

Man's High Prospect and Destiny

by T. Austin-Sparks

Man's high prospect and destiny require a certain type or species of being, and distinguishing between soul and spirit is crucial for spiritual growth and effectiveness.

Scripture: Psalm 8:4, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 14:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 2:5

Topics: "Human Destiny", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the profound question 'What is Man?' posed in Psalms 8:4-6 and Hebrews 2:5-8, exploring the Divine destiny of humanity and the disruption caused by sin. He emphasizes the need for man to be transformed into a new creation with faculties for a higher order, highlighting the importance of distinguishing between the soul and spirit for spiritual growth and maturity. The sermon addresses the failure of many to recognize the vital difference between soul and spirit, attributing it to the influence of pagan philosophers and Christian Fathers, ultimately calling for a deeper understanding of man's unique composition as spirit and soul.

Transcript

"What is Man?" Psalm 8:4-6. - Hebrews 2:5-8.

That nocturnal meditation and contemplation of the Psalmist, which led him to ask this question and to answer it by placing man at the centre of the universe, has bounded all the ages, gone back to the eternal counsels of the Godhead before the world was, and passed on to the consummation of those counsels in the inhabited earth to come, and beyond it. It is a question as to the Divinely conceived destiny of a specific creation called Man. Those thoughts had phases: "For a little while lower than the angels"; crowned "with glory and honour"; "to have dominion over the works of thy hands". The question of the Psalmist is taken up and enlarged upon by an inspired Apostle . "Not unto angels did he subject the inhabited earth to come ". "Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet".

But between the Divine conception and its ultimate realization there is all the tragedy of human disruption, and all the glory of Divine grace in redemption. What is before us here is to say something of the nature of that disruption as to man's own being, and therefore to see what conformity to the image of God's Son means as to the overcoming of that disrupted state. It is the question of man's own person, and what kind of person can alone inherit the kingdom of God.

For such a high and glorious destiny not only a spiritual or moral state is required, but a certain type or species of being. As the crawling caterpillar or silkworm has to spin its shroud and yield that form of life in order to awaken in a new order, break through into a new world as a beautiful moth or butterfly, so has man now to pass out of one order and be constituted anew with faculties and capacities for a higher. Man, according to God's mind, and according to a dim and intangible sense in himself, is of a universal character, with universal interests. But something has happened which, on the one hand, makes the realization of God's intentions impossible in man as he now is, and on the other hand, causes man to persist in a vain effort to achieve such realization. This terrible contradiction of things at the centre of the universe is the occasion of a new intervention on the part of God in the person of His Son. This intervention has several features. It shows what a man is according to God's mind; it secures the removal of the man that is not so according to God; it brings in the powers and constituents of a new creation; and it reveals and secures what man will be when he reaches the mature form which was ever in God's mind as the end and not the mere creation state of even unfallen man. As we see it, this all hangs upon the setting right of derangement in the nature of man whereby his living and full relationship with God is renewed. This, in the main relates to one part of his being called the pneuma or spirit, and it is here that we therefore need to have enlightenment.

An All-Important Distinction

On two occasions in his writings the Apostle Paul used a phrase which is of peculiarly important application to the subject which is before us. It is found in his letters to the Romans (2:18) and the Philippians (1:10), and the marginal rendering is

"distinguish the things that differ".

We cannot but feel that a very great deal of loss would have been prevented, and gain would have been secured, if that distinguishing had been applied to the matter of soul and spirit. This is no matter of merely technical interest to Bible students, but one which involves and touches the spiritual life of God's people at almost every point, and governs the whole question of life and death in spiritual things. There are few things more vital to fullness of life and effectiveness of service than this. It embraces so very much of the meaning of the redemptive purpose of God in and by the Cross of Christ. Many of the most perplexing problems which have pressed upon the Lord's people and servants through the years have their solution here. We might just mention one or two of these.

Firstly, there is the essential and basic difference between the New Creation and the Old with which there is bound up that heart-breaking problem of totally or largely unsatisfactory conversions: converts who seem to have given evidence of the big change over, but who--all too early--reveal symptoms that the really radical, regenerative, work is doubtful. This includes that heart-burning enquiry concerning the large numbers who make a profession under all the peculiarly favourable (?) conditions and provisions of well organized and advertised evangelistic missions, and of whom so great a proportion either drop back soon after the mission is over, or are untraceable, or are only kept by a ceaseless provision of evangelistic hot air and high tension atmosphere. It is said of one city in Great Britain, that every second man you may meet has at some time been 'converted', although now, of course, the great majority have nothing to do with such things. This, surely, in turn raises other questions as to what may be God's ways and means in the realm of evangelistic activity, and what are men's.

