

'Over All - Faith,' and a Final Consideration

by T. Austin-Sparks

Faith is the governing principle of the spiritual house, enabling us to maintain our testimony, minister to God's pleasure, and overcome Satan's wiles.

Scripture: Ezekiel 43:1

Topics: "Faith", "Spiritual House"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the centrality of faith in the life of the Church as a spiritual house, highlighting that faith governs the exaltation of Jesus, our ministry to God, and our service to others. He explains that true faith often requires perseverance in the face of trials and challenges, asserting that it is through faith that we testify to the overthrow of Satan and prepare for the coming glory. Sparks encourages believers to hold onto their faith, even when circumstances seem contrary, as this is what pleases God and reflects His glory. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper spiritual understanding of faith that transcends mere intellectual acknowledgment, urging the Church to embody the hope of glory through a living faith.

Transcript

READING: Eze. 43:1-2,4-5,7; Eph. 1:12, 3:21; 5:25-27; Col. 1:27; 1 Pet. 4:14; Heb. 10:37-39; 11:1.

In these meditations, we have been looking at some of the major features of God's spiritual house in which we who are the Lord's are living stones. We have been seeking to see what our being living parts of a spiritual house means, and there are two things which remain for this present time, which we trust the Lord will enable us to say. One is something which governs all these matters, and the other is the final feature of this spiritual house. I put it in that way because I think it will be most helpful to deal with these remaining matters in that order, and the one will lead quite naturally to the other, as you will see.

This thing which governs all the features, the spiritual features, of this spiritual house of God is faith.

Faith in Relation to

(1) The exaltation of the Lord Jesus

The first feature which we considered was that this spiritual house, of which we are a living part if we are in Christ, stands for the setting forth in a living way of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. We saw how that was the first great note in the Church's history on the day of Pentecost.

"God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2:36).

"Being at the right hand of God exalted... he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

It was a glorious expression of, and testimony to, the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, and the Church is constituted for that purpose, to maintain that, not firstly as a part of its doctrine, but as being in itself the living exhibit thereof throughout the dispensation and to hold that testimony in a living way right to the end.

But we shall find that, in that matter, as in all the others, it very soon becomes a question of a living faith. It was not that so much on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit came, and filled them that had believed, baptized them within and without, and in that mighty tidal-wave of the Spirit it was not difficult for them to proclaim and give expression to the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. And that is true in principle, although perhaps not in the same outward way, in the case of every child of God, when they first come into a living union with the Lord Jesus. It is not difficult at that time for us to proclaim, and by our very faces to announce, that Jesus is exalted, Jesus is Lord, Jesus lives. That is our first note of testimony when we receive the Spirit. It is the first thing which expresses itself in a believer. But we all have lived to know that it is not always as easy as that. It does not always come as spontaneously as that. We move into a time when, while the fact remains, we have to hold on to the fact in sheer and grim faith. We have to answer to apparent contradictions to the fact with an attestation of faith; for things rise up and there is a mighty reaction of the enemy to our testimony and to our position, and we have to hold the position in blind faith; not in feeling faith, not in seeing faith, but in cold, blind faith we have to maintain our position that Jesus is Lord, Jesus is exalted, Jesus is on the throne; and it is only by faith being put forth in the fact that we win through, and that testimony becomes a powerful thing in our deliverance, in our very life.

So faith governs this matter, and we shall find that, as we get nearer to the end, the challenge to the Lordship, the exaltation, the Kingship, the enthronement of the Lord Jesus will become intensely severe. It will be a bitter challenge and there will be a situation in which nothing but just faith, naked faith, on the part of God's elect, will keep them standing in the good of that truth, that Jesus Christ, after all, has the reins of government in His hands. If one thing is true about overcomers who do overcome, it is that they overcome by reason of faith; and faith is faith. So let us not, after all that we have heard and all that in which we have gloried, expect that this is going to be anything other than a testimony in faith. It is not going to be a life of knowing by every evidence, by every proof, by every sign, by every sensation, that Jesus is reigning without any question at all. It is not going to be like that. Do not expect that it is going to be like that. The Word of God makes it very clear that it is not the case. Mark the context, for example, of the verses we read from Hebrews 10.

"For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But my righteous one shall live by FAITH."

