

The Divine Purpose and Principles of the Christian Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

The purpose of the Christian life is to attain unto the fullness of Christ, which includes the continuous and ultimate finality of life, liberty, love, and enlargement.

Duration: 58:44

Scripture: Proverbs 4:23, John 3:3, 1 Corinthians 13:2, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 4:3, Colossians 1:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Topics: "Principles Of Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance and energy of life. He compares life to an incredible energy that opens up new worlds for those who experience it. The Christian life is described as a large and expansive journey, filled with liberty and release. The preacher also highlights the idea that life often requires difficulty to truly demonstrate its energy. Overall, the sermon focuses on the significance and vastness of the Christian life.

Transcript

May I repeat what I have said on each former occasion at the commencement? That in what we are saying, we have three classes of people, mainly in mind. Firstly, those who have never had a definite experience of what the word of God calls being born anew. That is, they have never entered by a living experience into the Christian life.

There have been some such with us on each occasion, and we don't want them to be overlooked while we are speaking of the Christian life. Then, in the second place, those who have but a little knowledge and experience of the Christian life, those who have but recently, more or less, entered into that experience and need to be helped at its beginnings. And then, in the third place, there are the old stagers who know all about it.

And my point in saying this is that you will understand that if it doesn't just meet you where you are, it may be meeting someone else, and you shouldn't be bored and impatient. Just try to think that that may be helpful to someone else. And so, we shall keep the level and tone of the gathering fresh and living if we have that in remembrance.

Our subject, as you know, generally is what it means to be a Christian. In the first place, we consider the immense significance of the Christian life. Then, last week, what happens when we become Christian? Now, tonight, the divine purpose and principles governing the Christian life.

The divine purpose and principles. Firstly, then, the divine purpose. And it is very necessary for us to be fully aware of the fact that purpose does govern the Christian life.

That word, purpose, purpose, that thought is very much in view in the New Testament. Most of you are familiar with one statement relating thereto. Although it is usually cut in half, and only the first half is taken.

All things work together for good to them that love God and are the called according to his purpose. Just bear with this with me for a minute. This will pass, I'm sure.

Is that suggestion or sympathy? I say we usually take the first bit. All things work together for good. We might go on, to them that love God.

But that is not the real statement. And to them that are the called according to his purpose. Called according to his purpose.

Then we have another word, not so generally known. Predestinated. According to the purpose.

Of him that broughteth all things after the counsel of his own will. According to the purpose. Again, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus.

Once more. According to his own purpose and grace. These are sufficient to indicate at least that this word purpose is a governing idea in the Christian life.

That we are not saved. We do not become Christians just to be saved and just to be Christians. That is only the beginning of something.

That is unto something very much more in the thought and in the intention of God. You are asking well what is the purpose? Well there are quite a lot of things said with regard to it as to what it is and what it is unto. I'm not going to take time to cite from the scriptures this evening.

We must not take too much detail. But when all the things said about it are gathered together, there is one thing which includes them all. Embraces and covers them all.

Of which they are all just parts. And that one inclusive and comprehensive thing which sets forth the divine purpose is in a clause in one of Paul's letters. So we all attain unto the fullness of Christ.

The fullness of Christ is the purpose with which we are called. Which governs the Christian life. Which gives to the Christian life its meaning.

The fullness of Christ. We are going to spend a little time in looking into that. But I'm sure you will instantly recognize that that makes Christ very great.

Surely if all the Christians that ever have been and are and will yet be are called with that purpose of attaining unto the fullness of Christ. And the number is just countless in all the centuries. In all the generations since the first Christians.

All put together this vast uncountable number are called with the same calling the fullness of Christ. Then Christ must be very great indeed. Yes and the Christian life must therefore be something very great.

If it takes its character, its meaning and its dimensions from Christ. Then the Christian life corresponding to Christ must be a very great thing. It makes the Christian life necessarily a progressive thing.

No Christian at any time in their experience or history here on this earth can ever say that they have reached that end. It means that the Christian life is one of progress and development. All moving towards that ultimate fullness.

So we find in the New Testament that the Christian life is set forth in three tenses. We are Christians. We are becoming Christians and we are going to be Christians.

