

Assurance as to God's Rest and Satisfaction in Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of assurance in the Christian life, which is rooted in the exaltation of the Lord Jesus and the value of His Blood.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:5

Topics: "Assurance in Christ", "The Church as God's House"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the assurance of God's rest and satisfaction in Christ, highlighting that believers are adopted as sons through Jesus, which brings glory to God. He discusses the importance of the exaltation of Christ as the foundation of the Church's assurance and the danger of internal disintegration caused by doubt and suspicion, which the enemy uses to undermine confidence. Sparks illustrates that true assurance comes from recognizing the value of Christ's blood and the rest it provides, leading to a victorious Christian life. He calls for believers to focus on their identity in Christ, as the spiritual house is built upon Him, and to maintain a positive outlook on their fellowship with one another. Ultimately, the Church exists to glorify God, reflecting His grace and the transformative power of Christ in their lives.

Transcript

"...having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved... to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ" (Eph. 1:5-6,12).

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

We are at this time being directed to take account of God's spiritual house, and in our previous meditation we were thinking of the first and pre-eminent feature of this spiritual house, in which we, in Christ, are living stones, as being the proclamation or setting forth of the exaltation of God's Son. We noticed that everything, so far as God's house is concerned, takes its rise from that exaltation. What happened on the

day of Pentecost was the spontaneous outflow of that exaltation of God's Son to the right hand of the Majesty on high, and the secret of life, of power, of victory, in those first days of the Church's life and history was this very fact. Its life flowed out from this; its testimony was this, that Jesus as God's Son was exalted to the throne on high. You know that was the testimony of Peter on the day of Pentecost. You know that was the note of Stephen. You know the Apostles continually testified to that great fact, that God had made Him Lord and Christ, that He was exalted. I repeat, everything came out of that, and it resolves itself into the great element of assurance, something which is always very necessary; and never was there a time when it was more necessary than now.

The Assault upon Assurance

In our previous meditation, we referred to the fact that the great spiritual enemy has pursued his ambition for world dominion along the line of the propagation of a lie, his great "fifth column" propaganda, and he has made great headway by the campaign of lies to the undermining of assurance and confidence.

There is another thing which he has done and is doing in a spiritual way, which is so clearly seen at present working out along temporal lines, and is indeed the confessed and published strategy of those who are now being driven and used and governed by Satan toward world domination by the elimination of Christ. They have put it on record that their strategy is to work secretly within the national life of their enemies steadily through the years, with a view to bringing about internal disintegration by the breakdown of confidence: and how they have done it and are doing it! I do not want to dwell on the earthly, temporal and political side of things, but it does disclose the principles of Satanic activity, this working subtly and secretly behind the scenes within the life of their enemies with a view to destroying confidence, and so bringing about collapse from the inside. Indeed, the phrase which is in print in that connection is, We will make our enemies defeat themselves! Well, they have done it in many countries.

Now, take it as a clue to what is happening spiritually. Oh, how Satan has pursued that course right through history, to destroy confidence, for confidence is a tremendous factor. You see how nations seek to bolster up and stimulate assurance within their own borders in order to secure strength against their enemies. What will they not do to reassure people, to put confidence into people? Satan knows that an assured people set him the biggest problem and represent the most impossible situation for him. Now, if you look at those first days of the Church's life, one outstanding feature was this assurance. They were men without questions, people without doubts. They could speak with authority because their hearts were settled; they were not divided inwardly. There were none of the seeds of internal disintegration. The basis of that assurance and settled position was just this, that the Holy Spirit had come and in them had mightily registered the fact that Jesus was on the throne. "Jesus... by the right hand of God exalted." They had no question about that, and therefore all doubts were set at rest. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus, when it becomes something settled in our own hearts, is a mighty factor in testimony, in life, in service, and unless we have it we are altogether at a discount.

Now, in days such as these in which we are living, the strategy of the enemy is to undermine assurance. I am not speaking about world things now, but spiritual assurance. The House of God is therefore built by this means, the assurance that Jesus Christ is exalted, and you cannot build without it. In the case of David and Solomon, we noted how the bringing in of that house for the Lord God which was to be exceeding magnificent, all sprang from the fact that God had secured both His king and the throne for His king. God made a covenant with David. God took an oath with David that of the fruit of his loins should one sit upon his throne, and his throne should be established for ever. Now, that is transferred, as you know, to

the Lord Jesus. It only had a merely figurative and very imperfect fulfilment in Solomon. Solomon came to a shameful end, but in the days of his glory he was a figure of another. Thus in the book of the Acts we have those words quoted from the Psalm:

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet" (Acts 2:34-35).

