

# Spiritual Enlightenment

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*Spiritual enlightenment comes by a living touch with the Lord Jesus, and involves a deeper understanding of God's eternal thought concerning man, redemption, and perfection.*

**Scripture:** John 9:1

**Topics:** "Personal Relationship with Christ", "Spiritual Enlightenment"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of spiritual enlightenment through the story of a man born blind, illustrating that his condition was divinely orchestrated to reveal God's works. The sermon highlights that true understanding of Christ comes not from mere doctrine but from a personal, living touch with Him, which opens our spiritual eyes. Sparks draws parallels between the man's blindness and Israel's spiritual state, stressing that enlightenment is a costly journey often requiring a break from tradition. He concludes that the ultimate goal is to know Christ as the Son of God, which transforms our understanding and relationship with Him. The message calls believers to pursue a personal walk with Christ, allowing Him to govern their spiritual lives.

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## Transcript

When we come to this point in the Gospel we mark a further step in the apprehension of Christ. You will see how, in what seems to be a very matter-of-fact way, the narrative goes on - "And as he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth." We have frequently observed, that the things which occurred in the life of our Lord were not just happenings, mere incidents, the details of which go to make up a story, but that they come within the compass of a sovereign purpose. Just as there was a spiritual link between the multitude being fed in the wilderness, and the Lord Jesus being given as the Bread of Life, so the principle operates in this event.

This case of a man born blind is marked by features which carry us well out of our depth. Undoubtedly there were a great many blind men in that part of the country at that same time, but this one, with special purposes in relation to a Divine thought, was brought just then into the path of the Lord Jesus. The mystery encircling his case is far too profound for us. The question of the disciples brought out an almost stunning disclosure. "Rabbi, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" Whether they were the victims of superstition, or whether they were thinking of that part of the Mosaic law which spoke of sins being visited upon children unto the third and fourth generation, the question drew out this statement which we cannot fathom, but which leads to a tremendous issue in spiritual value.

"Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." Thus you see there was an object in this man's condition, and that object governed a sovereign movement by which he came in the path of Christ at that moment. The whole context bears that out and throws a tremendous amount of light upon it.

### The Mystery of Israel's Blindness

We note the significant fact which goes to the root of the whole subject, that amongst all those who were blind in those parts at that time, this man was born blind. Probably a more rare thing than the other. It is not without significance that this particular instance was one of blindness from birth. That represents in principle the whole truth of Christ's coming as the Light. It is taken by the Word of God as settled, never argued but taken for granted, that the race is by nature in blindness, in darkness, that, at best, the natural man cannot see the Kingdom nor the things of the Spirit. We saw that with Nicodemus; with all his natural and religious enlightenment, all his intellectual equipment, all that he was in himself by nature, the Lord said to him: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." So that the old birth is a birth without sight, and the new birth is a birth with sight. Man by nature at best is unable to see that which relates to the Kingdom of God; man is born blind. Let us remember that this as a spiritual birth was meant, in the first place, to be brought home to Israel or Judaism. It is one of those germ truths which are so much more fully developed in the letter to the Romans. Israel's blindness is proverbial. A whole tragic history is wrapped up in that blindness. There came One Who could and would have given them sight, but they believed not that they were blind, and proved their blindness by crucifying the Lord of Glory.

From the specific application to Israel the truth is expanded to the race, and becomes of universal application. This universal fact is referred to many times in later New Testament writings. But as we proceed with the story we are made aware that this blindness, though surely not in the directive will of God, but the relative, is connected with the works of God. "We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day." "...That the works of God should be made manifest in him." The works of God, then, are related to the natural state of man in his blindness. God's works are to bring him into the place of spiritual enlightenment and understanding.

### Christ and the Sabbath Again

There are two other elements here to be noticed. This thing was done on the Sabbath day. Because it was done on the Sabbath day, it roused this fury amongst the Jewish elders. All the trouble which followed was largely related to that, or at least that was the pretext, it was done on the Sabbath day. The works of God bring those who by nature are blind and in the dark into spiritual enlightenment and understanding, and are connected by the Lord Jesus with the Sabbath day. The Sabbath day is seen all the way through to be a matter of Christ Himself. That is the heart of this chapter; we shall come to that presently. Christ is God's Sabbath: that is, all the works of God are completed in Christ. God comes to His rest in His Son, and looks upon all things in Christ with good pleasure, saying: It is very good. The "It is finished" of Calvary was the establishment of the spiritual truth of the Sabbath rest in the Lord Jesus; and coming into spiritual enlightenment and understanding, is a matter of coming into the finished work of God in Christ. Or to put that another way, a coming into an apprehension of Christ as the One Who has finished the works of God.

