

# The Centrality and Supremacy of Christ as 'Head of All Principality and Power'

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*Christ's centrality and supremacy are rooted in His work of delivering us from the authority of darkness and triumphing over principalities and powers.*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 1:15

**Topics:** "Spiritual Authority", "Supremacy Of Christ"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the centrality and supremacy of Christ as the 'Head of all principality and power,' addressing the dangers of false teachings that diminish His divine authority. He warns against philosophies that elevate Christ to a high rank among spiritual beings while undermining His unique position in the Godhead. Sparks highlights that Christ's supremacy is demonstrated through His work of delivering believers from darkness and triumphing over all powers through His Cross. He encourages believers to recognize their identity in Christ, who has broken the authority of darkness, and to rely on Him for victory over spiritual struggles. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper understanding of Christ's work and its implications for both salvation and daily living.

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## Transcript

Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13; 2:10,15.

In a previous meditation it was Christ's centrality and supremacy in the light of the individual which occupied us; then it was His centrality and supremacy in the Church, which is His Body. We are now to consider that which is implied by the tenth verse of chapter two of Colossians: "... the head of all principality and power." Going with that is this statement from chapter one: "... who delivered us out of the power of darkness."

### THE GREAT COLOSSIAN ERROR

To apprehend rightly and appreciate truly the value of particular statements in the letter, such as this which we have just read, we must keep in view the background and occasion of the letter; and so for a moment we will be occupied with the main things which are in view in this letter. And firstly, and all inclusively, there is this absolute supremacy of Christ. For the unveiling of that to the believers and the establishing of the believers in that, the Holy Spirit led the Apostle to write this letter.

It was because of a movement by means of a teaching which had come to Colossae, the effect of which was to take the Lord Jesus out of His prominent place and put Him in a lower place, that this letter was provoked. It was a corrective. The nature of that teaching was a combination of Judaism with a spurious Christian philosophy. There were elements of Judaism and elements of Christianity woven into a somewhat fascinating philosophy, and it had to do in the main with supernatural beings from low orders to very high orders: principalities and powers in the lower realms and in the higher realms, and these orders of supernatural and spiritual beings were traced through the ranks of spirits and angels and archangels, and then, as one of them, but of very high rank, Christ was presented.

And He was made to be just one of the superior, or perhaps the unique superior head, of angelic forces, angelic orders, and these were offered for worship. There was what the Apostle calls here: "a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels," by which he meant that people were assuming to be very humble people, worshipping angels, bowing down to any superior person in the spiritual realm, a voluntary humility and worship of angels. As you will see by reading again, the Apostle repudiates the whole thing as being earthly, and of man, and being pernicious and evil, and to be utterly put out because, under cover of a very sincere and earnest religiosity, it subtly struck at this one thing, it struck at the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus as in the Godhead.

It was a wonderful thing. It drew out worship. It even led to the worship of Jesus, it gave Him a very high place in heavenly orders; it represented a very great deal of devotion, and with its external rites which were taken over from Jewish ordinances, which you will see in the letter, it captured a great many, and they accepted it as a revelation, a wonderful revelation, and as a truth to be received and obeyed. They were in danger of failing to recognize the peril of this thing, that though it exalted Christ, led to the worship of Christ, produced in those who accepted it an attitude, apparently spiritual, of reverence and humility and had that moral effect in them of something to make them very reverential people, very humble, earnest people, with a great devotion to Christ, and a great respect for everything spiritual; yet all that blinded them to the deep, subtle, devilish thing that was there.

How far Satan will go even in bringing about a kind of devotion to Christ, and promote a mystical, psychical "Christianity" (?) with elements of moral elevation, and yet hide within that very thing something which is of himself and, being of himself, savours of that which was in him from that time when he himself was hurled out of heaven, that thing which would take from the Lord Jesus the absoluteness of His place in the Godhead.