There are three distinct words in the New Testament or in the original language indicating those tenses. I believe it was Bishop Handley Mole who was traveling on occasion and either he first or she first. However a Salvation Army lassie got into the same compartment as he and when they got settled along the way although he was a bishop or I believe dean at that time in his canonicals she interrogated him.

Sir are you saved? Quite upon kindly old bishop looked at her and said do you mean and then he quoted the three Greek words. It sounds a bit pedantic for me to quote them to you. Do you mean and he quoted the word I was saved and then the other Greek word I am being saved or the other one which means I'm going to be saved.

Of course she was completely bowled over. It's a bit rough on her and she didn't know what to say but it led to a very profitable talk about the beginning, the growth and the end of the Christian life. My point is that there it is in the New Testament.

We were saved, we are being saved and we are going to be saved. They're all there. We shall be saved is the word.

We shall be saved. The final stage. We were accepted in Christ.

We are growing in Christ. We are to be protected in Christ. Christ then is spread over the whole life of the Christian as its beginning, continuation and consummation.

That is a statement with which you all agree need no laboring but what does this mean? What is the fullness of Christ? Well what is the beginning or simple elementary nature of Christ into which we come at the beginning. When we come into Christ we say we have come into life. We have come into life.

We have found life in Christ. The great secret of the first experience is we have received the gift of God which is eternal life and we know it. As we were saying last week there is no doubt about it.

We know that life has been given to us. Let us hold that for a minute. Then at the beginning we speak of having received our sight or having come into light.

Into the light. But light, although we may not be able to define, explain everything that has become illumined to us, altogether new as another world, we know our eyes have been opened, come to see. Light has broken upon us.

We are able to say whereas I was blind now I see. I was in the dark now it's all light. Put it how you will.

The beginning of the Christian life is just that, light, light and then liberty. Liberty, one of the great things of the beginning of the Christian life, a wonderful sense of release, of emancipation, having been set free. It's a great, great sum of teaching in itself, the liberty that Christ brings us into.

It's a great reality is this liberty, this wonderful setting free. Further when we come into Christ we come into love, divine love and divine love comes into our heart. These are four of the things which in an elementary form we come into and come into us right at the beginning.

Of course there's much more to it and there are many more things but that's enough to provide for the answer to our inquiry. Life, a new life and a different life. I don't mean now the way we live, that follows of course, but a new dynamic power in us which is called divine life, a new life, another one all together and that life has in it another nature, belongs to another realm and has the nature of that other realm.

It's the realm of God himself with that life there comes into us a new nature. I don't mean now at this point of course that we are all together other creatures but this is the beginning. We are conscious that there's a new nature at work within us, working for certain things and against certain things which was never true of us before.

A new and different life, an energy and life is an energy isn't it? It's a wonderful energy is life. See what life will do. Life really demands difficulty to prove its energy.

Remember some years ago going down into Cornwall and staying on a farm and this farm was on, had fields on a slope and one of the fields was just strewn with large stones, large white stones over the whole field. It was the time of the year when seed was in and nothing was appearing and I said to the farmer surely you'll never get a crop of wheat on that field with all those stones. Don't you make any mistake, I thought that when I first came to this farm so I cleared them off.

I had a very poor crop so I put them back again and I get a very much better crop with the stones, much stronger and healthier than I had before. Life you see proves itself by difficulties and oppositions. Here's a new life force energy of a different kind of another kingdom that is given to us in our new birth.

It's different. It's like a new intelligence, a new understanding, a new clearness about things. Everybody who has had genuine Christian experience knows that they see what they could never see before.

They're always striving and struggling to see. Now they see and it's another world. It is open before them just as a new world is given to any person who has been born blind and sometimes get their sighted.

They're given a world, heard about it, talked about it, had it explained to them but they've never been able to say now I see, I see. Here it is, a new world given life, liberty, liberty, release and with release enlargement. What a large thing the Christian life is.

Nothing wrong with a Christian life that is small, mean, petty, limited and narrow. Christian life is a large thing. It's a land of far distances.