### The Works of God

The other thing is this remarkable statement in the correct translation, which is not in the Authorized Version - "We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day." That is undoubtedly the correct

translation. It is not "I must," it is "we must," and that, being the accurate translation, carries with it something of great importance and value. The Lord links with Himself His Own in the works of God for the enlightenment of those who are blinded and in the dark. He is saying in effect: We, these who are My co-workers, co-partners, must work these works in relation to that blindness and darkness, to bring into spiritual enlightenment and understanding. Paul entered into those works of God under commission. You remember he tells us what the Lord said to him, as to his commission: that he was to go, and that he should stand before rulers, kings, Gentiles, and that the object was: "...to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God..." He was one of the workers together with God in opening eyes, that they might turn from darkness to light, and he did it by the Spirit. In our spiritual life we are enjoying the good of all that. You will remember his words in the Ephesian letter 1:18: "...that... the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know..." And then he tabulates some of the things they might know by way of having their eyes enlightened with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. We, beloved, are called into the fellowship of God's Son in this ministry, and we come right into that little fragment of John 9:4: "We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day," and the works of God are: "...to open their eyes." Thus they are connected with man's state by nature, of his being born blind.

#### What the Knowledge of God Is

Now, in connection with the truth of spiritual enlightenment and understanding, it does not come by the presentation of truth. We may have heard much of the truth, and may be well informed in the doctrine, but we may yet be without spiritual understanding. Understanding does not come by a presentation of the truth. Understanding comes by a definite act of Christ in our hearts. It is a work which is done. An apprehension of Christ is not merely along the lines of formulated doctrine.

An apprehension of Christ is by reason of a living touch. He touched, He anointed his eyes. It is a living touch. It is an anointing of those inner eyes. There are deeper depths here to which we might go, and these may be touched as we proceed. But recognize what has been said. I want to emphasize, because of Israel's history which comes to its culmination in this chapter; the end of this chapter is the culmination of Israel's history as a blind people, because there was no inward faculty of spiritual understanding, and yet they had all the oracles of God.

You look at such a tremendous passage as Deut. 29:4: "But Jehovah hath not given you an heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day." You know that all the Law had been given; a tremendous presentation of Divine things had been handed to Israel at this point. They had come by a way of wonderful manifestations of God; the very full, rich history of God manifesting Himself in word and in deed, making Himself known to them. Now Moses was closing his career; in a very little while he would sing his song, as in the later chapters of this book (Deuteronomy), and would be buried by God.

Gathering all that up, all that history of God's manifestation to them, He said this remarkable thing in chapter 29 verse 4. Leaving the question of God's responsibility in the matter, Moses was simply taking account of the fact that after all they were not seeing, after all they were not hearing. Hearing they did not hear, seeing they did not perceive; having had presented, they did not know in their hearts. Now that history went on and on and on, centuries after Moses, and culminates here in John 9.

With all that followed Moses, all the centuries of the monarchy, all the ministry of the prophets, in John 9 they are still blind; they have all this mass of truth but no understanding, no eyes to see, ears to hear, nor

hearts to understand. Well might the book of Proverbs put understanding at a high price. Understanding is put above the price of rubies. It is a tremendous thing is spiritual understanding. It comes in, note, at length, by a living touch with the Lord Jesus, and is a priceless thing.

Israel had to obey commands; they did not have understanding. The feature of the new covenant is not obeying commands given us from without, it is having inward revelation of the Lord. "But this is the covenant that I will make... I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it." The revelation of God is Christ within. "For God... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." That is the new covenant, which is no longer for the believer a matter of: Thou shalt, and, Thou shalt not.

The Christian is not put under law in the sense that he is bound to do this and that, or may not do this, and may not do that. No, the believer is, if truly a child of God, governed, not by an outward system of permissions or prohibitions, but by an inward law of Divine understanding of the Lord's will on the basis of a living fellowship with Him. It is a blessed thing to see believers giving a manifestation of the fact of their having in their own hearts a knowledge of the Lord, of knowing what the Lord would have them do.

That they do not do things because it is expected of them by others, and do not refrain from doing certain things because of what others would say, they are knowing the Lord in their own hearts. That is the proof that they have come into living fellowship with the Lord Jesus, that they are no longer under the Mosaic economy but under the regime of the Holy Spirit indwelling. Israel blindly - that is, so far as their spiritual sight was concerned - followed the commandments and laws.

The child of God intelligently follows the known will of God. This light is connected with Christ as the Life. That means it is a living thing. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus which brings life and peace, and that is the way in which we know the mind of the Lord about any proposed thing. Life and peace, if our fellowship with Him is right; life and peace in our hearts. That is our light. If in any proposed course, before the Lord, we have neither life nor peace, we may suspend that course for the time being, and we shall find that our so doing will be justified.

