

The Foundation That Is Laid

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of spiritual growth and the foundational role of faith in achieving the full measure of Christ.

Scripture: Romans 8:19, Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 3:1

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Foundation in Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the primary objective of God for His people is to achieve full growth in Christ, as evidenced by the apostolic letters which focus on spiritual maturity. He highlights that believers must recognize their calling to pursue this goal, understanding that their faith in Christ's resurrection lays a firm foundation for their spiritual journey. Sparks argues that the church's effectiveness in evangelism is contingent upon its own spiritual growth, and that believers must remain steadfast in their faith to overcome life's challenges. He reassures that God's love and justification through Christ are unshakeable, providing the necessary security for believers to grow. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a commitment to spiritual maturity as the foundation for fulfilling God's purpose.

Transcript

Reading: Rom. 8:19,29; 1 Cor. 3:1-3; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 3:26-27; 4:6,19; Eph. 1:5, 18-19; 3:18-19; 4:13; Phil. 3:12-14; Col. 1:28; Heb. 5:12-14; 6:1.

This selection of passages is quite sufficient to show that the dominating objective of the Lord for His people is full growth, the full measure of Christ. Every apostolic letter has that object in view, and every one of these apostolic letters deals with some factor related to full growth. If that is true, then surely it is incumbent upon us as the Lord's people to have His goal before us, and to be found in the same spirit as was the apostle who said, "...that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended of Christ Jesus". The force of that statement may not have come to our hearts. The apostle has there said in very clear and precise language that when the Lord Jesus laid hold of him, it was for something more than that he should just become a saved man. It was in relation to a goal with which there was bound up a prize, and unto that there was to be an attaining. He said that everything for him was regarded as of value only in so far as it would help him to reach that goal, and nothing was of value at all which in no way contributed to that end. So should the Lord's people be, at all times, on full stretch for the purpose for which they have been apprehended. Everywhere in the Word of God His thought for His people is set forth as being that they should come to a full measure, to full growth, to the measure of Christ.

A Fact of Great Significance

It seems to me that the New Testament assumes that increase, along the line of expansion, that is, the adding to the church, comes by spiritual increase in the church along the line of spiritual growth amongst the Lord's people. I say, it seems to be assumed, for it is a very impressive thing that the New Testament is so very largely occupied with this one thing. The fact that all these letters -- every one of them -- were addressed to believers with one object, that of their spiritual growth, and so many of them embody the actual word "full growth" (often in the Authorised Version translated "perfection" or "perfect"), does not mean that the church ceased to be an evangelising instrument. They were going on with their work in relation to the unsaved, but the fact is that very little is actually said about that, and what we have here as the record is all to do with the church's own spiritual increase. That is tremendously significant, and its significance is of great importance to the Lord's people. It would almost seem that the church has forgotten this. In a very considerable circle there is a great concern for the evangelism side of the church's life and work -- a concern which is right and proper, and should never be less than it is, perhaps always more -- but so often and so largely the essential background of that work is overlooked, namely, an indispensable building-up and teaching ministry. The result is that the church is seeking to move out to meet the world situation with inadequate spiritual resources, and is very largely weak in face of the difficulties, and the results are of such a character as hardly to be an expression of the real power of God and fullness of Christ. That by the way, however.

It is that you and I might come to recognise this, that the Lord has set before us in His Word an overwhelming amount of evidence and proof that His dominating objective for His own is full growth, and that every child of God should have that always before him. We should be concerned about spiritual maturity, and should give it the place in our hearts, in our consideration, in our concern which it evidently occupies in the heart of the Lord Himself. We have referred to fragments in the letters of Paul, which bear directly upon this matter of spiritual full growth, showing that it is the Lord's will for His people. We have said that each of these apostolic letters deals with some factor which is immediately related to that divine object, full growth. We are not going to attempt to go through all the letters at this time, but we are going to make a beginning as the Lord enables. We are coming to feel something of what Paul felt when he wrote those words, "...admonishing every man and warning every man, that we may present every man perfect (full grown, complete) in Christ".

Christ Our Righteousness

Let us look for a moment at the letter to the Romans in this very connection. We remind ourselves of the words which are in chapter 8 verses 19 and 29. This letter to the Romans lays the foundation for all the Lord's work in His own people and in relation to this end which He has in view, and which is governing all that He has to say to them, and to do with them. This letter provides the ground upon which the Lord can go forward with His work in perfecting the saints. We ask, What is that ground? We know what the theme of the letter to the Romans is, the object for which the apostle wrote it. We know that its great outstanding truth is that of righteousness by faith, or, as it is sometimes called, justification by faith. What, then, is the issue of such faith? In this letter faith is set forth as that through which we are brought to the ground of what Christ is in resurrection. He "rose again for our justification". Christ in resurrection provides the ground of our justification and our righteousness. In death He has dealt with all unrighteousness, and therefore with all that alienated and separated from God and meant condemnation, judgment and death. Having dealt with that in death, in resurrection the ground is clear of all that. Sin has been met and dealt with and all its consequences, right to the end, and in resurrection God's way is open, and there is

righteousness where there was unrighteousness, communion where there was alienation, fellowship where there was distance. Christ in resurrection is the ground of our righteousness, and faith in the Lord Jesus is here shown to be that by which we are brought on to the ground of what Christ is in resurrection, and so the relationship with God is established in Christ risen, and is established unshakeably. That is the glorious issue of this chapter, as you observe.

