

# Christ Formed Within

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the necessity of spiritual growth and the formation of Christ within believers amidst opposition and challenges.*

**Scripture:** Romans 8:14, Galatians 3:1, Galatians 4:19, Galatians 5:1

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Formation of Christ"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the critical importance of spiritual growth and the formation of Christ within believers, as expressed in Galatians 4:19. He highlights the constant opposition to this divine purpose, illustrating how every movement towards spiritual maturity is met with resistance, often manifesting through prejudice and false teachings, such as those from the Judaisers. Sparks urges believers to recognize the significance of fully apprehending Christ, moving beyond mere belief to a deep, settled understanding of His meaning in their lives. He stresses that true spiritual maturity comes from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, which liberates believers from external religious practices and leads them to a genuine relationship with God. The sermon calls for a commitment to allow Christ to take shape within, ensuring that believers are grounded and not easily swayed by false doctrines.

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## Transcript

Reading: Galatians 3.

"...I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" Galatians 4:19.

### The Resistance to Divine Purpose

As we continue our meditation in relation to spiritual growth, spiritual full growth, recognising, as we have sought to do, the very great and serious place which the matter occupies in the Word of God, and how important the Lord evidently regards it, there is the other side to that fact which must impress us, namely, the way in which this matter of spiritual growth is fraught with opposition. Whenever you touch upon it you find yourself in the presence of something set against it. It is never presented in passive conditions. It is always encompassed by active opposing elements and forces. You find that the exhortation, the encouragement, the admonition is all of the most positive character as over against something. Whenever God has moved in the past towards spiritual increase, there is always present some counter-move, some antagonistic element. You can see it through the Word of God again and again.

When the Lord would bring Israel from the bondage and limitation of Egypt, at once there was bitter conflict. When Israel was at last brought into the land, almost immediately there was an Achan to arrest the whole movement and bring to a standstill that development unto the fullness of which the land spoke, and for the moment it was effectively done. So you may see it in a great number of instances in the Old Testament.

When God brought His Son into the world, which was a great movement towards spiritual fullness, there was to begin with a Herod, and then the Jews in their prejudice. Let us take note of the fact that prejudice is always set against spiritual progress. Prejudice never does give God a chance. It is a closed door. If one thing more than another marked the Jews, in the days when He who was God's fullness came amongst men, it was prejudice, and it was that which limited them, and robbed them of God's full purpose.

When the Day of Pentecost was fully come, and a mighty move towards fullness was made -- that which the apostle later refers to as "the fullness of him that filleth all in all" -- hardly has the church started upon its course before you find a suitable instrument to the enemy's arresting work in Ananias and Sapphira. Then you move on to the great apostle Paul, and always dogging his steps everywhere are the Judaisers.

So it is, that every movement of God is met by a counter-movement. Every step towards spiritual enlargement finds something present from the other side to check it, to arrest it, to frustrate it.

#### The Letters of Paul

Thus these letters of Paul bring up into view a large number of things which Satan has produced, very largely through the flesh, as counter-movements to God's end -- full growth. As we have seen, in Corinth it was carnality, and also in Corinth, as is made perfectly clear in the early chapters of the second letter to the Corinthians, and among the Galatians, it was the Judaisers. Theirs was a very unworthy way of going to work. One of their great strokes against what God was seeking to do, was doing through His servant Paul, was their attack upon him in person; that is, their attack upon him as the vessel being used by God, an attack in ways unworthy of those who professed to be seeking the interests of God.

It is always so. When God moves and takes up a vessel for the increase of Christ in His people, for spiritual enlargement, Satan raises up an attack upon that vessel, and seeks to frustrate the purpose by prejudicing that purpose through the vessel in some way. He will mis represent, lie -- oh, he will use every kind of movement to discount the instrument, so that the divine object may fall into disrepute or be brought under arrest.