Then there is the difficult problem of the very slow spiritual growth of those who really have received Christ. That spiritual maturity is a life-long matter is not doubted, but we are thinking of unduly delayed growth, with all the long-continued features of childhood or even of childishness. This is a matter deeply deplored by the writers of the New Testament letters, and, indeed, represents the main occasion of the mass of the New Testament itself. In the letter to the Thessalonians (the earliest of Paul's letters) the distinction between soul and spirit is just stated without discussion or explanation (1 Thess 5:23). The letters to the Corinthians can be said to centre in the same matter, when we remember that "natural" in chapter 2 verse 14 is really "soulical" and then that there is so much about the "spiritual" and "the spirituals", i.e. spiritual gifts. In the letter to the Hebrews, again, the whole subject matter is to be viewed in the light of "dividing asunder of soul and spirit" and "the Father of our spirits". In every case it is a question of spiritual progress or arrested progress.

There are many other questions, such as that of the small degree of real and genuine spiritual value resultant from so great and so long-continued an output of energy, devotion and resource. And what of that realm of the prosperity and success of spurious and ultimately harmful spiritual movements? Then the whole question of deception has to be seriously faced. The deception of Christians so that they are either led completely astray, or get into some state which renders them non-effectives in the work of God and, often, a positive denial of the very foundations of faith--this is, indeed, a branch of things which cannot be ignored, neither can every such case be wholly a matter for the medical expert.

To the above, many more spiritual difficulties could be added, and some of them will be mentioned and dealt with as we proceed. While each may have more than one explanation because of peculiar governing factors--and no one will think that we are claiming to have found the cause and cure of all woes--we do believe that the failure to discriminate in the matter of soul and spirit accounts for more of these conditions than has been recognized by the vast majority of the Lord's people. Having indicated the importance of this consideration, let us get nearer to the actual matter.

Whence This Blindness?

If all these--and many more--sorry conditions are largely due to a failure to recognize a vital difference, we must ask why it is that the failure has been so general. Of course, when we are seeking to trace spiritual deflection we shall always reach back at once to its source. As the one who has ever desired to spoil God's work and to frustrate God's purpose, Satan would find very great gain in hiding this, and in keeping God's people in ignorance as to so important a truth. This he has certainly done; hence the prayer of Paul: "having the eyes of your heart enlightened". But Satan has ways and means, and we must recognize these in order to be delivered from the evil one as well as from the evil. So we begin at the end.

The Generally Accepted Position

As to the being of man, the well-nigh universal position is that he is mind and matter, soul and body. Even in those directions where Christians would accept the Bible phraseology--"spirit, soul, and body"--either an inability to recognize the tremendous issues bound up with this threefold designation, or a fatal carelessness, results in a going on as though the differences were not there. But there are other and more positive factors to be taken into account.

The teachers of God's people have failed! Why have they failed? Primarily because they have not taken God's Word and definitely sought the enlightenment and teaching of the Holy Spirit direct. Or may it be that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as Teacher has not been a reality in so many cases?

There may be a third explanation. Is it because of fear of appearing unusual, singular, peculiar in running counter to so widely an accepted position? This leads us to ask: Whence this position? Is it of heaven or of men? Note the scriptural alternatives.

There are two quarters responsible for the present position and acceptance. Consciously or unconsciously, certain pagan philosophers or 'Christian Fathers' have influenced the whole course of interpretation in this matter. So far as psychologists go, their basic conclusions are pagan. The two who laid these foundations were Plato and Aristotle. We are not stating the teaching of these, and while we recognize that Aristotle could more easily be reconciled with the Biblical position (although still with considerable maneuvering) yet we want to point out with emphasis that neither of these had a Bible in hand, nor did they know anything of a basic experience by which, through the Holy Spirit, the inner man is renewed and enlightened. Theirs was only the light of natural reason, the wisdom of this world, and only suitable for a realm of its own kind.

Then as to the 'Christian Fathers', Augustine and others. They, in turn, flirted with the teaching of the said pagan philosophers, and came under their influence. If we could accept the infallibility of these 'Fathers' on some other more obvious matters, we might modify our attitude as to their position on this so much less patent issue; but we cannot! The 'Fathers' of the Church would have acted wisely if they had kept clear of the entangling alliance with Platonism, which seemed to offer at first such advantages. Now, the position is, that to be a teacher of God's people demands some understanding of man, especially of what he is and what his purpose is. For such a knowledge, either in the schools or in private study, the works of psychologists have been taken up. All of these are built up on the aforesaid pagan foundation. Of course, things have travelled a long way since Plato's days, and there is a whole world of research and experimentation extra to those pioneers; but--again--the basic formula is unchanged; man is said to be dual--mind and matter, soul and body. It may be that in some Bible institutes the more Biblical interpretation is taught, but how necessary it is that it should come as a revelation and not merely as a subject. It seems to us a crying shame that this matter has not been recognized as to its tremendous and far-reaching consequences. It is difficult to attend a convention of the most spiritual order, or find some special effort for God, without perceiving the governing influence--all unconscious--of the psychology which is not of the Word of God. What tremendous things would happen--though perhaps unseen (much safer so)--if influences were spiritual rather than soulical!

But what a change in the standard of values is necessary to let go the seen for the unseen, the present for the eternal, the earthly for the heavenly and the 'successful' for the real!

