

# Christ Revealed as God's Pattern

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*Christ is God's Pattern, and we should be a corporate expression of Christ, with the measure of Christ as strong as possible.*

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 4:5

**Topics:** "The Purpose of the Church", "Christ as the Pattern"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the revelation of Jesus Christ as the ultimate pattern for the Christian life and the Church. He explains that understanding Christ as God's Pattern is essential for believers to grasp their identity as 'bits of Christ' and to recognize the purpose of the Church as a collective expression of Christ. Sparks argues that true ministry and evangelism should focus on increasing the measure of Christ in believers and the world, rather than merely counting conversions or establishing institutions. He calls for a revolution in the Church to align with this vision, highlighting that the essence of Christianity is Christ Himself, who should be the center of all activities and relationships within the Church. Ultimately, Sparks urges believers to embody Christ in their lives, as He is the foundation and purpose of their existence.

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## Transcript

For the many friends who have not been with us through the earlier gatherings, let me say the very briefest possible word by way of retrospect. We have been led at this time to be occupied with the revelation of Jesus Christ. We feel that the Lord has led us in this way with more than the object of just studying some thing, but as related to the movements toward the consummation of this age which we feel are so evidently taking place and that therefore, in the final scenes, the Lord is culminating and consummating His Testimony on this earth, it is very necessary for His Church to be very clear as to their position. And that position is essentially and inseparably a matter of understanding exactly what the Christian life and the Christian Church is and the Testimony which is entrusted to them.

So we have spent nearly three days with the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation, particularly noting that as that book does bring to this culmination and consummation of everything in the age, the Lord takes very careful pains to give a full-orbed, clearly-defined, presentation of His Son. The significance of the very first chapter of that book is that Christ overshadows everything. Christ encompasses everything. Christ stands before everything as the Standard of God. And then all that follows - firstly in the dealing with the Church and then with the nations and then with the kingdom of Satan and then the bringing in of the eternal kingdom; all that is governed by what Christ is, by that matchless

presentation of Himself. I go over that again in order that we may see where we are, the setting of what we are saying today.

It has been there that the main part of our time has found us. But this morning we went back or over to the apostle Paul in this connection and began to consider the content of his words in the second of his Corinthian letters, chapter four, verses five and six: "We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, seeing it is God who said Let light be, who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This morning we spent our time with the beginning of what Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ. We did note right at the outset that what he saw, or in seeing the face of Jesus Christ (which simply means that the Spirit of God gave him an inward illumination or revelation of Christ) what he saw in the face of Jesus Christ brought about a tremendous revolution both in his being and in his whole outlook. And the first thing that he saw in the face of Jesus Christ or in the Person of Jesus Christ, was God's Purpose.

Well, we spent our morning time on Christ as the Purpose of God. This afternoon we are going to be occupied with the second thing that Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ, that is, he saw Christ as God's Pattern. I'm going to be quite simple in the way I speak and in what I say this afternoon because there are many young Christians here. What I say, or the way in which I say it, I trust will help them particularly; but I trust it will be, if necessary, a corrective for us all.

It is exceedingly difficult to convey the impression that must have come upon Paul when he saw the Lord Jesus - that time of which he speaks when he said, "it pleased God to reveal His Son in me" - the tremendous effect that it had upon that man. I wish it were possible to convey to you something of that, because it is not in the terms, the language or even in the teaching; it is in the IMPACT that we shall have the value. You may hear all that I have to say and missing that impact it will be of very little value. I want you therefore, to try to enter into this in spirit.

You see, when Paul saw Jesus Christ by revelation of the Holy Spirit, a WHOLE SYSTEM collapsed for him. It completely collapsed! A whole mentality and way of thinking was shattered; turned upside down, inside out. He had to go right away into the desert. He spent two or three years there to think this thing out, to reconstruct everything in the light of THIS. It was indeed a revolution in that man. And although we are Christians and although we have all the teaching of Paul and the other apostles, and we've got all the Christian tradition of the centuries, I do feel, dear friends, that there's the need of something like that with us. That we can have a system, a Christian system, just as thorough, just as complete, just as strong, with ALL its ramifications and paraphernalia as the Jews had - without the TREMENDOUS impact of it all. We can have it all... Christianity has become so largely only another Judaism in that sense; another system. I know it means much to you... I would take nothing from all the blessedness and reality Christ is to you, but still I hold to this - that there's a great need of a revolution even in the Church and in Christianity at this time and the same kind of revolution caused by the same kind of revelation as came to the apostle Paul. I trust that you will at least begin to see something of this as I go on on simple lines this afternoon.