Now here is a letter (the letter to the Galatians) which is full of terrific conflict. Martin Luther was a fighter if he was anything, and he said he had betrothed this letter to himself. But what did Luther say further in relation to that? "Beforehand I was in quietness and comfort, in rest and acceptance, but since I have surrounded myself with a solid block of enemies"! That is significant because of what this letter stands for. Would to God that Martin Luther had seen all that it stands for, instead of only its beginnings. However, here we are in the presence of conflict, and the point is for us to recognise that if God is moving towards the enlargement of the measure of Christ in the saints, that movement encounters all hell's antagonism, and the vessel used by the Lord to that end will come under the massed assaults of the enemy, both vehement and malicious. He will stop short at nothing in seeking to render that vessel inoperative, to paralyse it, so that it cannot fulfil its divine mission. I always take the apostle Paul as a personal representative of the truth which was committed to him, as a vessel, one in whom all that related to that truth was wrought out in his own history; and in this point, as in so many others, it is quite manifest that

Paul was raised up as a special vessel in relation to the full, eternal purpose of God concerning the church, and there was not another man in the dispensation who so met the force of hell, in its endeavour to paralyse and destroy, as that man. He stands to show us in his own history, and in his own person, what we may expect if we are linked with God's full purpose.

This should be enlightening and encouraging, looked at from one standpoint. It should explain things, and it should set us on our feet. The danger so often with us, when there is a mighty uprising of spiritual antagonism and we are made to suffer, and are suffering intensely, is that we should regard that suffering as something in itself, seek to attribute it to natural causes, to feel that it is something in the course of life which has come our way. We think we are just sufferers, and fail to see that, however the thing may appear to be like that, it is related definitely and directly to the purpose with which we are occupied.

It may be that you are not able to enter into this, because you are not in the experience of it, but others will understand. Believe me, that if you have betrothed God's full purpose to you, if you are married to God's full thought for His people -- for yourself and for others, especially for the church -- you are going to meet the Devil's attempted frustration of it in every conceivable way; the frustration of yourself, the frustration of your ministry. You are going to meet it physically, you are going to meet it in your soul, and you are going to meet it spiritually. You are going to meet it inside yourself, and you are going to meet it outside yourself. You are going to find yourself in a battle. And what is true of the individual will be true of any company that is standing in relation to God for that purpose.

#### The Form of the Attack Among the Galatians

So we find ourselves in that very atmosphere immediately we open this letter to the Galatians. Paul wastes no time here. He uses very few words by way of nicety. He introduces himself, and his introduction is an attack. He opens the battle in his first sentence. "Paul, an apostle (not from men, neither through man...)" That is an attack. The battle is joined. Judaisers have been at work, and they have persuaded these Galatians that Paul was not an authentic apostle, but had set himself up as something; he was not one of the twelve, but was self-appointed. "Paul, an apostle (not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)." You see, that is accepting the challenge. How it goes to the heart of things! It takes hold of the sword of the enemy and turns it right round and pierces himself. The Judaisers say I am not an apostle by recognition of Jerusalem; I have not been ordained at headquarters; I am not one of the authentic twelve; I have not received my credentials from the ecclesiastics, those who are called pillars. I agree! But I take my apostleship higher; I received it "through Jesus Christ, and God the Father..." What can you say to that? How are you going to handle that?

Now that is only just to point out that you are in the presence of conflict, and to establish the fact that where God is seeking to move towards the bringing of His Son to full formation in the church, Satan is always most active to defeat that end by any means possible. Bear that in mind at all times. The Lord help us to do it. If we remember that, it will be to our salvation.

What the Judaisers sought to do is perhaps something which we need not consider in detail. Had they had their way, this is what the effect and the outcome would have been, namely, that the Galatians would have returned to, and have become settled and fixed in religious formality, in ceremonial and ritual, in tradition and external religious works at the cost, firstly, of life, and ultimately of God's eternal purpose. The apostle takes up the battle for life in this letter, and makes it an issue of life.