(2) Ministering Unto the Lord

Then we spoke about another feature of this spiritual house, that it is in existence to minister to God's satisfaction and pleasure. That is a very nice idea! It is a very pleasant thought, a very beautiful thing, to think of being in existence to minister to God's pleasure, to God's satisfaction, to God's glory, and perhaps again at the outset we feel it is not such a big proposition. When we are in those first days of the blossom of spiritual experience, we think that the Lord is very well pleased and happy about us, and we are very happy with the Lord, and it is all right, the Lord is getting something. It is not so difficult to think about this matter of ministering to the Lord's good pleasure. But we discover again that, as the Lord's, we are led out

into the wilderness. There is a side of our being which has to be dealt with, that side which has been in the habit of having the upper hand, of having the preeminence, of doing all the dictating and the governing, and that has to be put down and another side, namely, that which is of the Lord, has to be brought up, and we come into that realm of which the Apostle speaks - "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17). There is something going on in us and when we get out there in that wilderness and are in the deep realities of trial, the demand on faith is no light thing. I am thinking of Israel's forty years in the wilderness while the Lord was dealing with them along the line of discipline, to bring them to that aspect of the Cross as represented by the Jordan, where it is no longer just a matter of their being justified by faith, but of being delivered from themselves by faith: and that required a great exercise of faith when the Jordan overflowed all its banks. But it was in the wilderness, and it is in the wilderness that we, under the hand of the Lord, are brought to understand that no flesh can glory in His presence; that in us, that is, in our flesh, no good thing dwelleth, and we have to have that brought home to us so that it is not just a theory, but a desperate and awful reality. So we cry, "Oh wretched man that I am!"

At such a time you have great questions as to whether there is any ministry to the glory and pleasure of God. It seems anything but that! And yet, beloved, when we are going through all that under the hand of God, out there in the wilderness, the very fact that we repose faith in the Lord to perfect that which concerneth us, to carry through that which He has commenced unto the day of Jesus Christ, is something which very much ministers to God's pleasure and satisfaction. Just picture it in its figurative setting with Israel in the wilderness. There was the Tabernacle in the midst, and there was God right in that Tabernacle in the Most Holy Place in the Shekinah glory. He was there all the time in the Shekinah glory inside, but on the outside, well, it was a wilderness all right, and there were those horribly ugly covers of the Tabernacle and the glory was hidden. All the beauty was concealed and the outer covers were anything but beautiful and glorious, and the Lord's people were having a very trying time. But at any moment, in the darkest day, the most difficult hour, when things seemed to be most hopeless, at any moment had you looked inside, the glory was to be found there, and it was just a matter of their faith. If they took the appearances as the criterion, they could say, Oh, we cannot see the Lord; everything looks very uninteresting and anything but glorious, and the situation is a very deplorable one and all this that we are going through and all this lack of sight with regard to the Lord's presence - well, there is nothing in it! We give it up! Again and again in the New Testament, the Lord comes back upon that to warn the Church against such an attitude. "They could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:19). And their unbelief worked in this way, "Is the Lord among us or not?" That was the thing that upset the Lord so much that He refused to allow that generation to go into the land. They asked the ultimate question, Is the Lord among us or not?

Why did they ask that? Because of appearances and difficulties. The glory was veiled, and it was only at rare intervals that the glory was displayed. For the greater part, the glory was not seen. Ah, what then of that word, Christ in you, the hope of glory! Now, that is the word the Apostle by the Spirit addresses to the Church, in the Church's time of difficulty, adversity, discipline, trial, of going through things, and he says, in effect, "Ah, yes, that is how it is on the outside, that is how it is in the matter of circumstances, but Christ in you is the hope of glory": and hope that is seen is not hope. Even this is a matter of faith. We do not always feel Christ in us. We do not live every moment in the consciousness that the Lord is inside: but He is, as truly as the Shekinah glory was there within the Most Holy Place when there was nothing on the outside to evidence it. At any moment you would have been able to prove it could you have looked within. So is it with the Lord's spiritual house, whose house are we. He is there and you have to take an attitude

towards this outside situation by which the Lord is bringing us into a new realm, a new position, that, after all, it is not the ultimate thing, the pre-eminent thing: the Lord Himself has said, "I will never leave thee." Faith laying hold of that when it seems there is nothing whatever that contributes to the Lord's glory and satisfaction in us, faith laying hold of the faithfulness of God and trusting Him to carry His work in us through to perfection, is itself a ministration to God's pleasure.

You see that by the contrary. How displeased God was with that generation. Of them He said, They shall not enter into My rest. Why was He displeased? Because they did not trust Him to get them through. They surrendered to the appearances of things in their own lives.

(3) Ministering to the Life of Others

Then the third thing we spoke about was that the Church is here as a spiritual house for the purpose of ministering to the life of others, of the Lord's people, and here the same principle holds good. It is such a good idea, it is such a fine thought: ministering to the life of others, that is splendid! If only that can be, well, it is a great thing to minister to the life of others, and the very suggestion makes us rise up and feel better. But you remember what the Apostle Paul said: "Death worketh in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:12). You see, it is Gideon's fleece all over again, wrung out, dried, and all around wet, and our ministering to the life of others is like that very often. We are just as dry as dry bones, wrung out. We are not conscious of being full of life and ministering life to others, and yet it is often just then that others do receive something, and that is to the glory of God. Oh, we said, we never thought there could be any blessing in it! Well, the Lord was not letting our flesh glory in the giving of life to others, but they were getting it.

