

The Cross: The Basis of the Church (Continued)

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the multifaceted significance of the Cross in securing God's righteousness, transforming human nature, and defeating Satan, which is foundational for the Church's existence and growth.

Scripture: Genesis 22:16, Matthew 3:15, Matthew 16:18, Matthew 27:46

Topics: "Righteousness", "The Cross"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the multifaceted significance of the Cross, highlighting its God-ward aspect as securing God's rights in righteousness, which is essential for the Church's existence. He explains that the Cross addresses human unrighteousness and establishes a clear distinction between our natural state and our identity in Christ. Furthermore, he discusses the Satan-ward aspect, asserting that the Cross dismantles the works of the devil and secures victory over evil. Sparks calls for a deeper understanding of the Cross, urging believers to recognize its ongoing relevance in their spiritual lives. He concludes that the Church must be built upon the foundation of the Cross, reflecting Christ's character and purpose.

Transcript

The God-ward Aspect of the Cross

The Cross first of all has its God-ward aspect or direction; that is, the Cross secures God's rights in righteousness. There is no hope of any Divine purpose being realised, there is no hope for the Church to become an actuality according to God's mind until that has been dealt with; until God's rights in righteousness have been secured. The Lord Jesus, then, came, and coming to John at Jordan to be baptized of him, John would have refused: but Jesus said, "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). In the same record later on He will say, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). But there is no hope for that until this has been settled; all righteousness, and that in His baptism, type and figure of His Cross, His burial, His resurrection, all righteousness settled. That is to say, God in the first instance has His place, has His rights secured.

How does God have His rights in righteousness secured? Well, by dealing with the unrighteousness in man, the unrighteousness of man, the unrighteousness in this world, the unrighteousness which from the beginning has been standing in God's way. Now, in this representative One, all that unrighteousness is

taken up and brought under judgment and death, the final judgment of unrighteousness in the death of Christ. Jordan, of course, is a very passive figure of it. The active positive view of the meaning of that can only be seen and understood if in any way the Holy Spirit shows us the meaning of that great and terrible cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). If ever a soul were to be fully alive to the eternal meaning of being God-forsaken, then such a one would understand the meaning of unrighteousness, the awfulness of eternal abandonment by God because of unrighteousness. To deal with that the Son of God came and went to the Cross.

God has something which He demands as His rights and that something is righteousness, perfect righteousness, righteousness filled full, fulfilled, and that must obtain before anything else can be realised. God must have His rights secured in utter righteousness.

But that means, of course, an utterness of abandonment to the will of God. Abandonment to the will of God - that is righteousness. God having His rights means that He has undivided allegiance, devotion, abandonment. That is the note from Genesis to Revelation. Whenever God gets anything which resembles that, you will notice there is something very, very wonderful that comes out from God. You think of it. We only dare take one instance, that of Abraham in the offering of Isaac. Here, you see, is an abandonment to God, an utterness, unquestioning devotion to the will of God. That is the only thing that governs; no arguments: and he might have argued. God said, "Take now thy son", and Abraham neither argued, reasoned, nor held back, but made his way to the appointed spot and virtually enacted the Divine requirement and offered Isaac. What was God's reaction? "Because thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed..." (Gen. 22:16-17). But, more than that, Abraham became the friend of God. The friend of God! I do not think there is any other title in the Bible which approximates to that in its meaning. "Abraham my friend" (Isa. 41:8). Think of Almighty God saying that of a man. Here is an utterness of devotion to the will of God. But that is the Cross, that is always connected with the Cross. With Abraham, it was, in type, bound up with the Cross, the offering of his only son whom he loved. It was the Cross.

But it is a figure, after all, of something greater in the Lord Jesus and His Cross. His was an abandonment even unto death, unquestioning devotion to the will of God. "I come to do thy will" (Heb. 10:7). "I delight to do thy will" (Psa. 40:8). "Not my will, but thine" (Luke 22:42). The will of God, that is the Cross, God getting His rights. Oh, beloved, you see what the Church is founded upon. Had the Church truly seen and taken its character from that, there would have been none of this situation which we find on the earth today amongst Christians.

Yes, the Cross God-ward means that God comes into His place. If you and I are going to say anything about the Cross, if we are going to preach and teach the Cross, let us understand that, from God's standpoint, this is what the Cross means, not merely a question of the benefits we derive, but what God Himself gets in us and through us by His Cross. That is the other aspect. God has His eye on that all the time, and that to which God has a right is this abandonment to His will without question. Upon that rock the Church is built.

The Man-ward Aspect of the Cross

Then there is the man-ward aspect of the Cross, that is, that not only does the Cross clear the ground for the Eternal Purpose of God in Christ by its answering to God's requirement of absolute righteousness, but it clears the ground of man, man's nature, man's being; for the Church can never be composed of man as

he is by nature. That is just where things have gone all wrong, and that is why we have such a situation. The old man has come into the Church, and he has no right and no place there. Yes, Jacob is there; whereas he ought to have been smitten, to have become a prince with God. You and I by nature have no place whatever in the Church, and the Cross deals with that and clears the ground, and will forever keep a clear line of demarcation registered between what we are by nature and what Christ is in us by grace. Do not forget that. The Holy Spirit by the Cross draws that line, and if you and I are really going on into God's fullest thought and purpose, that line will be constantly kept in view by the Holy Spirit, and we shall be made aware of it all the time - Yes, that is you, that is not Christ, that has no place here at all and you must leave it out! In this place, the House of God, the Church, it is Christ and only Christ, and you can only abide in this House as you abide in Christ; which in turn means that you must keep out of what you are by nature, and keep what you are by nature out. The Cross has for ever put those two asunder, cleared the ground for God's purpose.