The Apostle uses those words in connection with this other word to David: "David... being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; he foreseeing this spake of... the Christ," spake of this One; and God has fulfilled His word, not in a shadow, not in a type, but right up to the hilt in this greater Son of David. David's greater Son is on the throne of thrones, and out of God's securing of His King in glory and exaltation, the history of the Church begins, and the supreme note by which the Church is built is the note of absolute assurance which comes from what God has secured in glory in His Son.

God's Rest in His Son

Assurance comes from heart rest. Here again let us mark and how full of truth, exactitude, the Scriptures are everywhere - that it was no accident or chance or hap that Solomon, the man who was chosen for this position, had the name of Solomon. Solomon means "rest." Now you notice Stephen, referring to Solomon, says a rather interesting thing in Acts 7:47-49.

"But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands; as saith the prophet: The heaven is my throne, and the earth the footstool of my feet: O what manner of house will ye build me? saith the Lord: Or what is the place of my rest?"

Then Solomon had another name - Jedidiah, "Beloved of God." That is what we read in Ephesians - "hath made us accepted in the Beloved." You see, the Lord Jesus takes up Solomon on both his names. He is God's rest, "the place of my rest"; and He is the Beloved of God, the Beloved of the Father. So that, in the very first place, God gets all that His heart is set upon, with regard to what His house is to be, in the Person of His Son, and it is out of this that the house corporately, of which we are parts, takes its rise. It is built upon that heart rest which God has in His Son.

Now, you and I have to come to the same place as God in regard to the Lord Jesus before we can really be an expression of His house. We are His spiritual house: "Whose house are we." But that does not mean that God just puts us together as bricks. He must have living stones, and that phrase "living stones" implies, as the context shows in 1 Peter 2:5, that it is by a living relation with the chief Corner Stone that the house is built: "unto whom coming, a living stone... ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." The parts are one with the Corner Stone, all of a piece, so far as their nature is concerned, one with Him in what He is. As the building, we have to take our character from that chief Corner Stone which God has chosen. "I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious." God works to Him and from Him. You and I work to Him and from Him. But what is this that gives the House its character? It is God's full and perfect satisfaction in His Son which gives Him rest. God rested from all His works on the seventh day, and God beheld all things which He had made, and they were very good. Now, carry that right through in this spiritual connection with God's house, and long, long after you hear this word: "that he might present it (the church) to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." That is only saying, It is very good! The thing which first of all satisfies God's heart is that His Son has answered to all that He has ever required in a spiritual and a moral way. That is God's rest, and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus is

God's seal to the fact. God is satisfied, God is at rest. Thus it is that, as the Lord Jesus is just about to step out on that last bit of the journey which is to see Him crucified, He says, "Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5). Glorify thou Me! Yes, that is coming almost at once by the darkest part of the road. It is the way to the glory. This last step, the Cross, is the final stage and summing up of all that has been in the satisfaction of God's heart.

The Value of the Blood of Jesus

What I am coming to in all that I have said is this, that it is by His precious Blood that God's absolute rest in the Lord Jesus is secured. Oh, beloved, you and I need ever more and more to apprehend the supreme value of the Blood of Jesus! The value of the Blood of Jesus is the great factor at the end time. It is the supreme factor in heart rest, and heart rest is the only ground of victory; and therefore Satan is always seeking to rob the children of God of heart rest on spiritual matters.

I am going to make this appeal to you all at this time, although something more will have to be said at some other time about it; but I do want to make this appeal to you, that we ought to be at the place where the matter of our relationship with God in acceptance, in peace, in rest, in fellowship, is an absolute thing now. We must not allow the other side of our spiritual experience to cross that dividing line and come into the realm of our assurance. I mean, there is that other side where the Lord is conforming us to the image of His Son.

He has a great work on hand in us, and, as He takes it in hand, we discover as never before what a work it is. We discover ourselves, discover the depths of iniquity that are to be found in our fallen nature. It becomes a terrible thing to us. But never allow that which comes to light by God's handling of us to cross over into that other place of our acceptance, our standing, our peace with God. So many people fail to keep that line clearly defined and they accept all kinds of accusations from the enemy because the Lord is dealing with them in this way.