That enlargement there comes a new inward sense of prospect, prospect. Things are ever and ever beyond. The further you go in the Christian life the more conscious you are of how much more there is.

Never exhaust this real sense of prospect and future. A large wide open door. Love, a new motive power in the life, in the heart, a new motive power, love.

Hallmark of a true Christian, a true Christian life is love at its very beginning. Shows itself as we said last week in an instantaneous desire to share, let someone else know all about it, come into the good into which you have come, great heart overflow to all the world. The world might know and it is in its character so selfless, selfless.

Self goes out, you do anything, you make any sacrifice, never consider yourself. This love of Christ constraining great care for the interests of others and a deep warm devotion to their interests. A new love we of course cannot expand upon each of these.

Perhaps least of all this wonderful love of God is shed abroad in our heart. But you see these four things alone are there right at the beginning. In an elementary form of what is the fullness of Christ, it is simply the continuous and ultimate finality of those very things.

The continuous growth of life. The life, the freshness, this dynamic force of God within the life, this motive power, this divine nature which is in his life should never, never come to a standstill. It is supposed according to the eternal purpose to grow and grow and grow more and more, more life.

Oh dear friends do, do take this to heart. To receive eternal life may be a gift once and for all but you, you have yet to discover how wonderfully full that life is and how that life can become more and more abundant as you go on. The longer we as Christians live, the more we should be characterized by this mighty life of Christ.

The power of his resurrection it's called. It should just be there all the time and the same of all the others. The fullness of Christ progressively is the enlargement and development of those very things which came to us and into which we came at the beginning.

And if we attain unto fullness, we shall never do here in this life, but ultimately move right out into the fullness. It will be the universality of all these things. Now you, you can see how, how vast Christ is and how vast the Christian life must be.

For here the scripture speaks of Christ killing all things. Christ killing all things. That he should fill all things.

How is Christ going to fill all things? Well just in this way. That when death comes about, all things and the sabbatical will be full of his life and there will be nothing else. Full of his light, full of his liberty, full of his love, filling all things.

And it is just all that Christ is expressed in the whole creation. That is the purpose of the Christian life. And we have failed the purpose, if that is not true, in a progressive way now.

If it is not true that these things are increasing in us, we've missed the very object of the Christian life. Yes, if there's not more love and still more love and yet again more love, we've missed the very purpose of the Christian life. That is true of everything else.

Christ filling all things and all things filled into Christ. I don't know how best we could illustrate that. Perhaps a very good illustration is from the Old Testament because it is an illustration which is there for this very purpose and everybody knows something about King Solomon.

Well you read the story of Solomon. His great wisdom. The very synonym for wisdom.

The wisdom of Solomon. When anybody shows particular wisdom, acumen, we immediately dub them a little solemn. I saw recently, this perhaps you saw it, a class of boys were being told about the incident of the execution of John the Baptist.

You remember that the girl Salome danced before Herod and he was so pleased that he said what you request. What you ask for, I'll give it to you even to the half of my kingdom. She went and consulted her evil mother who hated John the Baptist because of what he had said about her evil ways.

And so the mother counseled the daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist and she did so. And Herod was very, very distressed. He looked for a way out, found none and because of the oath that he had made he commanded that the head of John the Baptist should be brought.

And the teacher turned to the class and said now what would you have done if you had been Herod? And one bright boy chirped out, I would have said to the woman, that belongs to the half of the kingdom that I did not promise. And so over the story is a young Solomon. I'll just by the way, that Solomon is the synonym for vast wisdom.

Also of vast wealth. The riches of Solomon. Vast power for his kingdom reached beyond all the kingdoms that had ever been in Israel.

And his vast glory. Even the Lord Jesus referred to that. It was proverbial.

He said even Solomon in all his glory. All his glory. None in that was Solomon of his kingdom.

So great in wisdom, riches, power and glory. His people were in it. They were in it.

Right in it. It says when the queen of Sheba came to prove for herself all this. Her verdict was the half was never told.

And Solomon's people were in it. They were in the good of that. But in certain senses it was in them.

It was in them as well. You're quite sure as you get a description of his table. And when those who fed at his table got up from the table his glory was in them.

