

The Church According to God's Thought (Continued)

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Cross of the Lord Jesus is the only force in God's universe that can deal with idolatry, destroying the works of the Devil and removing the ground of Satanic strength.

Scripture: Exodus 20:3

Topics: "Idolatry", "The Cross"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the Church is the divine outcome of the Cross, which fundamentally addresses idolatry in all its forms. He explains that the Cross not only serves as a central point of worship but also eradicates anything that takes God's place in our lives, including good things that can become idols. The sermon highlights that true worship must center on God Himself, rather than on religious institutions or practices that may distract from Him. Sparks illustrates this through biblical examples, particularly focusing on Moses' humility and readiness to relinquish his position for God's glory. Ultimately, the Cross empowers believers to hold everything in relation to God, ensuring that their lives reflect His purpose without the hindrance of idolatry.

Transcript

Well then, if the Church is the Divine outcome of the Cross, it must define the nature and meaning of the Cross. What does the Cross do? What is the function of the Cross? We have viewed that in three directions in our previous meditation - God-ward, man-ward and Satan-ward. Now, let us see it in one or two other connections which touch all three of these at the same time.

The Cross an End to All Idolatry

Firstly, the Cross puts an end to all idolatry. Take that away and think about it. It is a long story, and it is a very far-reaching story, is idolatry. I am going to say something which would take a very long time to verify, so far as the data and events are concerned, but which can be verified from the beginning to the end of the Scriptures. It is this: if we knew the truth, idolatry lies behind everything for which the Cross of Christ came into being, and when the Cross is really made active, what it is doing is to deal with idolatry in some form or another. Now that, perhaps, you cannot grasp for the moment. But we will go a little way further with it.

You see, the Cross, right at its very heart and centre, relates to worship. That is the final word, the ultimate matter in this universe, and now the universe has become Cross-centric; that is, the Cross of Christ now, since the Fall, has become the centre of this universe, and that Cross is to touch this universe from centre to circumference. There is a centrality and universality of the Cross, and at the very centre and circumference of this universe the one thing which is pre-eminent is worship. If you understand what worship is, then idolatry is simply, but comprehensively, anything and everything which in principle takes from, or even tends to take from, the utterness of God as the very life of man. God has made Himself the spring, the source, the centre of life, and for his life man is utterly dependent upon God, and can only find his life in God. God has bound man to Himself inseparably for his life, and will not allow man to have life, in the real sense, apart from Himself. He has made it a law in His universe that man cannot live apart from God, in the sense in which God means him to live and in God's meaning of life. God is man's life. Anything which becomes for man a substitute for God in life, for God Himself for life, is idolatry. Anything that draws man away from God, or tends to draw man away from God, is idolatry in principle: and, mark you, it is God Himself in Person Who is man's life, and man's centre. In a moment, I will say more about what that means.

What Idolatry Is

Idolatry is all that is not God as the basis or object of man's life. That is tremendously comprehensive. We think of idolatry, of course, in terms of heathen idols. We might perhaps bring it into a closer realm, where people clearly put things in the place of God but oh! it goes much deeper than that, and, in the Scriptures, idolatry is never regarded as merely negative or passive. There idolatry is always seen to be an active thing, inasmuch as it is the work of an intelligence which is opposed to God; and that Satanic intelligence is always making it its first object and aim, persistently, continuously, and by every means, to get something into the place of the Lord personally. You see, it is possible to have the things of the Lord in the place of the Lord Himself; and that is idolatry in principle. Yes, it may be the things of Jehovah not other gods. In place of the Lord, Who is the object of man's life, His things may be given precedence, and in principle that is idolatry, and the Cross is ever being used by the Holy Spirit to strike at everything, no matter what it is, that comes to occupy the place of the Lord Himself, the place that the Lord Himself should occupy. Idolatry is always religious, and it may be the Christian religion as well as any other religion that is marked by idolatry.

I am saying some strong things, but there is cause. You see, idolatry exists in principle whenever or wherever anything, even good in itself, becomes an object in itself rather than God, the Lord Himself. There are many things which are not only harmless but good in themselves, which have, nevertheless, been allowed to take the place of the Lord Himself, and good things can therefore embody the principle of idolatry in the one in whom the devotion is found. Touch some Christians, or Christian institutions, and let the touch be even in relation to something more of the Lord Himself, and you will find an uprising of jealous regard for the institution which utterly blinds to that possibility of an extra measure of the Lord Himself. You can be so devoted to a denomination, a missionary society, a piece of Christian work, that there is no room for any extra measure of the Lord. The thing itself has become the end, the object for which you live, and when the Lord wants to get you moved on into something more of Himself, the obstacle is that good Christian work, association, institution, tradition, connection. Yes, and that is idolatry in principle, and we see from history how the Lord again and again has had to smite with smashing blows things which in themselves were good, in order to save His people unto Himself personally. Even things which He gave at one time, have had to be taken away or shattered because the gift has become the end,

the object. That is what is happening: and a very necessary thing it is too. The Lord is not protecting good things today. If those have become something to which men have become devoted, with which they have become bound up, He is allowing them to be broken and destroyed.