They feel so bad, so worthless, so useless, so utterly impotent and evil, and suppose therefore that their relationship with the Lord is interrupted, and the Lord is not pleased with them, and all that sort of thing, and they lose their rest. I believe that is why a lot of people have turned strongly against the subjective side of God's working, because they have seen many Christians altogether breakdown in their assurance under it. You come to a place where you know the Lord has accepted you and that you have peace with God; your sins are forgiven, and you are blessedly at peace, enjoying the Lord.

Well, you are there for a time, and then you come into touch with something that has to do with spiritual progress and fuller life in Christ, and all that is bound up with that. Now many, as soon as they begin to touch that, lose their old basic assurance and joy, and because of that, there are those who have turned, not only against simple salvation and rejoicing in the Lord as Saviour, but all that is beyond besides. They will not have any more. They will not have what is subjective.

That does not justify their position, but it does say that we have to be very careful about this matter: and we have to stand up to this thing. We have to take this position, and no doubt some of you have taken this position - Well, I know I am beginning to know something of the depths of evil in my own nature; I am coming to see what I never would have believed to be true of myself. I have never had worse times about myself, the hopelessness of myself, than I am having now.

I am seeing more and more that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing! and so on, but... but that is the Lord's matter. That is for the Lord to deal with. I am not going to allow that to encroach upon my absolute acceptance with God, my basic standing before God. I am not going to allow all the problems of sanctification to come over and destroy the great assurance of justification! You must be very careful to keep that line clearly defined, because, if I am not mistaken, that is just the work of the devil to destroy the power of the Church and I believe that that is the heart of Rev. 12 - "They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb" - and who is it they are overcoming?

The accuser of the brethren. He is seeking to cast them down by accusation, and their answer to his accusation is the Blood of the Lamb. What is that? God satisfied, God at rest, and I at rest on the basis of the Blood. They overcame him and he is cast down. They are not cast down when they maintain their position there. The Blood is not something just for initial salvation: it is something for final triumph; it is the final thing. The value of the Blood is a tremendous thing to keep the Lord's people strong and assured, confident, and with the ringing note of authority; God's basis of satisfaction, the Blood of His Son making possible His exaltation.

Well, this is all to do with that necessary, indispensable element of assurance by which the Church is built. The spiritual house goes forward on that line. I believe that that is the secret of the remarkable progress at the beginning. "The Lord added to them daily those who were being saved." The Church grew in a way in which it has never grown since, and the great factor in the building of the house then, in the growth of the Church, was that there was this note of absolute assurance and confidence. They were a people who had heart rest, and who knew that Jesus Christ was enthroned. For them that settled matters in their hearts between themselves and God. That is all going back to our previous meditation, but it leads us right on to this further thing which the passages we have read bring specially before us. It is that the spiritual house has its existence for the very purpose of answering to God's own desire, ministering to God's own pleasure and glory. There are these phrases in Ephesians: "That we should be to the praise of the glory of his grace"; "to the praise of his glory," should exist to satisfy God's heart, to minister to His glory, to His pleasure. In this way, the spiritual house is to be God's answer to all that has happened in history.

God's New Creation

In the first creation gathered up into the first Adam, we have seen God surveying His working and saying, It is very good! Then followed breakdown, chaos, ruin in the creation. Out of a ruined creation, God lifted a nation, and the greatest thing that was ever said of Israel, I think, is in that little phrase. "Israel my glory." What a thing to say! Israel My glory! And in the early days of Solomon, Israel was God's glory. Again comes breakdown, failure, ruin. Finally we see God coming back again, coming back on Israel, coming back on creation with a new creation in Christ Jesus. Firstly, as to Christ Himself personally, and being able to say, as we have seen, "My beloved, in whom I am well pleased," I am fully satisfied. In other words, it is the new creation seen in Christ, and God saying, It is very good, I am well pleased.

But then there comes in the Church, the Church which is His Body, which is an extension of the new creation from Christ personal to Christ corporate, and the last thing in view about this Church is its coming down from heaven having the glory of God, or, to use the other words, "presented unto him a glorious church," or again, "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed" (2 Thess. 1:10). That is the end. So that this is God's final answer. There is not going to be another chaos and ruin in the creation. This is God's last answer to all that has gone before of ruin and breakdown. It is the Church, this spiritual house, a new creation.

