

Our Anchorage - the Love of God in Christ Jesus

by T. Austin-Sparks

The love of God in Christ Jesus serves as an anchorage for believers in times of suffering and persecution, and is not changed by our mistakes or unfaithfulness.

Scripture: John 1:14, Romans 5:20, Romans 8:31-39, Romans 12:1

Topics: "God's Love", "Grace and Sin"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of the love of God as revealed in Christ Jesus, drawing from Romans 8:31-39. He reflects on the experiences of Paul and others who encountered the glorified Christ, highlighting that despite the reality of sin and suffering, nothing can separate us from God's love. The sermon underscores that understanding the depth of sin enhances our appreciation for God's grace, which super-abounds over sin. Sparks encourages believers to find their anchorage in God's unwavering love, especially during trials and tribulations, asserting that even our mistakes do not sever our connection to His love. Ultimately, he calls for a response of total surrender to God in light of His incredible love.

Transcript

Reading: Romans 8:31-39

Our hearts have been directed to the glorified Lord Jesus, as the object and as the inspiration of Christian life, endurance, and service. We have looked at Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, and have seen a little of what that meant, for the rest of their lives, to the men who were with Him, and what Christ glorified meant to all the others who, at different times, and in different ways, and at different places, saw Him in glory - Stephen, and Paul, and later still, John.

John, in speaking many, many years afterward of the sole impression that remained with him from the time spent with the Lord Jesus, summed it all up in one marvellous phrase: a parenthesis it is in his gospel, but was there ever a more important and wonderful parenthesis? "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). What they saw, when they saw the Lord Jesus in His glory, was the manifestation of the grace of God.

This portion of Paul's Roman letter, which we have just read, seems to me to be Paul's way of stating what he saw in the face of Jesus Christ. After dwelling much upon this part of the Word, the impression has come to me, at this point, that this is what the apostle was working toward all the way through; this is his release. He has been doing a piece of very laborious work; he has set himself to a great treatise - and it is that - it has defeated all the greatest minds, ever since, in their efforts to fathom this letter and to interpret it. But you have a feeling as you read, and arrive at this point, that now the apostle said, 'Now that is that; let me say what I am after all the time, what I have really had in mind; let me unburden my heart'. And he does so here. 'These things' to which he refers - 'What shall we say to THESE THINGS?' - all THESE THINGS that he has been saying, what is the upshot? What do they all point to? 'What is the supreme significance and implication of all that I have been saying?' And he goes on to answer his own question, and to release from his heart this thing that has been there, prompting all his effort and undertaking. It is this mighty, mighty revelation of THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST.

I say he was working toward that. It is a painful process. The first stage of the letter, as you know, is occupied with that painful necessity, that so unpleasant necessity - the exposing of sin. He does it very thoroughly; he goes through the whole Gentile world, and gives, not an exaggerated picture, but a very terrible picture, of sin. There is no place in the whole Bible where sin in its awfulness is more exposed than in the early part of this letter. It is a terrible picture of human sin in its natural state. And he proceeds from the Gentile world to the Jewish world, the world of Israel. Although elect, chosen, called, separated, and given so much of Divine deposit and trust and revelation, Israel had to have the Law. You do not need a police force in a perfect State; you do not need law if there is no lawlessness. The very giving of the Law, Paul says, is only another proof that in this matter of sin Jews are no better than other people. 'By the law sin is manifested.' I have spoken of the Police Force: the very presence of a policeman says that there is wrong in the world; the very presence of the law means that there must be lawlessness. And so Israel is no better than the rest. Sin is universal; sin is in every creature; sin is the state of the whole creation. It is a terrible exposure, uncovering, but very necessary. I am quite sure that, when Paul got to the end of it, he sighed a sigh of relief, he was glad to get past that, to get on to something better than that - really what he was after.

You see the point: THIS is what he is after! he must do that - and God must make us know sin, the reality of sin, the awfulness of sin; sin must become a terrible thing with us, before ever we can appreciate the grace of God. No one ever appreciates Divine grace who has seen little or nothing of the sinfulness of sin in their own heart. Great pains, then, are taken in this letter to expose the reality and the nature of sin, and its effects; not in order to bring condemnation, not to make people miserable, but just to lead to the grace of God - to enhance Divine grace. So, the apostle says, 'where sin abounded' - bounded over Gentile and Jew, over the race, over the whole world; a great wave has passed over and inundated the whole creation - where sin, like a great ocean, spread itself, ABOUNDED, grace did SUPER-ABOUND! Grace was greater than the greatness of sin!

So he comes to this at last: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" It is a marvellous thing: and, as you can well see, the apostle is speaking much out of his own experience and history here, when he catalogues these things which are a real threat to hope and to life and to prospect. Very real and terrible things they are that he catalogues here. 'Shall tribulation...?' Paul knew something about tribulation; tribulation in his experience was a very real thing indeed. 'Or anguish...?' - yes, we find Paul more than once in anguish; anguish over the spiritual state of his beloved converts, and the churches. To the Thessalonians he speaks twice of his 'travail' for them - his anguish. 'Or

persecution...?' Paul knew quite a bit about that! 'Famine...' - he tells us he was in hunger; 'nakedness...' - yes, in nakedness; 'or peril, or sword...' And if that is not enough, 'death... life... angels... principalities... things present... things to come... powers... height... depth...', 'and', he says, 'I cannot go on enumerating and analysing any more' - '...or any other creation' - that covers everything! 'I am persuaded that there is nothing in creation - all these things and anything else that you would like to gather into that - I am persuaded that none of these things shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.' That is GRACE!