You know that, you know it all, I have not told you anything fresh. Ah, but it is very necessary for every one of us to be continually reminded of this lest we are found to be in God's way, lest we are found, after all, to be fighting against God; lest we are found to be bringing stuff into God's house which has no right there. Oh, that is a terrible thing. You know what happened in the days of Nehemiah over that, how Nehemiah had to turn the furniture of an enemy from the very House of God; how place had been given to that which was inimical to God's thought by the very people of God themselves. Oh no, God will not have anything of that!

Well, to come right on into all that fulness which is God's thought, the Cross has to come very powerfully and very drastically down, cleaving and cutting between what man is in himself and what he is in Christ, and keeping that difference always very distinct and very clear.

You will notice the Holy Spirit is very uncompromising, and we must never think that patience and forbearance of the Spirit with us means compromise on His part. The Lord may treat us gently and kindly for a time, but the time comes when the Lord would say, I have borne with you a long time on this matter and you have been presuming; you have been presuming upon My patience, on My longsuffering, on My mercifulness and kindness, and you have interpreted My patience with you as My condoning of your flesh, that I am not so particular, after all! That has been your attitude. If you have not said it, that is exactly what it amounts to, and then the time comes when the Lord says, "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17), and it begins with those who have been indulging the flesh because of the patience of God. The Holy Spirit does not indefinitely permit that. No, the Cross, in God's mind, is intended to clear the ground of all that, in order that there may be a place where Christ, and Christ only, is seen and known.

That is God's thought about the Church, for upon this the Bible is clear throughout, that you can never make Christ one thing and the Church another. I mean this, that, wherever you find the Church, you find that the Church is Christ. Take the tabernacle, the tabernacle in the wilderness. You cannot get away from the fact that this tabernacle represents something corporate. Here are all those boards bound together by ties, and that is a number of units bound together into one. You cannot get away from the fact that that is a type of the Church.

And yet look again, and can you discriminate between that and Christ? It is all Christ, every bit of it is Christ. Every substance, every form, every measurement, it is all Christ. These two are one. That does not mean that Christ has no separate, personal existence in glory as an entity. But Christ and His Church are one. But you and I and Christ are not the same. I would not dare to say that I am Christ, would you? Not at

all. You see what I mean. There is that about us which is other than Christ. Christ is one thing, and we are another thing, and yet there is a union within with Christ which makes us one in the sight of God. The outworking of that at length is going to be that, in seeing the Church perfected, you will see Christ glorified. You will see what it means that Christ is glorified, "when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed" (2 Thess. 1:10). That is not only identification in relationship, that is identification in nature. That is the end. Well, the Cross has to prepare the way for that by dealing with man in what he is and putting him in his nature aside, in order to bring in Christ in fullness.

The Satan-ward Aspect of the Cross

One word more. The Cross has another aspect, and that is Satan-ward. God-ward, man-ward, and Satan-ward. Many scriptures will at once leap into your minds in this connection. "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). When did He do it? He put off from Him the principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His Cross (Col. 2:15). As He moved to that Cross, He cried, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out." (John 12:31-32). And again, "The prince of this world hath been judged." (John 16:11).

The Cross undoes all the work of Satan. It removes all the ground of Satan's further work and closes the door to him. Oh, this is very utter, but it just means this, that if you and I really did live on the ground of the Cross utterly, Satan would never have a chance of doing anything. To put that round the other way, is to say that all that Satan is able to do is because we do not live on the ground of the Cross. The Cross undoes all his work and it deprives him of the ground of doing any more, and then eventually it results in the casting out of his kingdom altogether, in that day when it shall be made universally actual. That is secured in the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

The Church issues from that, follows upon that, is built upon that - the work of the Cross. The Church takes its character from that in the thought of God.

Well, we must leave it there for the time being. If all this is true, beloved, you understand the conflict. It is not to be wondered at that there is terrific conflict when the Cross is really brought into view and the Church according to God's mind issues therefrom. There is bound to be conflict; there is, and we know it! They set the altar in its place, they laid the foundation of the house of the Lord, and when the enemies heard, they drew nigh. That is the synopsis of a book, a story, a very big story.

That is a very brief word about the Cross by way of re-emphasis, but I am quite sure you will agree with me there is a tremendous need for bringing the greater meaning of the Cross before the people of God continually, before our own hearts. I am quite sure of this, the day will never come when the Holy Spirit will cease to speak to us, the Lord's people, about the Cross of Christ, that is, while we are on this earth. His emphasis may rather grow stronger and more emphatic. He will constantly bring us back to that Cross. Every degree of spiritual increase results from some further spiritual apprehension of the Cross. It is basic to everything. Of course, this is a superstition, but I believe in some parts of South America, when putting up a building, they start with a cross at the foundation and as every layer of stones and bricks is set on, they lift the cross as they go. It is a superstition, and is supposed to keep off demons, but there is something by way of illustration there. It is exactly what the Holy Spirit does. We do not grow, there is no increase, only by the Cross. At every stage, the Cross is applied anew. I think some people's idea is that you come to the Cross and then you leave it and you go on, and you go back to the Cross merely in

testimony, in thought, as to the time when you were converted: that was the Cross, and that was forty or fifty years ago. For many Christians the Cross is always something that is away back in the past history of their spiritual life. Oh no, not in God's thought. The Cross ought to be more than ever it was yesterday, or any of the yesterdays. It ought to be far more, and it will be if the Holy Spirit has His way.

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