We want to get the full force of the words at the end of chapter 8. Verses 35 to 39 must be taken in conjunction with verses 31 to 34. Now you see this unshakeable ground, this inseparable union, this indestructible life is because of what the Lord Jesus has done in His death and resurrection, and of what He is in His Person at God's right hand. I think there may have been times when we have been rather hesitant in quoting these words at the end of Romans 8. We have had a little tremor within as we have essayed to say those words and follow up: "...neither death nor life..." wondering whether we were being a little over-bold, a little over confident; whether at some time we might not be put to the test and find that, after all, our use of the words was not unlike Peter's self-confident assertion -- "I will follow thee even unto death" -- we have had a catch in the declaration. I confess that has been true of me, but now I am glad to say that there is no need for hesitation. There is a ground that is settled and fixed, unshakeable in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That ground is the expression of the love of God in Christ Jesus for me; not my love for Him, not anything that I have done or can do, not anything that is in me or that I can produce, but it is all what He is, what He has done, what He has given, and what He has established in His own Person at the right hand of God. That is divine love, and that has been made to rest upon you and upon me "whom he foreknew...". He has done it all in relation to us, the thing is finished, and there is not a power in God's universe that can alter it, that can change it, that can shake it. It is something which God has done. It is a manifestation of His own love in Christ, which nothing in the creation can touch, and it is bound up with God's elect. Therefore: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" This chapter reaches the point where we have put faith in God on that ground. That faith brings us onto the ground of what Christ is as risen, and that means that there is not a being that can lay anything to our charge. What a position! You can find many faults in me. I may find some faults in you. We may see much that is yet of the imperfections that are ours, but you cannot bring me under condemnation and separate me from the ground of my justification. You can find all the faults that there are to be found, and can go on doing that for the rest of your life, but you cannot upset the ground of my justification before God, you cannot touch that position of my experience with Him. The blood of Jesus Christ has settled and ratified that forever. If you can tear Jesus Christ from His place at God's right hand, then you can destroy my ground of salvation, of justification, but you cannot do that. It is fixed in heaven in Him.

To be Firmly Rooted in the Foundation Essential to Full Growth

The Lord lays that as our foundation. It is a security which is ours through faith by the grace of God. That is the message of the letter to the Romans. The grace of God to us in Jesus Christ provides such a ground that no part of the creation can lay anything to our charge, can bring us under condemnation. There is no power in this universe that can disturb what God has done for us in Christ. The Word tells us to take our place in faith upon that. Do not say, Oh the trials, the difficulties, the adversities, the sufferings; life, death, principalities, and all these things! They do make such a difference to us. They come upon us. They affect us, and upset us, and we come to feel that we do not love the Lord as much as we did the other day, that we are not so much in fellowship with the Lord as we were once, and we feel that is the upsetting of things. It is nothing of the kind. You and I must come finally to the place where we recognise that God is unchangeable, without variation, and that in the work of His cross our salvation will not move one hair's

breadth; it is as surely established as His throne. On that ground our salvation rests, and faith must take hold of that. Then we are able to say, "If God be for us..." and He is for us like that. Oh, the wonder of that word, "...God... for us"! He delivered up His Son for us, and with Him gave us all things. Through His cross He has justified us from all our sins, our iniquities, and in His Son there sees us as without sin, perfected! He says, Now, if only you will let your faith come and rest upon that, and will not move away from your faith onto your own ground of what you are in yourself, but will stay there, Satan's power is destroyed over your life, and there is nothing whatever in this universe that can prevent your reaching My end. Nothing that arises, be it life, or death, or things present, or things to come, or height, or depth, or principality, or any other creation -- nothing in this universe can prevent you reaching My end if you will keep your feet there in faith. That is the foundation for God, and He can never get us anywhere until we have come to that position. You know how true that is, that if there is any question, any uncertainty, any variation in any one of us at any time, we stop dead, and God is arrested, the Spirit of the Lord can go no further. While we believe God He goes on, no matter what He has to deal with. It amounts to this: Are we going to believe God or not? If we are not, then we may as well abandon everything, for everything depends upon that, upon whether we are going to believe God.

Now here is the foundation for faith. Full growth rests upon that foundation. You never make one bit of progress toward God's end until that foundation is settled. It is important that we stand upon the firm foundation of God. Do let us seek to get to this position. It is a word for believers, and more than ever perhaps a word for today, that we should come to the place where we recognise how altogether apart from variation God is. Of course, there are some people who do not vary a great deal, but there are others who know all the variations of this natural life; the variations of feelings, the variations of thoughts, the variations which come about by the circumstances around them. We find ourselves very largely influenced by how we are physically, or how circumstances are, or for some other reason; in different moods, in different states, as we think spiritually. We vary, sometimes from day to day if not from hour to hour. God is not like that. God's work is not like that. What God has accomplished in His Son by the cross and resurrection is not subject to influences of change; it stands, it is fixed. God has taken that attitude. He is not variable. If only we would come back and recognise that God is a God of infinite grace, that grace has been demonstrated to the uttermost, and it is unchanging! If we go from it, that makes no difference to it. It is the same. We come back and find God just there where we left Him. He has not moved a little bit.

This is not said to justify weakness, but to bring to a certain settled position as to the grace of God. Everything is by His grace, because of His grace, the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. If we get settled there, God can go on with His work. Full growth? Yes, when you believe God fundamentally, when you trust God, and when your trust in God is on the ground of that perfect justification which He has granted, the removal of every obstacle in the way of His full purpose. The letter to the Romans tells of that. The foundation is laid in faith for all God's purpose, and after that you move on to the superstructure. The other letters have to do with factors in full growth when the foundation is laid.

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