

The All-Inclusive Goal

by T. Austin-Sparks

The main goal of the Church is to attain unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, which is a matter of coming into an increasing measure of Christ.

Scripture: Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 1:23, Ephesians 4:10, Ephesians 4:13-14, Colossians 4:17, 1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6, 2 Timothy 4:5

Topics: "The Fulness of Christ", "Church Unity and Growth"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the ultimate goal of the Church is to attain 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,' as stated in Ephesians 4:13. He explains that the Church, as the Body of Christ, is essential for His completeness, and that various ministries within the Church must work together in harmony to achieve this goal. Each member's unique gifts and functions should be recognized and utilized for the collective growth of the body, avoiding imbalance that can lead to weakness. Sparks highlights the importance of being led by the Holy Spirit in discovering one's ministry, rather than relying on human appointment. Ultimately, the Church's progress towards the fulness of Christ requires mutual cooperation and a focus on spiritual maturity.

Transcript

"Till we all attain unto... the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

Everything before this and after it in this Letter has its focus upon this clause. Do you ask, "What is this whole Letter about?" The answer is in four words: "The Fulness of Christ." The two usages of this word "Fulness" by the Apostle in this Letter not only sum up the whole Letter, but present the most wonderful and remarkable thing in this wonderful document and, indeed, the most wonderful thing in the Bible. In chapter one, verse twenty-three, the astounding statement is that the Church, which is the Body of Christ, is "the fulness of Him That filleth all in all." That seems clearly to mean that Christ can no more be full as Head without His body to make Him complete: that He needs and depends upon His body for His self-realization and self-expression. Closer still: He "filleth all in all" and yet requires His body in order to fulfill His filling. The body is the fulness, the completing of Him. In chapter four, verse thirteen the finality of that truth is pushed along a line to a future climax. "Till we all attain" is linked with a vari-sided provision of functions. We are informed that, on His return to heaven--"When He ascended on high" --the Lord Jesus forthwith "gave gifts unto men." These were personal gifts, or gifts as persons, and they were men taken captive by Him. But these men were the expression of various functions: 'Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists,

Pastors and Teachers'-- different functions, each one given "grace according to the measure of their gift," but all together bound and energized by one object. The Apostle--inclusive; the other three (Pastors and Teachers being one function) making up one interrelated and interdependent ministry. These are not different "Schools" or categories working apart, but only different aspects or functions of one body. There has to be mutual recognition, mutual evaluation and mutual co-operation. The separating of these functions can only result in an unbalanced condition, and lack of balance always results in weakness and loss. To give an unbalanced emphasis to evangelism is only to have immature Christians. To give out-of-proportion weight to teaching may result in the introversion which is divorced from objective concern for men's salvation.

In a local assembly, constituted by the Holy Spirit, for its full-growth, all of these functions should be present. Those who minister should know what their particular gift, grace and anointing is; and the assembly also ought to know it. Things are thrown into confusion when there is a trying to be and do what the anointing is not meant for. What pathetic, and even tragic, situations come about when men try to be that for which they are not anointed! A leader must be obviously anointed for that function, and the anointing must be accepted and acknowledged. The same must be true of all other parts of the one ministry. But each personal gift must--and this is absolutely imperative--must keep the one inclusive goal in view, and definitely contribute to it--"The fulness of Christ," because it is a "measure of the gift of Christ." The question may arise as to knowing what our particular function is. The answer in general will, of course, be that as we seek to be a responsible member of the body, in the local church, we find that the Holy Spirit "burdens" us and exercises us in a particular way. Note: this is not official. That is, it is not by our being appointed by men, or by our assumption, but by our spontaneous and voluntary exercise in concern for Christ's interests in His body. The Lord save His body, and its ministering members, from the pathetic scene of ministries which are not the definite projecting of "He gave..."; He gave; not man chose, appointed, or "opened the platform" to anyone who would take it. The "giving" of the ascended Lord is selective, specific and deliberate.

We must here indicate something very precious and helpful in this connection in New Testament procedure. It is indicated in First Timothy, chapter four, verse fourteen, and implicit in various other instances. "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." The "Presbytery" here does not necessarily mean special Apostles, but surely First Timothy, chapter five, verse seventeen--"Let the elders that rule well." True, Paul did speak of "the gift of God, which is in thee through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:16). It would seem clear that, at some time, there was a praying over the members of Christ's body, and in the praying the Holy Spirit constrained to ask for some particular qualification by which the persons concerned would make a specific contribution to the ministry in the body. Elsewhere Paul exhorted Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5; A.V.), and to Archippus he sent a specific message that he should "take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col. 4:17). It might be a very good thing if all ministries were the result of such specific action in prayer! There would be a much greater "attaining unto the fulness of Christ," and much less of the ineffective and unprofitable "wisdom (or otherwise) of men."

Our passage in Ephesians four, verse thirteen indicates that the body, whether universal or locally represented should, by the ministries, be making progress toward the ultimate fulness. The words are "the building up of the body of Christ." "Edifying" in the Authorized Version is misleading because it conveys the idea of "headifying." While it is corporate growth, it, of course, must be true of each member. While

Paul mixes his metaphors, at one time speaking of a Temple and the next of the body, he eventually comes down fully on the body as "the full-grown man," and what he means by building up is seen in chapter four, verse fourteen: "no longer children." It is the transition from childhood in which the persons concerned are always having to be nursed and, like children, draw attention all the time to themselves, to becoming such as can take spiritual responsibility and care for others, with the outward-looking concern for the other members of the body. It is a matter of coming into an increasing measure of Christ.

"Till..." represents process and progress; "we all attain" is the corporate object; "the fulness of Christ"-- the goal reached. From chapter four, verses ten to fifteen, we are thrown backward to the election, the calling, and vocation, to the relevant conduct and walk, and onward to the conflict and the demand for "standing." Everything relates to and focuses upon "Attaining unto the fulness of Christ."

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