

In His Letter to the Galatians

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the significance of the gospel and the transformative power of Christ living within believers, emphasizing freedom from the Law through grace.

Scripture: Galatians 1:11, Galatians 2:20

Topics: "Freedom in Christ", "Indwelling Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the core message of Paul's letter to the Galatians, focusing on the phrase 'the gospel which I preach.' He highlights the intense conflict between Paul and the Judaizers, who insisted on adhering to the Law of Moses, while Paul argues for the freedom found in Christ. The essence of the gospel, according to Paul, is the indwelling of Christ within believers, which transforms their lives and empowers them to fulfill God's will. Sparks stresses that true Christianity is not merely about freedom from the Law but about living in the reality of Christ's presence and power within us. This understanding of the gospel is vital for Christians to experience true liberty and a new disposition aligned with God's desires.

Transcript

We now pass into the letter to the Galatians, where we actually have the phrase which is basic to this consideration - "the gospel which I preach". The phrase is found in the second chapter and the second verse, and in another form in chapter one, verse eleven - "the gospel which was preached by me". We have noted how many times this word 'gospel' occurs in the letters of Paul. The word is sprinkled through his letters, indicating by the frequency of its occurrence that that, after all, is what he is really writing about. The same thing is true in this brief letter to the Galatians. In the noun form - that is, where the whole body of Christian truth is called 'the gospel' - it occurs in this letter eight times; and then in the verb form - which cannot be translated into English correctly, that is, 'to gospel' or 'to good news', translated for our convenience into English as 'preach', 'preach the gospel', 'bring good tidings', and so on, but just one word in the original - in the verb form it is found in this letter six times: so that we have here fourteen occurrences in a very brief letter.

Now, if we could reconstruct the situation presented by this letter, or come upon it in actual reality, what should we find? Supposing that the situation represented here existed in some place today, and we visited that place where this thing was going on, what should we come upon? Well, we should find a tremendous controversy in progress, with three parties involved. On the one hand, we should find a group of men who

are extremely and bitterly anti-Paul. On the other hand, we should find Paul roused and stirred to the very depths of his being, as we never find him in any other place in his writings or in his journeys. And, in between these two parties, there would be the Christians who are the immediate occasion of this tremendous battle that is going on. Very much bigger issues than the local and the occasional are involved, because it is a matter of the far-reaching and abiding nature of the gospel. Now Paul, in the battle, is committing himself to a re-statement of 'the gospel which he preached', over against these who were seeking to undermine, neutralise and destroy his ministry altogether. What was it all about?

Well, first of all, take the anti-Paul party. What is their trouble? What is it that they are seeking to establish? In brief, in a word, their object is to establish the old, Jewish, religious tradition. They are standing vehemently for the permanence of that system. They are arguing that it came directly from God, and what comes directly from God cannot be changed or set aside. This thing has the support of antiquity. It is the thing which has obtained and has existed for many centuries, and therefore it carries the value of being something that is not, like Paul's teaching, something quite new. It is established in the ages of the past. They would go further, and say that Jesus did not abrogate the law of Moses: He said nothing about the law of Moses being set aside. Well, there is all this argument, and much else besides. Their position is that Judaism, the Law of Moses, is binding upon Christians. 'Be Christians, if you like, but you must add to your Christian faith the Law of Moses, and you must come under the government of all the Thou Shalts and Thou Shalt Nots of that tradition and that system; you must conform to the teachings and the practices of the Jewish system, of the tradition of Moses.' That is their position in brief.

On the other hand, there is Paul. He is no stranger to Moses, no stranger to the Jewish system. Born, bred, brought up, trained and very thoroughly taught in it all, nevertheless here he is found directly and positively opposed to their position. He argues that the Law was given by God indeed, but it was only given by God to show up man's weakness. The real value and effect of the Law is to show what man is like - that he just cannot keep it. How hopeless man is in the presence of God's demands! How helpless he is before this whole system of commandments - Thou Shalt and Thou Shalt Not! And though Christ did not abrogate the Law, set it aside, and say, 'That is all finished', Christ in Himself was the only One, the only One amongst all human beings that ever walked this earth, who could keep it; and He did keep it. He satisfied God in every detail of the Divine Law; and, having satisfied God and fulfilled the Law, He introduced and constituted another basis of relationship with God, and, thus the Law is in that way set aside. Another foundation of life with God is brought in by Jesus Christ.

