

The All-Inclusive Object

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Letter to the Hebrews emphasizes the importance of attaining fullness in Christ, which is the governing object of God's creation, and warns against becoming conformed to a traditional and fixed earthly religious system.

Scripture: Hebrews 1:2-3, Hebrews 2:10, Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 5:12 - 6:1, Hebrews 8:1-2, Hebrews 9:24, Hebrews 10:19-22, Hebrews 12:1-2, Hebrews 13:20-21

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Fullness of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of attaining the fullness of Christ as the central theme of the 'Letter to the Hebrews.' He argues that God's ultimate purpose is not merely to have converts but to lead them to spiritual maturity, which is essential for the Church to fulfill its mission. The sermon highlights that true spirituality transcends ritualistic practices and is rooted in a deep, personal relationship with Christ, who embodies the fullness of God's revelation. Sparks warns against the dangers of immaturity and conformity to outdated religious systems, urging believers to embrace the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, he calls for a continual pursuit of spiritual growth and a deeper understanding of Christ's nature and purpose.

Transcript

So far we have been mainly negative in our approach to the "Letter to the Hebrews," albeit seriously so, and we shall find it necessary as we go on to constantly strike the note of what God's mind concerning His people is not.

In commissioning His servant Jeremiah the Lord said that his ministry would be twice as much corrective and destructive as it would be constructive (Jer. 1:10). This indicated how much there was to be got out of the way before God's end could be reached. It was like Nehemiah's "much rubbish" in the way of the constructive work later on. But the best way to the corrective is always the positive, that is, presenting the purpose of God as fully as possible.

So, then, that which governs everything here in this letter, as everywhere else in the New Testament, is the believer's attainment unto

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and the strongest warnings - with terrible examples - are given as to failure in this matter. The fatal weakness of so very much of the Church's work, both in its evangelism and in inside activity, is its failure to realize that God has never been satisfied with just having converts or adherents, but has considered it so important to bring such to spiritual full growth as to make the abiding monument of Divine Revelation - the New Testament - ninety-nine percent a volume for Christians as to their spiritual life after conversion; this, first and foremost, is God's way of saying two things.

Firstly, that the end, apart from the attaining of which His eternal counsels would have broken down, is Christ in fullness, not in aspects alone. Secondly, that only a Church which has a large measure of Christ can adequately and effectively fulfil the purpose of the evangel. There is far more of spiritual force to be overcome in and around this world than can be met by the novitiate Church or Christian. Only Christ in fullness can do this, and the measure of effectiveness will ever be according to the measure of Christ. That the "Letter to the Hebrews" has so fully to do with this matter is to be seen from the fact that - in principles - it embraces and comprehends the whole New Testament revelation and meaning, doctrinal and practical. Sit down with it and see if you cannot find in it the essence of "Romans," "Corinthians," "Galatians," "Ephesians," "Philippians," "Colossians" and "Peter". And does it not set the basis for the interrogation of the churches in the "Revelation"?

But to come more immediately to the inclusive object, just take the thought of fullness and read the letter through with this as your guide. When you have done so, and have recognized that it is this which governs all, then start again with this second thought; in what way is Christ revealed here as fullness for our apprehending and attainment? A third question will eventually arise; what adjustments are necessary if that attainment is to be realized? We will seek to answer these questions in order.

Fullness - The Governing Object

God does not believe in either emptiness or partial occupation. This is clearly shown throughout the entire Scriptures. If at any given time He speaks in a particular way, on a particular line, and with a particular emphasis, it is only by way of building up to a whole and bringing all to completeness. This is the point in the first statement in this letter. God has in times past spoken in portions and ways, but all the portions and manners pointed to the whole, and eventually that whole is found to be Christ - His Son. He is not merely another way or form of speech, He is the sum and consummation of all. He has been implicit in all parts, but never complete in any one. All the parts were - in principle - aspects or features of Him. But fullness is not just the combination and coordination of the parts as types and figures, manners of speech. Rather is it the Divine meaning of all that has gone before. The fullness is spiritual, heavenly, eternal, not temporal, earthly and passing. This is a point which must make us pause and think again. Fullness will be found in the essential nature of God's thoughts, not in their symbolic representation. Thus sonship, when understood, is the greatest revelation ever given by God to man, and the greatest of all Divine thoughts for man. So chapters one and two sum up all in sonship.

First there is the presentation of the Son.

He has been made heir of all things.

He was the instrument in the making of the ages.

He is the fullness of the revelation of God.

He sustains all things in cohesiveness and being.

He accomplished purification of sins.

He sits at the right hand of God.

He is superior to the angelic orders.

He has inherited an ineffable name.

It is a presentation of Christ on two sides of His being, sonship in two connections - Son of God and Son of Man. Only in Paul's letter to the Colossians (chapter 1) and John's Gospel (chapter 1) is there anything to compare with this as a presentation of the fullness and transcendence of Christ.