That is what was here, back of this letter; and the letter was written to expose this Gnostic philosophy, this false spirituality, this Satanic devotion to the Lord Jesus, and to show that the Lord Jesus was not only at the top of angelic ranks, He was Head of all principality and power in the sense that He was the Son of God's love, and that He was one eternally with God in the Godhead. The fullness of the Godhead was in Him in bodily form.

Now, beloved, from what we have just said there ought to be guidance for us at the end time; and you can take what I have said and apply it to some things which are of this very character, which will have great vogue in the earth, but which just fall short of this essential thing. But that is not the object of my saying this, though it may provide that understanding and knowledge and guidance and precaution. He is head of all principality and power, Christ is absolutely supreme, in a unique supremacy, not as one of that order, at the top of that order, but One whose order is far above every other order and whose supremacy is because there is not another like Him. He does not belong to the angelic order. He is not a created being.

He is eternally one with God. Of course, to you that is nothing new, and provokes not a very great deal of enthusiasm because we all believe that quite heartily. I hope that is true of you; that you believe that, that you stand there, that from your heart you are well able to say without the slightest suspicion of a reservation: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

#### CHRIST'S SUPREMACY INDICATED BY HIS WORK

Now having said that, and seen that, you are able to move on to the thing which is connected with it as a main thing in this letter. Connected with the absolute supremacy of Christ, is His supremacy as indicated by His work. It is here that the Apostle shows in what way Christ is different from, and superior to, all other orders of angels and archangels and principalities and powers. It is not just the statement of the fact that He is, but it is the showing of HOW that is so, in what way that is so; and it is by reason of His work. You see that is what comes out in this letter. You take the great statement of chapter 1:13: "Who delivered us out of the authority (lit.) of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love." You can say that about no angel or archangel. There is no other being in heaven or in earth to whom you can attribute that. That represents His mighty work, and it was that that He did in what you read in chapter 2:15: "Having put off (lit. stripped off) from himself the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (His Cross)." When He did that He delivered us out of the authority of darkness, and we were translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. No angel did that. No archangel stripped off principalities and powers. He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His Cross. It was Christ who did that. It is Christ's whose is the kingdom. It is the kingdom of the Son of God's love, His is the kingdom; and that kingdom is His by reason of conquest, by reason of triumph, by reason of casting out all other principalities and powers; by displaying openly in His triumph those others who sought to take possession of the dominion of this world. His is the kingdom in virtue of His Cross; and His Cross is the scene of His dealing with every other authority and power in the universe that would in any way seek to take His rights as the eternal, predestined heir of all things, as the Apostle here says: "All things have been created through him, and unto him." The supremacy is based upon His work.

It is a great thing of course to recognize the personal supremacy of the Lord Jesus; it is an added thing, beloved, to recognize the greatness of the work which He accomplished which brought Him into that personal supremacy. In Philippians 2 we see the descending movement of the Son of God's love from the place of equality with God down, down, down, until utterly emptied; He became "obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." "Yea" says the Apostle: "yea" - and no glorious death, no honourable death in the sight of men - "the death of the cross" - "Wherefore" (For this reason, on this account, because of this, the death of the cross) "also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The ground of His supremacy is the uniqueness and the transcendence of the work which He has done.

#### OUR PLACE IN THIS SUPREMACY

Now the third thing which comes in with this letter brings us in. That is all glorious, and our hearts ought to be moved by that great objective reality, the supremacy of Christ and His work: but we have got to see how we come into it, and one or two fragments will help us. Let us look at Colossians 2:12. "Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your

flesh, you, I say, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses."

"If ye died with Christ" - might we not leave out the "if" and make it an affirmation: "Ye died with Christ." "If then ye were raised together with Christ..." You see formerly he has made the statement that this was so, that we were buried with Him, that we were raised with Him. Now we might take it up like that, as a two-fold affirmation: Ye died with Christ; ye were raised together with Christ: "... seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God."

