

# The Full Stature of Manhood

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the full stature of manhood in Christ, emphasizing spiritual growth through resurrection power and community support.*

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 12:2, Ephesians 4:13, Hebrews 2:5

**Topics:** "Identity in Christ", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of attaining the full stature of manhood in Christ, illustrating how humanity was created to express God's thoughts and realities. He explores the complexities of human existence, including physical, mental, and relational aspects, and highlights that Christ embodies the solution to these challenges, offering a new kind of humanity. Sparks underscores that spiritual growth is achieved through a deep concern for reproduction and increase, mirroring the life of Isaac, Joseph, and Moses, who exemplified dignity, discernment, and meekness. Ultimately, he calls believers to recognize their identity as 'men in Christ' and to pursue spiritual maturity that reflects the character of Christ.

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## Transcript

"I know a man in Christ..." (2 Corinthians 12:2)

"...till we all attain unto... a full-grown man... the stature of... Christ" (Ephesians 4:13)

"Not unto angels did He subject the world to come, whereof we speak. But one hath somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the Son of Man, that Thou visitest Him?" (Heb. 2:5,6)

We are now going to consider one particular aspect of this matter of manhood, namely, the full stature of manhood and how it is reached.

### The Great Universe Of Man

We begin by a word about the creation of man, in which, through the incarnation of Christ, all the wonderful thoughts and realities of God, Deity apart, are intended to be expressed in mankind. The creation of man, and the subsequent incarnation of Christ, represented the carrying into effect of that great mind of God to express Himself 'manwise'. It is a wonderful thing to think that God chose to make a peculiar kind of creature called 'man', bring into being something that is called 'humanity', in order that by

that means He might write for the revelation to the universe, the education of the universe, His own thoughts, His own mind. The knowledge of man is still in a very imperfect stage, after all the time that man has been on the earth. On the side of potential evil it is sometimes beyond human comprehension what man is capable of. Under grace and in union with God through Jesus Christ the potentialities of redeemed humanity are correspondingly high and beyond comprehension. It was this incomprehensible destiny of man in Christ that exhausted all the superlatives of language of which the Apostle Paul was capable.

Take some of the departments of the science of man. I am not going to give them their scientific names; you can quote the names to yourself, if you wish, but here are five distinct sciences of man. There is, firstly, that which has to do with the functions and phenomena of his physical being, the thing with which physicians and surgeons and all in that realm are trying to cope. After all the centuries of man's existence on the earth, they are still finding that there are new complexes and complications and depths and difficulties which are beyond them, just beyond them; always new situations arising in the physical bodies of people, causing considerable concern and perplexity, even to those who know most about it and, as we say, know all that there is to know about it; and so it goes on. The additional names that are accumulating to the maladies and the disorders of the human frame are very significant. In the realm of man's human body there is still, after all this time, with all this study, research and knowledge, a depth unfathomed, that is beyond the experts. They are so often at a standstill, at a loss what to do about it, and the whole question of reconstructing this human body, this physical life, and making it perfect, is as far from its realisation as ever it was. It breaks down just when it is thought that we are getting on.

Then there is that science of the human mind, so very largely developed in recent years, in our own lifetime. A new name has sprung up in this connection, and it is a world which is finding many giving themselves wholly to its study, to its exploration; a wonderful world and kingdom - the human mind being probed, analysed, investigated - you know that whole realm of things; and still the human mind is beyond the grasp of the experts. It still defeats and defies the best efforts to solve its problems, to put it right.

Further, there is the third realm of humanity, the realm of human relationships: human beings living together, whether it be two or whether it be communities or nations. It is what is called 'society', or human relationships. That again is a department of study and investigation, and much hard work, which is the whole-time, and whole lifetime, occupation, of a vast number of people - and what a complex world it is! You know it if it is only two people, and when you have to deal with a larger number, you understand what a burden it was that rested upon Paul when it made him refer, almost with a groan, to "that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28). It is the problem of people living together, getting on together, and, as I have said, when you expand that to nations the problem of human relationships is a tremendous thing. It has killed many of our greatest statesmen, trying to solve this problem of getting people and nations to go on together in amity, in good relationship.

Again expanding, there is that great science which has to do with human races, the races of people; not only the nations, but the races. We cannot go into that now, but you know how much time and money has been expended in the attempt to get down to the peculiar constitution of different races, with a view to solving human problems. This race is characterized by certain things and that race by another set of things, and this creates a great world problem of racial life and relationships, and demands constantly an immense amount of work and anxious thought; yet the racial problem today is as great as ever it was.

