

The Church - the Anointed Vessel

by T. Austin-Sparks

The anointing is the work of the Holy Spirit that joins and unites God to a person or thing, committing Himself to them for a specific purpose.

Scripture: Numbers 3:5-10, Ezekiel 28:14, Acts 10:38, Acts 19:2-3, Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 1:26-30, 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, 2 Corinthians 1:21, Ephesians 4:11-13, 1 John 2:27

Topics: "The Role of the Church", "The Anointing"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the Church as the Anointed Vessel, highlighting the various expressions of the Holy Spirit's work, particularly the anointing. He explains that the anointing signifies God's commitment and presence, both in the Old and New Testaments, and that the Church, constituted by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, carries the implication of God in the world. The anointing is not based on human choice but is a divine act that grants each member a specific function and purpose within the body of Christ. Sparks warns against the dangers of disregarding the anointing, which can lead to confusion and division, and stresses that every function, no matter how humble, is valuable when anointed. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of the Church's nature and the importance of the anointing in fulfilling God's purpose.

Transcript

In the Scriptures there are many ways in which the Holy Spirit's work is spoken of. There is the 'receiving'; the 'filling'; the 'baptizing'; the 'enduing'; the 'gifting'. It is not our purpose to consider the meaning of this variety of expressions, but to dwell upon one other, namely, the anointing. The anointing throughout both Old and New Testaments is shown to be both general and particular; comprehensive and specific.

The first thing about the general aspect of the anointing is that, because it is the Spirit of God who is the anointing Spirit, the anointing is God joining and uniting, and committing Himself to whatever or whoever is anointed. It means that whenever and wherever the anointing rests there God has to be reckoned with. To touch that is to touch God. To obtain a real knowledge of this truth and fact we have only to read those parts of the Book of Numbers which deal with the Levites, the Tabernacle and the vessels thereof. Life and death were bound up with all these as anointed because thereby God was bound up with them. In the New Testament this comprehensive aspect is first related to Christ and then to the Church.

The very word or name 'Christ' means Anointed. "Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed..." (Acts 10:38). To Him God was committed. To touch Him was to touch God, as history has proved. In the end everyone

is going to be judged and their destiny fixed according to their attitude and decision regarding Jesus Christ. What a tremendous amount of detail is comprehended by this inclusive truth!

When we pass to the Church we find that, according to the New Testament

The Church is the Anointed Vessel

On the Day of Pentecost a company of over five hundred men and women were constituted the Church of God by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. That company came under the anointed leadership of the exalted Lord Jesus, for INCLUSIVE anointing was always upon the head. From that time the Church carried into the world the implication of God: and rulers, empires, and peoples had to reckon with God in the Church. All that was true of Christ as the Anointed passed from Him as Head down to the Church, His Body. It was not what the people were, or are, in themselves, but because of the anointing, although anointed people are such because they do not stand on their own ground, but on the ground of Christ.

It is taken for granted in the New Testament that truly born from above, baptized believers have the anointing, and surprise is expressed if the evidence is not present (see Acts 19:2-3, R.V.). Place alongside of this reference 2 Corinthians 1:21, etc. The very place of believers as "in Christ" places them under His anointing, or in Him, as the anointed One.

But while the Holy Spirit is comprehensive and many-sided in meaning, the ANOINTING is everywhere in the Bible the term which has the particular meaning of position and function, office and purpose. Satan (Lucifer) in his unfallen position is said to have been the "anointed cherub that covereth" (Ezekiel 28:14). It was evidently a particular position and function. So, prophets, priests and kings were anointed for their position and their vocation. In the same way the Tabernacle and all its vessels and instruments were anointed to fulfil a particular purpose, and nothing could have a place or fulfil Divine purpose without the anointing. Everything and everyone had to be anointed for a SPECIFIC use and purpose, and no instrument could either choose its own function and position, or do the work of another. All this was God's law of efficiency, effectiveness, harmony and blessing. Life and death were bound up with this principle.

The anointing has always been within the Divine sovereignty, and NEVER in the choice, power, or hands of men. It is a very serious thing to either get or be put into a position for which God has not acted by the anointing.

When we come into the New Testament this law of the anointing is very clearly recognizable as to both Christ and the Church. First the sovereign ACT, then the MANY and VARIOUS functions. Both in the major appointments, such as Apostles and Prophets, which mainly relate to the Church universal, and in the particular functions in the local expression of the Church, the New Testament is very clear. The Holy Spirit is seen to be the custodian of the gifts, functions, appointments, and enduements in the churches. It is GOD'S order; to overlook, to ignore, to violate, to exceed this law is to mean an affront to the Holy Spirit. This will result in confusion, limitation, and divisions. Where men have put their hand upon a work of God the subsequent history has invariably been twofold: divisions and the relegating of such men to a place where discredit rests upon them, and their place of full usefulness has been lost. On the other hand, there is a no more heartening and inspiring truth revealed in the Scriptures than that by the anointing EVERY member of Christ has a particular function and value. The anointing is different from natural ability and qualification. The least gifted naturally is not thereby disqualified from Divine usefulness, and the most gifted or qualified naturally has no advantage here. The anointing is unique. Just put together 2 Corinthians 1:21 and 1 Corinthians 1:26-30, and all of 1 Corinthians 2.

In the Tabernacle of Israel there were great vessels under the anointing, and there were such humble instruments as the snuffers, but even the latter were anointed. Now, be careful! It was ANOINTED snuffers. There are plenty of people who take on themselves the function of snuffing. They will snuff ANYTHING, and snuff OUT anything. The snuffers of the Tabernacle were not for reducing or extinguishing the light of the testimony, but for keeping it fresh and from making an unpleasant atmosphere. It needs the anointing for such a ministry.

There is another thing that we must always remember, and it is that EVERY vessel, function, and place derives its value from its relatedness to all the others. Indeed, no one vessel however important, has either meaning or anointing apart from all the others. The anointing is ONE, although in a variety of operations. The lamps demand the snuffers, and the snuffers are absurd without the lamps.

All that we have here said is only an indication and pointer to a very large and important realm of Divine truth; many volumes would be required to exhaust and expound it all. But surely if this be God's truth, it is enough to - at least - indicate

(1) the real nature of the Church, churches and their function;

(2) why there is so much weakness and confusion, and loss of Divine impact;

(3) why the enemy is so concerned to counterfeit the Holy Spirit and thereby defeat the anointing of which he was once deprived. This latter will be a particular characteristic of the last times. That is why in the Scriptures, the anointing had such a close and vital place with warfare. Think on that!

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