We can clearly see that the method of the enemy was not restricted to the Galatians, for it had gone on before their day, and it goes on still: formalism, religious formality, ceremonial, ritual, religious traditions, many outward works in the name of God, all that in the place of, firstly, spiritual life, and then, finally, in the place of God's full intention for His people. That is very true. Of course, the enemy always knows where he has a salient point, where he has a vantage ground. These Galatians were mainly Gentiles, and they had come out of paganism, and in their pagan religious system there were many rites and ceremonies, many religious ordinances. There were all those performances and outward activities which constituted the form of worship of their gods, and to the natural man, the man of the soul, such things are indispensable. He must have what is tangible, he must have helps in religion; he must hear something, see something, do something, handle something. All these accompaniments of religion are essential to religion, and his religion would be a poor, starved thing if you took those away. Take the artistic away, take the aesthetic away, take away all the externals that come to our senses, and those means by which we express our sentient life, and what is religion? This pure, spiritual life of faith without anything of that is an uninteresting thing to the soul, and is very vague. Yes, what an unreal thing it is! These Galatians had come out of all that other thing, and had turned to the Lord. Then the Judaisers had come along with the Jewish order, and said, "Except you are circumcised you cannot be saved, and what you need is to come back to the Jewish ordinances". If you are at low ebb spiritually you are not able to stand up to that sort of thing very well, when there are plausible arguments and strong constraints, and when there is a turning upon the instrument which has been used for you and the pointing out of all the flaws and weaknesses in that one, and the showing of how that one has set himself up to be something which is contrary to the accepted position at Jerusalem. These leaders in Jerusalem had known Jesus Christ personally, in the flesh; they had been with Him, and they did not agree with this sort of thing, they still believed in these Jewish ordinances. "So you see Paul is all wrong; he is just one by himself, no one agrees with him", was what they urged.

It was all so subtle, and thus Satan had his point with them in relation to their old form of life, working on that uncrucified soul-life, and they came under the spell. "O, foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" As we have pointed out, the literal words there are, "Who did cast over you the witch's spell?" A spell is a nice sensation, till you wake up. A spell is usually cast over a person in order to rob him of something, and that in fact is what happened in the case before us.

#### Spiritual Apprehension of Christ

Let us, then, recognise the point, namely, that in Christ we are called out of that whole thing. That is earthly, that is of man, tradition, religious system of rites and ordinances, of days, times and seasons. We have been called out of that into a heavenly life in Jesus Christ by faith. When you really do get through you never have any inclination towards that other thing again, you are spoiled for it. But that is just the point of Galatians 4:19: "My little children for whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you." Paul was not saying at this point that he was in travail in relation to that end when Christ should be fully formed in them in the purpose of God. Of course, it had its bearing upon that, it was related to that ultimately, but that is not what he means here; not that full conformity to the image of Christ, not that full development of Christ in them. What he is saying here is this: "I am in travail until Christ takes definite shape in you." It is the difference between the embryo and the fully formed child. He said he was in agony about that. The trouble with them was that they had not clearly seen Christ, not clearly apprehended Christ; Christ was not distinctly defined in them, the meaning of Christ had not become definite in them. Something had happened. They had been begotten from above, they had received the Spirit, by faith they had turned to

the Lord Jesus, but it has become evident that they have not grasped the significance of Christ. Paul said, "I fear lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." What is labour in vain? Oh beloved, in relation to God's purpose, in relation to God's full thought, it is far from being enough that we should just believe on the Lord Jesus; it is essential that we should see who and what Jesus is, and what He means.

If you want proof that this is the point here between Paul and the Galatians, recognise this, that the personal name of the Lord Jesus Christ occurs forty-three times in this very brief letter. It is not the descriptive title, as so often elsewhere. It is the personal name, the Man Christ Jesus thirty-nine times out of the forty-three in this letter. Why? Why should he bring such a tremendous number of references to Him into this letter? Well, it is self-evident. Hear his exclamation, to this effect: "Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth, crucified", placarded openly, and you have not seen! Four times in this letter the Cross of Christ is referred to in relation to the biggest things with which we have to do. We are not going to stop now with them, but those four statements about the Cross of the Lord Jesus in this letter are the greatest things that could be said about the Cross, and they all have reference to the end of the personal ego: "I have been crucified..." -- the all embracing fact; then, by the same means, severance from the law -- "I... died unto the law"; severance from the flesh -- "They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof"; severance from the world -- "Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified", and you have not seen the implications.

