

The Cross and the Disruptive Power of Sin

by T. Austin-Sparks

The power of the Cross is the only cure for the disruptive power of sin, and it is essential for establishing order in the Church and revealing Christ.

Scripture: John 3:14, John 8:28, John 12:32, Acts 13:2-3, Romans 8:2, 1 Corinthians 1:23, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 2:9-11, Colossians 1:20, Revelation 5:9-10

Topics: "Unity in the Church", "The Power of the Cross"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the Cross as a unifying force against the disruptive power of sin, illustrating how sin acts as a spiritual disease that disintegrates both individuals and communities. He highlights that the Cross not only bears our sins but also judges and destroys the effects of sin, calling for a return to Divine order through the Holy Spirit's guidance. The sermon challenges believers to reflect on the Cross's role in their personal lives and local assemblies, urging them to seek the Holy Spirit's control to maintain unity and effectiveness in the Church. Ultimately, the message points to the Cross as the central theme of reconciliation and the foundation for a new creation where Christ is the focal point. Sparks calls for a deep examination of motives and situations in light of the Cross's transformative power.

Transcript

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14).

"Jesus therefore said, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things" (John 8:28).

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (John 12:32).

In the Scriptures cited above we have the Lord Jesus three times speaking of being "lifted up". Of course, it means on the Cross. In connection with that 'lifting up' He uses two phrases: "Whosoever" and "All men". The issue of the Cross, then, is said to be a unifying of humanity. When we think of the Cross, we usually, and almost entirely, think of sin. This is right, if we understand what is meant by sin. There are sins, and there is sin. The Cross is His 'bearing of our sins in His body on the tree'. The Cross is also the judgment upon, and destruction of, the effect of sin.

In the Bible sin is regarded as spiritual disease. There the greatest illustration of spiritual disease is leprosy, and the effect of leprosy is to disintegrate the body, to break down its unity. It does that first in the individual, and then in the society; for the leper must go outside of his family and away from other people. This breaking up principle and power of sin is also represented in another type, which has an embargo upon it when the Cross (in figure) is present, and that is leaven. The effect of leaven is to break up, disintegrate, and inflate.

Jesus says that the Cross, and the 'lifting up' will be against that effect of sin. Sin separates between man and God; between man and a heavenly society; between the "natural man" and the spiritual man in the Church. (See I Corinthians.) It was because of that divisive effect of sin that the Apostle said that he would know nothing among them but "Jesus Christ, and him crucified".

The only cure for divisions in any realm is the power of the Cross. We have -- in these messages -- been seeing the course of disruption, from Satan's jealousy of God's Son in the "before the world was" (John 17:5). and the resultant schism there, to the earth in its chaos as possibly Satan's earlier "princedom" ("the prince of this world"), then to -- and in the Garden -- man and wife; then to the family, the tribe, and the whole race.

That long and terrible history was destined by Divine Counsels to be met and destroyed, and "reconciliation", reunification, reintegration, to be accomplished in the same dimensions as the evil. The instigator and his work were to be destroyed and cast out of God's domain of light, life, and love, for ever. The Person to do it, and rightly constituted for it, was God's Son, and the instrument for its accomplishment was His Cross. Every aspect of the cosmic universe was focused in that Cross. The Cross is a factual position, basic, fundamental, final as to this schismatic power of sin. Then it is a progressive principle to be applied and made effective in the Church. The final and consummate vision of the Cross is a great multitude out of every tribe and nation singing in unison or harmony the Song of the Lamb.

This is all a very great test and challenge as to the place and work of the Cross in ourselves personally; in our relationships; in the local assemblies, and in the Church universally. The heart of the disrupted universe, and the heart of all disrupted situations contains an 'I'. It commenced there when "Lucifer" said in his heart, "I will be equal with the Most High". The principle of self-hood, in some form of 'grasping' and not letting go to God, is accountable for all schisms which affect Divine interests and glory. (See Philippians 2:9 onwards.)

