

Creation

by T. Austin-Sparks

God is the God of order, and our restoration to His order is essential for spiritual health, life, and progress.

Scripture: Psalm 86:11, John 15:4, Romans 6:13, Ephesians 1:9, Hebrews 12:11

Topics: "Christology", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches about the importance of knowing God in Christ, emphasizing that all aspects of God's will and purpose are centered on knowing the Lord Jesus. He highlights that continuous growth and progress in the Christian life come from deepening our knowledge of Christ, which will be the secret of growth and progress in both time and eternity. The sermon delves into the relationship of Christ to the eternal heavenly order, showcasing how He embodies the principles of a heavenly order and how everything will be restored and perfected in unity through Him.

Transcript

We began these messages with a fresh contemplation of the greatness of Christ; and then we went on to remind ourselves that everything which has to do with the realization of God's purpose in creating man, and this world, and its universe, is a matter of knowing God in Christ, which, of course, means knowing Christ. Every aspect and detail of God's will and God's way and God's end is a matter of knowing the Lord Jesus. All progress, as all life, rests upon that - knowing Him. The Christian life here is meant to be one of continuous growth and development and progress, but that only takes place as we come to know more, and still more, of the meaning of the Lord Jesus. This progress will not stop when we leave this world, and when time gives place to eternity: "Of the increase of his kingdom there will be no end." Stagnation is no mark of life, and life there will be ever manifesting itself in new and more wonderful fulnesses and forms. Therefore, the knowledge of Christ which will, in time and eternity, be the secret of growth and progress, will continue in heaven, and it will take eternity to exhaust it. Well, that was our next thing - all growth, progress, fruitfulness, rest upon this growing knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

That brought us to this: Seeing He is so vast, so immense, so many-sided, we can only see Him from one standpoint at a time; we have to move round to see Him from every angle. And at this time we are just looking at the Lord Jesus from one of the many angles, or points of view, which is this particular aspect of His significance: that He, in His Person and in His work, stands related to an eternal, heavenly order. He Himself, in His wonderful, complex Person, is the very embodiment of all the principles and laws of a great heavenly order. When everything is conformed to Christ and takes its character from Him, it will be one

glorious, harmonious whole, perfected into one, just one glorious unity.

So that is what we are seeking to grasp at this time: the relationship of Christ to this eternal heavenly order. We have, of course, laid our foundation in the Word of God. We have allowed that to come to us in one marvellous statement through the apostle Paul that "in the fulness of the times - the fulness of the times - God has determined to gather together (or, re-gather together) all things in Christ". Seeing that the very word contains that idea of re-gather, it implies, if it does not declare, that there was a glorious order at one time when everything was as God meant it to be. All the sons of God shouted for joy as they beheld the marvel of His creation and His order. That word implies that that order has been lost, and in its place there has come disorder; and it declares that the order is going to be restored in Christ. That is the great significance of the Lord Jesus from this standpoint. We repeat: He personally is the embodiment of that; and His work is related to that.

That led us to the place where the great river of revelation divides into four.

God is the God of order

We dwelt a little while on the fact that God is the God of order, although it altogether defeats us, for it is so great and so full. This fact, of God being such, is revealed clearly, firstly, in His creative work; secondly, in the great representation that we have in type and symbol in the Old Testament; thirdly, in His redemptive work; fourthly, in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In all these four ways there is a wonderful revelation that God is a God of order.

Let us think for just a minute or two on the first of those - revealed in creation.

While, of course, we are confronted with so much in this present world and system which seems to shout disorder, derangement, discord and confusion, even in nature, there is still discernible in nature a wonderful background of an ordered system. That is something which has engaged men for their whole life, and is a marvellous universe itself of instruction and of fascination. Here is an extract from a big work by one of the most outstanding biologists. He writes thus:

"The hosts of living organisms are not random creatures. They can be classified into battalions and regiments. Neither are they isolated creatures, for every thread of life is intertwined with others in a complex web. This is one of the fundamental biological truths, the co-relationship of organisms in the web of life. No creature lives or dies to itself. There is no insulation in nature. One organism gets linked on to others, and becomes dependent upon them for the very continuance of its race. Flowers and insects are fitted together as hand in glove. When we learn something of the intricate give and take, supply and demand, action and reaction, between plants and animals, between flowers and insects, we begin to get a glimpse of a vast organization in the creation."