God Himself Man's Life and Entire Good

What is He after? It is Himself which He is seeking to establish as the object of man's life, and not the things that have relation to Himself: and I say again, you meet something intensely fierce if you touch a thing, even though you are touching it maybe with a view to getting people to move on with the Lord Himself. To put that in the other way, if your appeal for moving on with the Lord seems to people to involve their having to move away from this or that or some other thing, then there is warfare; which shows that Satan in his eternal campaign of idolatry, has got a footing amongst Christians in relations to things which take the place of the Lord Himself, good things though they be in themselves; and you find, if you are spiritually sensitive, that you are not just encountering the established institutions, but you are encountering a terrific spiritual force. Is that true? It is true. Had I never come up against it, never would I have believed the terrific force there is lying behind Christian institutions if your ministry touches them. You meet something which turns upon you, and it is not just the thing or the people. It is something that threatens your very life, to slay, and this in principle and essence, beloved, is idolatry; because its ultimate effect is that even the Lord cannot have what His heart is set upon and get His people spiritually where He wants them, because they are so bound up with His things. They are not able to discriminate between His things and Himself.

The Cross will deal with all that, and the wonderful thing is that this is just the spontaneous effect of a real work of the Cross, when it is by the Holy Ghost. Now, put it to the test, or bring in your test cases. What about Saul of Tarsus? You touch the institutions of Saul of Tarsus, Judaism and its whole system, you touch it and see what you meet. You not only meet the strength of a bigot, you meet the spiritual force of hell: and so it was. What is there in God's universe that can meet that, deal with that, break that down, put that out of the way, so that it no longer has any power over the man? There is no force in God's universe save the Cross of the Lord Jesus. That will do it; and it did it, and it did it right there on the spot. It was not a case of growing out of Judaism, absorbing new ideas which supplanted the old; the thing was done. The Cross, Jesus Christ crucified, did it. Yes, and there are many other cases like that. The Cross does come with shattering power, if it gets a chance, upon those things which take the Lord's place, and gives Him a real way to become Himself the life, as He has determined to be, the All which He has claimed to be. The Cross does that. It gets rid of idolatry, not only in its various forms, but in its very principle, and in this way destroys the works of the Devil, removes the ground of Satanic strength. The Cross of the Lord Jesus gives God His full place, His utter place.

This may further explain why it is that the Lord has to take away things which He Himself gave, His own gifts, why the Lord seeks to have us hold everything in relation to Himself, and not as something in itself; that is, to keep us in that detached way inwardly, so that at any time we can without any difficulty let go our position, our ministry, our work for the Lord - anything, everything. We hold it for the Lord. Others can come and take our place, and there be no jealousy, no debate. That is why the Lord could speak so highly about Moses. Moses, My servant! Moses, the man of God! These are the titles, the designations, of Moses. Why? Well, you remember Moses' position was challenged by certain [ones] in Israel. "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken by us also?" And again later, when the company of Dathan and Abiram chided with both him and Aaron: "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up

yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" What did Moses do? Fight for his position, seek to vindicate himself? Did he go into dark despair because he saw that his place was being usurped or challenged? No, he just went to the Lord and, in effect, said, If You put me into this position, while You want me here You must look after me and see to it that I am able to fulfil my ministry: if You want me out of the way, I am quite ready to stand out; if You want them in, it is all right! Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets! He took that position, and the Lord said, I can come alongside of a situation like that, I can commit Myself there: and He did. You know what happened to the company of Dathan and Abiram. The meekness of Moses is the great feature of his life. "The man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). What did that mean in Moses' case? He held everything for the Lord, in relation to the Lord Himself, not for himself; and there is no difficulty whatever at any time in letting any given thing go when that is the case.

But oh, that is not always so with Christians. You chance to touch their work, or get in the way of their ministry, and you meet something. It is idolatry. Well, the Cross deals with that, and when the Cross has done its work in us, we will be very meek; in this sense, that we hold things only in relation to the Lord and His glory, and we have no difficulty in letting them go. We can stand back quite easily and let others go on. It is for the Lord to decide, and we give the Lord a clear way. The Cross does that. Beloved, no one need ever worry about the fulfilment of their ministry if, by the work of the Cross in them, they are thus abandoned to the Lord's interests. The Lord will see that, in the long run, that which He intended will be realised through that life, whatever men and demons do. It may not be as they thought it would be, but it will be. The values of their lives will be conserved by God, and not lost. All that is to the contrary is in principle idolatry, and the Cross is against it. That is why, as we were saying, the Lord so often has to take away His own gifts, because in the course of time they have taken His place.

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