And finally, there is that whole realm, which again is a complete science in itself, which has to do with human nature, and particularly with sin or evil in human nature. That goes by a name of its own. Well, that

has occupied man from the beginning: this sin in human nature - this evil, this wicked, human nature. What a world it is - what an ocean, what a depth!

There you have five great worlds, a constellation of worlds, forming a very universe, all related to man himself, to mankind. All this came in when man came in; all this is bound up with humanity, with this being called man. How vast and far from fully explored is this whole question of man!

Christ The Embodiment Of God - Intended Humanity

Now, why all this? It is not just a point of interest, some matter to throw in. This leads to something.

Christ is the comprehensive embodiment of all this in a new kind of humanity, in the God-intended kind of humanity. He affects the whole of those five realms pertaining to mankind.

He relates to the whole problem of this physical life of man, and the whole problem of the physical life of man is going to be solved in the humanity of Jesus Christ, "when this corruptible shall... put on incorruption, and this mortal... put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:54). When this body of our corruption is made like unto His body of glory (Phil. 3:21), the whole problem of man's physical world will be finally solved. And that is not just a statement of fact concerning some future time. He has given us that life to indwell us NOW, so that even now, in a body of corruption, we may know the power of His resurrection, we may know a life which triumphs over that corruption until God has finished with us here. We have that very life given to us NOW, so that our mortal, our dying, bodies can be quickened by the Divine Spirit to fulfil a work of God here on this earth contrary to all human possibilities. When we ought to be dead - ought, indeed, to have died a good many times! - it is not so because there is a life in us which is triumphing until our work is done. He has solved the whole problem of that world of the physical, and in giving us eternal life has already given us the earnest of that solution, and on the basis of that this body will be conformed to the body of His glory. "Then shall come to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Cor. 15:54).

And what is true in that whole realm of the physical man, the human physical side, is true of all the others. Take this matter of the mind of man which is such a problem. The New Testament teaches us that there is another mind, the mind of Christ, and "God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline" ("a sound mind", AN.) (2 Tim. 1:7). It is another mind, a heavenly mind, the mind of Christ; a 'new-mindedness'. You have no need that I gather up the Scriptures on that. The problem of psychology (now I have given it its name!) is solved by the Holy Spirit in the believer. It is part of our inheritance in Christ to have a sound mind, not to be unbalanced. We will go no further with that, because we have so much ground to cover.

Again, in this whole matter of human relationships - what we call society, the relationships of people on this earth - has not Christ solved that? There is a testimony whenever the Lord's children from many lands come together. He has not changed our temperaments, He has not changed our basic individuality. He has not annihilated our varied personalities, He has not put out of existence our different nationalities, but He has made us one. We have one life, we have one language. All those things which separate us humanly, that is, in the old humanity, are touched in Christ. Oh, that we recognised this more! When divisions come, when there is strife and schism and the like, we are in the realm of the old creation, we are not in the realm of Christ. He, in His own humanity, makes a different kind of corporate entity. It is a wonderful thing, this corporate entity, the "one new man" (Eph. 2:15), "where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman" (Col. 3:11); all are one,

there is one new man. The problem of society is solved in Christ.

But then there is this question of race, the races on the earth with all the problems of racial differences and conflicts. Oh, I do not understand people who call themselves Christians, with their New Testament in their hands, putting up colour bars! I understand the problems, but I believe there is another way through the problem than the colour bar. I think that is a perfect contradiction of the New Testament: it seems to me to clearly say: 'This New Testament teaching about the oneness of the Body of Christ, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither coloured nor white, is an impossible thing. It cannot be; it will not work.' Very well, then; scrap the New Testament and cease calling yourselves Christians. This thing is solved in Christ. It has been proved possible, and it has been and is being proved workable. It only wants the grace of God to get into both sides, the government of the Holy Spirit on both sides - not on one side only, but on both sides - and the problem is solved. It may require patience, instruction, building up, but the basis is there when we are all baptized in one Spirit into one Body, whether bond or free, whether this or that. Christ touches this thing.

Finally, this whole matter of human sin. Well, I need not stop to say much about that - the great problem of sin in human nature, of evil in mankind himself. We need not look beyond ourselves; we know in ourselves that Christ has solved that problem, which is still such an awful problem for the people who are interested in ethics, the problem which is defeating the moral philosophers all the time. That is settled in Christ.