The Position as in the Word of God, A Comparison

The phrase "the hidden man" is but one expression used in connection with this subject. But let it be seen at once to discriminate between the 'inner' and the 'outward' man in a different sense from what is meant apart from the Scriptures. It is not the discrimination of the psychologists or philosophers as such, whether they be ancient or modern, pagan or Christian. For them the 'inward man' is the soul, and the 'outward man' the body. Not so in the Word of God. There the "inward" or "hidden" man is the spirit, and the "outward" man the soul or body, either or both. These two terms or designations are respectively synonymous with "spiritual man" and "natural man", and these two are capable of being divided asunder by the sword of the Spirit--the Word of God. It is as dangerous to make one what God calls two as it is to put asunder what God makes one. The only oneness of the three--spirit, soul, and body--is that they compose or comprise one man. The literal translation of 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is, "your whole person", or

"your whole man", or "the whole of you, spirit, soul, and body"; and three distinct words in the Greek are used, as elsewhere. The Spirit of God does not use words at random, just for variety's sake. Basic spiritual principles are involved in words used by God. The very word 'natural', as applied to man, as we know, is the Greek word *psukikos*, the Anglicised form of which is *psychical*. 'Spiritual' is the adjective of 'spirit', and 'soulish' or 'soulical' the adjective of 'soul'. In James 3:15, "sensual" is used, but "soulical" is more accurate, and it is interesting and significant to note in passing, that in that Scripture there are two descriptions of wisdom.

Man Unique in Creation

That which makes man unique in the whole realm of creation is not that he is or has a soul, but that he has a spirit and a soul; and it may be that the union in one person of soul and spirit makes him unique beyond this creation in the whole universe. God is spirit. Angels are spirits. There are many passages in the Scriptures which indicate the difference between the inner 'I' of the spirit and the outer 'I' of the soul. For instance, Paul says: "My spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful" (1 Cor 14:14). Then, in 1 Corinthians 2:14, he says that "the natural (soulical) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... and he cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned", or, "are discerned by the spiritual (or spirit ones)". This distinction is very marked in Paul's recounting of the reception of his special revelation:

"I will come to... revelations of the Lord. I (the outward man) knew a man in Christ (the inner man) above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I [the outer man] cannot tell... God knoweth;) such an one (the inner man) caught up to the third heaven. And I [the outer man] knew such a man (the inner man) (whether in the body or out of the body, I [the outer man] cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he (the inner man) was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man (the outer man) to utter. Of such an one (the inner man) will I (the outer man) glory: yet of myself I (the outer man) will not glory" (2 Cor 12:1-5).

Here, in passing, we note that, unless the Lord gives the gift of utterance, the things revealed to the spirit cannot be expressed by the outer man. In another place the Apostle asked for the prayers of the Lord's people that he might have "utterance" to speak the mystery.

Many other instances might be given, such as "I delight in the law of God after the inward man", and Romans 7 as a whole.

Then we draw attention to the following:

"I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus... for they refreshed my spirit" (1 Cor 16:17-18).

"The Spirit himself beareth witness, with our spirit" (Rom 8:16).

"To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 5:5).

"...that she may be holy both in body and in spirit" (1 Cor 7:34).

In the New Testament there are very many occurrences of both "soul" and "spirit", and inasmuch as our present and first purpose is to distinguish between these, or to note that they are distinguished by the Word of God, we must define a general rule by which they are divided. This general division can be

marked in this way; the soul (often translated "life") relates to man in his own conscious life here in this world; his good or evil; his power to do, to achieve, to enjoy, to profit, to know and acquire what is of this world, and to live as a responsible, self-conscious being, answering to God for himself and his life, and so taking account of his life as to include the reality of a Divinely intended higher destiny and intention than just to live to himself and for the brief span of this life. The soul can be affected by and responsive to something higher, but its immediate relationship is not with God. Such relationship is indirect and secondary.

The spirit is that by which--given the necessary "renewing"--man is directly related to things Divine. He is thereby constituted to be capable of relationship with spiritual beings and spiritual things. This is a broad and general rule, and if some passages seem to contradict it, the difficulty will usually disappear if we remember the proviso that, on the one hand, God holds man responsible as an intelligent, self-conscious being who can at least choose and seek; and, on the other hand, when the spirit has been renewed and brought into living touch with God, the soul is affected thereby, and both receives from God and gives to God by way of the spirit. All this will be dealt with much more fully as we go on. A passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians might well and aptly be cited here:

"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them, that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save THE SPIRIT OF THE MAN, WHICH IS IN HIM? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received... the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things... of God" (1 Cor 2:9-12).

Each kingdom is governed by and limited to its own nature. A beast and a man cannot go far in mutual intercourse. What is a Handel oratorio to a dog?

So far we have but been paving the way for our real business, and now we must come immediately to grips with it. But may we repeat, before commencing a new chapter, that ours is no academic or technical undertaking. For this we have neither ability nor inclination. We are burdened with a great desire to see a real change in the spiritual condition which exists today, and our object is wholly spiritual, and for God's pleasure and satisfaction in His people.

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