

# Conformed to the Image of His Son

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores God's eternal purpose of conforming humanity to the image of Christ through obedience and the contrast between Adam and Jesus.*

**Scripture:** Romans 5:12, Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 15:44, Philippians 2:7, Hebrews 1:3, Hebrews 2:8, Hebrews 4:6, Hebrews 10:5

**Topics:** "Christ Formation", "Obedience To God"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the eternal purpose of God, emphasizing the contrast between the first Adam and the last Adam, Jesus Christ, as the ultimate image to which God intended to conform humanity. He explores the significance of Christ emptying Himself and becoming obedient unto death to bring back God's original intention for humanity. The sermon highlights the importance of obedience in God's plan, showcasing the consequences of disobedience through various biblical examples. It concludes with the call for believers to live by the life of Christ within them, leading to conformity to His image.

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## Transcript

"Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned: - for until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of him that was to come. But not as the trespass, so also is the free gift. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound unto the many. And not as through one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment came of one unto condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses unto justification. For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ. So then as through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation, even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous" (Romans 5:12-19).

"But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name"

(Philippians 2:7-9).

"Who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3).

"Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he subjected all things unto him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we see not yet all things subjected to him. But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God he should taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:8-9).

"Seeing therefore it remaineth that some should enter thereinto, and they to whom the good tidings were before preached failed to enter in because of disobedience" (Hebrews 4:6).

"Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body didst thou prepare for me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I am come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:5-7).

"It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is of 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" (1 Corinthians 15:44-49).

These passages will lead us to one other - Romans 8:29: "For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son...".

There are two great lines, or departments, of revelation given us in the Word of God throughout. One is that of the purpose of God eternally; the other is that which has to do with the whole scheme of redemption. These are two things, although now related. Originally there were not two things, but only one thing, for in God's eternal thoughts and intentions the scheme of redemption had no immediate place. While being eternal, and always living as much at the end as at the beginning, He would, because of His own omniscience, have that whole plan of redemption present. But it was simply to meet an emergency, and was not in the original purpose. To allow it a place in the original purpose means that you must allow the fall as being a part of God's purpose, and you must make sin a part of God's purpose. That we could never do. So that what we have through the Scriptures is the straight line of God's eternal thought, and then the hiatus, or shall we say the detour, the bend in the road, in which the whole redemptive plan is found. That bend strikes off from the eternal straight way, and comes back to it at the end, and is, therefore, only contributory to the purpose. It is something which has to be, because of something not intended having taken place.

It would seem that the greater part of the Scriptures are occupied with the bend, and it would also appear that primarily the straight line of God's first and supreme thought is revealed to us through the Apostle Paul. The magnificence, the glory of the revelation which came through that Apostle particularly is that of God's eternal thought. Paul is particularly used to bring us back into the counsels of God before times, before man, before, therefore, the fall, and to show us the straight line of God's thought unto its ultimate manifestation in realisation. Most else - not all, but most - has to do with the redemptive programme. But

when Paul does bring in his specific revelation, what he calls "My gospel" - and by that term he does not mean something that belonged to him, but something which came through him particularly - he knew that a specific and peculiar revelation was entrusted to him. When that does come in through the Apostle we are able with his key to unlock many doors in the Scriptures and so get the solution to much that is otherwise covered.

## GOD'S ETERNAL THOUGHT

The point for our present occupation is that of the eternal thought of God as here summed up in this remarkable clause, so far as man is concerned: "Whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son..." Christ, the image to which God eternally intended to conform man. That is our object, and that is what is before our eyes - Christ. Christ, as the image to which God is working. Of course, now we can clearly see the need for the redemptive programme, but before ever there was a fall, before ever sin entered, that was God's thought. It is not something which has come in later, a subsequent intention of God. This is the eternal thought which rides above all the course of fall, and sin, and ruin, and redemption - the master-thought of God.

Having that before us as the object, then, we are able to come to these Scriptures which we have before us, and find that they interpret a very great deal more for us. We have read in one fragment that Adam was a figure of Him that was to come. Now that does not mean that Adam was the image to which God intended to conform all Adam's race, not even unfallen Adam. A type is marked by contrasts, as well as similarities. All types bear those two marks. There are similarities between types and anti-types, but there are also differences, contrasts, and it is important to note the contrasts as well as the similarities. There are distinct contrasts between the first Adam and the last Adam as well as similarities. The first, "a living soul"; the last, "a life-giving spirit". There is an enormous gap between those two. That is a contrast; that is not a comparison. The first, "of the earth, earthy"; the last, "of heaven", heavenly. There again, you see, even in the presence of the type and the Anti-type, you have the most emphatic differences; while, on the other hand, there are quite obvious likenesses. We will come to that in a moment.