We have got to see as Paul saw Jesus as God's Pattern, Jesus as God's Model. What Paul has shown us in his writings is that he came to see that before ever this world was created, before any of this cosmic system was set up, God had in view the constituting of a universe on the basis of sonship; His Son. HE was before all things. HE was God's appointed mind concerning all things. And all things were to be made with the embodiment of the spiritual and eternal features of Christ. And when God reaches His End, and we come out with the work completed, finally, the thing that will obtain will be that in everything

perceptible, everything in the creation revealing something of Jesus Christ. And oh, what a wonderful universe that would be! If we meet a little bit of Jesus Christ anywhere in anyone today, what a blessed thing it is. But think of that being universal and nothing else to it! Now that is what was in God's eye and mind right back there in the eternity past. And so God set in motion all the creative processes and, by reason of necessity, all the redemptive processes, all the elective processes, all the sovereign and providential processes of His grace to work out this Pattern, to perfect this design - all things according to Christ. That's Paul's great phrase "According to Christ!" according to Christ - that controls everything. Now, Paul came to see that and that vision, that perception and apprehension or revelation was the governing motive, power and object of everything for him, "for me to live", said he, "is Christ".

Now then, we can break that up into very simple questions and answers. What is a Christian? What IS a Christian? How interesting it would be if you were handed out a half a sheet of note paper all of you and asked to put down your answer. What is a Christian? What is Paul's answer? What would your answer be? A person who believes certain things about the Lord Jesus? A person who has come to make the Jesus their Saviour, who has given himself or herself to Christ? How would you put it? But what is Paul's answer? Now that's the true one: a Christian is a bit of Christ, a bit of Christ! Every true Christian is a bit of Christ. We will bear that out more fully as we go along. From God's standpoint now, and He has laid the foundation for that, from God's standpoint now, the only thing that concerns Him is our interest to Him in you, in me, as Christians, as believers, is that bit of Christ which we represent. That's all He's concerned with where we are concerned; the bit of Christ that we are. He's concerned first of all to have it as a bit of Christ and then He is concerned to enlarge it to something more of Christ and to bring it to as full a measure of Christ as He can. And God's focus is upon the bit of Christ that has been made a part of us, that has been deposited in us by new birth. By new birth God has deposited something of Christ in us. It may be a very much smaller thing than all its surroundings - and we are the surroundings, what we are - to begin with it may be, but it is of transcendently greater INTRINSIC value than all the rest. To God it is THE value. He is prepared to do anything in relation to that.

And so every true Christian from God's standpoint is just a bit of His Son. "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts whereby we cry Abba, Father." Now I cannot gather up all the Scripture that proves that, shows how that is, but that is the simple beginning. What are you when you become a Christian? What are you as a Christian? What is it that makes you a Christian? What is the Christian and the Christian life, what is it? Well now, strip it of everything that has been gathered around it - men say this is what makes a Christian, this and that and the other thing comprises a Christian. Strip it of all that that has become the accretion of Christianity and come right down to this: a Christian is a bit of Christ. Go about this world, get that mentality, realize that I am - not when I'm in the meetings only, not when I'm with other Christians only, but wherever I am - I am a bit of Christ. In that measure, in that measure, where I am Christ is. People have got to know it, that it is not I, a professing Christian, a religious person, a person who belongs to Christianity; but I in very reality as a bit of Christ Himself. I am there in this world. For me to live is Christ! Let's go on.

What is a church? What is a church? Now then, what was Paul's idea and mentality about churches? Do you really think that Paul set out on a campaign to set up churches? To bring churches into being? To build churches? Do you think that? Do you think that his vision and his mission in his mind was to see churches set up all over the world? Think about that again, this is where we've got to rethink things. When you use the word 'church' or 'churches' you're only meaning companies of Christians, you're only meaning groups living together, gathering together in certain places on a basis of corporate life. I believe most

strongly that the apostle Paul would repudiate the whole idea or suggestion that he felt himself chosen of God to go about this world setting up churches. If you asked him what his business was in this matter, why, after having got the individual parts of Christ in gathering them together and constituting them local companies, fellowships, (churches if you like) if you'd asked him why... he would simply answer you in the simplest terms, I believe, and yet with very strong feeling and conviction: that there should be a larger expression of Christ in that place and by as many bits of Christ brought together as possible, the measure of Christ should be as strong in that place as possible. In other words, just that CHRIST should be all the more there! He's governed by this whole Pattern of God - that Christ should fill all things! And he saw that two is better than one and three is better than two in this matter and the more bits of Christ brought together (forgive me putting it like that, I must put it in simplest language) the more bits of Christ there are really brought together, so the stronger the IMPACT of Christ in any place.