His riches was in them. And they knew it. It worked both ways.

They were in the greatness of Solomon. But the greatness of Solomon was in them. Now here in the New Testament Jesus says that a greater than Solomon is here.

A greater than Solomon is here. Christ infinitely transcends Solomon. And therefore the people of Christ are that much greater than Solomon's people.

His fullness is to be their inheritance. They are to be in it. It is to be in them.

The purpose of God is there. For God has purposed it to have a people essentially in great prosperity. In great wealth.

Great spiritual riches. Great spiritual glory. We are called says the word of God unto his eternal glory.

That's the purpose. Briefly and very simply. The principles governing the Christian First is this.

I mark you there is no realizing the purpose apart from the principles. The principles are basic and governmental to the purpose. You never get on in the purpose either progressively or to it finally only by way of the divine principles.

Now if the purpose lays hold of our hearts and we we do respond say yes. Wonderful thing to be a Christian. Wonderful thing to be called according to that purpose.

And I want to attain unto that. There's necessary to know some principles which govern that and without which apart from which there is no getting on in the purpose and no development of the purpose in us. And the first basic principle of the purpose is the cross.

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The cross operating in two ways or the cross as on both of its sides. Firstly his cross and what it means for us.

And then his cross as what it means in us. Those are two sides of the cross which occupy a vast amount of the New Testament teaching. The cross is a work fully and finally done.

It is a work which is finished on one side. That is as to our being allowed to come to God having access that's the New Testament word access to God and having union with God and having fellowship with God. All the work for that has been fully finished.

We are made nigh by the blood of his cross. We have been made one with him by the cross. The cross on that side is a fully accomplished work for our approach to God.

Our access to God. Our union with God and there is nothing more to be done apart from our accepting of it by faith. But there's the other side to the cross what it is to mean in us.

The cross is also an abiding power in our lives. It's a principle to be continuously at work in us. On the one side it is what the cross meant in itself then and there.

On the other side it is what the cross requires of us. What did it mean? Well all inclusively and comprehensively the cross meant the removal from God's sight of one kind of man. Jesus Christ at a given point assumed the representative capacity of all men as they were in God's sight in sin under judgment.

He says the scripture was made sin for us. He who knew no sin. Again he was made a curse in our place.

That's where we were. All men were there. Sin.

Not only sinners but they were sin in God's sight and the judgment and the condemnation in rejection. And Jesus at that given point took that place, your place, my place, the place of every man as in God's sight under that rejection and entered into all the conscious meaning of that rejection. You and I have never known, never known to have the slightest taste, the slightest sense of having been rejected of God is enough to disintegrate the very soul.

You and I should have any little consciousness of being forsaken of God. It would be devastating to our moral being, intolerable and unbearable. He took the sum of that in full consciousness.

It disintegrated him. His very heart ruptured under it and broke because he knew and endured in that one awful eternal moment being forsaken of God on our behalf. My God thou has forsaken me.

That was done for you and for me. We never need a weight to that. If we would accept what he has done for us.

But it was you see the setting aside of a kind of man which he had voluntarily accepted, voluntarily allowed himself to become or to take the place of that kind of man in that awful hour. It was God saying I've closed the door to her forever for that kind of creation. That's what the cross means that in Christ's death you and I have been set aside in what we are naturally.

Men and women by nature. God has in Christ disposed of and removed a kind of being, a species of creation put out of the way. In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that's all gone.

That man's gone. It's not that man that is raised from the dead. The new man another he has now put off that man and now assumes the place of a new creation man.

And there the heaven is open. God accepts that man. That man is installed and instated forever before God as the type of man that God has ever had in mind.

The cross on the one side sets aside one man and on the other side it instates and installs another kind of man. Therefore says the apostle if any man be in Christ there's a new creation. The old things are passed away behold they become new.

The Christian life is just that. In principle the cross has registered this. There's a difference.

A difference between where we were and how we were and what we were in God's sight before and how it is now. Different man. Different creation.

In Christ. In Christ. By faith in Christ.