That is Paul's argument in brief. Of course, there are many details in it, but Paul comes to the opposite conclusion to that which these Judaizers had reached. The Mosaic law is no longer binding upon Christians in the way in which it was binding upon the Jews. The argument of Paul is that in Christ we are freed from the Law. The great word in this letter is liberty in relation to the Law.

From the strong terms used in this letter we can gather how intense are the feelings of those concerned. Of course, these Judaizers are very, very strong. They have pursued Paul wherever he has gone. They have sought by every means, by personal attack and by argument and persuasion, to undo his work and to lead away his converts from him and bring them back to Moses. Paul is found here, as I have said, in a state of perfect vehemence. This Paul, so capable of forbearance and longsuffering and patience, as we saw in our last chapter in the case of the Corinthians, where every kind of provocation to anger was met by him - the wonderful, wonderful patience and forbearance of Paul with those people - yet here the man seems to have become stripped of all such forbearance: here he is literally hurling anathemas at these men. Twice over, with a double emphasis, he says, "Let him be anathema... so say I now again, Let him

be anathema" - accursed.

Now, when Paul gets like that, there must be something involved. For a man like Paul to be worked up in that way, you must conclude that there is something serious on hand. And indeed there is, and this very heat of the Apostle indicates how serious was the difference between these two positions.

The Answer to the Situation

Now, in the letter we may feel that there is much mysterious material. For instance, in drawing upon Old Testament types, Paul uses as an allegory the incident of Hagar and Ishmael. We know the details; we are not going into that at all. There seems to be a lot of mysterious material that Paul is using for his argument. But when we have read it all through and considered it and felt the impact of it, what does it all amount to? When we have studied this and been impressed with its seriousness, what is it that we are left with? Is it just a conclusion about legalism - that the Law no longer holds us in bondage, and we are freed from it? Is it that a dispensation of liberty in that respect has been introduced, and that its principles are no longer binding upon us? Is that just the position? Is it that Christianity is something without obligations as to truth and as to practice? Is it that grace will override all our breaking of laws and violating of principles? - a false interpretation of grace indeed! - but is it that? What is it?

You see, it is possible to grasp very truly the value of a letter like this, but for it to remain, after all, just a theological matter, a mere matter of doctrine. Yes, the letter to the Galatians teaches that we are no longer under the Law of Moses, and that we are free as children of God. Very nice, very beautiful! But where is that going to lead you? What does it amount to? All that is negative.

I wonder - and this is the whole point just now - I wonder how many of us are really living in the enjoyment of the secret and heart of the gospel, as it is presented in this letter. Paul is saying much here about the gospel or the good tidings. What really is the gospel, or the good tidings, as found here in this letter and in this particular connection? After all, it is not just that Christians want to be 'libertised' - freed from all restraints, from all bondage and all obligations, just to do as they like, follow their own inclinations. That is not it at all. You and I want to know something more positive than that. We cannot be satisfied with mere negatives.

Christ Within

What does the gospel amount to here? Paul says, 'This is the gospel'. It is summarised in one fragment of this letter, a very well-known passage of Scripture, at which we all rejoice - Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me". This is the gospel, the good tidings, of the indwelling Christ. This is the heart of the whole matter, this is the answer to the whole argument, this settles all the questions, this deals with all the difficulties - the gospel, the good news, of the indwelling Christ.

And, when you think of it, this is the most vital and fundamental factor in Christianity. No wonder Paul saw that, if this was sacrificed, Christianity went for nothing: the Judaizers had carried everything away; Christianity had become of no meaning at all. He was fighting, therefore, for Christianity on one point only - but one which included the whole. The whole was wrapped up and bound up with this: "Christ liveth in me". If that is true, you do not need to argue about anything at all; all the argument is settled.

