

The Government of Love

by T. Austin-Sparks

The government of love is the rule of God's love in all aspects of life, as seen in the city of God in Revelation 21 and 22.

Scripture: John 3:16, Romans 11:36, 1 Corinthians 2:2, Ephesians 1:6, Ephesians 2:6, 1 Peter 2:7, Revelation 21:9-22

Topics: "The Lamb", "Government of Love"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of 'the Lamb' in the final vision of Revelation, illustrating that the essence of God's purpose culminates in the 'government of love.' He explains that the new Jerusalem symbolizes a community characterized by love and divine governance, with the Lamb as its foundation and source of life. The sermon explores themes of cleansing love, the transformative power of suffering, and the necessity of experiencing Christ's love to truly serve others. Ultimately, Sparks highlights that the Lamb's presence is central to understanding God's relationship with humanity and the eternal value of love in service.

Transcript

Reading: Revelation 21 and 22.

We have now reached the end, with this symbolic or pictorial presentation of what constitutes God's end: and it is surely very impressive, and a very significant thing, that, as we come to the end and are given to see the city, the phrase "the Lamb" touches everything. Seven times in connection with the city that phrase occurs. Everything is based upon the Lamb. The Lamb gives character and meaning to everything. When the angel said, "Come hither", he might just as well have said, "I will show you the Lamb"; for it is all the fruit of the Lamb, and that sums up everything in the Bible. As we have been seeing, the Lamb reaches right back to what God purposed and intended -- a people answering to the heart and mind of God -- and the Lamb has secured it. Here it is, secured, and this is what it is like. That people is here represented as "the holy city, new Jerusalem", and identified as "the Lamb's wife" -- such a mixture of similes that we are compelled to draw back, and say, "Well, it can only mean that that people is characterized by two things in one: the city ever and always stands for government, the seat of government; the wife, according to God's mind, always stands for love: put those two things together and you have the sum of the whole history -- it is the government of love." And that is the meaning of the Lamb, the Lamb of God.

Then that inclusive truth, the government of love, is analysed for us, in the sevenfold reference to the Lamb. Without anything like a full or exhaustive study of the content, we just light upon a single point in each reference.

The Foundation and Wall of Love

You notice, then, to begin with, the first mention of the Lamb after being presented in connection with the bride -- that is, after the statement, "I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb". The first reference to the Lamb after that comes in verse 14: "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb". I am not going to touch upon the phrase "the apostles of the Lamb". The foundations bear the inscription of the Lamb. But what is this wall? What does it stand for? Well, many of you know quite well that a wall is that which includes and excludes and declares that within this demarcation a certain state of things obtains, while a different state of things obtains without. We speak of it as a "testimony", the wall of testimony. Here is a "wall great and high", and when you look at the dimensions of this city wall, you find that it is very great in extent, as well as in height. It just speaks of the fullness of Christ in terms of love. It is a big area -- there is a lot inside; and it surely does correspond, as we were saying in our previous meditation, to Paul's words in his Ephesian letter (3:17-19) -- "That ye... may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" -- "the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ". That is the wall -- "the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ". This people, then, to pass from the typology and symbolism and imagery -- this people, this redeemed people, is the embodiment of the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ.

The length: it takes us back to eternity past, to the Beloved of the Father -- so beloved that the Father gave Him a mighty inheritance: through Him, by Him, unto Him, were to be all things created (Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16). He, says the apostle, was "heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2). The Beloved; the first-begotten of the Father; the heir of all things -- "that he might fill all things" (Eph. 4:10); and the purpose was to sum up all things in Christ. That is the measure of the Father's love for the Son. The Father speaks of Him as "My beloved Son". All the mighty vast extent of the love of God is centred in Christ. That is the length of it -- from eternity to eternity. And then "his grace, which he freely bestowed on us IN the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6); that is, He made us heirs of that same love, so that the very love which He has for His Son is transferred to us. We were "chosen in him before the foundation of the world", and on into the ages of the ages to come. That is the length of His love.

Its depth is seen in its being redeeming love -- cutting deep down under and beneath the uttermost iniquity.

The height -- "and hath seated us together with him in the heavenlies" (Eph. 2:6).

And the breadth -- "Whosoever": "...his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life".