Well, take it for what it is worth. You will see that that gathers up into a few sentences something that is capable of tremendous enlargement. You see it everywhere. Behind this creation there is a mind that loves to have things properly ordered and related. Behind this creation there is a perfect, spiritual system. God is the God of order, and what is true in natural history is seen to be true everywhere else. God has arranged the year in seasons. He has arranged the co-operation of heaven and earth in that the heavenly bodies govern the movements of the earth, the tides; and so on.

We would not know where to stop if we were to allow ourselves to go on with this! There is one hymn in our hymn-book which begins: "The spacious firmament on high..." You notice that the conclusion of that hymn is: "It all declares a Mind Divine." Well, if we wanted to go on with this we do not need to go far away to the celestial bodies or to objects outside of ourselves. We have only to have a little intelligence about our own human bodies, and to see that the human body, in health, is a marvellous system of related, dependent, interdependent, co-operative functions, principles and elements. Anyone who really has any knowledge of the human body ought to be a great worshipper! It is a marvellous unity in diversity. It all speaks of this "hand in glove" principle, of one thing fitting into another in perfect harmony and symmetry. There is another side to that, I know, and I am going to speak about it presently.

We have done no more than stated a fact: that wherever you can trace the hand of God before the other hand comes upon it - either the hand of man or the hand of the devil - you find this beautiful harmony, this wonderful order.

We come to the Old Testament, and anyone familiar with it will not need an exhaustive proof of this great truth. In the Old Testament representations of God's mind we begin with Him bringing order out of chaos, for that is where everything begins. God, who is the God of order, reacts against this state of chaos, and His reaction issues in a remarkable and excellent order. And what is true as to God bringing order out of chaos where the earth is concerned is seen to be a principle that is working all through the Old Testament. You see it at work in a representative people - and here is the glory and the tragedy of Israel. The glory of Israel is that they were taken out of the nations to be the embodiment and the manifestation of a heavenly order on this earth, and the tragedy of Israel is that Israel has come to chaos. You see them in Egypt, and what was true in nature was true spiritually and morally of Israel in Egypt - chaos; no order; barrenness; frustration, confusion; hopelessness. Exodus is the book of emergence from all that, and they are not a rabble, a crowd of refugees going out into the wilderness. They are ordered, and ordered by their ranks. You can trace these marks as you read carefully. No, they are not just a mixed-up crowd, a disorderly crowd, running amok to get out of Egypt. See them marching like an army, in their serried ranks and their appointed order! It is order out of chaos. See them at Sinai, when God has given His pattern for their national life. Just take a look at one of those pictures that we have of Israel assembled around the tabernacle. And then, the order of the service. Leviticus is the book of the ordering of worship. And what a marvellous system that book is of the order of worship! It is not just that God said this, and that, and that is to be in the way of sacrifices and offerings and feasts; you will notice that there is an amazing sequence, an ordered sequence, and that need is supplied at every point. It is a progressive, ordered development of worship, of approach to God, under a specified and particularized government. That book of Leviticus is a wonderful book! You move into the book of Numbers, and the very name of the book indicates what it is all about. This is the book of the marchings through the wilderness, and everything is numbered, tabulated and ordered. I just indicate the details and you will pick them up.

Pass over the many years until you come to the temple, and this is one of the things that almost overwhelms you! The marvellous, meticulous order about this temple - every detail, every measurement; the size of everything; the place of everything; the material of everything. And what shall we say about the "courses of the singers" and the "courses of the priesthood" all in course round the clock. Everything is prescribed for. And when the Queen of Sheba came and looked at the order of the house there was no more breath left in her! That was the impressive thing. Everything here was so quietly, harmoniously and beautifully regulated. It all speaks of a mastermind, and that was God. He gave the pattern for that, and He gave the revelation. And although that was disrupted and the people went into captivity, passing

seventy years in exile, the return of the remnant, the rebuilding of the wall and of the house were again marked by this order. We have read and studied the book of Nehemiah from other standpoints and have perhaps not been impressed with the wonderful organization in it. You notice that one whole chapter is taken up with: "next unto him ... and next unto him ... " It is all arranged and ordered. It is, if you like, all organized. We can use that word in the Old Testament if we cannot in the New Testament. Nehemiah represents a master-organizer in the things of God. This is all under divine direction, and it all points to this: God is a God of order. We must be impressed with this, dear friends. It is not something to see objectively and historically. You and I have to be tremendously impressed with this and see that God is very particular about how things are done, what things are done, and who does these things, and also about the relationships that obtain amongst those who are employed. God is very particular, and, as we have said, this is not because He loves to have things "just so", but because He is made that way. We know quite well that real progress, real fruitfulness and real achievement demand order. If we come into a place that is all upside down, disturbed, with everything all over the place, we know that we have got a job on hand, and we begin by saying: "Well, we cannot do anything until we have got this straightened out." That is God: "We cannot get on until we have got it straightened out! We shall never get anywhere until things are put straight."