Let us stay with what we have just said about Adam not being the image to which God was working for the race. Adam was not the full image to which God intended to conform the race, not even the unfallen Adam. He was only God's thought potentially and probationally. Potentially: that means he was capable of being brought to God's full thought. He was made with the possibilities of being brought to the fullness of God's thought, that ultimate image of God's Son; but, it being merely and only potentially, it was governed by what was probational. And there was one word which governed the probation, and - like a peg upon which there has rested a greater weight of responsibility than any other peg in the history of this universe - that word is "obedience". It is well-nigh impossible for us to range and gauge the measure of responsibility bound up with that word "obedience". All the potentialities in Adam concerning God's full thought, the image of His Son, hung upon that one word. "By one man's disobedience"!

There is your type. But how the type fell short of the Anti-type: "Obedient unto death"! 'By one man's obedience'! What a difference! You are not surprised, when you have that simply stated, that God is so particular about obedience. You are not surprised that the whole of the Scriptures state that God will have utter and implicit obedience, and that He never waives obedience one hair's breadth, and that every act of disobedience is lifted into a realm where it is made something glaring. Disobedience is never covered up. Disobedience is brought out by God every time and put into a place where it is made to speak of the most terrible thing in God's sight. Think of some of the instances in the Scriptures!

Think of Moses, the man who had been through the forty years of discipline in the wilderness; the man who had for another forty years taken the weight, the burden, the strain of that great host; the man with whom it is said: 'God spake face to face as a man speaketh with his friend'. Think of all the close and intimate touch with God that Moses had, entering into the very cloud where God was, and hearing His voice. And then at last, over one act, having the one life-long ambition and desire of his heart forbidden him. He pleaded with God to let him go in, until God said: "Speak no more unto me of this matter... thou shalt not go over...". It seems so hard and cruel. This man has poured out his life so utterly for God, has stood in the breach again and again, and has upheld God's honour so continuously; and yet the one thing upon which his heart was always set was refused him because of one act. It was an act of disobedience. God must show what is His attitude toward that. For all time and in all subsequent generations the story must be told with bated breath that all may know the tragedy of disobedience. Moses is in a better 'Land of Promise' now, but he has ministered a terrible lesson in time.

Think of Achan. Only one wedge of gold, one Babylonish garment - there are plenty of others! A small thing in itself. Yes! But Achan, his wife, his children, his cattle, his tent, and all that pertained unto Achan has to be utterly destroyed IN THE SIGHT OF ALL ISRAEL! Why? One act of disobedience!

You see God's thought about it, God's estimate of it. And if that represents God's mind about disobedience, surely God's heart is, commensurately, at least, toward obedience. Later we shall see something more of the range and the power of obedience. We mention that here because it relates to that probation of Adam, and all the lost potentialities in him for the realization of God's ultimate thought. They were all frustrated, not only in Adam, but in Adam's race, by one act of disobedience.

We leave that for a moment while we just look at some of these comparisons and contrasts between the type and the Anti-type; between Adam and Christ; the first Adam, and the SECOND Man, the LAST Adam. We have noted, as to nature, the first, "a living soul", the last, "a life-giving spirit"; the first, "of the earth, earthy", the last, the second, "the Lord from heaven". Now let us check our thought there, and, if we are not so, make ourselves quite clear that it was not sin that made Adam what Paul calls, in 1 Corinthians 15, the 'soul man'. In that chapter, you remember, in speaking about the body, and the resurrection of the body, he says: "If there is a NATURAL body, there is also a SPIRITUAL body." We know that the word 'natural' there is the soul body, the soulical body. There is a soulical body, and there is a spiritual body. "That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural." The first, then, was the natural, but that is not the fallen Adam. That is Adam unfallen, which shows quite clearly that the type was less than the Anti-type and very different. It is unfallen Adam who has the soulical body. We have not soulical bodies because we are fallen man. We need to be very clear about that. We have soulical bodies simply because we are joined to Adam. When we become joined to Christ we have the germ of the spiritual body: "He that is joined to the Lord is one SPIRIT."

Adam, on the side of comparison or parallel, and not contrast, was the first among many brethren. He is called the first in relation to the creation. There were to be many more like him; there was to be a whole race conformed to his type, the Adam type. Unfallen Adam would produce after his kind; fallen Adam would produce after HIS kind, as it has proved. He was the first, then, of a race. In the same way the Lord Jesus is the Firstborn among many brethren. It is important in this connection to note an essential and fundamental difference. The Greek word for "Firstborn" has two meanings: 'priority' and 'primary'. 'Priority' just means the first of a line. 'Primary' means supreme, chief, above. Adam was a first; but Christ was more than that - He was supreme. That is the whole argument connected with Colossians 1:15. (See that Letter.)

