

The Creation Motivated by the Love of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The love of God is the central theme of the Bible and the motive behind creation, and it is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Genesis 22:2, Isaiah 41:8, Lamentations 2:13, Hosea 11:1, Matthew 3:17, John 3:14-16, John 15:15, Romans 3:6, Ephesians 2:4-5, Hebrews 12:6

Topics: "God's Love", "Understanding God's Heart"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the creation of the universe is fundamentally motivated by the love of God, as expressed in Ephesians 2:4-5 and John 3:16. He argues that behind all creation lies not just a mind or will, but a heart filled with love, which is the essence of God's dealings with humanity. Sparks highlights that God's love leads to a deeper understanding of Him and reveals His heart, especially through the relationship exemplified by Abraham and the nation of Israel. Ultimately, he asserts that the love of God is the key to understanding the Scriptures and the very nature of God, culminating in the embodiment of that love through Jesus Christ. The sermon calls believers to recognize and embrace this profound love at the center of their faith.

Transcript

"...but God, being rich in mercy, for HIS GREAT LOVE wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved)" (Eph. 2:4-5).

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life. FOR GOD SO LOVED the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-16).

There is a great weight made to rest upon that little word "for" - "FOR God so loved the world." We say that John 3:16 is the heart of the gospel: but it is much more than that, it is the heart of the universe. There is back of all things in this created universe a heart; not just a mind or a will, a design, a reason, a power, a fiat, but a heart. We are familiar with the attempts to prove there is a design in creation, that there is a mind behind the universe, and that a will brought it into being. That is all quite good and right; but we are not so often asked to consider that behind it all there is a heart - and more heart than anything else. The reason, the will, the design, come from the heart. Everything takes its rise in the heart of God. We have said much about the thoughts of God, the counsels of God. The nearer we get to the very centre of things, the more we shall become affected by this fact, that right there in the centre is a heart. It is a heart that we

shall come to eventually; not an explanation to satisfy our reason, not a demonstration of power, but just a heart - but a mighty heart: and when we use that word rightly, we simply mean love. We speak of people being heartless. That means that they are without all that love means. Love is not the governing thing in their thoughts, actions, and motives; they are strangers to love. Heart then for us means love, and when we say that back of all things and at the centre of all things there is a heart, we mean there is love.

All the dealings and ways of God with His own people will have a twofold result - but mark well that this is with His Own, who have come into some very real and vital relationship with Himself in an inward way.

THE TWOFOLD EFFECT OF GOD'S DEALINGS

(a) A DEEPENING EXERCISE TO KNOW HIM

Firstly, a deepening exercise to understand Him, to know Him. Think about that. Is it not true that God's dealings with us and God's ways with us have the effect of causing us to reach out longingly for a knowledge, some better understanding, of Himself; when things have got beyond us, nay, the Lord has got beyond us. For all that we know, for all that we may have learned, He has got beyond us now. He is too deep, too hidden for us now; He is defeating all our efforts and all our ability to understand Him. But we are not just prepared to leave it there and throw up our hands and say right away, "Well, I do not understand the Lord, I do not know what He is after, what He means; I give it up." Those in whom the Spirit of God is at work find that, although they may be in such a position as to be completely helpless and hopeless in the matter of knowing and understanding the Lord, at this juncture they find they HAVE to know, they MUST know, they cannot just leave it there and give up. Everything depends now upon knowing the Lord anew. And it is a very big everything - far more than our life here on this earth as mere human beings. If that were all, we should cut it short and seek the way out through the forbidden door. But we know that something very much more is at stake than just the finishing of the tenure of our days on this earth. Everything that matters over and above this earthly life, all that we have said and professed and claimed and hoped for, is bound up with this crisis. There has to be a discovering of the Lord in some new way. That is the first effect of the Lord's dealings and ways with His Own.

(b) THE RESULTANT KNOWLEDGE OF HIS HEART

The second thing, as issuing from that, is the resultant knowledge - not in the first place of His mind, not an explanation to our reason, a solving of our problems, a satisfying of our enquiries, but the knowledge of His heart. Any of you who have known anything of a life with God can test it by your experience. You have these deep crises, you come to an impasse by reason of the ways and dealings of the Lord with you, and the one thing, the only thing, to save you is a new knowledge of the Lord. I ask you, has He EXPLAINED Himself to you in the first place? Has He ever come to you and said, "Now this is exactly why I have taken you, and am taking you, this way" - and so solved your problems and satisfied your mind? Has He done that? Not in the first place. No, the first effect of this deep exercise of your heart is the knowledge of His heart; that is, arrival in a new way at the fact and the reality of the love of God. We shall come to the wisdom of God through the love of God. We shall come to the understanding of God only along the path of the love of God. Everything is revolving upon this pivot of the universe - the heart of God.