The point which we must now make sure of grasping is that, while fullness has ever been God's thought and intention for His creation, there has been no possibility of real spiritual fullness since the fall of man until Christ, the Son, was seated at God's right hand after His circuit of humiliation, suffering, death and resurrection. God begins from fullness He does not work towards it. Only in experience does fullness progress, but it is really, in God's mind, working back to the initially fixed realization in Christ. When the Son - the Divine standard of fullness - has been set before us, then sonship in relation to Him (not in Deity but as Son of Man, chapter 2) is brought out as to the believing family. All family titles are used: "children," "brethren," "sons," and "God's House."

This not being a detailed exposition of the letter, very much must be left without comment, although it is so valuable. We are governed by one thought.

When the Son and the sons have been presented, and with them God's thought and intention of fullness as governing the creative work, especially in relation to "man" and "the Son of Man" (2:6), then the great and significant phrase is used "Partners in a heavenly calling". By this phrase we are precipitated into the whole object of this letter, its subject matter, and the crisis which it represents.

1. 'The heavenly calling.' What is it?

The dominion over "the inhabited earth to come, (whereof we are speaking)" (2:5).

a. Man, in the first place was intended for this, but he missed it or forfeited it.

b. Israel was a type of an elect people with this as their destiny. They forfeited it (see chapter 3, etc.).

c. The dominion has been fully secured in "the Son of Man," Who is Son of God - "Thy throne, O God" (1:8) - and Who is now "crowned with glory and honour". And this "inheritance" is for the Church.

2. But there are two factors of major importance.

a. This "heavenly calling" is essentially heavenly and spiritual. It has no connection with this present earth excepting as to spiritual testimony.

b. Its full realization and fulfilment is "to come," it is future, after this age.

Let us look at these two things more closely. What is the aspect of this letter? It is entirely upward! See the heavenly references.

"Heavenly calling," (3:1); "heavenly gift," (6:4); "heavenly country," (11:16); "heavenly Jerusalem," (12:22); "heavenly things," (8:5,9:23); "passed through the heavens," (4:14); "higher than the heavens," "High Priest," (7:26); "throne of the Majesty in the heavens," (8:1); "entered into heaven itself," (9:24); "in heaven a better..." (10:34); "enrolled in heaven," (12:23); "Him That speaketh from heaven," (12:25); "make to tremble the heaven..." (12:26).

So, the Lord and everything of Him is looked at as from below. The counterpart of the whole Old Testament system is seen to be in heaven, and it was only a temporal representation of the heavenly and spiritual reality. Christ is in heaven, and all of our religious bonds with God are through Christ as there. Every bond with the earth is broken, even while we are walking on the earth. Christ in heaven takes the place of all earthly figures and representations in ritual. It is important to recognize that this letter was addressed - in the first place - to a people who for centuries had held the position of a people whom God had taken out of the world unto Himself, explaining their own nature and history in the light of Christianity, showing that even such a people may make their separation earthly and earthbound. Everything here and now is essentially spirit, but it is shown that there can be a false spirituality, a pseudo-spirituality. It was thought by the Jews, as it is thought by multitudes of well-meaning Christians, that the performing of certain rites, the preserving of certain forms, the following of a certain ritual, the wearing of certain garments, the employment of certain instruments, language, tones: and, indeed, the recognition of a set of more or less sentient accompaniments: if bathed in an atmosphere of reverence and solemnity, is spirituality. This letter in which we are meditating most definitely cuts clean in between soul (of which the above is the expression) and spirit (4:12). In effect its corrective is that when you have true spirituality you need none of the above; and, indeed, this is the age in which that has all given place to what is purely and solely spiritual. But you can have all that, and not be really spiritual people. The more truly spiritual you are the less you will be impressed by, or taken up with, these things. They will be to you like so much child's play. This can be proved by the fact that in the realms where ritual is the greatest the gap between personal knowledge of the Lord and ritual is also the greatest. Whereas a deep rich life in God is usually found where there is little or nothing of outward forms in the sense of a system of religion.

Let it be noted, as we close this chapter, that it is in this very realm and connection that the appeal, the warnings, the exhortations, and the argument of this letter lie. Not concerning Corinthian sensuality or worldliness or divisions; not the sins of Christians; but the immaturity, childhood (chapter 5:12 to chapter 6:12) of those who, although "once enlightened," were in danger of having their spiritual life limited and frustrated by becoming conformed to a traditional and fixed earthly religious system which, although instituted by God at one time to serve in the lower classes of the school of the ages, has, with this age, been left behind, and all who are of this dispensation begin their spiritual life and education at an entirely different level, and with an entirely superior equipment.

This equipment is twofold, making for such transcendent possibilities and responsibilities; Christ in full revelation; not in types and symbols, but in living reality; actually Himself the Priest, the Sacrifice, the Altar, the Mercy Seat, the Tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, etc., etc.; and then the Holy Spirit given to make Christ, in all that He is, a living inward reality, so that we live in the good of all by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. But Christ is infinitely vaster and fuller than has ever been conceived by man, and the growing revelation and apprehension of Him by the energy of the Holy Spirit keeps the believer's life ever moving forward and growing, so that Christianity should never be a static system but an ever-expanding life. Hence the constantly recurring appeal, "Let us go on," "Let us... let us..."

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