

The Conflict

by T. Austin-Sparks

The ultimate object of the Cross and the Church is the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, and Satan's opposition is focused on this ultimate issue.

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, Romans 8:37, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Ephesians 6:12, Philippians 2:9-11, Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Peter 5:8-9, Revelation 12:11

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "The Cross"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the intrinsic connection between the Cross, the Church, and the spiritual conflict that arises from their relationship. He explains that the Cross serves as the gateway to the Church, which embodies the meaning of Calvary and demonstrates the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The greater the understanding and expression of the Cross within the Church, the more intense the spiritual conflict becomes, as it directly challenges the authority of evil. Ultimately, the conflict centers on the Lordship of Christ, which Satan opposes through various means, seeking to undermine the unity and purpose of the Church. Sparks concludes that a true understanding of the Cross leads to a living expression of the Church that actively engages in spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness.

Transcript

We shall, by the Lord's enabling, go on with our consideration of the Church, the Cross, and the Spiritual Conflict.

So far we have been occupied with the Cross and the Church; in the first place seeing that the Cross, in the mind and purpose of God, is intended to lead immediately and directly to the Church. Just as the altar at the door of the court of the tabernacle in the wilderness stood right in direct line with the sanctuary, and led to it - the priestly ministry commenced at that altar, and then passed on right into the sanctuary and found its consummation in the Most Holy Place - so the Cross of the Lord Jesus stands there as the very gateway into the House of God, and is intended to lead the people of God straight through into the corporate life in union with Christ. And so also in the temple, the altar is that which leads into the house; and in the rebuilding of the temple by the remnant back from the captivity, the first thing was the setting of the altar into its place, and then the laying of the foundation of the Lord's house, and the building of it. So it is in the mind of God always, that the Cross carries with it the House, and leads to it, and any kind of Gospel which ends with the Cross as a thing in itself and does not carry through to a living expression of the House of God, the Church, is a Gospel which has failed of its main purpose in God's mind. Well, we

have been emphasizing that considerably, but the reiteration of it may be useful, for the Lord to revive and perhaps make clear in a new way what it is He is seeking.

Then we have gone on to see that when the Church really does come in, it becomes the great practical Gospel or demonstration of the meaning of the Cross, because it embodies and shows forth all that Calvary was intended to mean. God's preaching is not just a preaching in words, the proclaiming of the Gospel is not only the enunciation of truths; it is the practical living expression of that in a people. Otherwise angels could have preached the Gospel; anybody could preach it. The Lord has bound up a revelation of Himself with a people who are the living embodiment of that revelation, and that is the function and nature of the Church.

Well now, we move on a little in regard to the third thing, namely, the conflict. The Cross and the Church being bound together in great Divine meaning explain the conflict. From that very fact conflict results; it just springs up. The Church embodying the meaning of Calvary is the occasion of the conflict, and where there is a real apprehension of the full meaning of the Cross and a practical expression of it in a people, there you have conflict in its most intense and persistent form. To say that in other words, the measure of the living corporate embodiment and expression of the meaning of Calvary is the measure of spiritual warfare. The more there is of the living apprehension of the Cross and the more there is of a living expression of God's thought about the Church, the more there will be of spiritual conflict, the more the antagonism and hatred of the powers of evil will be manifested, expressed, demonstrated.

The Supreme Object of the Cross and the Church

Now in this matter of the conflict, we should begin by reminding ourselves that the Cross and the Church have one supreme object in view. It is always helpful to be able to reduce great things to concrete and direct implications. The Cross is a great thing, a comprehensive thing. The Church too is a great and a comprehensive thing. We could talk about the Cross all our lives, and be moving round to different angles and aspects all the time. Who will ever be able to exhaust the meaning of the Cross of the Lord Jesus? We can talk about the Church in the same way and go on indefinitely covering new ground in relation to the Church. It is always beyond us, there is always more; and yet, when all has been said that ever will be said about the Church and the Cross, the whole thing can be gathered into one quite simple and direct meaning. It focuses upon one thing and one thing only. The Cross in all its fulness of meaning, the Church in all its mighty, Divine significance, have one object in view ultimately, and that object is the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ. Say what you like about the Cross, say what you can about the Cross, it all comes back to that. Its focal point is the Lordship of Jesus Christ in fulness and finality. The Cross in every phase of its meaning and application comes to that eventually.