The Lord no longer says to us directly on matters: Yes, you should do so-and-so; and: No, you should not do so-and-so. He now speaks by spiritual laws, not always by verbal phrases, and His speech, the speech of the Spirit, is to spirit first, interpreted afterward by the mind. He speaks in our hearts, and the language of the Spirit is life, peace, rest, or to the contrary.

Now what is needed at this point, is a recognition of what it is that comes to us by a vital touch of Christ upon our spiritual eyes; that is, the content of the light that comes to us. Well, so comprehensive is the answer to that, that, without exaggeration, it would keep us here for a very long time because it embodies everything that will ever come to us in our relationship to the Lord.

### Christ - The Answer to Every Problem

One matter that will come is God's eternal thought concerning man; our place in the original intention of God. That is not a small subject in itself. The answer to the question: "Why am I?" "What have I a being for?" "Why the human race?" That is revealed in the person of Christ. If you apprehend Christ, you have apprehended that. The Incarnation is the answer to the enquiry as to the reason of man's existence. See Christ the Son of Man, and you see what God's thought was for man, and what God's intention is to have concerning man. That is an apprehension of Christ that answers the deepest question of the human heart:

"Why am I?" "Why the race?" Christ the answer! But that original thought of God was interfered with as first projected, and we see anything but Christ in the race. We see an awful distortion, an awful misrepresentation; but God has not abandoned His thought.

And the second revelation comes in, how? Not now out of nothing but out of a ruin will God get His intention; and we are introduced to the great theme of redemption. How? The answer to that second question How? is, Christ. He is made unto us redemption. The apprehension of Christ is the answer to the question - How? in all this wreck, this ruin of the race. A living apprehension and understanding of Christ answers that. How will God do this thing? Look at Him, apprehend Him by faith, and it is done in you, God has done it. "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation" (R.V. margin). The seed of the creation wholly conformed to Christ is planted in new birth.

Then the further question arises. Having apprehended Christ as the answer to the How? we are still up against the problem of the imperfection of our lives. We are not already perfect, neither have we already attained. By what means shall we attain and be made perfect? Christ is the answer. "...Christ in you, the hope of Glory." Christ in you, apprehended by faith, is the basis of your conformity to His image. "...until Christ be formed in you." How are we conformed to the image of His Son? The answer is Christ as a living reality within by His Spirit.

And so we could go on and on seeing what Christ is, and what enlightenment concerning Christ brings by way of answering all questions. This is what I mean by the content of spiritual sight, spiritual enlightenment and understanding. It is no small thing to have your eyes opened, and there is a progressiveness about this which has no end. We shall go on seeing more and more in Christ, not only to the end of this short span, but yonder where vision is perfect, we shall be exploring the meaning of Christ throughout the eternal ages, ever coming upon some fresh meaning of Christ. That is my hope in my present despair. I come to a fragment of the whole Scriptures such as "John"; I do not know how many times I have read it, sought to explain it; I begin again and I find I know nothing about it. Coming into a realm like this you say: Oh, that someone would give us some light about this! I know I shall have to start "John" all over again, and every time there will be a fuller unveiling of the Lord Jesus, and I know, if I have my three score years and ten here, it will still seem so at the end. Our hope is we shall understand the Scriptures up there. We shall see Him as He is; but now, through a glass darkly. There are many things I want to know, but it is a great thing to have the beginning. It is a precious thing to have our eyes opened. To be here in this very small way, with a little measure of spiritual sight, looking into the Lord Jesus, is a great thing to our hearts. It is a blessed thing for the enrichment of our lives. You know how much stronger you feel, when the Lord has given you a little bit of light you did not possess before. Spiritual sight is a very real thing, enlightenment and understanding. It is a blessed gift of God in the Lord Jesus, and it comes by this vital touch of His upon the inner faculty.

### The Law of Spiritual Enlightenment

Now I must hasten on to touch the law of spiritual enlightenment and understanding. I do see that there are the deep things here, which might not yield a great deal of profit, even were we to stay with them. Such matters as this clay which the Lord made, and with which He anointed the eyes of this man. There seems to me to be a suggestion in that in keeping with the meaning of the body of Christ. The Father prepared Him a body in which to do His work, and all Christ's Calvary work was done in a physical body; and our taking by faith, in the Spirit, of the body of Christ symbolized in the loaf, is meant to be to us a spiritual ministration of what that body represents as a humanity triumphant; bringing us into fellowship

with His triumphant humanity, making a link between us, in spirit, and His humanity which has gone through in victory. The apprehension of the absolute triumphant humanity of the Lord Jesus by faith is something for our hearts. And this clay seems to carry that same significance; that it is the touch, as it were, of the humanity of the Lord Jesus upon us. It is a vital link between Him, and what He is as the Meal Offering, the fine flour giving virtue to our spiritual man.