Is that not proved in many ways, and not least by spiritual conflict? Upon what does spiritual conflict turn and hinge? Well, when we get into the vortex of a great spiritual warfare, where the pressure is almost unendurable, where everything is going against us, when the heavens are as brass over us and our prayers seem to get nowhere, when the Word of God seems a sealed book, when adversity and

disappointment follow on in quick succession, what is the upshot? The upshot is the love of God every time. When the evil forces create conditions like that, and when the Lord is giving them so much liberty for the time being, those forces are always near to whisper about His love, to turn for us His love into hate. "This is not His love, this is the opposite of love!" Is that not true? You have only to get right down, really down, to have that issue of the love of God presented to you. The heart of the universe is this matter of God's love.

THE LOVE OF GOD THE KEY TO THE SCRIPTURES

Having said that, are we not able with this key to unlock the whole of the Scriptures? Is not this the key to the Bible? - for the Bible is one continuous and growing revelation of this central and basic fact, that love is the motive of all things. What was the motive back of the creation, and of man as the very centre of the creation? It was love. All the rest of the Bible is an unfolding of God's love for man. Man was made for the heart of God. It is a mystery. The mystery deepens and grows as we go on; but there is always a mystery about love, even amongst humans. Love is a strange thing. Very often you cannot for the life of you explain why some people love certain other people - why it was that So-and-so fell in love with So-and-so; it defeats every attempt to explain. Well, if that is so in the human realm, the Divine is infinite in its range above the human. To explain in terms of love why God, with all His perfect knowledge, knowing the end from the beginning, set His hand to make man, is not the easiest thing. Indeed, I think we are at the depth of mystery. You follow that through the Bible. As we proceed, we are coming on to that again and again.

GOD AND ABRAHAM - A HEART RELATIONSHIP

You can only explain and understand the drama of Eden by recognizing that it was a love matter between God and man, and that the enemy's activity from then on to the end was, and ever is, to cheat God of that on which His HEART is set, to take from God the object of His love. From that tragedy of the garden, you find God moving again in sovereign love, choosing that which is called "the seed." You see Him fastening mysteriously, inexplicably, upon certain individuals. Let Abraham stand out as a very strong and full example.

God fastened upon Abraham, and brought him into a relationship with Himself which was a relationship of love. Mark the progressiveness of God's dealings with Abraham as a representative one in bringing that man right into His very heart. Step by step, stage by stage, Abraham was being brought more to the inward side of the heart of God. I am not going now to trace those steps: they are familiar to you. In His dissatisfaction and disappointment with man, and yet in His hunger to have man all for Himself (which was the first motivating activity of God) God chose this man Abraham, brought him in love to that relationship with Himself, one with His heart in His disappointment over man and in His desire to have man according to His own mind; right through those successive stages to the final step - "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest... and offer him" (Gen. 22:2).

It was the last step of a spiritual journey where finally, in one magnificent, triumphant step of faith, Abraham went right into the heart of God. "For God so loved... that he gave HIS only begotten Son." He became one with God's heart in its passion to have man. That is the essence of John 3:15-16. So the end of that journey sees Abraham as the friend of God, "Abraham my friend" (Isa. 41:8). You can have all other kinds of relationship without having that. You can be parents and children; you can be husband and wife; yes, you can be on the basis of any known relationship, and yet not just come to that - "my friend."

If a man's son is his friend, or if a son's father is his friend, you have something extra, the climax and the crown of the relationship. And so with every other relationship. Said the Lord Jesus to His disciples, "No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends" (John 15:15). Abraham, the friend of God! Is it not perfectly clear that, in the choosing of this seed, what God was after was a heart relationship? It was a matter of God's heart. The climax of all was not merely some world, some creation, some race of very wonderful people objective to God upon whom He had conferred many wonderful blessings and benefits, that the universe could look on and say, "Well, God thinks a lot of those people, He has done a lot for them."