The right hand is always the place of honour and power; that is where He is. "For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." "Lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there cannot be Greek and Jew... but Christ is all, and in all." That is the way into the good of what we have been saying and it is necessary for us to carry Christ's work right through to this full issue.

The full issue of His absolute victory in the realm of all principality and power, in the realm of the authority of darkness - I say it is necessary to carry His work through to that full issue. Forgiveness of sins is a great blessing, the atonement for our sins is a great blessing, to be saved from hell at last and go to heaven is a great blessing, we would not minimise them for a moment or take from the greatness and the grandeur of those things because of the infinite cost with which they were purchased for us, but I say again, it is necessary for us to carry the work of Christ through to its full issue, and its full issue lies in the realm of principalities and powers, lies in the realm of the authority of darkness, the jurisdiction of darkness.

That is important for the sinner to know, that it is not only a matter of being forgiven his sins and saved from sin, but that the sinner should know that in salvation all the authority, the jurisdiction of principalities and powers, of the Adversary, Satan himself, has been destroyed and broken, and out of that jurisdiction, that authority, that rightful hold of Satan, they have been rescued - for that is the word here - rescued by Christ in His Cross; it means that Satan has no more power because he has no more right.

His power depends upon his right, and his right is based upon a state of things in our hearts, and the Cross deals with the state of things and destroys or removes the ground of his right, and breaks his power. Carry it right through. Now all that is in Christ for us. Christ in Himself embodies His supremacy over the Adversary because in Him there is no one of that ground that the Adversary must have upon which to encamp and construct his rightful authority to hold in bondage.

In Christ there is no such ground; Christ is in us when we believe, and, as we have already pointed out, that apprehended by faith means that the authority of Satan is broken because there is that in us which is Christ; there is Christ in us in whom there is no ground for the jurisdiction of Satan. To be delivered not only from sin (let me say it again) but from the authority of Satan, is a tremendous thing. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again."

What is the value of that? The Accuser comes along and tries to lay a charge against us. What is our ground of answer? Oh, our ground of answer is this: "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again." That is the way to answer the accusation of the enemy; Christ, who hath triumphed over sin and over all the grounds of Satan's authority. You and I can never meet the enemy ourselves in ourselves, he would have the best of the argument every time, but if we are able to present him with Christ, what can he do?

"... the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." They are the words of the Lord Jesus. What power has he? In Christ's death and resurrection all his power has been destroyed. "Who shall lay

anything to the charge of God's elect?" "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Do you follow that? That is the provision God has made, and if only we had a fuller, readier apprehension of Christ we should find that to be the way of victory. What is it that the Holy Spirit works upon in order to make victory in us actual?

It is not our struggles to be better. THE HOLY SPIRIT NEVER HELPS US IN A STRUGGLE TO BE BETTER. We may struggle on for ever, and die struggling, and the Holy Spirit will not help us if that is the way in which we think we are going to be either saved or sanctified. What is it with which the Holy Spirit will cooperate? It is our faith apprehension and appropriation of Christ as our perfection, as our salvation. "Oh," you say, "yes, but we are sinful and there is so much wrong about us; are we to close our eyes to actualities about ourselves?"

You are to open your eyes to Christ. Stop looking at yourself and your own sin and get your eyes fixed upon the Lord Jesus as perfection for you to God, and from God to you, and as you take Him by faith - "Not what I am, O Lord, but what Thou art" - "I in myself am bad: '... in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing,' but Lord, You are my salvation, You are my righteousness, You are my holiness, You are my sanctification, I hold on to You for all that" the Holy Spirit makes that good to us. It is our appreciation of Christ that is the Holy Spirit's ground of activity; that is the way of deliverance.

