

# The Basis of Oneness

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the foundational aspects of oneness in the Church through the significance of the Feasts of the Lord and the power of Christ's Blood.*

**Scripture:** Leviticus 23:1

**Topics:** "The Power of the Blood", "Oneness in Christ"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of corporate oneness among God's people, illustrated through the Feasts of the Lord in Leviticus. He explains that these feasts represent a covenant in life by blood, the elimination of the flesh, and the resurrection power of Christ, which are essential for true unity in the Church. Sparks argues that oneness cannot be achieved through doctrine alone but requires a living experience of the power of Christ's blood and resurrection. He highlights the importance of recognizing and repenting of the flesh to maintain fellowship and unity within the Body of Christ. Ultimately, he asserts that the Church's existence and mission are rooted in the transformative power of Christ's blood and the heavenly nature of its calling.

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## Transcript

Now, seeing that it is set forth as being so, that we are together, we want to see something more of the ground of this oneness. I think perhaps we could be helped most by reminding ourselves of the 23rd chapter of Leviticus, the chapter which contains the establishing of the Feasts of the Lord. Now the main feature, the dominating feature of these feasts is that they represent the corporate life of the people of God, the corporate life of the Church. You see they are the gatherings together of all the Lord's people. These feasts are called holy convocations. The people are convoked, their oneness is revealed on these occasions and by these occasions, so that the primary element is the corporate life of the people of God as expressed at these times.

That is what is in view. That at these times people cease to live private lives, cease to live detached individual lives, even their own domestic lives or their own social lives within their own circle. All that which is departmental is abandoned at these times and the people are found as one. That being the case you proceed to take account of what it is that makes their oneness, and you see it is the feasts. Yes, but then it is the different kinds of feasts all put together making one whole which is the foundation of the corporate life and fellowship of the Lord's people.

So you go through the feasts. (I am not going to deal with them at large or in detail, I simply mention them and perhaps the outstanding feature of them). You begin with

### The Feast Of The Passover

A great many Divine principles are gathered up in the Feast of the Passover, but there is one thing which embraces all the others and becomes that for which the Passover stands, that which it represents, that is, A COVENANT IN LIFE BY BLOOD. Everything is gathered up into that. God makes a covenant. He makes that covenant by blood; that blood of the covenant is deliverance from judgment and death, a holding in life when death is abroad in judgment, the destroyer rendered inoperative. Well, that is life triumphant in the presence of death, over the Devil, in the power of shed and sprinkled blood, and there is a covenant between God and His own. That is the first step, the first thing which brings into being the corporate life of God's people.

Now I want to discriminate. A great many people of today have tried, and are trying to realize the oneness of the Church upon the basis of the doctrine of the virtue and efficacy of the Blood of the Lord Jesus, the doctrine of the Blood; if you like - the atonement, the value of the Blood, the whole teaching of the Blood of the Lord Jesus from whatsoever angle it may be preached, in whatsoever direction it may be applied; they are trying to realize the oneness of the Church by establishing that as an essential doctrine, and if you accept that as one of the doctrines of the faith, then you come into the oneness of the Church. But never yet has doctrine been able to realize oneness. It is not sufficient that you have fundamentalism, which after all may only be the gathering together of certain recognized fundamental doctrines; it is not enough to have that as the basis of unity. It does not work, you cannot get it on the basis of doctrine, on the basis of creed, you have got to have it on the basis of experience, on the basis of power, of something wrought, something brought about. We know that there are plenty of people who believe in all the eternal and infinite virtue and value of the Blood of the Lord Jesus who know very little experimentally about the power of His Blood in their lives as a mighty force working against the power of death within and without. That is a heavenly thing, but creed can be quite an earthly thing, perfectly sound and true, but quite an earthly thing for an earthly society, not efficacious in the spiritual realm.

It is the spiritual power of the Blood as registered in the spiritual universe that is the true value of the Blood, and it is when you come into that that you come into the true oneness of the Church - spiritual, not creedal. It is experimental, not doctrinal. It is life as an active, energetic, mighty thing. It is not our loyalty to sound doctrine. It is very important to notice that distinction. The maintenance of the oneness of the Body of Christ, beloved, requires something infinitely more than a sound creed and true doctrine; it needs a power, a terrific power, a force mightier than any other force in this universe, and the Blood is that.

It is on the ground of that Blood that the Church has been brought into being. Christ now lives in virtue of His own Blood, and He, living in virtue of that has brought all His members into heavenly fellowship with Him by the same virtue of His Blood. It is a living, working, operating thing this Blood, and the Passover is just that we have come into an experimental, living, active union with one another in Christ in the power of His Blood in that covenant. That is the oneness of the Church, the Body of Christ. Until something of that operates we have not come into the active operation of the Church's life as a heavenly Body.

