

The Criteria of Livingness - Reproduction

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of reproduction as a fundamental principle of livingness, where life is transmitted and passed on, and warns against exclusivism and self-centredness.

Scripture: Genesis 1:28, Matthew 28:19, John 15:8

Topics: "Reproduction in Faith", "The Danger of Exclusivism"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the law of reproduction as essential evidence of life, highlighting that God's command to 'be fruitful and multiply' reflects the organic relatedness of life. He warns against exclusivism, which leads to death and disintegration, and stresses that true livingness involves transmitting life to others rather than hoarding it. The sermon illustrates the importance of being a vessel for God's blessings to the nations, contrasting the barren fig tree with the fruitful vine. Sparks calls for a spirit of sacrifice and travail in reproduction, urging Christians to focus on what they can give to the world rather than becoming self-centered. Ultimately, the vitality of any Christian community is measured by its ability to produce life beyond itself.

Transcript

Having noted that essential evidence of life which is organic relatedness, we naturally move to the law of reproduction. When God united man and woman in "the grace of life", He immediately said "Be fruitful, and multiply".

Reproduction is the law, the object, and the evidence of organic, living, relatedness. Someone has said that 'Any organism that refuses right-of-way to life by denying it facilities for transmission commits a breach of trust. Nowhere is life a possession simply to be enjoyed. It is a stewardship to be sacredly worked so as to be a centre of transmitted energy.' A barren fig tree was taken by Christ as a symbol of Israel's failure in trust, and was cursed. Israel received, but did not pass on, and thereby lost its right to continue. Over against the barren fig tree is set the Vine, the chief concern of the Husbandman for which is "that it bear much fruit". The trust was given to Israel as "children of Abraham" to whom God said "In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed". All nature cries with a loud voice that the God of creation is no believer in a 'No thoroughfare', 'Cul-de-sac', 'Dead end' way of existence. Whether it be the individual, the group, or the nation, 'No exit' is a contradiction of a fundamental natural and spiritual law. An open highway for life is the law of organic livingness.

Exclusivism is, sooner or later, death and disintegration. The history of exclusivism is the history of unending divisions, and those divisions have always meant limitation and self-centredness. Strangle a limb and it will die. Stop circulation and mortification will ensue. Be an end in yourself, and you weave your own shroud.

The New Testament with its supreme characteristic of newness is so clearly marked by world-vision. If there is a tendency to become exclusive and self-sufficient, then He who had said "Unto the uttermost part of the world" will sovereignly order that "They (were) scattered abroad everywhere". A veritable rising from His throne (as seen by Stephen) will be to apprehend a "chosen vessel... unto the nations", Heaven's battleaxe against Judaistic prejudice, bigotry, and exclusivism. The swinging of that axe meant hard hitting for carnal selfishness at Corinth, and wrathful anathemas for Galatia. While, on the other hand, the glorying and rejoicing over Thessalonica, Philippi, Ephesus, etc., was because that through them the word and testimony went into "All Asia" and Europe. It is not enough to have interest in the nations, whether by praying, and reporting, and reading. It is a matter of what we have to give. What can we transmit? What will the nations get if they come to us? Is there reproduction in the nations?

There can be no reproduction without travail. This is the spirit of sacrifice. Self-centredness, whether individual or collective, means selfishness. There can be plenty of missionary interest born of many various incentives, but rather pleasurable and romantic, and not travail, anguish, and unto blood. There is a great conflict for the universal, and this battle is often against that pernicious, inveterate, incorrigible tendency to lower levels, smaller measure, mediocrity, collective introspection.

The livingness of the individual Christian, the local church; or any institution bearing the name of Christian will be determined by what is found through it of vital value beyond itself. A very successful manoeuvre of the devil is to get a local company (or an individual, for that) wasting long months or years, and great spiritual vitality in occupation - if not obsession - with its own affairs, and in so doing limiting its reproductiveness, its 'being fruitful and multiplying'. It really means loss of the dominating and emancipating vision of the immensity of Christ.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-criteria-of-livingness-reproduction/>

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