If you had but believed (Galatians and all others) you would have once for all been delivered from earthly religious systems, earthly orders, rites, ceremonies, traditions, and all that sort of thing, and you would be in a heavenly place; for Christ crucified means that. To apprehend Christ means absolute emancipation out of everything here, even in a religious way, after a religious kind. It is that which represents the whole question of maturity and immaturity. You ask, What was it that constituted immaturity amongst the Galatians? It was that, under persuasion, influence and argument, they were ready to drop back so easily and so quickly into an earthly religious order with which the Cross of Christ had finished, which the Cross of Christ had brought to an end. Oh yes, the law of Moses, and all his order, and his ritual ended in the Cross of the Lord Jesus. It served a purpose, but reached its fulfilment in Christ, and Christ crucified marked an end. In Christ risen, all that it pointed to is taken up in a spiritual way to heaven, and now we are united with Christ in heaven. He fulfils all the values of that for us. He is our High Priest, our sacrifice, our precious Blood, our meeting place, our righteousness, our approach, our access to God, our acceptance. Everything shadowed in the types and figures is carried up into Him risen and exalted, and we have it all in spiritual value. Yes, you say, but it is all so far away, and unreal, and we want something that we can handle and see and hear. Ah, that is immaturity, that is spiritual infancy. Children always want something (and rightly so) that they can see and hear. But the apostle in this letter plunges the Galatians right into the place where all those infant things are finished with. He says, "You must begin sonship from the beginning". It is remarkable how far advanced he is in his point of view in this letter.

While the placing of sons lies in the future, while the inheritance lies there, the apostle says, we are all sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ, and we are expected now to begin to live upon the sonship principle. We do not want toys to play with on the earth, picture books to look at, object lessons, but we have come in spirit immediately to an apprehension of Jesus Christ, and a living fellowship with Him, so that all that kind of thing is passed. The Cross of the Lord Jesus in this letter is not set forth merely in relation to what we would call gross sin, but is set over against all religion in the flesh, and when Paul says, "I have been

crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me", he further adds: "and that life which I now live in the flesh, I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God..." You notice the context. It is the difference between life in the law and life in the risen Christ; not the difference between the religious life of the Jew as such and the religious man as such. All that is one thing, and the Cross cuts that off, and the "I" that is in that is brought to an end. Now I live, he says, "yet no longer I, but Christ... and that life which I now live I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God..." It is a kind of life. The Cross brings out to that kind of life which is the life of the Son of God lived by us through faith. That must be reserved for further consideration. We will stay with the more obvious points in the letter.

#### Christ Formed Within, A Question of Supreme Importance

I think we can be content to dwell for a little while longer upon those words in chapter 4:19: "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you."

It is the anguished cry that believers should come to a place where they are fixed -- "Christ be formed". It is the place where there is some definiteness in them as to the Lord Jesus. It is a settled thing. They have SEEN the Lord Jesus and they are settled. You cannot move them; that is, they have the root of the matter in themselves. Christ has taken shape in them.

Now, if Paul agonizes, groans, travails in that connection, how important it is, and what serious consequences must be related to a Galatian condition. The crying need amongst the Lord's people is that they should come to a fixed and settled place and position in consequence of the meaning of Christ having come home to them in clearness and in definiteness; that they should be settled and grounded, not easily moved away, not easily falling under the witch's spell. They know the Lord, and you cannot move them. You do not have to nurse people like that. You do not have to keep picking them up and putting them on their feet. You have to supply no crutches. You can count on them. You know that they have that basic knowledge of the Lord, that they will not be moved away easily, that they will go right on. They see what this means; they have grasped the significance of Jesus Christ, and you can count on them to go on. You will agree that this is a very necessary state to God's end, which is full growth; to have an initial and fundamental grasp of the significance of Christ, and to have become fixed in relation to Him. It is because that is lacking that there is such spiritual poverty and limitation, weakness, defectiveness and defeat everywhere. It is a matter of seeing the Lord Jesus.