Another man is placed where the other one was in the resurrection of Christ. Now there rises the all the teaching of the necessity for our first of all accepting that position. We will never get anywhere in Christ into the realm of fullness on the way to fullness until we have accepted that position in which God has put us in the death of Christ.

In effect he says to us look here in yourself you're a dead man. A dead woman. Where I'm concerned you have got to recognize that when my son died you died in him.

Till you do that you never get anywhere at all. When you do that then you are in a position to take your place in Christ risen. In Christ risen.

And there is a new creation. You see first of all it's a matter of position to be taken. Deliberately taken by faith.

This is not new to many of you but it needs constantly to be underlined. That's the basic position of the Christian life. It's the basic principle of the Christian life.

That we have got to consent to God's verdict upon us by nature. We're not to dissect ourselves and say this is good and this is bad. This is not so good and this is not so bad and do that sort of thing.

God says the whole lot of you has gone in my son. I don't make differences between what you call good and bad. I regard you as all together under condemnation.

There is none good not one. Now that's basic. I say again it makes all the difference when you get hold of the fundamental principle of the Christian life.

Many Christians don't make any progress at all and this development and growth in fullness is stayed and arrested because they haven't got that settled. They're still trying to make something of the one that God says he never will entertain at all. They're still thinking that they can be something in themselves and trying to be something in themselves.

They've never accepted this utter ultimate position. God says I put you in a grave with my son and that was the end of that. Now everything has got to be from another source all together of another kind.

It's all got to come from Christ risen now and not from you at all. That is the key to fullness. It opens up the way, throws open the doors widely.

When you get that really settled and by faith take that position there is no limit to what can be in the Christian life. Then when the position the utter position has been taken and accepted acknowledged received by faith then the other side begins. The application of the principle we accept that ultimate position as a basis and recognize it as God's own verdict and then the principle of the cross begins to work in us.

Yes the tenses again are Romans 6. We were crucified with Christ. We were crucified with Christ but then Paul says always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. That's the life whereby Jesus conquered death should be manifested in us.

Again he said I die daily and his aspiration was that I may know him and the power of his resurrection. You see the principle is at work. It was done but now it's being applied as an active thing in the life.

On the one side bringing, bringing into an actual reality our death with Christ. On the other side corresponding and balancing the bringing into actual experience our life union with Christ. As the death works so the life works.

This is just the meaning of Christian life. What is God doing with us? Why all this trouble? All this difficulty? This discipline? This chastening? This hard way? This difficult school? Why all this? Thought the Christian life was going to be one continuous song and picnic and joy ride. We find that it isn't.

Doesn't mean that the joy disappears. Not a bit of it. The miracle of joy goes on in spite of everything.

But it does mean that we come into a lot of difficulties and into what to our old man. That old man is a very difficult way. What's the meaning? How God is applying the principle getting the old man out of the way making room for the new.

And is it not true of a Christian, a true Christian as differing from any other person, that suffering produces beauty. Suffering produces the fruit, the nature of Christ. Suffering just brings out what Christ is.

In others so often usually suffering brings out bitterness, resentment. Some of the most difficult people that I have ever met and tried to help have been people who because of some great adversity in their lives have turned against God, become bitter, sour. Suffering's done that.

That is not what happens to a Christian. Marvel of the Christian life, the miracle of the Christian life is just this. You find some dear children of God in lifelong suffering and agony.

Either in body or in circumstance. Just wonderfully radiant, wonderfully radiant. You go in where they are for peace of God, deep joy.

The hymns they sing are hymns about the love of God. They're their favorite hymns. And if they ought to sing about anything at all, well it ought not to be that.

Naturally speaking, but they're their favorite hymns for love of God. You say this is marvelous. I have certain instances clearly in my mind of such people outstanding in my own experience like that.

What's it all for? Why the principle of the cross is at work on the one side clearing the ground for Christ, for this new creation life, or making way for the fullness of Christ. That is the first principle and it can only be mentioned in brief. We hurry to a close.

And this is a very important principle that I'm going to mention. The next then is the principle or law of fullness is relatedness. See, no individual Christian and no number of Christians just as separate isolated individuals can come to the fullness of Christ.