#### The Greatness Of Christ

Christ affects this whole universe of man on all his sides and aspects. Is not Christ great? He is the comprehensive embodiment of a new type of humanity in which these other things are solved and settled and put away. How great Christ is! And therefore how great the new man is, the man in Christ! Christ is so great that He can give character altogether different from, and altogether higher than, that which we know belonging to humanity. He can give character to a vast multitude, for the Church ultimately is no little thing. We are, I am afraid, inclined, as we look out on the world and take note of how 'few there are that be saved', of the small percentage of real believers in the multitudes, the millions, on this earth, we are inclined to think that the Church must be a very little thing. But when we come to the sum at the end we shall find that the Church is no little thing, but a great multitude, a vast concourse, and that vast concourse, that immense thing, is taking its whole character from one Man. How great Christ is!

#### Spiritual Full Stature

Having said that - and that is only my introduction - I want to come to this matter of spiritual full stature. The first thing, of course, standing over it all is seeing how great Christ is. How great is this humanity of Christ! And then how wonderful must be the purpose of our being in Christ! To Paul it was an unceasing wonder to be able to say of himself: "I know a man in Christ". It is no little thing to be "a man in Christ". And then of course the meaning of God's work in us comes in here: for it is in the light of this that God is pursuing all His work in us and all His dealings with us. If He is breaking down one humanity in us, it is only to build up another. If He is putting us through fiery testings and trials, and experiences that constitute great difficulties to our own natural humanity, it is only to produce this other humanity. God's dealings with us, His ways with us, are all explained by the great purpose, the great destiny unto which we are called - conformity to the image of His Son.

Now, taking a little phrase which occurs in the Bible in a number of connections, I want to say something about this matter of full stature and how it is reached, and I am going to take some Old Testament

illustrations of this.

### The Power Of Resurrection

"And Isaac sowed in that land, and found in the same year a hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great, and grew more and more until he became very great" (Genesis 26:12-13).

THE MAN did. Here is a type of manhood come to full stature - Isaac. Now we who are familiar with the typology of the Old Testament know that Isaac is the embodiment of the power of resurrection. I need not go over the ground to prove that. Abraham through faith received him back from the dead, and so Isaac stands out as the great example or type of resurrection power. And then, on resurrection ground, Isaac engages in agriculture, the realm in which, more than in any other realm, resurrection is known. In that realm, where the predominant law is the law of resurrection, he becomes very great. The law of resurrection operates so that he increases more and more and becomes very great.

We lay stress on this. The increase, this greatness of Isaac, is through resurrection - that is the point. He knows in his own person, his own history, his own experience, in his very being, he knows the power of resurrection, and by reason of that very experience, that experimental knowledge, he becomes very great. Through all the demands and processes of agriculture he came to know this: for, although it says only that he sowed and in the same year reaped a hundredfold, there is no sowing without a good deal of ploughing; he had to do the ploughing, and then the sowing and all the other labour, with all the endurance, all the patience, all the courage, all the persistence, all the faith, all the hope. All these things are drawn into the work of agriculture. I think it is a realm in which perhaps heroism lies more deeply than in any other realm. To see all the hard work of ploughing and harrowing and sowing blotted out in a night's storm and then go and start again - that calls for something; it calls for there being something in YOU before there is something in the soil; you are not going to have that from the soil unless that is in yourself; what comes from the soil will be because of what is in you - the power of resurrection. You have to believe in the power of resurrection to be a good farmer, especially in the days of the blight and the adversity and the ruin of everything. The power of resurrection - Isaac knew that.

### Concern For Reproduction And Increase

Now what did it amount to in his case? What does it amount to in any man in that particular realm and sphere of life? It amounts to this - a tremendous concern for reproduction and increase. That is the secret of spiritual full-growth - a real and mighty and triumphant concern for increase and reproduction. Whether it be the Church as a whole or a local company or an individual believer, spiritual growth, enlargement, 'greatness', will depend upon a deep concern for reproduction. It used to be said, and it is still said in some circles, that a non-missionary church is a dead church - it never grows; and there is much truth in that. Where there is no concern for reproduction, for the salvation of souls, for the expansion of the church, there is no growth. The kind of spirit that does the ploughing, the sowing, the hard work, the grind; that endures, that exercises patience and courage against adversity and disappointment, and persists because it believes that this thing can be and should be, because the Lord of resurrection dictates it: that kind of spirit is going to lead to much enlargement, spiritually, of the individual, the local church, and the whole Church. So Isaac is not only the embodiment, but the expression, of the power of resurrection, and that is shown by this great concern for increase.