You will remember the Meal Offering of Leviticus represented the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus. This had to be presented to God as an offering. It represents the spiritual apprehension of the human perfections of the Lord Jesus in His body while here on earth, and a link with God is formed by that means, and spiritual values result to the offerer. Do you follow that? Well now, there is something in a spiritual touch of the perfect humanity of Christ in truth, in spirit, upon our lives; a living touch with Him in what He is as Man triumphant over death. I said that there were deeper matters that needed a good deal more exploring, but I suggest that to you, as something that may perhaps be enlarged with your enlarging spiritual understanding. I see something very precious. I am thrown back upon the initial question: Why eat the flesh and drink the Blood of the Son of Man? Why? "This is my body which is given for you." Why? This is not the body now with sin resting upon it, as when He was made sin, and bore our sins in His Own body on the tree. It is the body which has triumphed over sin through death. He gives us that, and says: "Take, eat"; "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves." Why? Why, if it is not to bring us in spirit in our human life into fellowship with Him in the triumph of His humanity; to make possible a human life here triumphant; to make His triumphant humanity a living principle for us in our human lives? Is not that the principle? And so the virtues of the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus are made vital factors for our spiritual growth, development, and a touch of that upon our hearts carries with it the value of life and light. Now if I have got you out of your depth forgive me, but ask the Lord that, if there is anything there for you, He will show you.

### The Living Christ or Dead Tradition

I come now, briefly, to the law of spiritual understanding, and it will not take very long to point it out and deal with it. What does this chapter, or the general context, show to be the law of spiritual enlightenment and understanding? Well, you need to read the whole story through again; the start in the opening of this man's eyes, and all that was subsequent to it, or issued from it, and you will see that one thing governs this whole matter; because Christ was doing this thing as a sign; remember that; a sign in the midst of blindness, spiritual blindness, the blindness of Israel all round.

This man received his sight. It was a sign. It was meant to relate to that situation. What was the issue raised for this man in the terrific conflict which followed. Oh, what a battle arose over this man! Why, his parents were very soon dragged into it. They had the scare of their lives and compromised, and would not say what they knew, would not be frank and honest, because afraid of the consequences. At length this man was put out of the synagogue, excommunicated. Why? It was Christ or tradition.

That was the issue. The whole question was as to whether Christ was going to be the Lord, or whether He was going to be lorded over, and dominated by dead tradition. Here, as we have seen, were all the oracles of God. Here was all the form of doctrine, here the tradition of the elders, here those set, fixed, ecclesiastical rulers in relation to it, holding it to themselves and giving their own interpretation; without life, without light, and yet holding the truth. And then Christ, on the other hand, Who had it all, but also that which they did not have, the life and the light.

Hear Him: "It was said... but I say." In no instance was it a contradiction of Moses, but an interpretation of Moses. You look at the context, and you will see that what Christ said was getting at the inner principle and not merely the outward phraseology. Moses said: "Thou shalt not kill... But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...." Not a contradiction, but an interpretation. That is getting at the principle.

The principle of murder is anger. And if you have got the principle, you are just as guilty of the issue as though you had committed it. It is there in principle. It is the living authority of Christ which is in question, and the law of spiritual enlightenment and understanding is the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ as over mere tradition; it may be religious heredity, training, upbringing. If these two things clash, and if our traditions, and our acceptances, and our religious systems, are not in fellowship with Christ as life and light, or for one moment get in the way of a living walk with God; if going on with the Lord Jesus means that these things should be left behind, well, our spiritual understanding and enlightenment hang upon that issue.

Many a person has not gone on into the fuller revelation, and come to an inward rich knowledge of the Lord, because they have stuck to the old traditional life, and will not break with it; because they have allowed man to dominate their conscience and understanding, instead of coming direct to the Lord. It is not now, What saith the Rabbi, tradition, or Moses? It is: What saith the Lord to my own heart? And the whole issue in this chapter for this man was whether the Lord Jesus was going to be his Master, or whether he was going to break with the Lord Jesus, and turn back to the Pharisees, to the old school again.

The law of his enlightenment was there. You may say he was enlightened before that issue arose. Yes, but it is the sign. You have to see the Lord was doing something more. The end of verse 34: "And they cast him out," would be chapter 10, verse 1: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out."