If the Church is going to count, fulfil her vocation, register her impact upon the principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness, hosts of wickedness, and accomplish her universal mission, her pre-destined purpose, it can only be on the basis of this tremendous power that is in the precious Blood of

the Lord Jesus. That being true, the Church has no existence apart from that Blood, and therefore no vocation apart from the Blood.

We have said we have got to come into an appreciation of it, to approximate to what is already true; but in the mind of God no one is a member of Christ's Body who does not stand right in all the virtue of His precious Blood. I do not mean that they intelligently apprehend all the meaning of that Blood, that they have come into the full revelation of what that Blood is, but that their relationship to the Lord Jesus is brought about in virtue of that Blood, and that in heaven it is the Blood that has joined them to Him and one another. It is in the power of that that the Church is going to be ultimately triumphant. "They overcame because of the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11).

That is just the beginning, you see. So if we are going to know, appreciate, enjoy and profit by the corporate truth of the Body of Christ, we have got to learn what the power of the Blood is, and that Blood has got to become a recognized force in our lives against the things which the Devil seeks to use for breaking up fellowship. Oh, how much less there might have been of Satanic success along the line of schism and division if only the Lord's people had recognized the power and virtue of the Blood against all such Satanic activity! If you and I came into a state of strain in our relationships as the result of some work of the enemy, beloved, the only thing that will bring us back into fellowship is the pleading of the power of the Blood against all that the enemy has done. That itself is full proof of the fact that the Body is one in virtue of the Blood initially, continually and finally. The Passover yields that primary truth, so the coming together of the Lord's people in the Old Testament, their corporate life, their fellowship, was in the first place upon a basis of a covenant in the blood as triumphant over death and the destroyer, the first phase of their fellowship. The second of these feasts was

#### The Feast Of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be continued for seven whole days, representing a perfect period, a perfect spiritual period - (seven is the number of spiritual perfection) - that is a perfect spiritual period throughout which all that is of the flesh is eliminated and ruled out, for the leaven is the ferment of the flesh, is the work of the flesh, the potent element of the flesh which is corrupt, and we know that it is the leaven which is the basis of corruption. The flesh is corrupt, the flesh has got to be eliminated, ruled out throughout the whole period of spiritual life. We have to come to Romans 6, and see in the Cross of the Lord Jesus the body of the flesh put out of operation, where we recognize that this flesh is by God ruled out. The Lord demands that it shall be set aside, we must repudiate it, we must accept God's position about this, that the flesh must not have a place. It does not mean that we shall never be tempted along the line of the flesh, nor that we shall never be conscious that the flesh is there, but it does mean that we have to repudiate the flesh even though we might be touched by it; we have to take back that ground and repudiate it and say, "I repent, I put that back, I recognize that is corruption and that will corrupt everything, and I put it down, I put it out. I reckon myself dead to it." Just as on the eve of the Passover the father of the Jewish household would light his lamp and go through the house room by room, searching in every corner, every cupboard, every out of the way place to find any leaven if he could, and having swept his house clean of leaven so far as he knew by the most thorough search, even then before God he was not satisfied, he would make the declaration, "I have searched my house, I have purged it of the leaven which I know, but if there should yet be some leaven which has eluded my utmost search and scrutiny, I repudiate it also."

The thoroughness of the repudiation of the flesh as the corrupting element, that is the feast of unleavened bread. The Oneness of the Church the Body of Christ demands that not only our sins should have been put away, but that we should have been put away in the flesh. The natural man corrupts things, spoils things, divides. We know it is the ferment of the flesh that works against the unity of the Body, brings about schisms, upsets the positive spiritual functioning of the Lord's people in spiritual oneness. It is the flesh that does it all; so that when all the people are going to express their oneness of life in God it is necessary for them to repudiate the flesh, to get rid of the leaven. Any slight uprising of jealousy, or envy, or personal feeling, or heat of myself, or provocation which is personal provocation, not on a basis of principle, righteousness, but personal provocation which casts a shadow between me and another, I have got to go back on that at once and with all my heart I have got to say, "That was wrong and I repent of it and seek to have that leaven extracted, put aside."