Are you concerned for spiritual increase, or are you just sitting passively, indifferently, a passenger, a parasite, drawing everything to yourself and giving nothing? Are you one being carried all through the

years, or are you one who is a true farmer in this spiritual sense, really concerned about increase? This thing must be a hundredfold; nothing less than that can really mark the full blessing of God - a hundredfold in me and in others. Oh, how that would correct a great deal of our attitude toward others. Our attitude is far too often one that would limit other people's spiritual life. We criticize, we talk about them, we point out their faults, what is going on. How do we use our tongues about the Lord's people and His servants? What is going on in our homes in that matter? If it really did touch those people of God directly, would it be to their enlargement or be to their undoing or their limitation? What is our attitude? Are we true Isaacs in this, that we are concerned for their growth, for their increase, and are not going to do anything, by lip or hand or any other way, that would hinder the spiritual growth of other people, whether individuals or the Church? It is a very pertinent thing, this. You may take it as a settled thing that if you are using your tongue detrimentally to the people of God, you are cutting across your own spiritual growth, you are dwarfing your own spiritual stature. These people are little people, contemptible people; they are of small spiritual stature. Oh, may we grow up! - and we shall grow up as we have a heart enlarged for spiritual increase.

Dignity, Discernment, Authority

"The man, the lord of the land, spake roughly with us, and took us for spies of the country... And the man, the lord of the land, said unto us..." (Genesis 42:30,33).

"And Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us... but if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down; for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you... And they said, The man asked straitly concerning ourselves... take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man: and God Almighty give you mercy before the man... And Joseph said unto them, What deed is this that ye have done? Know ye not that such a man as I can indeed divine?" (Gen. 43. Verses 3,5,7,13,14; 44:15).

Here is "the man". What are the features of this man? This is a man of stature. He is a big man, he is a great man. This man is marked by great dignity. That is patent; it lies on the surface of the story. These brothers of his are all aware of the dignity of this man. This man is marked by discernment - "Know ye not that such a man as I can indeed divine?". You remember that that was how he got to his position - Pharaoh had his dream, and Joseph was the only one who could interpret, and the verdict was that the Spirit of God was in him. He could discern, he had power of discernment and interpretation. And he had authority. Everything is in this man's hands. He has them completely in his hands. Those three things are the characteristics of Joseph - dignity, discernment, authority.

That is stature. Those are the things that mark spiritual full-growth. We could spend a lot of time on that. In one who has spiritual dignity there is nothing mean, nothing contemptible, nothing small, nothing petty; he is one who has to be recognised as a man of stature, as one who counts for something. The man who has discernment is one who can see through beyond his own nose, who is far-seeing, 'inseeing', who has what we call vision; he is a man who has a secret knowledge of the meaning of things. And the possession of spiritual authority means that there is something about that man or woman which is more than themselves. They themselves, perhaps, would not command much respect and certainly not command obedience, but there is something about them that you have to take account of. They have got what we were speaking about in the last chapter - history with God. That gives them something that makes itself known and felt in the presence of other people. They have to say, 'They know what they are talking about, you cannot just twist them round your finger; they know where they stand; there is something about them that you are

compelled to recognise, acknowledge and bow to'. That is spiritual authority. Let us not interpret these things physically - I was going to say literally. These are spiritual factors, spiritual features, these are the marks of spiritual growth; and here is a big man, a great man, who has reached full stature.

Are not these the features of Christ? Look at Him again. Is there not dignity about Him? There is nothing small, nothing petty, nothing mean or contemptible about Christ. There is dignity right the way through. There is insight, discernment, perception, vision, knowledge beyond the ordinary. As for authority, He was someone to be reckoned with, even in the day of His humiliation. Sometimes when we are in a bad way physically and having a bad time, we lose out. But there He is, in the deepest humiliation, mocked, spat upon, crowned with thorns, suffering - and the great Roman representative is in His hands. It is Pilate in the hands and before the bar of Jesus, not the other way round. He is there in His dignity and His authority, which is a spiritual thing from heaven. These are the features of Christ. Now, those are to be reproduced in us, and these are the things which will appear as we grow. They will be marks of growth.