You see, it is again a matter of faith. Do not think that this ministering to the life of others is always going to be something of which we are conscious, that we are just full and overflowing with life, and people are getting it. I think more often than not it is the other way round. For us it is a grim holding on to God in faith and others are getting the blessing and we are amazed. It can be so. Have faith then: fulfil your ministry in faith.

"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed,

Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (Psa. 126:6)

Weeping, but in faith. The reward of faith is a great "doubtless."

(4) A Local Corporate Representation of Christ

Then our fourth feature of the spiritual house was that it is here to be a local corporate representation of the Lord Jesus. We meditated upon that word of His, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20), and dwelt upon it as a statement pointing on to the great truth of the Body of Christ, that, wherever there are two or three members of His Body, that is a representation and expression of Christ in that place.

But I again see that so often this is only made good by faith. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst" - but faith has to rise up very strongly and very deliberately and lay hold of that. You see, you may be two or three gathered somewhere, but there may be nothing whatever of an expression and manifestation of the presence of Christ. You have to come together in faith. You have to stand together in faith. You have to put your feet squarely upon His assurance and declare yourself as resting upon that assurance, and as we take hold of the truth that where the Body is the Lord is, it is then

that the thing becomes a reality. We do not make it a reality by faith, but we bring out the reality by faith. The Lord looks for a definite standing upon these things and an assertion of faith. We are here; yes, but we are not here just as two or three gathered in the name of Jesus in a passive way. There will be no expression of the Lord's presence when things are like that. We come together in faith and we stand in faith that there is going to be an expression of the Lord by our very being here; and, unless we come together like that, it will be but a congregation, a service, a coming and going. When we come together in a living way with a living faith, it is not an address we have come to listen to, but we have come definitely to meet with the Lord, and the Lord has assured us that, as we are gathered together in His name, we shall meet Him. If that is our spirit, our attitude, there will be something of a living expression of the Lord. Faith is a great factor in the matter of corporate life to make its values real. I cannot go further than that.

(5) Testimony to the Overthrow of Satan

The fifth feature was that this spiritual house is here to testify in a living way to the overthrow of Satan. Well, that is a fact; Satan has been overthrown by Christ. So far as the Lord Jesus is concerned, the overthrow of Satan has been accomplished and established, and on the day of Pentecost there was no difficulty in their believing it, enjoying it and proclaiming it. But they lived to see other days when it was not just like that. They lived to see days when it seemed that Satan was anything but overthrown, anything but disposed. They saw him apparently doing just as he wanted to do, having it all his own way. They saw him bringing to death their fellow-believers and colleagues in ministry. They saw the ravages of the Devil on the right hand and on the left. Does this mean that the thing they once said so strongly and with such conviction is no longer true and they were mistaken even then? Not at all! This matter has to become a matter of the faith of the Lord's people. The overthrow of Satan, so far as this world is concerned, is a matter of the militant faith of the Church.

I simply draw from Ephesians this. When the Apostle has told us of all the armour that we are to put on in this spiritual warfare against the wiles of the Devil, he says, Now above all take the shield of faith. Our English language is poor in expressing what Paul said. Paul did not say "above all" in the sense in which we should mean it. He said, Now over all take the big shield of faith. As you know, the Roman legions had more than one kind of shield. They had the little round shield, which was only for the protection of the face and head against arrows and darts. But then they had the big shield, which could shield them completely, and often an army marched into battle with it over them. As they put the big shields side by side, it was like forming a solid mail roof. They marched under it, the big shield being over everything, covering everything. All else requires this one thing. All else may yield, prove insufficient. With everything, over and above everything - faith! It requires the militant faith of the Church to bring about here what Christ has brought about in heaven, namely, the overthrow of the Evil One. It is by faith now that Satan is overthrown, so far as the Church is concerned, and so far as things here are concerned. But of course, our faith is not in something which is going to be, it is in something which already is, namely, Christ's victory.

(6) Present Testimony to the Coming Day of Glory

Now I come to the last thing, which has not been mentioned. The final feature of this spiritual house, which comes up with the passages we have read, is that the spiritual house, the Church, is here in the light of the coming day of the fullness of Glory, to stand in the light of that, to receive upon itself the light of that, and to reflect the light of that day that is coming.

In Ezekiel's Temple, you notice how we read that, after all those goings in and out and round about and through and up and down, at last the man led him by the way of the gate which is toward the east and toward the glory. The east is the sunrise, the new day, and it is by that way that the fullness of the glory comes in. The house, you see, stands right in the way of the coming glory. It is there with its face toward the sunrise, toward the glory. That is the type in Ezekiel, but we have many other passages.

