ, and therefore governed by what He is as the new creation Man, then you are getting what God is after; and you can have that in a local company and in local companies which thereby become not places that stand for some extraordinary truth, something different from all other teachings, and all the time trying to get hold of something that is extraordinary and remote from common recognition. No, you simply get there an embodiment and an expression of Christ; and that is all that God wants, and all we ought to want. People meeting us as companies as well as individuals will be meeting something that touches them. They will say, If only there were more of this, the world would be a different place; and yet this is something so outside the realm of human possibility that only God could do this - this is God! It requires Almighty God, and yet here it is; it touches us - we see that this is what is needed!

Oh, the tragedy in this connection in these days! You hear it on the wireless almost any day; you find the literature of our day just crowded with it, the recognition of the fact that if only things were on the line of Christ, if only Christ's teaching were put into practice, if only Christ and what He was really were here and expressed, how different the world would be!

There is plenty of recognition and acknowledgment of that; but on the other side, men at once begin to say, Well, let us get busy on this; we will do this and that to bring it about. They do not recognize that this is a miracle from heaven and that it has to come in by a birth, a reconstituting, a new creation fiat. That is where the gap is, and the tragedy; and men fall between the two.

But we know better: there He is, and there His Spirit is to do it. It seems to take a long time. A little bit of conformity to His image seems to occupy almost a lifetime. But nevertheless He is doing something; it does make a difference to have Christ; there are many changes because Christ has come in, we do know that. There are going to be greater changes yet. After all, whatever we may say about the poverty of things in the Church, the world would be a poor place if the people of God were taken out of it; and it will be, when they have gone. There is something here that is not of the world, and the world needs it.

The Lord help us to see Christ and get continually to Him for this conformity to His image - this taking of the Spirit of Christ, this inward reconstituting after the Son of Man, a new creation in Christ Jesus.

"Ye Are My Friends"

by T. Austin-Sparks

Among the various titles by which Christians were called in the New Testament surely the most wonderful is that given by the Lord Jesus - "Ye are my friends":

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends if ye do the things which I command you. No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends: for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you. Ye did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide" (John 15:13-16).

It is indeed a very wonderful and beautiful thing that the Son of God called such as the disciples were, and such as we are, His friends. I do not think there is a greater or more beautiful word in all our language than that word 'friend'. It is the most intimate title in all human relationships. Every other relationship that we can think of may exist without this. Perhaps we think that the marriage relationship is the most intimate, but it is possible for that relationship to exist without friendship. Happy indeed is the man whose wife is his friend, and happy is the wife whose husband is her friend. It is a very close relationship between children and parents and parents and children, but it is a great thing when the father can call his son his friend, and when he can say, not 'my son', but 'my friend'. And, again, it is a great thing when a child can say, not only 'my father', but 'my friend': 'my father is my friend' - 'my mother is my friend'. It is something extra in relationship. We may admire a person and have a lot of association with them: we may think that we know them and could say: 'Well, I know so-and-so very well', but, even so, there may not be friendship. Friendship is always just that bit extra.

When Jesus said: "Ye are my friends", He was going beyond 'Ye are My disciples' and 'Ye are My followers'. He could have called them by many other names, but when He said: "Ye are my friends" He went beyond anything else. And I think that the Lord Jesus found the most complete satisfaction of His heart in this word. To say "Ye are my friends" was as far as anybody could possibly go. Really, there is nothing beyond it. You reach the end of all relationships when you really come to friendship. How rich and how precious, then, is this title!

In the picture of the new Jerusalem which we have at the end of the Bible it says: "The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones" (Revelation 21:19). The foundation of that city was that which was most precious, and I think the most precious foundation of life is friendship. The new Jerusalem itself will be built upon the foundation of the friendship between the Lord Jesus and His own.

Well, that is just a little about friendship. But what is the nature of friendship? We have it here in John 15: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth, but I have called you friends: for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you." Friendship is that position which makes it possible to open the heart fully, to keep nothing back; and to have such confidence that you can trust the other person with all that is in your heart. Jesus said: 'All that the Father has shown Me I have shown you. I have kept nothing back from you. I have put perfect confidence in you.'

I have had no suspicions of you and have not been afraid to say just what was in My heart.'

You know, that is very wonderful. Go back again in this Gospel by John and in chapter two you will find: "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, during the feast, many believed on his name, beholding his signs which he did. But Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man, for he himself knew what was in man" (John 2:23-25).

Jesus knew all men, and because of that He did not commit Himself to them... "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus" (John 3:1), and what follows shows that Jesus knew Nicodemus and He did not commit Himself to him. Nicodemus was not in the position of a friend, at least, not at this time. How much he was before the end we do not know. He did act like a friend in the burial of Jesus, for something had happened to him by that time. But at this time he was amongst those men to whom Jesus did not commit Himself. He simply said, in effect: 'Before I can commit Myself to you, you must be born again.'