"Christ liveth in me". Christ! What is Christ? Who is Christ? What does Christ mean? What does He embody? Why, everything that satisfies God is found in Christ! In His Son Jesus Christ, God has His full, final, complete answer. Christ can stand up to every demand of God, and has done so. Christ can bring the full and complete favour of God wherever He is. Oh, we could stay long with that - what Christ is, how great Christ is, how wonderful Christ is! And "Christ liveth in me"! Christ, that Christ of the eternal glory, that Christ of the self-emptying, humiliation, that Christ of the triumphant life, that Christ of the mighty Cross, of the resurrection, of the return to glory, and of the enthronement now, is in you and in me! What more can we want - what more could we have - what greater thing than that?

The Power of Christ Within

Now Christ is an actual, living Person: not an abstract idea, an historical figure, but an actual, living Person. "Christ liveth in me". I do not wear a crucifix of a dead Christ on the outside. I have a living Christ within, the good news of a living Christ inside. You can read that, or hear it said, and you can nod your head and say, 'Yes, Amen': you agree with that! But I have known people to hear that for years, and agree with it as heartily as you do - and then one day to wake up to it. 'You know, after all I have heard about that, I have only just come to realise that it is true that Christ really lives in me!' It is something more than the doctrine of Christ within - it is the experience.

Paul focuses his whole history as a Christian and as a servant of God upon that one thing. 'God has shined in my heart' (2 Cor. 4:6). 'It pleased God, who separated me from my birth, to reveal His Son in me' (Gal. 1:15,16). 'The gospel which I preached was not of man', "but... through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11,12). How did it come? Not only objectively and outwardly, but inwardly. 'God has shined within'. "Christ liveth in me". The most startling thing that ever happened to a man in the course of human history was that which happened to Saul of Tarsus on that noonday when he realised that Jesus of Nazareth, who he thought was done with, dead and buried, was alive, alive, actually alive. Remember how very alive He was. And Paul says: 'That One liveth - and not only in the glory - He liveth in me, in me!' A living Person, a living actual power within, yes, a real power inside, is Christ.

The Intelligence of Christ Within

Furthermore, He is a real Intelligence, who possesses the full knowledge of all that God wants, and, possessing that, dwelling within me, is the repository and vehicle of God's full will for my life. Full intelligence by Christ within! All the knowledge that Christ possesses is within, and if that is true, if Christ is within - the Apostle, of course, is speaking here not only about Christ within, but much about the Holy Spirit, to which we will come presently - if the indwelling Christ has His way, then that which He is becomes actual in the life of the child of God: the fact that He is a living Person, the fact that He is a mighty power, the fact that He is a full, Divine Intelligence.

Christ Within the Knowledge of the Will of God

We would like to have all understanding in our mind, all knowledge and intelligence in our reason. We have not got it, but we have another kind of intelligence. The true child of God has another kind of intelligence, altogether different from that which is of the reason. We do not know how to explain and interpret it, but somehow we know. We can only say, 'We know'. We know what the Lord does not want where we are concerned. We find it impossible to be comfortable along any line that the Lord does not want, and we come to that position so often. We put it in different ways, but we have to say, 'I know the Lord does not want me to do that, to go that way; it is as deep in me as anything. To do it would be to

violate something that relates to my very life with God.'

That is on the negative side. And on the positive, if the Lord really wants something, we know it; in spite of everything, we know it. If only we will wait for that, it will be so sure. The trouble is that we cannot wait for the Lord; we get into such tangles over these problems of guidance. But when the Lord's time comes, there is no question about it at all: we know. How do we know? It is spiritual knowledge, it is spiritual intelligence. It is Christ dwelling within, in possession of all the mind of God.

Now, here are these poor Galatian Christians, torn between the Judaizers and Paul. They do not know what to make of this. These, on the one side, are so strong about their line of things; and on the other hand, here is Paul, saying that they are all wrong! What are they to do? The answer comes: 'If Christ is in you, you will know - you will know what you ought to do'. And that is the only real way of knowing what you ought to do - what is right, and what is wrong. Christ in you. But you will know.

Christ Within the Power of Endurance

Now you say, 'I have not realised that, I do not feel that, I do not see that; I have not got all that intelligence, I do not sense all that power'. You see, as Paul is always trying to point out, there is such a great difference between the human kind of knowledge and spiritual knowledge. We have knowledge of this kind, not by information, but by experience.