Because that goes without saying if you think about it. How could if Christ is as big as that? Christ is as big as we have said. How can any one individual come to that? Nonsense.

Think of it. It would be arrogant to suggest that. It will require a vast, vast multitude to come to that.

But they will never come to it as a multitude or congregation of individuals. See the great conception that is given to us in the New Testament of the aggregate of Christians is the body of Christ. And you've only to think for a moment about that.

About your body and you know quite well that no one member of your body or all the members of your body if detached from the others will grow. It requires not only all the members but the all the members united making one body. There can be no development either of any member or members nor even of the whole body together until articulation has taken place, has been made.

I believe that the very first thing that a student of medicine has to face is a box of bones. I venerate very early in the course of things a box of bones handed over. It's all the members, all the bones of a human body now then put those together and make up a skeleton.

That's the first lesson. And the very first lesson of fullness and of growth is the articulation of Christians. The recognition of this fact.

Firstly they belong to one another. Secondly that they cannot get on without one another. Their spiritual life depends upon their relatedness with one another.

And the maintenance of that adjustment to one another is the secret of spiritual growth. And you will see that if Satan can carry out his master stroke of separating Christians, he has effected their spiritual arrest. It's always like that.

That's why he's our friend. Divisions are the masterpiece of the devil set against God's ultimate purpose, the fullness of Christ. We would only look at our divisions, not only the larger ones but the little ones between us and somebody else in the light of how it affects our spiritual growth or their spiritual growth and then relates to the larger interest of Christ in Christ we would have a motive for getting rid of those divisions, healing those quarrels and adjusting our relationship.

Relatedness is vital to growth. Like that. It is first of all articulation.

That is member to member. And then it is mutuality of life. Mutuality of life.

Dependent and interdependent. Recognition of the fact that we must have one another. That our very spiritual life depends upon it.

Fellowship is essential, is indispensable. That's a principle of growth. Don't make any mistake about it.

You will be greater or smaller in your measure of Christ according to the recognition and observance of that principle. But mark you, it is not artificial. It is not something that we organize.

It is not institutional. It is organic. It is by life and by love.

It is not from the outside, arranging it, deciding to have it and fixing it up. It comes from the inside. It comes from Christ within.

Paul put his finger upon that very thing. When in the church in Corinth he found different circles. One circle centered in himself, a circle saying I am, we are of Paul.

Another circle centered in Apollos, we are of Apollos. And another circle centered in Peter and we are of Peter. And so on.

His appeal to them was this. Is Christ divided? Is Christ divided? Of course the answer is no, you can't divide Christ. Then if Christ, if Christ is in you and governs, this is all a contradiction to Christ.

This is all not Christ. And no wonder the poor, mean, miserable measure of spiritual life that there was at Corinth at that time. Thank God we have another side of the story later on.

They evidently got over it. Got right on the basis, the principle of the cross and his second letter to them gives a very different picture of things there. But that is Christ.

Cannot be divided and all divisions whether they be just between two Christians or more unto the great divisions of Christians are a contradiction of Christ. And no wonder spiritual poverty, weakness, ineffectiveness, lack of registration and impact upon this world. Devils triumph there.

Just take note of that. It's a great battleground is this matter of fellowship for that very reason that all the evil forces are set against it. And Paul says this is a matter about which we've got to be very diligent.

It requires diligence. Give diligence to keep the unity of the spirit. I close with just mentioning a third principle.

I'm not enlarging upon it. It is the principle of purity of spirit. You and I will not grow at all in the increase of Christ toward the fullness of Christ unless we maintain a very pure spirit.

You ask me what I mean by pure spirit. I mean an open heart. An open heart.

Free from prejudice. Free from prejudice. Free from suspicion.

Readiness to receive. Ability to adjust. No final closure.

Even though you may have been brought up in a certain way open that if the Lord has more life and truth to shine forth to break forth from his word you're open to it. Never come to a final position that you know it all. You've got it all.

You're in it all. A pure spirit. A pure spirit.

An open heart. A ready spontaneity to every bit of life that God gives. Obedient.

Instant. Without arguing. That's a pure spirit.

And you'd be surprised how much hangs upon that.

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