How? Because they hear His voice! The whole question of the Lord's sheep comes in, when they thrust this man out. Those whom men cast out, the Lord takes up, and forms of them His Own flock on the basis of knowing, hearing, understanding His voice. That from which they have come out does not hear, see, or know; that is the realm of darkness. This man was cast out, and it was not until he was cast out, that the Lord sought him and started leading him, in principle. Now you have to have the Lord's application of the truth.

Do not begin to apply it in any mechanical way. I am emphasizing the principle of this, not how you are to apply it. The principle is this, that there are two lordships. There is the lordship of lifeless tradition, a religious order and system of things, which may have had a right and proper origin in God, but has now been taken up by man, possessed by man, used by man, interpreted and applied by man, and that dominates. On the other hand there is the living, personal Christ for the individual life, to be the Governor of the heart in all questions of spiritual life.

Which of these two is going to be Lord? I say, if such a position does hold, that these two things are two different things. We may well thank God when these two things are found to be as one. That is, Christ may be livingly Lord within an ordered arrangement here; but if things are as they were in this case, Christ as

One Lord, and religious tradition as another, then there is an issue, there is a crisis. I see, in applying the principle, that so much of our knowledge of the Lord depends upon our willingness to go on with Him, when such a course means very often a break with, or, departure from some old tyrannizing religious tradition. While we remain in bondage to that, we are kept in a limitation of spiritual knowledge. The law of revelation and of growing in revelation is a personal, close, spiritual walk with the Lord.

### The Cost of Spiritual Sight

But many will not pay the price that is involved in that. It was a price for this man. His parents, they come under a shadow. His own family were not all too pleased that this man's way had involved them in this issue. Undoubtedly they would be glad that he got his sight, but they wished it had not been quite in this way, and on this particular day, and in this particular relationship; that he could have had the blessing in some other way that would not have involved so much difficulty with the authorities.

There is the beautiful simplicity of this man that strikes you all the way through. They argue with him, and talk about the Lord Jesus as not being true, etc. He says: Why, here is a strange thing, a man opens the eyes of the blind, a thing never known since the creation of the world, and you say that one who does a thing like that is wrong, is evil, is bad. The man has got a beautiful knowledge of the Lord, and he cannot understand that point of view. And when you have light, you cannot understand the point of view of people who take that attitude. But it cost him much.

There are few more costly things than spiritual revelation. Spiritual revelation will at once begin to cut off certain relationships. A good many people will not go on with you, when you get spiritual revelation; they cannot, they have not got it. A good many people will take the attitude, that you think you have got more light, and are something superior, that you know better. You will, perhaps lose open doors, spheres of old-time acceptance. You come under suspicion. You will meet the open assault of the powers of darkness and blindness. Your possession of revelation in the apprehension of Christ will be challenged from every quarter. It is a costly thing, and sometimes you will feel like this man, that you have been cast out, and are alone. Take heart if ever that comes your way. It is at that point the Lord begins to look for the man. "Jesus findeth him." Yes, put out, but then led out, and the leading out is because: "My sheep hear my voice." Led out and led in.

Now the great note, of course, to strike in closing is this; that it was when the man came to the fullness of the meaning of Christ, the crisis arose for him, and all that followed came about. He has gone through shadows, he has gone to a Man, a Prophet, and at last, cast out, the Lord said to him: "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" "and who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" "Thou hast both seen him, and he it is that speaketh with thee." The man capitulated to that absolutely, and then he discovered the meaning of his being outside. He was in the way of a wonderful fullness. It is the great climax of revelation, when we really get the spiritual apprehension of Who Christ is. Not a great, good, wonderful Man Who works miracles, not even the Great Prophet, but the Son of God. Everything hangs upon that. That is the end the Lord has in view, that we should know Him in the fullness of His Being. We shall come to that through His humanity. We shall know Him as Son of Man in the touch of the clay, but when we have come by that way we shall come to know that He is more than that, He is the Son of God.

I feel that in such a range, and in so much detail, I may not have been as clear as I would wish in bringing this truth before you. Do not be worried about all the detail, but take two single thoughts. The fact of the truth of spiritual enlightenment and understanding as the Lord's will for all His Own; inward, personal

knowledge that relates to the Lord Jesus, an apprehension of Him. The other thing is the law, that we come out to the Lord Himself. We do not allow anything to come between us and the Lord by way of governing our spiritual lives; but go on with the Lord Himself whatever the cost may be. To know Him in fullness demands a personal walk with the Lord Himself, where He is Lord, He dominates in all things, however hoary may be the tradition. It is the Lord Himself Who must govern, and thus we shall grow in understanding.

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