

The Heavenly Man and the Word of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Heavenly Man is governed by the Word of God, and the Word of God is the source of life and redemption.

Scripture: Matthew 4:4, John 5:39, John 6:63, John 8:47, John 12:48, John 14:10, Hebrews 4:12-13, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 John 4:17, Revelation 3:1

Topics: "The Word of God", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the Heavenly Man, Jesus Christ, in relation to the Word of God, illustrating how His life was begotten, tested, and governed by the Word. He explains that the Word is not merely a statement but an act of God that brings life and growth, and that believers must be governed by the Spirit of life in the Word to experience true growth in Christ. Sparks warns against the danger of relying solely on the letter of the Word without the Spirit, which can lead to a lifeless faith. He concludes that true life and doctrine arise from a living relationship with the Heavenly Man, rather than from mere adherence to doctrine or church structure.

Transcript

Reading: Matt. 4:4; John 6:63,68, 8:47, 14:10; 1 Pet. 1:23,25; Heb. 4:12,13; 1 John 4:17.

You will notice that what is said in the first four of these passages arises out of the fact that the Lord Jesus was the Heavenly Man. In the temptation in the wilderness, as recorded in the passage in Matthew, we see that it was following the opening of the heavens and the attestation from the Father, "This is My beloved Son..." that the enemy made his challenge to all that this designation of Christ as the Heavenly Man implied. "If Thou art the Son...." The temptations had their foundation in the fact of the heavenliness of the Lord Jesus. In the passages in John's Gospel the same feature is seen. As we have already noted, John keeps in view the heavenliness of the Lord Jesus all the way through, from the first words of his Gospel to the end. The challenge of the Lord Jesus carries that same meaning: "Believest thou not that I am in the Father...." The Heavenly Man is brought before us at this point in relation to the Word of God.

We closed our previous meditation by dealing with the vital principle of redemption, and we were saying that that principle, which is eternal life, makes the redemption that is perfect in Christ, progressive in us. Redemption is introduced into us with the receiving of eternal life, and as the life operates, works, and increases, we come increasingly into the good of redemption. The real values of redemption become ours in experience by the operation of the life of the Redeemer in us, the Redeemer operating in us by His own life.

Christ the Beginning of the Creation of God

In John twenty, at verse twenty-two we have an incident recorded which has given rise to a certain measure of perplexity: "...He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit...." We perhaps want an explanation of that act, and of those words, and I think the explanation is that what He did and said was in pattern, and not immediately in actuality; that is, it was a representative act on the part of the last Adam. John twenty sees us on resurrection ground with the Lord Jesus. We remember that it is written, "The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). That must, in spiritual reality, relate to His resurrection. Not in the full sense was He a life-giving spirit before the Cross, neither was He the last Adam before the Cross. All that was represented by, and summed up, in Him, but in the sense of generation, this only begins on resurrection ground. There in the fullest sense He becomes the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. So on resurrection ground He performs this representative or pattern act, and utters these representative words as the last Adam, fulfilling in the spiritual sense the words of Revelation three, verse one: "...the beginning of the creation of God." In the literal sense He was that at the beginning of this world. He was the beginning of the creation of God. That does not mean that He was the first one created by God; it means that He began the creation of God literally then, as to this world.

In the new creation He is taking that place in the spiritual sense: "...the beginning of the creation of God." In the beginning of the literal creation there was a breathing into man of the breath of lives. Now, as the last Adam, as a life-giving spirit, He breathes upon them. It is a typical act. It is the last Adam acting in a pattern-way in relation to the first members of the new creation, the beginning of the creation of God. He is typically infusing eternal life into the new creation. It is only a typical act, because the Spirit was not yet given. The full expression of it came later at Pentecost.

The Heavenly Man in Relation to the Word of God

Here is life in relation to the Heavenly Man in the full sense. We now come to bring all this life principle in the Heavenly Man into relation to the Word of God. The Word of God is very closely related to this life, and this life is very closely related to the Word of God, both of them as in the Heavenly Man, the life and the Word. So much is this so that they are not things in Him, but He is them. He is the Word, and He is the life; the life and the Word are in Him as His very being. Yet the Word is utterance as well as person. If you have taken the trouble to study the technique of the point that is raised in the use of the words "Logos" and "rema," you know how difficult it is always to differentiate between the two. You know how they run into one another, and how very often they meet and are one. So it is that the person has the word and the word is the word of the person. There is a difference, and yet they are both bound up with the person. We shall see as we go on what it means.