What the Church Is

What, then, is this spiritual house? What is this Church? Let us not have an objective mentality about this, thinking of it as something somewhere outside of and apart from ourselves. What is it? The answer is a very simple one. The spiritual house of God is Christ Himself. Yes, but not Christ personally alone, but Christ in you, in me, the hope of glory. Oh, it is just here that all the mistakes have been made about the Church, with such disastrous results. The Church, the House of God, is simply Christ Himself in undivided oneness found in all those in whom He really dwells. That is all. That is the Church. Seek to root out of your mentality any and every other idea of the Church. It is not Christ divided into a thousand or a million fragments amongst so many believers. It is still one Christ. You and I are not the Church. It is Christ in you and in me that is the Church. We still remain what we are outside of the Church still on our natural ground, but it is the measure of Christ in us that constitutes the Church, a spiritual Church, a spiritual house, the one Christ by the one Spirit in all those in whom He dwells. That is the Church. God has never seen in that Church, in that Temple, anything but His Son. He is the Temple of God and you and I can never belong to the Church save as Christ is in us. I know that is a simple thing to say, but if we would just fasten on that and see what that means; it is one of the great factors of unspeakably great power against the enemy, if only we would live on that basis, if only we would abide there.

There are two ways of approaching the matter, and I see again the great success of Satanic propaganda in this matter. I do not know what you older Christians think about it. We can only speak of what we have recognized in our lifetime, but we have lived long enough to recognize the course of things, and to me it does seem, and it more than seems, that, in the last few years, the last few decades, there has been a far greater development and growth of suspicion amongst Christians than there used to be, so that today it is almost impossible to speak anywhere without people wondering if you are quite sound. It is in the atmosphere. It seems to me that there is a constant alertness to scent something that is not quite sound, and anything that is of God is prejudiced by that attitude, that state of things. The real truth of God is not getting a chance because this suspicion has spread over all the world, among all Christians. Is this quite right? Is this quite sound? Is this quite true? What is the snag here? What is the error in this? It is like that. That is the positive line, that has become the positive line, and, beloved, I believe that this is one of the marks of this Satanic propaganda to bring about collapse from the inside, because it means that there is internal disintegration, there is no cohesion, the people of God are broken up into thousands of fragments by this very spirit and atmosphere of suspicion bringing about prejudice, and the Church cannot move together as a solid whole. There are very few Christians indeed who can move a hundred percent together, as one, simply because of this. Satan brings it into the most intimate circles of Christian life and fellowship, all the time bringing up this horrible element of uncertainty, question. Yes, he has got into the inside, and he is bringing about internal disintegration and collapse in a very quiet way, but subtly working through the years, and he can win many bloodless battles along that line. He can take territory very easily along that line and hold it and gain his end of dominion.

Take another earthly expression of this spiritual background of things. Do you not see, beloved, that over there there is no room whatever for a second thought or a second mind? Anybody through the last seven years who has had another thought, another mind, a second idea, has been eliminated. You may not there have two minds. You have got to subjugate your mind to this other mind, this dominating mind. You must not have an opinion, you must not reason, you must not speak in any way that cuts across the prevailing mind, the mind of the dictator. There is no room for anything that is second. It is one. Satan knows the almost infinite value of oneness, and that is a secret of progress, of success; a ruthless, murderous

elimination of every second voice, to have only one voice, one mind, one will, dominating all others. Dare you think otherwise? Dare you have a mind of your own? Well, have it, but make very sure that you never let it be known. That is the regime, and what power there is for the object in view!