You see the mighty, all-embracing love of Christ -- and at last there is a people found in that. The foundation of everything is the Lamb, as embodying God's great, redeeming love, and in the end there will be this great testimony to the greatness of God's love. It is a strong foundation. Sometimes you may be tempted to despair -- and well might we despair of ourselves; and perhaps we might despair of others too. Sometimes we might wonder if ever we shall get through and come out at the end all right. Many questions, indeed, arise in us, forced up by the power that is against us, the strength of everything, of all

that we have to meet both within and without. Yes, it is tremendously strong, but His love is stronger. There is a foundation here that cannot be shaken. It is mighty redeeming love, as suggested by this very name -- the Lamb: a mighty foundation. Well, if we are there at last in the city -- and do not objectify that: we ARE the city, by grace -- if we are components of that, we shall never be able for one moment to say anything about it but: Oh, the strength of His love! It is a deep and mighty foundation. That is very simple, but very blessed. It is the beginning.

His Cleansing Love

And then you notice in verse 27 -- "There shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life". Leave the last word for a minute and get the value of the other. Here is access into the city, or having a place in this: and how do we have a place? Yes, by His love -- but oh, by His CLEANSING love! Really there is nothing that can cleanse and purify more mightily than true love. The Lord is dealing with us in chastening, yes, disciplinary suffering, but we are told quite definitely that it is because He loves us. And here His love must work in a cleansing way. You notice that these are the things that are not according to the Lamb -- unclean, abomination, lie. These are the things that the Lamb of God destroyed. The "unclean" -- He is a Lamb without spot and without blemish. He destroys in Himself everything unclean and unholy; and by His mighty, mighty work of the Cross He will present this Bride to Himself "not having spot or blemish or any such thing". -- "Abomination": that is a word that would take us through a very great deal of the Bible, and we dare not stay at the moment with it. It is that which God abhors: an abomination to God. What is it? If pride is an abomination to God, if pride was the thing that commenced all the mischief -- when pride was found in Lucifer's heart and all the trouble came from that proud conception -- we can understand that pride is the root-sin and that everything of pride is an abomination to God. And the Lamb is just the opposite -- emptied of all self, all pride. You find the Lamb is the synonym for meekness, not pride. He by His own blood would purge us of that abominable thing. -- "That maketh a lie": yes, it was a lie that started the course of iniquity from the "liar from the beginning". Everything untrue, everything false, everything that is not absolutely clear and transparent, open, capable of standing the searching eyes of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire: all that is dealt with by the Lamb. A state of purity is brought about. "Having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal"; absolutely clear.

So then, this access, this franchise of the city, this right to be there, comes by the sanctifying work, the continuous cleansing, of His precious Blood, and the deepening application of His Cross to all that falsehood and pride and uncleanness that there is in us. It is His sanctifying love.

Life From the Throne

"He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1). Life from the throne. What throne is this? It is of God, yes, and of the Lamb. We have seen through the pages of the book of the Revelation the Lamb in the midst of the throne; the Lamb as the centre of worship, of adoration; the Lamb in the place of supremacy, of dominion. What is this supremacy?

We are dealing with principles, not with figures. Sometimes the figurative and symbolic gets in our way. We cannot help getting a certain kind of mentality which visualizes things. It would be ridiculous to literalize here. To talk about a wife being a city and a city being a wife is absurd. But, you see, you are dealing with principles, and here you have a throne, which speaks of government, dominion, power,

authority, victory; and life coming out of that -- life coming from the victory of the Lamb.

How can I make that helpful? Perhaps in this way. We are concerned in these meditations with the followers of the Lamb, those who "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth". This means that, if we in fellowship with Christ are baptized into His death, as an experience, not once nor twice, but ever more deeply, so that there is being brought about a continuous decrease of ourselves, in painful death-experiences of many kinds, in order that we may know the power of His resurrection proportionately, that is bringing us into a place of great strength, great power, great authority. This power of His resurrection, working in life triumphant over death, does put us in a strong place. If you know what it is to be taken into a very desperate situation where, but for God, it is the end, it is death, and then God comes with the power of resurrection, you have a tremendously strong position. You are able to say, "Now I know: this is no theory with me, no fiction, no mere doctrine: I know beyond any question the power of His resurrection, the power of His life as triumphant over death". That is governmental. You can never govern in a really spiritual way by just having a doctrine of resurrection. It does not bring you personally into any place of power to believe in resurrection as a matter of truth, but go through it, know it in your own experience through desperate situations, and you are established. That is the principle of the throne -- coming to know life as triumphant.