Sin need not separate us from the love of God! Do you believe that? Sin need not separate you from the love of God, because of Romans 8: 'One died...'; 'it is Christ Who died, yes, rather, that is risen'; and, further, He is 'at the right hand of God making intercession'. Therefore, sin need not, and, on that ground, cannot separate us from the love of God.

Now, whether we individually experience all the things that are mentioned here, or not, the fact is that there are a great many things that are given a complexion by the forces of evil, with the object of separating us from the love of God. Suffering, anguish, persecution, death, and even life - for life can be a terrible thing for some people - many things that come into our experience, are just played upon by these forces of evil everywhere, to tell us that the love of God is not a reality; that God does not love us - this is proof positive; this is the evidence! In this storm, when the winds blow from every quarter, when all the elements are against us, we need an anchorage; we need something that will hold.

There is no question about Paul's devotion to the Lord; he knew in his own heart that there was no controversy between him and the Lord; he was not aware of being in revolt against the Lord, or being contrary to the known will of God; his whole being was poised and focused upon the pleasure of his Lord, to be well-pleasing unto Him - he knew it. And yet, with that in his heart, he is meeting all these things: his ministry is being discredited; his name is being defamed; he is suspect wherever he goes; he moves all over the world in an atmosphere of suspicion and ostracism, and not only in the world, but amongst Christians; he is not universally loved even in the churches that had their existence through his ministry. No, this thing has spread, like an awful vapour, everywhere, to somehow destroy this man and his ministry; and there were not a few who would be glad if he were dead. He knew it. And in these many forms of expression he met it almost every day of his life.

A man, or a Christian, meeting things like that, needs an anchorage. When things beat on you, and sorrow overwhelms you, you need an anchorage. Your anchorage will not be self-vindication - or self-justification - you will not get anywhere along that line; your anchorage will not even be your own sense of rightness. The only anchor that will hold in all this is God's love for you. You may make mistakes - and we are always wrong when we think of Paul or any other apostle as being faultless. I used to feel, in younger days, that it was a terrible thing to allow myself to think that Paul could be wrong, or that any other apostle could be wrong, or make a mistake. I thought these men must be infallible. Oh, no, it is we who are wrong when we take that attitude. Paul made mistakes, and he let himself in for difficulties by his mistakes; but what he came out with was this. The love of God is not changed when I make mistakes; the love of God does not let me go when I make mistakes. When I default, make wrong decisions, take wrong directions, perhaps say wrong things - that does not break the cable between my soul and the anchor of His love; it holds! 'I am persuaded... persuaded that none of these things - anything in the creation that you can mention' - "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord".

That is what Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ. John's word for it was: "full of grace and truth". Paul would have endorsed that; indeed, this is his great endorsement. Sin - yes, horrible, awful, despicable, wicked, cruel; unfaithfulness, on the part of Israel; departure from Divine intention - yes (for you know he throws in a section immediately after chapter 8; the next two or three chapters are a section by themselves to illustrate his point). But it does not make any difference to the Divine love. Let us think about that just for a moment - this section that he puts in to illustrate his point. Israel: 'Hath God cast off His people? God forbid!' (11:1) - it is one of his nine 'God forbids' in this letter. Yes, but look what Israel has done! Look at Calvary - look at their work; look at Stephen - look at their work; look at what they are doing everywhere - ISRAEL!

Yes, they may be under judgment; they may be suffering for their sin, their wickedness, their iniquity; they may have been set aside for the dispensation as God's instrument because of their unfaithfulness. 'But', says the apostle, 'that has not ended God's love for them'. Judgment in this world, and in this life, is never a proof that God's love is at an end; it may be the very proof of His love. It is better for us to suffer when we do wrong, in order to discover something new of His love through suffering. I venture to say that many of us have come to what little we do apprehend of the Divine love, through the realization of our own faultiness, and what it leads to. But Israel is a great illustration; and even yet, a spiritual company from the natural Israel will be found in the Kingdom, and in the Church. God has not washed His hands of them eternally as a people, and said, No Jew, no Israelite, will ever again have a chance. Not at all! Bad as they have been, and done what they have done, He has set His love upon them, and His love will keep the door open.

But you see the message. 'Who shall separate us from the love of God?' 'What shall we say to these things? If God is for us' - and this is how He is for us, and where He is for us, and when He is for us, and through everything His love - what shall we say? Well, after making this tremendous sweep of Divine love, and then illustrating it with Israel in this most impressive way, he answers his question, his interrogation, by saying: "I beseech you therefore... by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (12:1). What shall we say? The answer must be not in words, but in an act - 'present your bodies, by the mercies of God'. That 'love so amazing, so Divine, demands our souls, our life, our all.'

'Sirs, we would see Jesus.'

What are you looking for? This is what you ought to see when you see Jesus - the Love of God in the Face of Jesus Christ.

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