So, coming back to our main subject, the Divine order is in the Person of God's Son. It is secured by His Cross. It is increased by the principle of the Cross at work in believers. It is the real meaning of 'knowing Christ', and it is consummated when the Lamb in the throne is the adored Centre of a new Creation.

Let us not just view all this objectively, but continually challenge all motives and situations by it.

The Application of the the Message to Local Assemblies

While the disruptive work of the enemy of Christ is extended to the whole Church -- the true Church -- to effect its disunity by every possible means because the true Church -- the Elect of God -- is destined in the eternal counsels to occupy the position of administration of the 'new heaven and new earth', it is of particular interest and concern to the enemy to disrupt and discredit all local representations of Christ and His Body. This he will do -- and does -- by bringing about wrong order. Order -- Divine order -- is

absolutely indispensable to growth, strength, and effectiveness. This fact is greatly overlooked and therefore much advantage is given to the disruptive forces. Because the Divine order is heavenly and spiritual, only the Holy Spirit, sent down from heaven, knows what it is and can administer and constitute it. Immediately man puts his hand upon the Church local to organize, form, arrange, and control it, disorder -- or un-order -- will set in, with the results of confusion, limitation, artificiality, make-believe, and -- in time -- an end in itself. It can be worse -- even shame and disgrace.

Therefore, to have the Divine order it is basically essential -- as in the beginning -- that the Holy Spirit shall be in complete control in terms of the absolute headship and lordship of Christ. This means that everything shall be meticulously referred and deferred to the Holy Spirit. This is the principle embodied in fasting with prayer. We say the principle, because there is no virtue in fasting without its meaning. To some men it might be costly to go without a meal or two; to others meals are not of such account, indeed, they feel better without a few. The principle of fasting (not only or merely in going without food for a day) is the refraining from what is of man in any way to give the Lord a full way through occupation with Him, which is the function of prayer. The Lord does not want us to go on 'hunger strike' to get what we want, but to go on self-strength strike to let Him have what He wants. It was out of this 'prayer with fasting' that the Holy Spirit instigated the Divine order at the beginning. (Acts 13, etc.) Note: the appointments were made firstly through abandoned prayer, then by Holy Spirit direction, then in the midst of the (local) Church, and evidently by the Church's unity. Who will ever estimate the values which issued from that microcosm of the heavenly order? The most impressive thing, and the most significant, is that the local emerged into the universal. Souls saved, companies born, and saints fed in far-reaching ministry, and all-time values. Man's arrangements and appointments do not work out in that way!

Every assembly ought to be a vessel of light and food for all the Lord's people, as well as of evangelism to the unsaved.

The law of order as governing development, growth, strength, effectiveness, and reproduction is written large by God in all organic nature, and not least in the human body.

Order is the spontaneous outworking of life. It proves that life is unimpeded, unobstructed, and working normally. What is true in nature is equally true in the spiritual organism -- the Church. It is when there is an invasion of something contrary to "the law of the Spirit of life", from selfhood or the world, that the life is obstructed and there is a loss of power, effectiveness, and productiveness. The Bible calls this "the Anointing". Every vessel, every ministry, every "office", every position, every function in the local Church should manifestly be under the anointing. It should be evident to all that that man in that position, doing what he is doing, is unmistakably there and functioning under the anointing; that God put him in that position, and therefore life flows through him and his function.

When we have said this (and we could add very much more concerning Divine order in the local assembly), we are brought back to an all-inclusive and comprehensive work and meaning of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit: it is to reveal Christ. We have said that Christ -- the Son of God -- is the full embodiment of the heavenly order. By the Anointing He expressed that order. We need to get right away from our man-crystallized systems of Christianity to a new Holy Spirit revealed apprehension of Christ. If the Holy Spirit is really governing He will organically constitute all things according to Christ, and the Church and churches will not be institutions, organizations, or even 'churches', but representations and expressions of Christ.

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