The question raised all the time by the Cross is, Yes, but how does it work out in the dethronement of every other authority within and without the life of the child of God, and the enthronement of the Lord Jesus in utterness as Lord? That is the question all the time. We are not dealing with things in relation to the Cross. There may be many things incidental, but they are not ends in themselves. There are things in us, all sorts of things in us, and those things have to be met by the Cross, and the Cross has to be applied to them; but never let us think that the business of the Holy Spirit with the Cross is just to deal with these things as though they were the end that the Lord was seeking. No, in dealing with the things, the Lord has an object in view all the time, and it is toward that object that He is dealing with every detail, and that object is the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ.

And so it is with the Church. Oh, how many things there are about the Church which are wonderful and glorious to contemplate; its nature, its function, its vocation, and so on. But none of these things in the mind of God is an end in itself. The Church ultimately exists for one thing only, and that is this sovereign, Headship of the Lord Jesus. Everything that we have to say about one another, about related life, about fellowship, about corporate expression, about functioning, and all the other things to do with the Church, they are only on the way to this other thing, that the Lordship of Christ, His sovereign Headship over all things to the Church, might be in expression. There is one thing central to this universe in God's thought into which everything else is gathered, and that is the Lordship of His Son Whom He made heir of all things, through Whom also He made the ages.

The Focal Point of All Satanic Opposition

Well, if that is true, we are well on the way to understanding the conflict; because the Lordship of Christ is the one focal point of all Satanic challenge and opposition. Never let us think that the antagonism of Satan relates to mere details, mere incidents, relates to us or to things. No, Satan has a comprehensive view of the situation. He is able to take in the whole range of things, and to see the significance of details, and if he focuses upon any detail, as he does, it is only with his far view, his whole view, that he does it. The end that he is after through everything is this matter of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Yes, he may focus a good deal of attention upon a relationship, upon two believers who are brought together, who have to live together, and he may bring a great amount of power and stress and cunning to bear upon those related lives in order to divide them. Do you think he is interested in dividing people as such, and that, when he has done that, he will be satisfied because that is done? Never! That is not his object at all. In making that division, he has something very much bigger in view, and that is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And so our relationships as just two people carry with them the great significance of the lordship of Satan or the Lordship of Christ, and anything between just two simple children of God resolves itself into no less a matter than the ultimate thing in God's universe. The ultimate thing may be bound up with just two simple children of God in their related lives.

And what is true in that, is true in a countless number of things which in themselves may seem to be very insignificant and hardly worth taking account of. How petty many things seem, how paltry! You almost blush to talk about them as things, they are so silly, and yet somehow or other Satan is most interested in them. But do you think that Satan is petty or paltry in that sense, just wanting to make a lot of silly mischief here and there? Oh no, we give him credit for something more than that. His kingdom is at stake, and in all these silly little matters, so absurd and ridiculous, there is bound up this mighty issue of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Thus in all these matters, the Cross has to have a very deep place; in our relationships, in the twos and the threes, and the little circles, so that Satan does not get in and secure a foothold to destroy this expression of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The Cross has to be there. The Cross carries with it, not just the dealing with failure, little things in the lives of God's people: the Cross carries with it the immense issue of the Lordship of God's Son.

The Church, therefore, takes up that meaning of the Cross and is to be a company of the Lord's people on this earth which represents the overthrow of Satan's power, in his destruction of oneness, fellowship, relatedness, co-operation, and this bringing into view of the absolute Lordship and sovereign Headship of Jesus Christ. The Church is for that. This is the question bound up with the Cross and with the Church, namely, Christ's Lordship, and Satan is interested in the Lord's people only in so far as this ultimate thing

is being really affected.

You see, you can have what is called "the Church", and what are called "the churches", with no knowledge whatever of this spiritual warfare. This real spiritual conflict in the heavenlies against the forces of evil is a thing which is altogether foreign to that which is called "the Church" here in this world. They do not have any fights, any battles, any warfare. It is something outside their ken. Why? They have got no impact of a living knowledge of the Cross. The Cross with them is a story, a history, a doctrine, a creed, not a mighty inwrought reality and power. Immediately it becomes that, they will know the fight. Satan does not trouble where there is no living working of the Cross. That is not the Church. You cannot have a church without the Cross, and you cannot have the Cross without a living expression which provokes the powers of evil. That is the Cross according to God's mind.

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