That is why the apostle uses, with all his might, his own personal case as a case in point. He opens this letter, and takes up the battle. He declares his apostleship as from heaven, and not from men. Then he goes on with his own case, and before long he will say, "It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me." When that happened, he says, in effect, "I went not up to confer with flesh and blood at Jerusalem; I had the root of the matter in myself by direct act of the Holy Spirit."

#### All is by the Spirit

Go through this letter again and count the number of times that the Spirit is mentioned. You will find everywhere it is the Spirit, and it is this inward work of the Holy Spirit in the heart that makes him see the Lord Jesus. I am not talking about seeing a figure, not about seeing a person as such; I am talking about seeing the meaning of God's Son, the meaning of the Man Christ Jesus, how He gathers up everything that has ever been, or ever will be, in His own person, and becomes the embodiment of all God's thought, intention, and the fountain-head of every resource in relation to that purpose of God: and He becomes that

to him. Paul needs no Jewish altars, no Jewish priests, no Jewish blood-shedding and sacrifices, no Jewish temple or tabernacle. Jesus Christ is all that and infinitely more to him. Paul does not live by those things, Jesus Christ is his life. He does not need guidance from those things, Jesus Christ is his guidance. It is what the Lord Jesus is to him that is the sum total of it all.

When you have that, you are out, you are free. Oh, no one need say to you, You must do this, and you must not do that. That is the law. You are out, you are free, you have no life in that; you have rest, and liberty, and power, and peace in Christ, in communion with Him, in fellowship with God in Him. Think of the terrific fall this was on the part of the Galatians. Paul appeals to them: "Oh you, who began in the Spirit, do you think now you can be perfected in the flesh? You who came into the way of all that by the Holy Spirit, do you think you are going to reach God's full end, be made perfect by coming down to fleshly religious activities? It is unthinkable. No wonder you find Paul amazed, perplexed, bewildered and vehemently angry that anybody would so undo the Cross of Christ, so set aside the life in the Spirit. Spiritual maturity is that the Holy Spirit has revealed and is revealing all the meaning of CHRIST IN US, and we are living on Him. Spiritual immaturity is that we must have all these external religious things to help us to be good, and with a very unsatisfactory result. Do you see the point? Read the letter again in the light of this word: "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba..." In the original languages of the Bible, the Hebrew and the Greek, when you read that particular clause you are using exactly the word that the Lord Jesus used when He prayed to the Father. When He prayed He did not say in English, Father! He said, Abba! I do not see any particular value in it coming down to us like that, but it is strange that the Holy Spirit has preserved that, and given us the original word and then the translation, as though He would bring us right into the closest touch with this thing, bring us there in spirit to the very heart of the Lord Jesus.

Just as Jesus Christ said to the Father, Abba! so the same Spirit as in Christ is in us causing us to know the same relationship with the Father as He had: "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba..." That is where life in the Spirit begins -- Father! It is by the Spirit of His Son.

You see God's purpose, God's end, that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. The Spirit of His Son in us crying "Father", revealing Christ in us. "It pleased God... to reveal his Son in me." That puts everything on the inside from start to finish, the beginning and the end; the first step and the fullness is bound up with that. "Reveal his Son in me"! That stands over against all externalities of religion. The difference is between life and death, earth and heaven, time and eternity. And so Paul calls this liberty, "the liberty of the sons of God." "Stand fast therefore in the liberty..."

May the Lord make this all clear, and bring it home to our hearts, that we may know Christ.

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