We have all got to do that. We are still in this natural life susceptible to being upset and offended, we are still very touchy. Oh, yes, we know it quite well! Whether we feel we have a right to be upset or not, that is not the question, the thing is has our flesh come into the situation? If it has it has put up a barrier between us and others, and we must go and confess the fault of which we were guilty. Not all the time excusing ourselves because we were more wronged than wrong, nor hiding our own wrong because they were wrong. We must go back and say, "I ought not to have reacted as I did to it, I ought to have sought grace to return good for evil." We do not always do that, not any of us; but unless we do that, unless we keep short accounts there is going to rise up a barrier between us.

The Body of Christ in its corporate oneness is based upon the working fact of Romans 6 and Colossians 2:11-12, the whole body of the flesh circumcised, put away. You see again how necessary it is to have something more than the principle of our identification with Christ in death; it has got to be, not the principle, but the active working of the principle. The principle probably does not do anything other than put us into a false position, and it will do so if it is not applied. We can be just as deluded by truth as we can be by error. Quite a lot of people are deluded by truth. They have the principle, they have the doctrine, and for them that is the end of everything; they do not see that what is necessary is that the principle should operate and that it should be life. You see that the corporate life of Israel was based upon this second thing the putting away of the flesh. The third of the feasts was

### The Feast Of The First-Fruits

Now that embraces many aspects of truth and leads on to much more than at present we have it in mind to mention. We just take the primary thing, the initial thing, the outstanding thing which governs everything else in these feasts. When you come to the Feast of the First-fruits, you are simply coming to the great truth of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as representative. The first ripe fruits represent all the other to follow, the first-fruits are taken in representation of the whole. The priest takes those first ripe ears of corn to the Lord and thanks the Lord for the whole harvest. These are the earnest of the harvest, and we know from "Corinthians" what the Apostle says about this, that the Lord Jesus is a First-fruits, so that He is in His own Person representatively the Church in resurrection. "We are risen together with Him," says "Ephesians." We have been buried with Him, that is the old man put away, now we are risen with Him, and the real oneness of the members of Christ, the oneness of the Body of Christ is found in its living testimony to resurrection union with the Lord Jesus. We know how He established that principle in His simple and well-known little parable of the grain of wheat. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). You see there is a multiplication, a hundred-fold. One corn dying issues in a hundred corns living. It is resurrection corporeity in Christ

through His death.

Oh that we should enter into the working force of that as the Body of Christ; and you know when we really do begin to enter experimentally and livingly into the fact that we were planted together with Him in the likeness of His resurrection, and the power of His resurrection is operative in us, what a sense of fellowship that brings to us, what a difference in our relationships. If we are knowing the power of resurrection life at work in us, what fellowship we have. If we know something mutually of life triumphant over death, a working thing in us, a mutuality in experience, that mutuality is going to count, and it already is a testimony in the heavenlies, it is working against the forces of death and darkness.

That thing wrought into the Body of Christ is the testimony to the fact that the power of the Devil is broken, and a testimony to the fact that Christ has overcome death and has swallowed up death in victory (1 Cor. 15:54; Hos. 13:14). Unless we know that experimentally in the spiritual realm we shall not know it in the physical. The physical always follows the spiritual in the Divine order. We will never know resurrection of the body unto eternal life unless we know already resurrection in the spirit. It is a working force that constitutes the very basis of the existence of the Church's activity and function. To enter into the fact of the oneness of the Body we have got to enter into the experience of the power of resurrection. The fourth is

#### The Day Of Atonement

As in all the others, there are many principles included, but one thing predominates. The Lord says, "It is a Sabbath of rest unto you, ye shall do no work." This is a feast of gathering together of the Lord's people into rest, the Day of Atonement. Now, leaving all the other elements, let us notice the significance of the Sabbath rest coming in at this point. The feasts have been already introduced with the establishment of the Sabbath; here the Sabbath rest comes in in a special, peculiar, particular place in connection with the Day of Atonement, and it says this to us; that on the basis of our covenant union with God in life triumphant over death by the Blood shed and sprinkled, on the basis of our old man having been crucified with Christ, the body of the flesh put away, on the basis of our having come into the knowledge of union with Christ risen, the power of His resurrection, we enter into rest. We enter into rest; we come to an end of our works and enter into God's Sabbath, God's rest; we come to the place where we no longer strive after an end but where we have reached the end, where struggling to satisfy God ceases, and God is satisfied. He looks upon His works perfectly satisfied, we come into God's satisfaction.

In this Day of Atonement, in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus and the atoning value of His Blood sprinkled on the mercy seat right in the presence of God, God has found an answer to all His desires and requirements and has come to His rest, full satisfaction in His Son. That Blood is taken into the presence of God as a testimony to the fact that all is done and finished and God rests in the full accomplishment of the Lord Jesus, through His Blood, and there is no more striving. When we come there, to the apprehension of the perfect work of the Lord Jesus in His atonement we ought to come to rest. All fretful care to satisfy God ought to be put aside and we ought to find Christ meeting all our need for us before the Father.