In the Letter to the Hebrews the words are used: "Bringing many sons to glory." And then Scriptures are quoted concerning Him: "I and the children which God hath given me"; "I will declare thy name unto my brethren". That is the outworking of Isaiah 53: "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days." But this is spiritual after type, and that stands over against a query in Isaiah 53: "Who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken." "Cut off!" "Who shall declare his generation?" You see, he stepped into the place of Adam voluntarily, under judgment, condemnation, and His soul is made an offering for sin. And that ends the generation, and there will be no posterity in Christ to declare His generation. Who is to declare His generation? He will have no seed along that line. Let us say it reverently: Jesus was not married because He was - on the Adam-representation side - to have no posterity. It is only in resurrection that He has "children" and "sees his seed". When that happens He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days. There is another seed in Christ. In Christ the Adam seed is brought to an end, but in the same place, the Cross of the Lord Jesus, in the power of resurrection, a Christ-seed is brought in, and He is the Firstborn among many brethren, the Firstborn from among the dead. Adam was the first of the race which was according to HIM. Christ is the First of the race which is to be according to Him.

In Divine intention Adam was not only the first, but was to be the head of the race. That is something more than first. As head he was to occupy the place of authority, government, supremacy; the race was to be subject to him. I wonder if you have ever seen the inside of that little fragment in this Letter to the Hebrews! It is an extraordinary fragment. In speaking about Melchizedek and Abraham, it says that Levi paid tithes to Abraham, though Levi was still in the loins of Abraham when Abraham met Melchizedek. Now that is an extraordinary statement, but it contains a principle. It is this principle - that all the unborn race in Adam paid its tithe to Adam. You and I by nature are paying our tithe to Adam today. By one man's disobedience, by one trespass, the many are made sinners. And well we know it! We are paying to Adam today, and it is a costly thing. You see, he was head, he held that position of authority, that he should demand from the race yet unborn a recognition of his headship. The whole race is gathered up into that head, and that head stands over the race, and what that head is the race is, and the race cannot get away from Adam. You can never detach yourself from Adam by nature. You are tied to Adam, and you have got to pay your tribute to Adam. What he is, you are, and you have to recognize it. In nature the headship is perverted and false, but it is powerful.

The Lord Jesus is also Head of His race. He is "Head of every man", and He is given to be "Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body." But what a contrast comes in with the comparison! The comparison is headship; the contrast is in the kind of headship. None of us will mind paying tribute to the Lord Jesus. IN THE THOUGHT of God there was a race in the very loins of Christ from eternity; a spiritual seed. And that spiritual seed should, in Him, as its Head, pay tribute to Him; and those of us who are in Christ in His sovereign Headship should rejoice in it, and ought to pay Him what He requires. I trust we do! We owe Him everything! The natural man owes Adam a great deal, and he is paying Adam. But the spiritual man owes Christ everything as Head.

There you have your comparison and your contrast between the first Adam, and the last Adam.

#### THE SIGNIFICANT TITLE "SON OF MAN"

Now let us notice titles again for a moment. The Lord Jesus is called "Son of Man". That title carries with it one thought, which links the Adam race and the new creation in the eternal intention of God. It is a

wonderful thing to see what Christ represents, and His great representative title is "Son of Man". In that title He gathers up God's eternal thought as it is in the Adam race, as well as in the new creation. That is, it represents the continuity of humanity in Him. God's thought was humanity. "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" That relates to Adam in the first place. That first Scripture in Psalm 8 applies to Adam unfallen. When it is taken and quoted in the Hebrew Letter it is carried on to Christ, or carried into Christ. So that this thought, "Son of Man", embraced God's intention to have a humanity in charge. The literal translation, as we know, of those words is this: 'What is man that thou makest mention of him, or the son of man that thou puttest him in charge?' That is set over against this: "Not unto angels did he subject the inhabited earth to come, whereof we speak. But one hath somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou puttest him in charge?" Of what? "The inhabited earth to come, whereof we speak." That applied to, and was bound up with, Adam unfallen; he was put in charge. But God's thought has broken down in Adam, and there is to be another inhabited earth to come. And God's original thought is realized in Christ. But as it was collective in Adam, so it is collectively in Christ. It is not Adam as an isolated unit, but Adam's race in charge. It is not Christ as an isolated unit, it is Christ's race in charge. "Son of Man" is an inclusive term. While that is a general thought, there is that in this other title of the Lord Jesus which is specific and unique, "the second man". We must not be confused and talk about the second Adam. There is no second Adam; it is the last Adam, the second Man. That is uniqueness, something by itself. He is the Lord from heaven; God manifest in the flesh; the last Adam. That represents the deepest point of the contrast. There will be no more Adams after Him. Go through your Old Testament, and, if you can by any means mark the Hebrew words, you will see that the word "Adam" was a more or less general term for man. When it refers to man again and again it is simply the word "Adam", a general term. There is the other word, "ish", which means 'husband' or 'lord', or man in a specific sense, but very often it is the word "Adam" applied to any man. But when you speak about the last Adam, Christ comes into a unique place. There are no more Adams after that, Christ is the end; Christ marks a finish.