You will recall that Ezekiel saw this river -- and wherever that river came, death was overcome, life triumphed. Right down even to the Dead Sea, wherever the river came everything lived. It is the mighty power of life, His life, the life of the Lamb imparted to us, a tremendous thing. Simple as a statement, but not simple when it comes to going through the experience to know it. But it is a very powerful position to be in when you are able to say to other people, "Look here, I have been in your desperate plight; I have more than once been in the place where it seemed to me to be an utter end; and I have known the coming in of the Lord to bring me right up out of that, right back into life". That is a powerful position to be in. It will have very great influence and weight, be of the greatest value. The river comes out of the throne, and it is the throne of the Lamb; that is, it is the government of a life laid down and raised again. I am only talking about the rest of the New Testament. God raised Him from the dead, and that is something you cannot get over, that is a mighty thing, that is the impact of the throne. "I am... the Living one; and I became dead, and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Rev. 1:17,18, R.V.M.). That is the throne, authority in the power of resurrection life, and that is found here in the people at the end, a mighty thing that God is doing now.

Light Through Suffering

Then we pass back again to chapter 21:23 -- "And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb"; the margin says, "and the Lamb, the lamp thereof". It does not matter which way you put it; it means the same. What we have said about life is also true about light. Light is a governmental thing, it governs. But what is meant here is that you come into light through suffering. You come to possess light and radiate light by way of the Cross. "The Lamb is the lamp". Light is not a mental thing: that is to say, it is not just a matter of having a store of mental knowledge. That is not light. It is possible to have an enormous amount of doctrine and truth and never be luminaries, that is, never register impact upon darkness. Real light is experimental: that is to say, it is the fruit of experience, the experience of suffering.

How have you children of God come to know what you do know of the Lord, that real kind of knowledge of the Lord which is so precious to us, which means so much and which makes you in that measure of value

to others? It is through suffering, it is through the difficult way the Lord has led you, it is through the work of the Cross that He has wrought in you. "The Lamb is the lamp" -- suffering leading to knowledge, to light, to understanding. It is the only way. These people at the end will be in the good of a great and wonderful revelation which has come by their fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. It is very true. It may not be too comforting from one standpoint, but it is true; and it ought to help us to realise this: that the Lord, in the way in which He is dealing with us, in the sufferings which He allows to come upon us, is really seeking our education, that we may have a knowledge of Himself which can only come that way, and which is a peculiar kind of knowledge of tremendous value to us and through us to others. We do not learn in any other way. It is the Lamb, always the Lamb-principle, the way of suffering and sacrifice and self-emptying, that brings us into the knowledge of the Lord. "The Lamb is the lamp thereof"; and, just as it is deeper death unto fuller life, so it may often be deeper darkness unto fuller light.

The Lord seems to lead us in a way where we are less and less able naturally to understand Him. He gets us altogether out of our natural capacity, beyond our capacity for interpreting His ways. We just do not know what the Lord is doing, or why He is doing what He is doing; yet it is the way by which we come to a very real kind of inward knowledge of Himself. It may not be capable of explanation in words to anybody, but we know, somehow or other we know, and that is a mighty thing, a mighty power of knowledge. It is light through the Cross.

The Wife of the Lamb

"Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9). These people answering at last to God's deepest desire and fullest intention must be a people in the good of the preciousness of Christ. I think that is what is meant by the wife of the Lamb. Peter puts it this way: "For you therefore that believe in the preciousness" (1 Peter 2:7) -- the old version is, "he is precious" -- the preciousness of Christ, an apprehension of how Christ is to be desired above all others. And this preciousness has been wrought inwardly. He has, indeed, seen a preciousness in her -- "Christ... loved the church, and gave himself up for it" (Eph. 5:25) -- preciousness as of a pearl of great price. But somehow or other with these people that has been turned the other way, and they have come to such an appreciation of His love for them that He has become endeared to them unto an uttermost abandonment to Him. "For this cause" -- and this is the heavenly law of marriage -- "for this cause" to leave everything else for the one, means just this: such an apprehension of the preciousness of Christ that all is for Him, with no reserve whatsoever. That is the principle of the wife. What the Lord would seek to produce in us, in growing measure, is that apprehension of His value which draws us out to Himself ever more deeply and fully, in this wonderful relationship of unreserved abandonment to Him as our Lord.