"We should be unto the praise of his glory." That is the Church in Ephesians. But there is this passage in Hebrews.

"For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But my righteous one shall live by faith... Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen."

Here, you see, is a standing by faith in the light of that glorious hope, that blessed hope, and knowing in the heart the assurance of that unseen glory. We are here as the Lord's house to be a present testimony to the coming day of glory. But that is not testimony in word, in doctrine: it is to be in life, in reality. But that can only be in a spiritual way, and therefore it can only be along the line of faith. We have to apprehend the day of the Lord, the day of glory, the coming of the Lord in glory; we have to apprehend that in a spiritual way. There are a lot of people who are apprehending it in a prophetic way, but I do not always find that the study of prophecy results in glory. I find very often that it results in a good deal of death and confusion, and it is not all prophetic students who are living in the glory of the coming day. They are living in the belief of it, in the argument about it, but not in the glory of it. It is no mere doctrinal or mental apprehension of that great truth that will bring the glory of it into our lives, but a spiritual apprehension.

I used to study prophecy a good deal, and the book of the Revelation had a very prominent place in it. But the more I studied it, the more confused I got, the more difficulties I found. It did not get me through very far to glory. But then the Lord gave me a clue, and showed me the spiritual principles lying behind the book of the Revelation, and I was able to apprehend that book in a spiritual way. I do not mean that I spiritualized everything, but I was able to apprehend it in a spiritual way. The cloud was lifted and there was life.

Take this matter of the coming of the Lord; and, of course, that is the coming of the Lord in glory, when He shall come in the clouds of glory, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints - the coming in by the east of the glory of the Lord. Have you noticed that in any time in the dispensation, when spiritual people have been gathered together, and in their gathering together have been speaking or singing of the coming of the Lord, how spontaneously the glory rises and comes in?

Have you noticed that? Now, I do not believe that is merely psychological, and I do not believe it is because we are all thinking of ourselves, and of how great a day it will be when we are delivered from all our bonds. I believe rather this rising of glory is in spite of a very great deal. We have lived long enough, most of us, to know many people who believed fervently and said with emphasis that the Lord was coming in their lifetime and they would be raptured, and they have been in their graves for years.

That is enough to turn you away from the whole subject and say, We have heard that before! It is enough to put you among those scoffers of whom Peter writes, who say, "Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:4). You may take that attitude, if you like; but it is in spite of all that that, when you contemplate the coming of the Lord, something gets the better of your mentality, your arguments, and all that bad history, and you find the glory rising.

It is so, in spite of it all. Why is it? It was so at the beginning of the Church dispensation, and it has been so in every age: yet the Holy Spirit knew at the beginning that the Lord's coming would not be for a couple of thousand years, at any rate. But nevertheless there has been this spontaneous breaking out of real joy and glory at any moment when spiritual people have been dwelling upon the coming of the Lord. Why is it? Because the Holy Spirit does not live in time at all, He does not belong to time.

The Holy Spirit is outside of time and He already has the end with Him and He is the Spirit of the end, and when we really get into the Spirit we are in the Holy Spirit's end. If we dwell in the mind - oh, this reasoning line of things! - out of the Spirit, there is no joy. But when we let go and we are in the Spirit, we find ourselves with the Holy Spirit right at the end. We are outside of time, we are in the glory already in foreshadowing. The Holy Spirit is timeless and you get outside of time and you have everything; you have your finality, your fullness.

Thus, when John was in the Spirit in the isle of Patmos, he got right through to the end of things very quickly, the thing which we in time have not reached yet. That is what I mean by apprehending this matter spiritually. Beware of apprehending prophecy as a mental thing. The Holy Spirit in you in a living way will bring you into the good of things. Thus by the Spirit today we should stand with the light of the glorious fullness of the day of the Lord. We should be here as a testimony, not to prophetic things, not to teaching or doctrine about the Second Advent and all the problems connected therewith, but to the spiritual meaning of that.

What is it? Why, that is the end to which God has been working right through the centuries, the one thing upon which His heart is set, in which He has His satisfaction, His glory, His praise, His fullness, and the Holy spirit is always there to make good something of that when we dwell upon it. He is there to be to us "the earnest of our inheritance," and to make us know it is a matter of faith, after all.

We do not always feel the glory of the coming of the Lord, we are not always living in the bright shining of that day, but "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen," and when we let go our arguments and get into the Spirit, that is, get really into fellowship with the Holy Spirit, the weight of those arguments disappears, all the seeming contradictions in history go out. The glory of the Lord comes in by the gate which is toward the east.

"Yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But my righteous one shall live by faith."

The Lord then strengthen our faith and keep our hearts in faith.

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