#### CHRIST THE WAY OUT FOR THE SINNER

Hear that wretched man crying out: "... for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." In that up and down life, resolving and failing, at last he cries: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me? ...I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." What is the way out for the wretched man? An apprehending of Christ. Not his struggles, his resolutions, his efforts in making up his mind that today he is going to be better, and coming back and having to repent at the end of the day. No, no! It is our faithhold on Christ which is the way out, the positive ground of victory. You try that way. God honours His Son, and God honours our faith in His Son. "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again," triumphant; and, "Christ in you" "... the head of all principality and power." This, for the unsaved, is a necessary fact. If we had been converted on the strength of this we would have been stronger believers from the beginning. If only we had known this when first we were saved we would have leaped into something that came to us many years afterward. Oh for the preaching of salvation to the full! You get a different kind of convert altogether when you carry the work of Christ to its full issue; when it is not only preached that your sins will be forgiven and you will go to heaven and not hell - perhaps a little more than that; but it is infinitely more than that, and if only we preached the fullness of Christ's work we would have converts that went ahead, apace, and reached maturity much sooner than the majority are doing, and we should find that most of our conventions are quite unnecessary, for they are mostly to get us to the place where we ought to have come when we were converted.

#### THE PREACHER NEEDS TO KNOW THIS

It is necessary for the believer; may I just say that is necessary for the worker, the preacher of the Gospel, the one who has to do with souls. You will not be a popular preacher of course, if you preach this. You will find, more than ever, that hell will be out against you, and many of the Lord's people will turn against you, but it is necessary. You take the case of the heathen; though what we have in the heathen is only obvious and patent: the same thing holds in the case of the enlightened, civilized, but it is not so obvious, it has been covered up by civilization and a great deal of Christian tradition: but in the case of the heathen it is very patent. What is the trouble with so many converts from heathenism? They go so far on the matter of

forgiveness and salvation from sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus, but oh, the haunting, tracking, pursuing fear of the spirit world, evil spirits, the authority of darkness; it follows them up, and very often that is the thing which drags them down and brings them back into bondage; and because of the fear of that, and the consequences of their action in breaking from the traditions of their fathers, fear of the consequences in the spiritual realm, what may happen to them, what may overtake them, they become again in bondage to fear and leave the way and go back.

If only we could bring to them in the power of the Holy Ghost right at the beginning the proclamation of Him "who delivered us out of the power (lit. authority) of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love," and get that in, we should see different results. Take that to them.

Beloved, the same thing obtains here in this country as in heathen countries, but I have said it is veiled. The authority of darkness is just as real here as it is amongst the heathen, the same Gospel is necessary, and you will find that until you have registered the impact of Christ's Calvary work against spiritual forces behind men you have not wrought out their full deliverance. We believers know what it is for the enemy to try to get us into the grip of fear again concerning himself. The authority of darkness is a very real thing to us. We have experiences, and if we were to capitulate to them, that would be the end of us. He tries to bring upon us that impingement of the authority of darkness, and if we surrender to it, capitulate to it, accept it, we are beaten. If we are the Lord's, Christ is within, and Christ is supreme and we must go on even if we have no feeling, or if we have a very bad feeling; when it seems to be the last thing we ought to be saying, we say it because it is God's fact, and when we begin to affirm God's fact we win through. Believers know what it is for the enemy to try to make them accept the authority of darkness. Stand upon the truth of God. God does not change with our feelings. God does not alter with our consciousness. This whole life of ours is subject to variation, more swift than the variation of weather, but He rules, unalterable, unchangeable. He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." And if He is there within, He has come to stay, and victory is in faith; believing that, standing on that, holding to that; and we must carry that through to its final and full issue, that He is Lord of all, "Head of all principality and power." Satan will sometimes try to make us believe that he is in the place of ascendancy, the place of supremacy, but since Calvary he is not, we stand there.

The Lord give us a new joy in the Son of His love as supreme in every realm.

Flash from our eyes the glow of our thanksgiving,

Glad and regretful, confident and calm,

Then through all life and what is after living

Thrill to the tireless music of a psalm.

Yea; through life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning,

He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed:

Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning;

Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.

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