The Lamb the Temple

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof" (Rev. 21:22). What is a temple for? Well, the temple is the immediate seat of God, just where you expect to find God -- and the Lamb is the temple. We shall find God in Christ crucified, Christ offered for us, Christ our Lamb. It is in Him as such that we shall ever meet the Lord. There are many people who are trying to find God without and apart from Jesus Christ crucified, and they cannot do it and they never will. Oh, what pathetic and tragic cases there are like that. We have heard them. "Yes, I believe in God; I pray to God". "What does that mean to you?" "Oh, well, it means a lot to me to believe that God is; it helps me to think about God". "But what is the effect in your character? Does that really mean victory over sin, does it really mean salvation?" "Oh, now you are talking about things that I do not know anything about". "Where does

God's Son come in, and His work on the Cross -- His atonement for sin?" "Oh, no, I cannot accept that". And so, with all their believing in God, they are walking either in the darkness or in the shadows; for there is no way to God but by Christ crucified. You will never come to God's end in any other way. He is the one in whom alone you will find God. Christ crucified, Christ your atonement, your sacrifice: that is the meeting place of God with your heart and of your heart with God. God's place is there. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19); and you will never find God or reconciliation anywhere else. These people are the ones who have found God, and they have found Him in Christ and they know that the Lamb is the temple.

The Throne of the Lamb

"And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein" (Rev. 22:3). We have spoken about the throne and what it means -- governing; but, again, how far-reaching and comprehensive is this truth, that it is Christ crucified who solves all problems, who really governs all the situations. We are carried back to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, back, indeed, to that terrible situation amongst the believers in Corinth. What a deplorable state of things existed there. It was a condition that might take the heart out of any man. You might say, "How can we handle a situation like this? How can this be cleared up?" And Paul had to sit down with the whole situation and think it out and pray it over, and then he arrived at one conclusion. "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Then see how he applies that. He applies Christ crucified to their divisions, to their lawsuits, and to the whole situation, and then he resolves it all into one word -- love (1 Cor. 13). That can solve it, and that will solve it. Every problem, every situation, can be cleared up by that love of God in Christ Jesus expressed in the Cross. Yes, the Cross governs. It is the throne.

When we have said all that, and it is only so very little, what do we arrive at as the ultimate meaning? I think it is in verse 24 of chapter 21. "And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it". Here we have the secret and principle of service. (And do remember that, when you are dealing with principles, you are not dealing with past, present and future. This picture must not be wholly referred to the future. All this must not be regarded merely as something yet to come. The consummation may be future, but the principles are eternal, they are always present.) The principles of service, of others being ministered to, others deriving profit and benefit -- is that it is only possible as the Lord's people are in fellowship with the Lamb AS THE LAMB: that is, in fellowship with Him in His sufferings, in the way of His Cross. That is the only way to be of value to anyone else. You can never really serve other people's spiritual life by study, by the accumulation of knowledge, or by any technical means whatever. The measure in which other people are benefited or helped by you will be just the measure in which you know the Lamb-life, the way of the Cross.

And again I come back to this that has been said so often in these studies. It will be the measure in which we follow the Lamb, as the LAMB, and what that word means in all its content, that will be the measure of our present and eternal value to God in others -- just that measure. Therefore, if the Lord seems to be taking you more than ordinarily into sufferings; if it does seem that yours is an unusually hard way, and the Lord's hand seems to be very heavily upon you: do interpret in the light of this ultimate issue in the whole book of God, that others are to get benefit, others are to come into some good through the way He is taking you.

That really is the way of service. The principle of service is suffering: you cannot get away from it. And the measure of value is the measure of your fellowship with Him in His sufferings. I repeat, that we cannot get

away from this -- it is true. Perhaps some are now able to recognize this, and to see quite clearly that, if the Lord has been able to use them, it has been because of the deep way in which He has led them -- and that is the justification of it. It is the Lamb everywhere, stamped upon everything, and ultimately it works out in value. "The nations... walk by the light thereof": they derive their value from this thing which, wherever you look, from circumference to centre, has the Lamb on it. God is going to impress and stamp His people with the Lamb, and so He will secure that instrument, that vessel, that channel of universal blessing, upon which He has set His heart.

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