What about our progressive sanctification? Is there nothing to be done of that in us? Yes, but you will never progressively move into perfection, holiness, until that basis is fully settled, the Lord Jesus has presented everything for you for the satisfaction of the Father. We grow in grace on the basis that already Christ has accomplished the whole work for us and we have nothing that we can do to add to His work for our sanctification.

Luther was sent to Rome with a commission and he was very anxious to visit the City and that special place of penance that he might get special privileges and indulgences and so on by climbing those stairs on his hands and knees. He thought by imposing upon himself that terrible suffering he would find the rest of justification. He started, the thing became laborious and something said, "The just shall live by faith," and on he went again; the voice said again, "The just shall live by faith," and he tried more steps; the emphasis came back again upon one word, "The just shall LIVE by faith" (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38), and that was what led to his conversion and his abandonment of the whole Romish system of justification by works.

"The just shall LIVE by faith." It is not our faith as something in itself, it is the Object of our faith, the work of the Lord Jesus. We make far too much of the measure of our faith, it is the Object of our faith. It is when we get our faith fastened upon the Object, Christ and His perfect work for us, that we enter into rest. We climb no more stone steps on hands and knees. This is a basic thing to the corporate life of the Lord's people. The element of unrest, ferment, dissatisfaction goes out, and we have peace with God, we have got harmony, for that is only another word for peace. That is rest. Peace in the Bible is not some sort of atmosphere, but a right adjustment of all elements to one another in a perfect harmony.

The last of these feasts is

The Feast Of Tabernacles

And how proper is their order. You see how their sequence is just right when you come to the Feast of Tabernacles. You notice that the people during their time of convocation are called upon to leave their houses and come out and go and cut down boughs of trees and build themselves booths and dwell in these booths outside their houses throughout the whole of the time of the feasts. It is a corporate action, and if you will just follow through the Feast of Tabernacles in the Old Testament into the Book of Nehemiah you will find that it points backward, and in the case of the remnant where the Feast of Tabernacles was reinstated there is a distinct link made between that reinstating and Israel's coming out of Egypt (Lev. 23:42-43).

It is said that this Feast of Tabernacles is meant to perpetuate the memory of Israel's coming out of Egypt, and yet when they came out of Egypt there was no Feast of Tabernacles established. The Feast of Tabernacles is the means of perpetuating the memory of Exodus. They came out of stone houses, directly related to the earth, they came out into a wilderness where everything was not earthly, everything was heavenly. Heavenly symbols - the blue robe of the High Priest and the bit of the same blue on the border of the garment of every man, woman and child throughout all their generations. So heavenliness was the character of these people, they were not of this earth, but out for God unto the heavenlies, and the Feast of Tabernacles speaks of the heavenliness of the people of God.

Beloved, that is an important basic factor of the Church which is His Body. We were saying that God in this dispensation is doing nothing whatever publicly to constitute something on this earth, and yet men are striving as hard as they can to set up something on this earth for God.

There at the end of the second century of this Christian era, perhaps before that, this thing came in, and there were means and methods adopted to make the Church something on this earth, to organize it as a world force, to put it into such form that it would appeal to men and impress men of this world, so that the world would take account of it, and say it was a great force, and something that cannot be ignored. That has developed and has ever been an absolute violation of the principle of God for this whole dispensation.

What God is doing is building a heavenly Church, a Body in the heavens, and the Church of God is not a thing seen, it is a thing unseen, a secret people, spiritual, by the world unknown - it knew Him not (John 1:10).

That is basic to our oneness. Immediately there is a tendency to set up something here on the earth you will get divisions; it does not matter how spiritual it is, immediately it touches the earth you will get divisions. Some of the most beautiful movements of God, really God's movement from heaven, immediately they get into the hands of men and become something on the earth, division comes in and you get more sects.

The only safety is to keep off the earth, the only safety is to recognize what God is doing. There will be a testimony here in the world, but there is a difference between there being a testimony in the world and there being an organization in the world.

The Lord is out of sympathy with every movement to set up something here on the earth. He will do that in a coming age, but not in this. If we do things by way of setting up something here on the earth, even for God, it is not long before the Lord leaves us to take the responsibility for it, the Lord will not take the responsibility for that. He will take responsibility for all that is according to His own mind in this age, that which is absolutely heavenly.

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