Well now, that is an earthly expression of a spiritual system. Bring that into the realm of the Church. Why is the Church paralysed, weakened, held up? Why can it not go forward terrible as an army with banners? Because there has been this disintegrating work secretly going on within its borders, so that suspicion is the order of the day. I suggest to you that, for the sake of the overthrow of the Satanic kingdom which is to be brought about by and through the Church in union with its Head, its Lord, in glory, for the sake of that and unto that end, you and I should make the opposite our positive course. Let us not be forever suspiciously asking, what is wrong? What is doubtful? What is unsafe here? but positively, What is there of Christ in this? On that I fasten! What do I see or sense of the Lord Jesus in this matter? With that I engage, I co-operate. Oh, if we would only take that as our positive course, Satan would soon be losing ground, the Church would soon be coming up a glorious Church. One thing which characterised the Church at its beginning was oneness. They spoke the same things, they were all of one mind and one heart, and what ground the enemy lost! But, as soon as the enemy began his secret 'fifth column' work of propagating internal doubts, suspicions, prejudices, he very soon brought the Church down out of that realm of reigning life and scattered its power. Oh, we must pray the Lord that the one Christ, the one Spirit, shall be in the ascendant in us! We shall not be living either upon the ground of what we are naturally - for we shall always be affected by what we are naturally, but upon the ground of what there is of Christ in one another; neither let us be dwelling upon the ground of possible error, possible false teaching, and possibility of it being there all the time and almost looking for that more than anything else. Oh, we must trust the Lord about this matter! I do believe, beloved, that the safest way, the way of our protection from error, is to go on with the Lord. Our position must be - I am going on with the Lord where I find the Lord, and I am going to trust the Lord in the matter of error, and, as we walk with the Lord, we shall sense, without looking for it, where the error is, and we shall be warned by the Spirit, we shall know. We must move on the positive basis, that of the Lord Himself, and that is glory in the Church, when it is the Lord. "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

We know quite well, in simple ways, that this is true. We meet one another, we have never met before. We discover very quickly by our spiritual sense that we belong to the Lord, and then we have a very blessed time simply on that ground. We flow together because we are the Lord's, and, if only we stood there, we would go on having a blessed time; but presently we begin to discuss some doctrine and find we do not agree. All the glory goes out, the fellowship breaks down. Oh, the Lord hold us into Himself!

Now, I am saying this spiritual house is Christ, and all that is not Christ has got to be kept in its own place, and we have got to seek to remain on the basis of Christ as in us and as in one another, and this is the glory of God, that we should be to the glory of His grace. That is where it begins - His grace. It seems to me, it has seemed to me through the years, (I do not know whether I am right in doctrine now or not, it is a forgivable mistake if it is error), but it has seemed to me through the years very often, that the Lord Himself has taken pains to keep me on the basis of grace, and by that I mean He has so often let me know in experience that, but for His grace, I am a lost man in experience, not a doctrine, not as truth. Oh, today, it would be a bad thing for me if it were not for the grace of God! Yes, to appeal even today to the Blood, to the grace of God, because of that precious Blood, today, after so many years of knowing the Lord! Yes, it is grace today, and it is that that brings glory to God, allowing us to know how base, how foul, we are, and letting us know that that makes no difference to Him because of the Blood. That is glory to God. I do not

know what the deepest note in your heart is today, but that is the deepest note in my own heart after these years. Ah, it is the grace of God that is the glory of my heart, the glory of His grace. He is glorified by our recognition of His grace and our abiding on the basis of His grace. The glory is soon taken away from the Lord when we get on to any other ground; what we are and can do and what we are doing. The Lord will very soon put a stake in our flesh when we begin to get exalted like that. He is being robbed of glory. He is glorified by our transfiguration, our conformity to the image of His Son. Paul says, "We... beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image" (2 Cor. 3:18). The glory is connected with the change, transformed into the same image. He is glorified as we are changed into the image of His Son. He is glorified when our lives are becoming fruitful. "Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit" (John 15:8). And the fruit, in the first place, is the fruit of the nature of the Lord Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. "Herein is my Father glorified." Fruit in service, of course, but fruit in life, and He is glorified by the endurance of the saints.

Ah, yes, let us lay this to heart as our final word. If only we recognised it. There is a great deal of glory brought to the Lord simply along the line of endurance. At times we can do no more. The only thing to do is to give up or to hold on; to let go, or to endure. Peter has a lot to say about that. "This is grace, if a man endure." and just to endure brings glory to God. It will be a great story, it will be one of the large and glorious volumes in the library of heaven, the story of the endurance of the saints, how much glory it brought to God. Oh, the story will be a romance! How many people were influenced by it, how many unbelievers came to believe because of the endurance of some saint in the time of suffering! How many other saints were mightily supported as they saw the steadfast endurance of another under fiercest trial! How much the Lord got out of just sheer endurance! Yes, this is to the glory of God, if we endure. The Lord get glory in the Church by Christ Jesus unto all ages forever and ever, and may we indeed be a house for His glory in these various ways.

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