

Have We Fettered & Imprisoned

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores how human traditions and systems can imprison the Spirit, limiting true spiritual freedom and expression.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:5, Matthew 15:9, John 4:24, Acts 5:29, Romans 8:15, 2 Corinthians 3:6, Galatians 5:1, Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Hebrews 12:1-2

Topics: "Spiritual Freedom", "The Role of Tradition"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks addresses the historical tendency of Christianity to imprison the Spirit through human traditions and established forms, which often stifle the divine movement and limit spiritual growth. He emphasizes that while God gives visions with unlimited potential, these visions can quickly become constrained by human interpretations and organizations, leading to a loss of their original vitality. Sparks challenges listeners to reflect on their spiritual journeys, questioning whether they are bound by systems or truly led by the Spirit. He warns that the letter of the law can kill the Spirit, urging believers to maintain a direct connection to the source of life. Ultimately, he calls for a rebellion against unspiritual restrictions to embrace the true freedom of the Spirit.

Transcript

From the latter days of the Apostles till now, the history of Christianity is a history of prisons. This history is not of literal or material prisons, though there have been not a few of these. It is a history of prisons, which are the result of man's long established habit of bringing the Spirit into bondage.

How many times has the Spirit broken loose and moved in a new and free way only to have that way brought under man's control and crystallized into another form, creed, organization, denomination, sect, order, community, or the like! The invariable result has been that the Spirit's free movement and life has been cramped or even killed by the prison of the framework into which He has been drawn or forced.

Have I Fettered the Spirit's Fire with Religious Tradition?

Every time we seek to express something divine in word or form, we at once limit it. When that expression or form becomes the established and recognized formula, we have, in effect, put fetters on the Spirit. God gives a vision, and every God-given vision has unlimited potential and possibilities. But all too soon the vision is laid hold of by men who never received it by the Spirit. Then the grapes of Eschol turn to raisins in their hands. So very many of the living fruits of the heavenly country have suffered in this way and become

dried, shrunken, and unctionless shadows of their early glory.

Successors, sponsors, or adherents build an earthly organization on a living movement of the Spirit, born with fire in the heart of some prophet. They imprison the vision in a tradition. A message becomes a creed; a heavenly vision becomes an earthly institution; a movement of the Spirit becomes a work, which must be kept going by the steam of human energy and maintained by man's resourcefulness.

Any real (or seeming) departure or diversion from the recognized and traditional order of creed or practice will sooner or later become heresy, to be violently suspected, repressed, and cast out. What was, at its beginning, a spiritual energy-producing a living organism, expressing something that God really wanted and to which He gave birth has too often become something which the next generation has to sustain and struggle hard at to keep going. The thing has developed a self-interest, and it will go hard with anyone or anything interfering or seeming to interfere with it. The Spirit has become the prisoner of the institution or system, and as a result the people become limited spiritually.

How Did I Get Where I Am?

Why is all this so true, resulting in strain, divisions, jealousies, rivalries, and often deception? If there is any remedy, what is it? The answer is to be found in an honest and fundamental question: Why am I where I am? Did I enter into something objectively? Was it something already formed, presented to me with an appeal, an argument, a need? Was it real at all? Or did the Spirit open the eyes of my heart and give me a heavenly vision, which on one side made me cry, "Woe is me," and on the other, "Here am I"? Was it a life-crisis? Did I take up a teaching, a complexion of truth, a work, an enterprise? Was I at the very source of life? Was it a definite and overpowering apprehending from heaven? Is my position that of a relationship to something from which I can resign? In a word, is my imprisonment that of a system or order of an outward kind? Or am I the bond-slave of the Spirit?

The Apostle Paul, in particular, shows that the former bondage or imprisonment can even be what he calls "the letter." In this sense, the Bible can be death ("the letter killeth"-2 Cor. 3:6). Not that we can have the Spirit and the life without the Word, but it can most certainly be the other way around. For we can definitely have the Word without the Spirit and the life.

What Will it Cost Me to Move Forward?

It is seriously important that everything, including us be kept continuously in touch with the original source of life. Succession and continuation is not ecclesiastical, traditional, or of human choice and decision. Continuation is certainly not policy, nor expediency, nor fear. Continuation is anointing-the anointed eye, ear, hand, and foot. It is a fire in the bones, not the obligations of a profession, association, or idea.

The Spirit must have initiated our course and position. All along the way the Spirit must be referred to and deferred to. In anything in which the Spirit may have His liberties limited, the Spirit will be a rebel. And if He is in us, He will make us to rebel against unspiritual restrictions. This does not for a moment mean that all rebellion and the bid for what is called liberty is of the Spirit. It just means that in the realm of nature we are broken people, robbed of a power to fight for our own conceptions.

So it becomes simply an issue of imprisonment either to the Spirit or to something else. It must be at the greatest cost, and because the Spirit has done a deep and drastic thing in us, "Here am I; I can do no other. So help me God."

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