No, dear friends, it is not God's idea to set up churches or Christian fellowship centres or that sort of thing - institutions and what not - that's not His idea at all. Let's clear the whole mind on this matter. If any company of Christians fails in THIS respect: to be there a corporate and an adequate expression of the Lord Jesus, the presence of Christ commensurate with their numbers or their being there; they've failed in the purpose of their existence in that place! There's no justification. I believe that that is EXACTLY why the Lord said to Ephesus as the representative church in which all were included: "repent or I will remove thy lampstand out of its place". ALTHOUGH there were so many commendable things, they were THINGS! Works, labours, yes toil, THINGS... but evidently THE Thing was lost sight of in the things. And THE Thing which, and which alone justifies, and gives meaning to any local company of the Lord's people, is not the people and not their procedure, not their forms, but CHRIST! CHRIST is met, CHRIST is found. Anybody who is seeking Christ will find Him there and whether they are seeking Him or not they will meet Him if they go there. It is Christ!

So Paul would say, Ephesus, Laodicea, Thyatira, Sardis, Corinth, anywhere; I'm not out to set up a Christian church there, I'm out to bring Christ there, to have Christ there and the bringing together of these, may I use the word again, bits of Christ, is only to increase the measure of Christ. And if you want evidence from the other side that this is so, remember that the great enemy knows the implications of Christ; he knows the implications of the presence of Christ and especially the presence of Christ corporately expressed. And if there's one thing that the enemy has set himself to do, it is to DESTROY the fellowship of the Spirit of Christ - to scatter the believers, to divide them, to BREAK UP this unity of Christ because he knows THAT on the one side weakens Christ, on the other side it strengthens his kingdom. Well, there's no argument there at all, there's no answer to that, that's a fact beyond any, any question at all; that this matter of the RELATEDNESS of Christians is the most contended thing in this universe. What are churches? Why meet together? Just that. Just that. Not the other in the mind of God, Christ is God's Pattern.

Then what about those two great things that belong to the Church and the churches: baptism and the Lord's table. What are we? Well, ask everywhere what kind of a church are you and what do you do and, "Well, we believe in baptism", various forms given to the name in different times, "we believe in and practice baptism." Do you? You believe in and practice baptism of infants, you call it. You, there, believe in and practice baptism of adults and believers. You believe a little water will do, you believe that a lot of water is necessary. However, baptism is a part of our order and system because we believe that it's a New Testament part of the Christian church and order. Is that all? Is that all? See, you can never, never reach any conclusion of the whole matter by arguing about the right and the wrong of THIS method or THIS time.

Don't you try. The only way in which to settle this whole matter is to stand right back and say, "What, according to the revelation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, does this thing really indicate?" And Paul will give us undoubted light on this matter. And he will tell us in an accumulation of statements by him in this, "Why, baptism... do you want to know what it is? Yes, it's right it's right, but it's not an ordinance, it's not a ceremony, it is not a rite, it is not a bit of ritual. Baptism is just the way in which Christians say: one whole thing has gone and Christ has taken its place. It's something that testifies to the fact that now all the ground is Christ's, we've died to all other ground. Everything else has died and been buried, and now on this ground of resurrection, it is only Christ!" And if baptism doesn't mean that, it has no New Testament meaning. You see, it's related to this One Thing! It is not something to be just perpetuated and carried out because it is something that they did at the beginning. It is something which has got to be brought right up to date with every new believer: that they have definitely died and been buried to ALL that is not Christ! It is a position taken. And now they live, and they live ONLY for Christ - it is Christ. "I have been crucified with Christ, it is NO longer I... but Christ". That's utter isn't it? So it's not the thing, it's the meaning.

What about the Lord's table? Here again, we believe in the Lord's supper, the holy communion or the Lord's table; whatever phrase applies to the different sections... And we have it, some once a quarter and some once a month and some once a week, and that's our order and our procedure and that's what we believe is the way. Is that all? Is that all? "We must have the Lord's table, we must have the Lord's supper, because... because, well, they did it in New Testament times and it's quite clearly the Lord's will that it should be had..." IT, IT, IT! See? That's where the whole thing breaks down. It's an IT: some THING! What IS the Lord's table? What IS the loaf and the cup? It is the Church's and the believer's CONTINUOUS declaration that CHRIST is their Life - that they have NO life but Christ! It is all Christ. That's not going to communion service. You see the emptiness and hollowness of so much. The meaning is good, all well meant... but oh, oh, the power and presence of Christ - that's the Thing that matters; not the ordinance, not the maintenance of the order, but the LIVING Christ. Christ is our Life; and that not only individually and personally, He is that - He is MY Life and my only Life - Bread and Wine - but He is the Life of the Church. He is Corporate Life, Corporate Life.