That is the beginning of this friendship. Yes, Jesus has told us that the real nature of friendship is that He can just commit Himself to His friends. He said many things to other people, but He did not put Himself into their hands. And that is all the difference. You may have a lot of fellowship, say a lot of things, and they may be quite true things, but that is not putting yourself into the *hands* of those people. There is all the difference between conversation and fellowship *and* committal. Friendship means that you have committed yourselves to one another - you have really put yourself into the hands of the other person. That is what Jesus said friendship means: "All things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you." 'I have had no reserves where you are concerned.'

I am sure you are feeling that this is a very wonderful thing and are wondering more and more at it as we go on. Just think that the Son of God should do that - that He should be willing to commit Himself to some people!

And these were not empty words. He went on to show that He would prove His friendship. What is the proof of friendship? Well, of course, it is firstly, as we have said, committing yourself to the other.

But then Jesus said this: "Greater love hath no man than this. That a man lay down his life for his friends." That is the proof of friendship. How much are you prepared to sacrifice, to suffer and to put up with? "A man lay down his life for his friends." Now, of course, you are thinking of one thing - of dying in some way for your friends. But there are a thousand ways of laying down your life for your friends. It is a matter of laying down *our* lives all the time - not just some big act of dying for our friends, but every day laying down our lives, letting something of ourselves go, letting some personal interest go and just saying: 'That does not matter - it is for my friend. That is not so important - it is for my friend.' Friendship makes everything else unimportant. If there is real friendship we do not stay to say: 'Well, now, must I do that? Am I really obliged to do that? Can I not get out of it in some way? Really, is there any harm in my doing this?'

You know, that is the attitude of a lot of Christians. 'Why may I not do this? Is there any harm in it? A lot of other people do it so why should I not do it?'

I even know Christians who do it. Must I really not do this?' Supposing Jesus had taken that attitude! No, friendship puts all that kind of thing away and never talks about 'Must I?' 'Is there no other way?' This is a laying down of the life for a friend.

So I say that there are many ways of laying down our life. What is laying down our life? It is just holding that nothing is too valuable or important to be kept from our friend. It does not matter what it costs, or how painful it is - friendship makes it possible.

We have the great illustration in the Bible. There is only one man in all the Bible who was called God's friend: "Abraham... the friend of God" (James 2:23). What a wonderful thing to be said of any man - "Abraham, my friend", said God (Isaiah 41:8). It is God speaking about a man, and He is saying "My friend"! How could God call Abraham His friend? What made Abraham a friend of God? "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest... and offer him" (Genesis 22:2). What did Abraham say? 'You have asked too much. Isaac is too precious. He is everything to me. Oh, no, I cannot offer him!?' No, Abraham did not talk like that. I think it is most wonderful when it says: "And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and he clave the wood for the burnt offering" (Genesis 22:3). I venture to suggest to you that if you were faced with that you would not get up early that morning! You would be staying in bed just as long as you could and putting it off as long as possible. But it says: "Abraham rose *early in the morning*." What was he about to do? He was about to enter right into the heart of God in giving his only begotten son, and enter right into fellowship with the passion of God's heart. "God so loved... that He gave *His* only begotten Son." It was because of that that Abraham was God's friend. He had entered right into the heart of God and counted nothing too precious for the friendship of God.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends", and in offering Isaac Abraham indeed laid down his life. "Abraham, my friend." That is the nature of friendship. And Jesus proved His friendship. This is the proof - that He has laid down His life.

Then we go on to ask another question: What is the basis of this friendship? Jesus knew what was going to happen in the near future, for it was getting very near to the day when they would all forsake Him, and yet, knowing all that, He said: "Ye are my friends." There must be some basis which is more than just this present time. Jesus was looking beyond the Cross, and He was seeing that the day would come when these men would stand strongly on the ground of the Cross. We now have the full story. Oh, yes, not so long after this they were letting everything in this world go for Him. The Cross had truly entered into their hearts. The spirit of the Cross had truly taken possession of them and they were standing firmly upon that ground. And Jesus knew that that was how it would be. He knew what was going to happen in the next few days, but He was always speaking to them about *afterward*, that human failure was not the last thing and was not going to be the end of everything. To that poor, failing Peter He said this: "And do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). 'You are going to have a terrible fall, but that is not going to be the end. You will turn again and you will have a great ministry afterward.'

Jesus was always looking beyond the Cross, and He saw that these men would stand upon the ground of the Cross. The Cross means that you do not hold anything for yourself, but only for your friend, and that was true of these men.