But I do not want just to be piling a lot of data upon you. It is of very vital spiritual consequence that we get it into us that God is particular, and He is not going to overlook anything, or bypass anything. He will have it so, or He will not have all that He desires. He will be patient; He will work; He will wait; He will do a lot to get it so; He may take years to get it so, but that will be our loss. If He could have it His way, He would get on with His job forthwith by having things according to His order. Frustration, delay, unfruitfulness, are always due to this absence of God's way of doing things, or of His object in doing things, or of what He wants done, or of the way in which He wants it done. Let us never deceive ourselves in false satisfaction because God gives some blessing!

That is perhaps enough by way of emphasizing the fact that God is the God of order. I have only opened a window to you through which you can see a universe.

We come to the next thing: the disruption and disorder. There is a sense in which the Bible throughout is occupied with the confronting of this long drawn-out, obdurate, incorrigible disorder, and with the evil forces that are behind it. You meet it everywhere - the dealing with interfering forces is found almost everywhere in the Bible. The Bible shows the source of this disruption and disorder. And we are all too aware of this disorder. Everywhere in this universe, in this creation, there is a disrupted order, a disorder. There is a great schism everywhere. That is true, is it not? Well, taking it that you agree that it is so, the Bible shows us where it came from, the range of it, the entrance of it into this world, its development in this world, its nature and its effects, and its main cause.

This disorder, the Bible shows us, began in heaven. It was a rebellion against God; and we know how it entered into this world. The first result was that man himself became a divided creature, a centre of civil war in his own nature. Man is, by nature, no longer a unity. He is himself a clash of two worlds. The Psalmist prays: "Unite my heart" (Psalm 86:11). "Unite my heart!" Our hearts are divided things. Man is a division, and he is himself a conflict. And when I speak of man, I am uniting the man and the woman, for with both of them this became true in themselves individually, and then, of course, it became true of them as two. The enemy sought to divide the husband and the wife - and he did it. He struck right home to that marvellous oneness. You see, the Scripture goes out of its way to describe and emphasize the oneness: "They shall be one flesh... the twain shall be one flesh." It has so much to say about that oneness of

husband and wife, but this disruptive influence and power came in and divided them. It is a real lesson! From the husband and the wife it reached to the family, and it is not long before you find the family disrupted. Cain and Abel - the one murdering the other, and destroying the family life. From the family, it reached out to embrace the whole race; and you know how the book of Genesis contains the story of racial disruption and confusion. This thing spread and it has become universal. The spirit of it is in the lower heavens: "The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" - it is in the air: "the prince of the power of the air"; you can breathe it and you can sense it in this world, the antagonism, hatred and malice, and much more like that. It has come right into the human life of the individual, and into human relationships, into the nearest two. It has come right into the family - and what a problem family life is now! And what a key it is to so much more! - until the race is shot through and through with this disrupting and dislocating spirit and power. Yes, it is here. We have seen where it came from, how it started, its range, its development, its nature and its effects - to set every man's hand against his brother.

Its main cause. This is something that we must stay with for a moment. Do remember that the Bible always regards this matter as a rebellion, for it is the spirit of rebellion. The more we know of our own natures under stress, under trial, under pressure, the more true we know this to be. Right in our constitution there is something that rebels, and would even rebel against God and His ways, would question His wisdom and His love. It is in us. And the seat of this rebellion is in man himself. He is a disrupted being, not only disrupted in his relationship with God, but disrupted in his own personality. Man is a divided creature in himself, for the spirit of rebellion came in. The word "iniquity", which is such a characteristic word of the Old Testament, has its roots in this very idea of rebellion. The real nature of this thing lies here - and perhaps we can illustrate this best by looking at the physical body, because those who know something about this - the laws of physical health and disease - tell us that it is all a matter of the environment of the living cells. This is a quotation: "It is the cell environment that is responsible for whatever disease affects the human body, either in the immediate environment of the cells, the presence of a poison, or the absence of some essential ingredient." All these millions of living cells are environed by this lymph stream, which provides what is necessary for their life. This lymph stream is their environment. If some poison gets into that stream, or if something essential to their life is lacking, then the living cells fall into disease, and the body in its whole order is upset. And sickness is only disorder, is it not? Now, I have taken this illustration, because God has written His spiritual laws in all His creation, and, I think, preeminently in the human body.