Some of us have been on the Christian way for many years. If it had been left to us, should we be still going on with the Lord? If we had had to carry on, struggle through, fight it out, on our own resources, should we still be here? I think I can say for you as for myself, Certainly not! We would not be here today; we should not be rejoicing in the Lord, going on with the Lord. If Satan could have had his way, we should not be here, for both in ourselves and in Satan we have found every conceivable thing inimical to Christ, to make it impossible for us to go on with the Lord. Everything in our own selves is against us spiritually. Everything in Satan is up against us, and everything that he can use is thrown into the battle for our undoing.

But we are here, and that is the proof that Christ in us is a living power, and it is found - though not yet in fulness - in experience, in fact, and not just in our sensing it. We would like to have the sensations of this great power, to feel it; but no, there is often the hiding of His power, and it only comes out in facts - often in quite long-term facts.

The Disposition of Christ Within

Power, intelligence, knowledge: and then disposition. This is one of the realities of the Christian life. When Christ is within, we have a different disposition altogether. We are disposed to new things, disposed in new ways. Yes, our disposition has changed. The things which we once found to be our life no longer draw us to them. We are not disposed to them any longer. This is the world's problem with the Christian: 'Why do you not do this, that and the other?' And the only answer we can give, but which never satisfies them, is, 'I have lost all disposition for that sort of thing: I am no longer disposed that way: I have a disposition in another direction altogether.' It is like that: another disposition - Christ within. That is Christianity!

You see, Moses says, 'You have got to do this, and you have got to do that, and you must not do this, and you must not do that'; and my disposition is altogether against Moses. Moses says, 'You must do this' - I

do not want to do it; it may be quite right, it may have come from God, but I just do not find it in my nature, in my disposition, to do it. Moses said, 'I must not do this', and my disposition says, 'I want to do that - that is just the very thing that I do want to do!' Somehow or other, in myself I am just across God in every way.

What is the solution to the Law? Christ in you. If Christ is in you, then you will be disposed to do what God wants you to do, and you will fulfil the Law. If Christ is in you, you will have no disposition for doing what God does not want you to do, and you will again fulfil the Law. But, you see, you fulfil it on another basis altogether. You fulfil it, not because Moses said it, but because Christ is in you; not because you must, but because Christ gives you another disposition. This is the gospel, the good news, of the indwelling Christ.

The Work of the Holy Spirit Within

Now, when you turn to the teaching about the Holy Spirit in this letter, you find that it comes to the same thing. Christ in you is the Holy Spirit's standard and He is working in you on the basis of the indwelling Christ to bring you into line with Christ, to build you up according to the Christ who is in you. The Holy Spirit is the energy of Christ within, the energy to make us Christ-like, to enable us to be like Christ, and therefore to be fulfillers of everything that is right in the sight of God, and shunners of everything that is not right in the sight of God. There is an energy by the Holy Spirit to do this.

The Apostle speaks about the fruit of the Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22,23). The Spirit, you see, is inside, and He is the Spirit of Christ within to cause that the fruits of Christ shall be borne in us, or, shall we say, the fruit of Christ which shows itself in all these many ways. The fruit of Christ is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control", the fruit of the mighty energy of the Spirit of Christ within.

And what about law? Yes, the Spirit works according to law. Before he is through, the Apostle says that tremendous thing, that terrible thing: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7,8). The law of the Spirit, you see, is this. Sow, and you reap; what you sow, you reap. Sow to the Spirit, and you reap life everlasting. If you sow to the Spirit - that is only saying, in figurative language, If you conform to the Spirit's energy, the Spirit's law, the Spirit's government, or to Christ in you - you will reap Christ, you will reap life. There is a law here, and 'free from the Law' does not mean that we are set free from any necessity for recognising that God has constituted His universe, our bodies and souls, upon principles; but it does mean this, that Christ in us makes it possible for us to obey the principles, whereas otherwise we should be violating them all the time.

"The gospel which I preach", says Paul: 'after all, it amounts to this - after all your arguments about legalism and Judaizers and the rest, it amounts to this: - "Christ liveth in me".' That is good news, that is hope - everything is possible!

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