But Jesus also saw something else. He knew that before long they would receive the Holy Spirit and that they would be governed by Him. And when the Holy Spirit really takes possession you can be trusted. These men could not be trusted without the Holy Spirit, but when He came in, then you could depend upon them. They would not be governed by personal interests, nor would they have any fleshly considerations, but they would live by the Spirit and not by the flesh. And Jesus said: 'On that ground ye are My friends, and that day is as though it is now. Ye are My friends because I know that you men are going to stand on the ground of the Cross and are going to be led by the Holy Spirit.'

You see, that is the basis of friendship. If we live on our own natural ground then the Lord will never be able to depend upon us, but if the Cross has done its deep work in our hearts, and if we are really governed by the Holy Spirit, the Lord has all the ground that He requires to commit Himself to us, all that is necessary for Him to say: "Ye are my friends."

I think there was one thing that the Lord Jesus knew about eleven of these men. Yes, they were men of many weaknesses and many failures. They often said the wrong thing and often did the wrong thing, but Jesus knew that He had their hearts. In spite of everything He had captured their hearts. They had a heart for Him. They may have made mistakes, and He knew all about that, but He knew that they had given Him their hearts. They had a heart for the Lord, and that is the basis of His friendship. He is saying: 'Have I really got *all* your heart? I know all about your weaknesses and your failures, but, really, is your *whole* heart over on my side?'

Judas never gave his heart to the Lord. He had a heart for himself and for worldly gain. Jesus could never say to him: 'You are My friend', but He called him "the son of perdition" (John 27:12). But with these eleven He was quite sure where their hearts were. He even saw what would happen when He was on trial and crucified, but He told them what to do and where to meet Him *after* that. He knew that they would come through because they had a heart for Him. You have only to look at these people when Jesus had been crucified and was in the grave. How sad they were! It is as though they had lost everything in life, and they *had* lost everything, simply because they had given their whole hearts to the Lord Jesus. That is the basis of His friendship.

It is in these things, then, that the Lord is able to trust us and commit Himself to us. This is the relationship that the Lord Jesus wants more than anything else. The breakdown in friendship is so often because of some natural interest arising, some question of how it is going to affect us rather than how it is going to affect Him.

This is something very challenging to our hearts, and it is a lesson that all of us have to learn. I have to learn it, and am trying to do so. You have to learn it - that the greatest thing in all life is how our behaviour affects the Lord Jesus; how our appearance before the world affects the Lord Jesus; how differences between us affect the Lord Jesus. Yes, everything, how it affects the Lord Jesus. You know, that is the very essence of friendship. True friendship is always governed by this: 'I would do nothing to hurt my friend. That is the last thing that ever I want to do!', and Jesus wants to put our lives upon that basis.

He will never do anything to hurt us, but how much we hurt Him! We must bring everything to the judgment bar of friendship.

The greatest characteristic of friendship is loyalty. I do not think there is a greater or grander virtue than loyalty. You may not always understand your best friend; he or she may sometimes do things that you cannot understand, things about which you do not feel very happy at the moment, but if it is friendship you are loyal to your friend, whether you understand him or not. You will not betray your friend or talk about him to his detriment, nor do anything that would injure him. You will always be loyal. Faithfulness is the heart of friendship and that is the attitude of the Lord Jesus.

But the Lord wants to put His disciples on the same basis. He wants this spirit and nature of friendship to exist between His own. He wants them to have the same spirit as is in Himself and to be friends of one another. We may say: 'Yes, he or she is my fellow-Christian.' As Christians we may speak of one another as our brothers and sisters, but I have said there is something more than that, more than fellow-Christians, more than brothers and sisters. I suppose I must not put it in the Christian realm and say more than fathers and mothers, but the meaning is the same. There is just that something extra - 'He is more than my brother, he is my friend.' 'She is more than my sister, she is my friend.' Oh, that the Lord might be able to get that kind of relationship!

May He write this word deeply in our hearts and send us back to the places where we are going with a heart wholly for Him! Nothing held back, but a complete committal to Him, that He has us altogether, and by His grace we will never do anything that will hurt Him. We will always ask the question about everything: 'How will this affect my Lord?' You see, friendship has two sides. It is not one-sided. It is not friendship when I do all the friendliness and you do not do any. No, it has two sides. We must be to Him what He is to us, and we must be to one another what He is to us.

Now this is going to be a very difficult thing, but remember the Cross and the Holy Spirit. They are the two great powers which make this possible. The Cross is not only the crucifixion of Christ many years ago: it is a mighty power in life every day. The Holy Spirit is not somebody who came at Pentecost many years ago. He is here today and can be in us, and if He really has the control of our lives the one thing which will concern us most is 'How does my life affect the Lord Jesus?'

Take that message away with you, and seek to live by it in all the days before us.

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