That is all true, but something far more than that is involved. The end which God has in view is a race of friends, the expression of mutual love; God's love begetting love, destroying that evil work when God lost what He was after in the first place - a potential friend. You cannot understand that; He is speaking in human language, to express a Divine mystery; but the Bible is full of it.

GOD AND ISRAEL - LOVE THE ONLY EXPLANATION

From the individual seed you come to the nation. Again the mystery deepens. Why choose that nation, Israel, the seed of Jacob? But here is the nation chosen. It would take us a long time, but it would be well worth doing, to trace the love of God in the history of that nation. We find ourselves very near the heart of God when we touch Israel. You think of all the words the Lord used, the titles He employed, concerning that people. He called Israel His child. "When Israel was a child then I loved him" (Hosea 11:1). He called Israel His son. "I... called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1). He spoke of Israel as betrothed unto Himself, His wife (Hosea 2:19,20 etc.); His daughter - "virgin daughter of Zion" (Lam. 2:13 etc.) He spoke of Himself as Israel's mother - "Can a woman forget her... child... yea, these may forget, yet will not I forget thee" (Isa. 49:15). Have you not read the prophecies of Hosea? There, within a very small compass, you have this whole story of God's love for Israel in such terms of strength and passion and longing and yearning and heart-brokenness as cannot be found anywhere else.

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him... I drew (Ephraim) with cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that lift up the yoke on their jaws; and I laid food before them. They shall not return into the land of Egypt; but the Assyrian shall be their king, because they refused to return to me. And the sword shall fall upon their cities, and shall consume their bars, and devour them, because of their own counsels. And my people are bent on backsliding from me: though they call them to him that is on high, none at all will exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I cast thee off, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? my heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together" (Hosea 11:1,4-8).

That is God speaking; and note the setting of that eleventh chapter of the prophecies of Hosea. It is the time when Israel's sin had filled the cup to overflowing, the time when they had reached the climax of iniquity and idolatry, practicing such wickedness as I would not dare to mention here. It would be a scandal in the presence of decent-minded people to say what was going on in the streets of Jerusalem in the name of religion. It is at such a time, when His wrath might most justly have been poured out upon them, that God says about those people - "How shall I give thee up?" You know the story of Hosea's life - how he was commanded by God to go and love and marry a harlot, all to set forth in the life of the prophet the great truth that however deeply buried in iniquity these people were, God loved them. Oh, the mystery of God's love! Will you tell me it is not true that the universe has at its very center a heart that loves? Well, think again and go back to your Old Testament.

GOD'S LOVE EMBODIED IN HIS SON

We pass to the New Testament, and what do we find? We find there that the heart of the universe is now embodied and revealed in One Who is God Himself incarnate. This One gathers up into Himself - and far transcends - all the past. If Israel has so direly sinned and so stricken the heart of God, that heart has gone beyond Israel now. Here, in the person of His Son, God is showing it is not only Israel that is in His heart, but the whole world. "God so loved the world". "...the Gentiles are fellow-heirs" (Eph. 3:6). And then you read the first chapters of Romans, and see the state of the world. Horrible things are said about the state of man in those chapters; and yet how does that letter break out? It breaks out in a matchless revelation of the grace of God, which is only another word for love. In this One - His Son - the love of God, far transcending all the wonderful revelation of it in the past, is now embodied and manifested.

You can see the link of the Lord Jesus with all the Scriptures of the past; and let this be the key to them. It is not just that He was foretold - though that is true: He was the theme of the Old Testament writers and they were all pointing toward Him. But it is something more than that. What have they all been dealing with, what has been the substance, the essence, of all the Old Testament writings? Is it not God's love for man? The Lord Jesus embodies in Himself all the Old Testament on that point; He includes everything.

Oh, but you say, there is another side to the Old Testament. There is the awful story of God's wrath. Ah yes, but what is God's wrath? Rightly understood, wrath, anger, only exists because of love. There is no such thing as anger or wrath if there is no such thing as love. In the fallen creation, if we are angry, it is so often because of some self-love. There is very rarely that crystal-pure essence of wrath which is utterly selfless. We are angry because in some way we are cheated or defeated or robbed; something is happening to us, and we are angry. There is very little of that pure wrath of God in this creation, that which is apart from any selfish consideration whatever, when we are angry in a disinterested, detached way, angry with pure anger. If you can get that, then it is that because you love so strongly, therefore you hate so strongly. Wrath is only the other side of love. If God is angry, it is His love in reverse expression. That comes out at the end of the Bible. It is seen to be anger because of all that Divine love means - the very NATURE of God.