But how did Joseph come to it? By emptying and suffering, in exactly the same way as Christ. That is how he came to growth; out of this deep and dire distress, out of this anguish, out of all this suffering through which he went, came these very virtues, these very features. You can see Joseph being developed in the fire. In Potiphar's house, in the fiery trial, the dignity develops: 'Should such a one as I do this thing?'. It was in the fire, in the dungeon, that these features were developed. It was through suffering. It will be the same with us; but that is what God is after, to develop these things. It is a wonderful thing that the grace of God just reverses the order of things. Ordinarily in suffering the unregenerate man loses calibre and often loses character; but in the case of the believer, with the grace of God suffering only adds to character and calibre. Something comes up and grows which is fine, which is grand. That is the story of so many a suffering child of God. It is grand to see them, to be with them. Oh, that is not natural, that is not something that they inherit. That is something that has come by the grace of God, something that has come out of the fires.

### Meekness

"Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

What a verdict! "ABOVE all men"; head and shoulders above all other men! And how was he head and shoulders above all other men? It says it was in meekness, a tremendous summing up of a man's life! You could say about Moses that he was great in many respects, very great, but the Bible does not make a lot of his greatness in other respects. The Bible passes its verdict upon him that he was the meekest man upon the earth. See God's estimate of greatness, what God calls greatness - meekness. We need not stay with it. What is it? Well, meekness is what he thought of himself; it is what a man is in himself and toward himself. When Moses was alone and when Moses had any thought about himself at all, those thoughts about himself were very poor. He never, when thinking about himself, recognised that there was any reason why he should assert himself, that there was any ground on which he could stand up for his rights or could be something, any reason why they ought to take account of what he was in his own inner life. There was none of that - it was the other way. His thoughts about himself were very small thoughts, and he was only in his position because he had great thoughts of God and little thoughts about himself. That is all we need say. That is Meekness. It works, of course, in many ways, it comes out in many ways; but that is the heart of the matter - what we are in our own eyes about ourselves, and therefore how we behave.

Moses was not always meek, as we know from his early life in Egypt; but, under the hand of God, his weakest point became his strongest.

Now look at the Lord Jesus. There did come a Man on the earth greater than Moses, and His greatness was superior greatness even to that of Moses. He was on the same ground. "I am meek and lowly in heart", He said; "learn of Me" (Matt. 11:29). That is the way to grow. Pride is one of the most ruinous things in the realm of spiritual growth.

#### Devotion To The Lord's Testimony In His People

"Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went forth throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai waxed greater and greater" (Esther 9:4).

"The man... waxed greater and greater." You see how this little phrase "the man" in every connection is related to stature, to growth, to greatness. "The man Mordecai waxed and greater." Why? What was the secret of his greatness? Why did God sovereignly act to bring that man right up, in that startling way, from sitting at the door as a kind of eavesdropper and beggar - bring him up and up and up, until at last this could be said of him: "the man Mordecai waxed greater and greater"? Why? There is only one reason. Here was a man who at any cost was devoted to the interests of the Lord's people and to the Lord's testimony as vested in the Lord's people. That is the answer. You know the story of Mordecai and of Esther. Here is a man whose whole story is summed up in this deep, overwhelming concern for the Lord's people, because they embodied the Lord's testimony. We need, of course, to go over that whole ground of how Israel, chosen of God, was chosen as a people in the earth to be the vessel of His testimony, and here these people are at the point of being wiped out to the last child by this cunning, evil work, the devil-inspired device of Haman, "this wicked Haman", the Agagite. This man Mordecai set himself right in the full tide and flood of that iniquity, which was nothing less than the destruction of the life of the people of God in order to carry away the Lord's testimony from the earth. He set himself, and the tide broke on him, and God honoured him and raised him up and saw to it that he became great. His greatness was not the mere turn of fortune in his favour. It was because of what God was in him; and it is ever like that. Whatever other people try to do, however much they try to keep us down and under and out, spiritual greatness will be brought about by the Lord in us, if only we have this overwhelming concern for His interests in His people.

These are the features of greatness, because they are the features of Christ, and it is by these things that we come to the full stature of "a man in Christ". How important it is for us to recognise that all this is to be true in us as men and women - not as glorified saints hereafter, and certainly not as angels, but as men and women on this earth now, as human beings down here. How wonderful to know that it can commence and develop right away, even here and now, through the grace of God.

Thus, I trust we have been helped to see what God is really after; what intrinsic value is; and what will be the nature of incorruption. Man thinks much of Christian WORK. God thinks most of Christian MEN! There is no grander title than "O, man of God" (or woman). This is the Gold of the Sanctuary, and The Final Criterion.

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