I earlier used that word "bits" of Christ. It's an awkward word; pieces of Christ, fragments of Christ, for when you take the Loaf and break it and you all, twenty, thirty, fifty, hundred, two hundred, have that piece of the Loaf, is that a piece in itself? No, it's the Loaf in representation. "Seeing that we who are many are one loaf." One Loaf! One Loaf, one Body. The Lord's table is the declaration of that Life which finds us, joins us, and binds us and holds us together, so that divisions in the Church NULLIFY the very meaning of the Lord's table. Divisions amongst believers rule out the very significance of the Loaf and the Cup; are a denial of it. It cannot be when you come to the Lord's table. It's a contradiction because it is Christ and Christ is not divided! Christ is not divided, Paul says that doesn't he? Is Christ divided? No. The Lord's table is then a representation of Christ as the ABIDING Life of the Church, until He comes, until He comes... that Testimony to Christ. Just Christ, that's all. Oh, when you come to the Lord's table do remember that. What are you doing? Just going through some thing that is a part of the church form and order, of Christian procedure? Oh no, I am here declaring one thing in two ways, firstly that Christ is my very subsistence. I have no life, I have no constitution, I have no maintenance, I have no continuance apart from Christ. He is my Existence. I declare that for myself, but here is a very searching thing: I declare that my fellowship with other believers in Christ is also my Life, that Christ is my Life collectively by fellowship, by oneness, by the unity of the Spirit and that if I break that, if I break that or allow that to be broken; if I fail to try and repair any breach between me and another child of God, I am simply saying that the Lord's table is a mere form - it's robbed of all its meaning, its real meaning and I am strangling my own

spiritual life. I am doing injury to my own spiritual life because my Life is not only an individual life, it's a collective or corporate Life. We depend for our Life upon one another, brethren. Satan will rob us of our Life by interfering with our relationships. Let there be no mistake about it, that can be very easily proved.

We go on... what is ministry? What is ministry? Now, this doesn't only apply to those who minister. Any who minister can listen with all your ears, but those who are ministered to, what is ministry? Is it to make people know what the Bible contains as its subject matter from Genesis to Revelation? Well, that's important, and very good, and in some senses it may be necessary as a foundation... Is it to give out addresses by research and study and get it off onto a company of Christians? Oh, I could go on like that, it's not pleasant. What is ministry? Any ministry and all ministry that does not make possible and provide for an immediate increase of the Lord Jesus, is not the ministry of the Holy Ghost; is not the ministry of Christ. ALL ministry must have as its IMMEDIATE object, the increase and the building up of Christ in His people. That is the test; not that it is interesting, informative or anything else, but that here Christ is being ministered: "I'm being brought right into touch with Christ. Christ is being brought into touch with me. Not a lot of words... no; I'm having to face up to the Lord Jesus in some way today, the whole issue of this word is: Christ! The living Christ". That is ministry. That is ministry, you see it's like that, you can take all that I'm saying back to Paul. Take it all back, take it back into this second letter to the Corinthians alone and you'll find that's it.

And then, for the present, because of the time, this final question: what is evangelism? What is evangelism? You say evangelization is the business of the church. True. What is evangelism? Try not to misunderstand me when I say that the end that God has in view is not just to get people saved - He wants them saved, He sent His Son that they should be saved - we cannot be too much concerned for their salvation. But that is not the end upon which the eye of God is resting. Evangelism, the salvation of men's souls with God is a related matter. It is to people, the kingdom of heaven with Christ, Christ-people; more and more in whom He may have His dwelling to be an out-shining of Himself. Listen: "When it pleased God to reveal His Son in me that I might proclaim HIM among the nations". Evangelism is NOT to get so many people converted. Evangelism is THROUGH their being saved to INCREASE the measure of Christ in this universe! That's a sufficient and a much greater motive I think, than to be able to count heads and say we've had so many conversions. Oh no, let us say rather, "Christ is getting more and more ground in this way!" Different mentality! And I am not quite certain that the Lord is not very much reserved and straitened because of this wrong idea - we put it the other way. I believe that if really the whole concern in evangelism was not to be able to count heads and say so many converts and so many have signed the cards and so on and so on, but to say "My, Christ is gaining ground!" I believe that if that were more the object and the motive, God would come into it more. Because I do believe, dear friends - and forgive me for putting it as my belief, that doesn't matter at all what I believe, but test it by the Word of God - that where Christ is the ONE, the ONLY, the FULL Object in view, God's interest is the greater. God commits Himself. So it must be in all this, the individual fragment of Christ. Oh, to be here as Christ here, then the Father will be with you; for the local companies to be here in this neighbourhood as Christ, as Christ... God will commit Himself to that. So in everything else, everything else that we have mentioned: Christ, only Christ! Christ the Beginning, Christ the End, Christ All in all.

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