The "second man" represents a new order. The "last Adam" represents that that is the last order. The last order is the order of Christ. It is very blessed to realize that we need not fear any other order of man after Christ's order. He is the end of orders, because God realizes all His thought in Him, and there is no need to create any more. It is all realized in Christ as the "last Adam". That word "last" speaks of uniqueness, finality, conclusiveness in God's eternal thought.

Having made that more or less general and fragmentary survey, let us come back to the original thought of God bringing a humanity, a race, to the image of His Son. It was not in the eternal thought of God that Jesus Christ should be the Lamb of God slain. Although God in eternity knew what would be necessary, yet it was not part of the original plan, only provisionally. God's plan was straightforward; His Son the image, a race created and conformed to that image. And so God's Son in eternity represented God's thought for a race, and stood there in that position, in that capacity. Then man was disobedient, sin entered, there was the fall and all the consequences, and the Son of God voluntarily accepted a new capacity, and in a voluntary way, because of what had taken place, He emptied Himself, and was made "in the likeness of sinful flesh". Be sure of your terms! Not made in sinful flesh; He never was! But, "in the LIKENESS of sinful flesh". Found in fashion as a Man, He became OBEDIENT unto death, the death of the Cross. A new capacity to come down to that point where everything in God's thought had gone wrong on the question of OBEDIENCE, in order to bring it back into the straight line. And so the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus was a voluntary thing on His part, a thing which He accepted of Himself, and not as a part of God's eternal intention.

Now there enters this, which seems to be a necessary thing, that at some time or other, apart from any fall at all, a manifestation of the Son of God would have been necessary. If He were God's image for the race (leaving the fall out), and God was working in that race, with its potentialities, for that image, and that image developing, developing, developing, there had to come about a point at which a change took place, and the "living soul" was changed into the other kind, "a life-giving spirit", the natural changed to the spiritual. When does that take place? "When we see him we shall be like him." When He appears we shall be changed. In that hour of the trump this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible put on incorruption. It is at the end of the redemptive programme, just where the bend comes back to the straight road, where you again strike the main road of God's thought, that is the manifestation of Christ, our manifestation with Him, and the final change takes place. Conformity to the image of His Son in fullness, in finality; no longer the natural, but now the spiritual. So far as the body is concerned, that is the final touch. "That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural." So that the manifestation of the Son of God was essential sooner or later in the history of this world, to bring about that. His manifestation in flesh was for redemptive purposes. His manifestation in glory will be for consummative purposes.

To whom, and for whom, will He be manifested? For those in whom already there has been introduced that life which is His life, which is essentially spiritual, and has in it the power of conforming to His image. Fallen Adam was forbidden to touch that tree which represented life. It was guarded, protected. It is born-again man who receives that life. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." We who are born again have received the life of the Son, and that is operating in us. What is it doing? If it is having its way, and we are truly in fellowship with it; if we are OBEDIENT to it - which is only in another way saying, obedient to Him who is the life - conformity has already commenced. We have potentially become spiritual; we have received the Spirit. I use that word 'potentially' in the light of what is ultimate. What is ultimate is that the natural body will be changed for the spiritual body, the fullness of what is spiritual. That has commenced in the born-again ones. It is the power of His life, by which we are being conformed to His image.

The thing that rests with us - and which must be postponed for a later meditation - is how to live on the life of the Lord Jesus, with a view to being conformed to His image. What we have said is preliminary and very largely general. It is going over a good deal of ground in a general way.

Let us get the Lord Jesus, as God's great object and goal, before our eyes, and see that God's eternal thought is conformity to His image, and that He has now in Christ put into us that life eternal, and that we have not to struggle toward the image of Christ, to battle and wrestle for Christ-likeness; we have to be obedient to His life within us. Obedience carries conformity to His image.

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