But to return to our point. The issue of the Old Testament is - "God so loved the world that he gave his... Son." The Scriptures have all been pointing to that, but it is love that is behind all. The Lord Jesus is the succession of all that has gone before showing the love of God.

THE LOVE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SON TO HIS FATHER

You see Him in His relationship to God His Father. Oh, if the Lord Jesus does reveal God, how does He reveal Him? Well, I do not see any fuller way in which He reveals Him than in terms of love, through His devotion to the One Whom He always calls "My Father." The Father says, once, twice "This is (Thou art) my beloved Son" (Matt.3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11). He could have said, "Thou art my loved Son," but He did not. He said, "Thou art my beloved Son." It is not making something out of nothing. Look at some words with that little prefix. "Betrothed" - that is your relationship of a troth to a person. "Besiege" - the direct, immediate relationship of an investing army to those invested. "Beseech" - there is something more in beseeching than just asking. When you beseech, you give yourself, you pour yourself out, you let yourself go, you hold nothing back. And so, "Beloved." The point is that God has come into an immediate heart-relationship with this One, He has taken Him into His heart, He has related to Him in terms of love. His relationship with this One is not just that He loves Him, He has given Himself to Him. He is "BE-loved"!

See the relationship of the Lord Jesus to God's will. Oh, yes, it was a blood conflict, even unto death, sweating as it were great drops of blood, but His love for the Father bore Him through. "The cup which the FATHER hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). "FATHER... not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). This love relationship to His Father went down so deep, was so tremendous. Words with us have become so common as to be robbed of a great deal of their strength. I was going to say, it was terrific, that love for the Father, when you see what the Son went through. Do you notice that when He had fought through the battle, that battle of His relationship with the Father in terms of love, from that moment He was so calm and steady and tranquil that everything was going down before Him? The battle is over, the situation is established. They come to take Him, with torches gleaming in the night; with sound of hurrying feet, of swords being drawn from their scabbards; a traitor betraying a leader, a traitor who has said, "I know where He goes, I know because I have been with Him, I will take you to Him; and in case you might mistake one of His disciples for Him, I will give you a sign as to which is He, I will kiss Him." Thus they came, with all the hatred that lay behind on the part of the High Priest and the rulers; and He is as steady as a rock, they fall back from before Him. "Whom seek ye?" "Jesus of Nazareth." "I am" - and "they went backward, and fell to the ground." Again He says, "Whom seek ye?" "Jesus of Nazareth." "I told you that I am he"; "if you seek Me, here I am; take Me, let these others go free." See how tranquil, steady, rock-like, He was right to the last, before the rulers, the High Priest, before Pilate. Oh, there is something about triumphant love that settles a great deal of conflict and hate and fever and anxiety, and makes you very steady. That was the Lord Jesus.

THE SON'S LOVE RELATIONSHIP TO HIS OWN

See His relationship to His Own. It is summed up in one word - "having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). Perhaps He loved Judas. You notice that when Judas led that band to Him, He did not look at him and say, "Traitor! You scoundrel! You wicked man!" He said, "Friend"! I think that was enough to send Judas to suicide. "He called me friend, and yet He knew what I was doing!" He loved His Own to the end. And, knowing ourselves, shall we not agree that there is a mystery about this love? Oh, yes!

I am going to stop there, because at that point you have to go right on from the persons here in the days of His flesh, through the rest of the New Testament, and all the teaching that was given to the Church, and so at length to the Revelation, and you find it is all turning round this one point - the love of God. I think I have said enough to give some ground, at least, for believing it is true. Oh, there may have been times in your experience, and there may yet be - if you have not yet come there, do not worry, go on with the Lord - when you wonder whether you will ever again speak about the love of God. Everything seems to argue to the contrary, and Satan has struck such a blow as to have made your faith rock. What the Lord is, I think, trying to say to us is this, that that may very well be just the way to a new discovery that it is all in love, and just the opposite to what the devil is trying to say. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Heb. 12:6).

Well, to sum all that up again; at the centre of this universe is a heart. That is God's side. Our side has yet to be contemplated. But oh, it is wonderful, inexplicable love, and I, for my part, am one of those who believe that if only we could present the love of God aright, we should never have to speak of the wrath of God in order to persuade men - and even if we did, we should have to show that His wrath is love in reverse.

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