

# The Church According to God's Thought

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The Cross is intended to lead directly and immediately to the Church, the expression of the life of the Lord Jesus on earth, and the Church is the embodiment of Calvary.*

**Scripture:** Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Galatians 6:14, Ephesians 1:22

**Topics:** "The Church", "The Cross"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the vital connection between the Cross, the Church, and spiritual conflict, highlighting that the purpose of the Cross is to lead directly to the Church. He stresses that the Church is not just a mystical concept but an actual functioning organism meant to express the life of the Lord Jesus in unity and harmony. The sermon underscores that the Cross is intended to bring about a properly governed and regulated Church, where the life of Christ is co-ordinated and expressed without contradictions, ultimately fulfilling God's intention for His Body.

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## Transcript

Our hearts have been directed anew to the relationship between the Cross, the Church, and the spiritual conflict, and what we are seeing in the first place is that, in the purpose of God, the Cross is intended to lead directly and immediately to the Church. You will just suffer a word or two of re-emphasis in that particular matter before we go further.

The Expression in the Church of the Life of the Lord Jesus

It is possible to have an evangelism of the Cross which does not lead directly and definitely to the Church, and it is possible to have a teaching about the Cross in its fuller meanings; that is, the Cross beyond the elementary matters of new birth, justification and such matters; it is possible, I say, to have a message, a teaching, which is fuller concerning the Cross than that, which, nevertheless, does not really and actually lead to the Church; in both of which cases the Divine intention is missed, the purpose of God is not reached. Now, probably someone might say, But surely everyone who is born again is in the Church, and the Church comes into being in that way: what is the Church but the company of those who are born again? Yes, but that is not what I am talking about. That may be true, and yet, for all practical purposes, the Church may not exist; for all practical purposes, in the real, present, practical values of the Church, the Body of Christ, it might not be in existence. I am speaking now not so much about the Church as it is called mystical; that is, that somewhere outside of this realm, in the unseen and the unknown, all believers are one, spiritual oneness obtains, and that is the Church. That may be true, I do not dispute that, but

there is something more than that. If that were all, then perhaps we should be excused for all the things which exist here on the earth, and we could accept them without any question or heartache, and we could just go blithely on our way, saying, Oh yes, it is quite true that all the Lord's people are divided up into thousands of warring sections and parties, nevertheless we do not take any notice of that; they are all one in heaven, they share one common life! I am quite sure that some of us do not feel that is what the Lord would have us accept. No, I am not speaking about the Church "mystical", to use a word of which I am always a little afraid. I am speaking about the Church actual. The Lord Jesus died that there might be an expression here on the earth of what He is in heaven, to have a working expression of His life.

Surely the very term "Body of Christ" means something more than just the fact that the life of the Body is one life. It signifies that the members of the Body are one Body. You see what I mean. Take the physical body. You or I may be alive physically more or less, but as for the members of our physical body there may be something that has altogether upset their unity; a germ, an injury, and there is no co-ordination of the members; they do not work together in co-operation and harmony, there is no proper control. There may be an acting of certain members out of relation to the others; yes, all sorts of things like that, where we would not say for a moment that that is because there are two or three different kinds of life in that body. We should say the life that is there is only one life; that is, that that man or woman has not the life of a man and of a dog, and of a bird, and of a fish, all different kinds of life, and that it is this that explains the contradictions in their make-up; that one moment you come on the cat life, and another the fish life, (whatever those things represent!). No, it is one kind of life, human life, and so far as the life is concerned, it is a unity. But the expression in the body is not the expression of one life; it is not showing itself in a co-ordinated activity.

And the Church, all who are born again, may be sharing the one life of the Lord Jesus, and yet in the Body that life may not be showing itself in a co-ordinated, properly ordered organism in expression: and do you think the Lord can be satisfied with just the life being there and the expression being full of contradictions? Surely not! So that there is something more than being born again and receiving the life of the Lord. That life is given for a purpose, and that purpose is to bring about this properly governed and ordered and regulated and co-ordinated organism, the Church, which is His Body. I am speaking about that, not the mere existence of the Church, not the one mystical life of the Church, but the Church as a functioning thing under the sovereign government of Christ as its Head. The Cross was intended to lead to that.

Now I repeat, it is possible to have an evangelism that does not result in that at all, and such an evangelism is falling short of the intention of the Cross. It is possible to have a teaching of the full meaning of the Cross which does not work out in the Church according to God's thought, and such a teaching is falling short. We have known such teaching, full teaching on the meaning of the Cross, but what has remained has just been everything that is here amongst men; every kind of division going on, every kind of distinction in Christian sections continuing, all the differences and the conflicting differences just persisting in the presence of a fuller message of Calvary. Then there is something wrong somewhere, for the Cross, when really known and really operative, will deal with all that which contradicts the real Divine thought about the Church. The Cross is intended to lead to the Church as God has conceived the Church. Well now, we were saying this afternoon that the Cross has certain specific aspects or directions in which it deals with things that are in the way of God's thought concerning the Church. We shall go on now with some other things that the Cross effects. But let us recognise that the Cross provides the ground for the Church and the Church is intended to show what the Cross means. When the Church does approximate to the Divine thought in reality, you will see there exactly what the Cross has meant and has accomplished.

The Church will be the embodiment of Calvary. The Church is to preach the Cross by what it is first; and that is where you begin in the book of the Acts. You can see all that obtained in the pre-Calvary days, even with Christ amongst men, and Christ with a company round Him. You can see all the old elements of divisions, strifes, ambitions, avarice, pride, self-assertiveness, all these things are there in the Gospels, even amongst disciples, and the inner circle of disciples. But when the Cross is an accomplished fact, and the Holy Ghost brings it right into the life of that company, then you find a wonderful revelation of what that Cross has done; for they had all things common, not one said of the things which he possessed that they were his own, and so on. You have something done. All self-interest has gone, all that rivalry has disappeared. Now it is all for the other; it is love, it is joy, it is peace. The end of Acts 2 is a wonderful revelation of what the Cross has done in people. And that is how the Lord wishes it to be. And when you come to Corinthians, to conditions which are such a violent contradiction of the Church according to God's mind, the only thing to do is to know nothing save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. You have to get back to the Cross, in order to get the Church as it should be. So the Cross provides the ground and the means for the Church, and the Church becomes the embodiment of the meaning of the Cross. That is what obtains when God has things according to His mind.

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.

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