You see, all this disorder, and resultant sickness, all the pain and agony due to this disruption, are because man left his environment. God is man's true environment. In Him there is no darkness at all, and no poison. In Him is all that we need for our life and for our health. But man left his environment. He took himself out of his environment in God, and took his life into his own hands, to say what he would do and not do, what he would have and not have, He became a law unto himself, rebelling against God as his law and his environment. What happened? He entered into an environment of poison and of fatal lack of what is necessary to his very life. Salvation - which is the word for health - is a return into God. Hence Christ emphasized the need to "Abide in Me".

Now start again with that thought. You see, the whole Bible is about bringing man back to God, bringing him into God, and restoring him to his environment. "In Him we live and move and have our being" is the fundamental truth of the spiritual life. There is one thing I suggest to you, or hint at, which, if you grasp it, would be such a tremendous help to you. When the Lord says anything it may look on the face of it something very simple, and not at all profound and wonderful. But anything that comes from the Lord,

though it be apparently very simple, contains all the vast knowledge and understanding that the Lord has, and not to take account of that "simple" thing may bring you into a vast amount of trouble. When the Lord Jesus says: "Abide in Me" it sounds so simple and so ordinary, but it contains all this history, and this great principle and truth: "If you get out of your environment you are exposed to all the poisons and all that creates spiritual disease. Abide in Me for your health's sake! for your life's sake! for the sake of everything! Abide in Me, and I in you!" Have you got that? You look again at any seemingly "little" thing that the Lord says, and if you could see you would find that you have a universe of meaning in it.

Well, the main cause of all the disorder is getting out of your rightful sphere in God, and that is what happened at the beginning. The cure, as we shall see when we come to the redemptive work, is to get back into your place, into your cover, in God. Forsake your wandering, which is outside. Leave your independence, and come in.

Now, you see, this carries with it the whole matter of the absolute, undivided, unquestioned supremacy and sovereignty of God in and through Jesus Christ. Put that another way: the absolute surrender, yieldedness, un-questioning acceptance of the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ as Head. That is the way of life, the way of health, the way of fruitfulness, and the way of progress. And we know so well that frustration, limitation, arrest, barrenness are because there is still unyieldedness to Him in the life. Adam took things into his own hands and said: "I will be the lord of my life", and we are like that by nature. And I am afraid we have not got so far away from it in grace. We meet one another, and what do we meet? We meet a man and a woman who have got a mind of their own, a will of their own, and a way of their own, and will never be taught by you, or told by you, what they should do. Unteachable, stubborn, mulish, knowing best!

Let me close with this: Pain, all pain, is because of disorder. Pain is nature shouting: "There is something wrong!" It is true in the physical. You may kill pain. There are lots of things provided for killing pain, and I am afraid I am one who says: "Thank the Lord for that!" Nevertheless, no sensible person believes that the killing of pain is getting rid of the trouble. No, you may kill the pain and silence the cry, but the trouble that is there may work itself out in your death. The killing of the pain does not mean that you heal the disorder.

The world is trying to silence this cry of pain, to numb this ache, to kill it, and go on as though there is nothing wrong; but it is there. What is true in the physical is true in the spiritual. Pain in our spiritual life, in our corporate life, is the cry that there is something wrong, there is disorder somewhere, and things are not as the Lord intended them to be. There is a dislocation in the joints, there is a fracture in the fellowship, and there is a disease of sin in the Body. We cannot just take something to numb the pain, silence the cry, and go on as though it were all right. No, the thing will work itself out. We have got to stop and say: "What is it? Where is the disorder? Where are things wrong? What is it that is against God's mind?" Until we can get our hand upon that, there is no hope for clearing up the situation at all. That is the need. Remember that the Bible says that the end of the age will see disorder - rebellion - come to the full.

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