(a) Begotten by the Word

In the first place, as we have been saying, the Lord Jesus as the Heavenly Man was begotten through the Word. The angel visited Mary and presented her with the Word of God, and waited for her to respond to it before there was any living result, and when, after consideration and fighting her battle through the problem and the difficulty, and the cost of it, she responded, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word," then the living Christ was implanted.

(b) Tested by the Word

In the temptation in the wilderness, it is clearly indicated to us that, in the background of things, it was the Word of God that was governing the Lord. Every temptation was met with the Word of God: "It is written...." Life was contingent upon the Word of God: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). In the Heavenly Man the life question is bound up with the Word of God. If you take the opposite of that, you know that the earthly man dies because he refuses the Word of God; his life depends upon the Word of God and his attitude toward it. Here the last Adam is taken up on the same basis, and inasmuch as He met the three temptations with the Word of God, it is perfectly clear that His life was bound up with the Word of God. It was the Word of God that was governing this whole experience, and its issue. The Heavenly Man was being assailed with a view to tearing Him out of His heavenly life, as it were, by getting Him in some way to refuse, or violate, or ignore the Word of God. He maintained His position as the Heavenly Man in life on the ground of the Word of God.

(c) Governed by the Word

Not only was He begotten through the Word, and tested by the Word, but in the third place, Christ was governed throughout the whole of His life by the Word of God. All the Law and the Prophets apply to Him. Said He to Jewish leaders, "Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of Me" (John 5:39). The suggestion there does not immediately affect our consideration, but is worth noting. In effect He was saying: In your searching of the Scriptures for eternal life, it is the Person in the Scriptures that you need to know; it is in Him in Whom the Scriptures are gathered up that eternal life is found. That is the force of the statement: "...these are they which bear witness of Me." Again, when with the two on the way to Emmaus after His resurrection, it is said of Him that "beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. "

We mark the fact, then, that all the Scriptures applied to Him. He embodied and fulfilled all the Scriptures. How often will He say, while here on the earth, concerning a certain movement, a certain act, a certain experience, a certain statement, "...that the scriptures might be fulfilled...." If you have never taken out every instance in which that occurs, you should do so. It is worth gathering up.

The Relation of the Holy Spirit to the Word of God and the Heavenly Man

Now I want you to note this. The Lord Jesus, in the whole of His life, was being governed by the Word of God. How necessary it was, then, for Him to walk in the Spirit, so that the Word of God should be fulfilled. Now what does that mean? Take, for example, the Old Testament. Do you suppose for one moment that every statement in the Old Testament was always present in the mental consciousness of the Lord Jesus, and that when He went to do something He referred to His manual, and said: "Now shall I do this, or shall I do that? What does the Scripture say I ought to do?" Yet every part of the Scripture was controlling His life, and there was a sense in which He was responsible for everything there. It all applied to Him. But He was not carrying all the Scriptures in His head, nor even in a book, and referring to His memory or His manual for His conduct, His utterances, His acts, His experiences, for what He allowed and what He did not allow, for what He did and what He did not. Although the Word of God was with Him richly, although He would have had a great knowledge of the Scriptures--and that becomes perfectly clear as we read His utterances--that is not the way in which the Word of God governed Him; as though He had to call Scriptures to remembrance on every occasion and to act accordingly. He was moving in the Spirit of life, and as He did so He moved according to the Word of God. When necessary the Spirit of life brought the

Word of God to His remembrance, and He was able to use it. How He did use it! But apart from any quoting of Scripture, and apart from any present memory of the particular passage which governed any given incident, the Spirit was moving with life, in relation to the Word of God. He was governed by the Word of God, so that even when, as Man, He was helpless upon the Cross, unable to do anything, it says of those very conditions, "...that the scripture might be fulfilled...." Again, it is recorded that when He was dead on the Cross, and they came to break the legs of those crucified, finding Him already dead, they break not His legs, "...that the scripture might be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken" (John 19:36). That Man is under the government of the Word of God in everything because of the Spirit possessing, because of the Spirit directing, and the Spirit taking responsibility.

I can see a danger there, and am going to safeguard what we are saying, but let us first of all stress this law. If we are walking in the Spirit, and are moving according to the life of the Heavenly Man, our lives will be ordered according to the Word of God. Sometimes we shall not know the Scripture that applies to a given moment, but we shall know of something happening; we shall know that at that point we were checked; it was as though within us something said: That is not right, you will have to correct that statement; there is a flaw in that, and you will have to make that good. How often we have known that. Afterwards we have discovered where we were mistaken. The Spirit of life does not let anything that is contrary to the Word of God pass, if we are walking in the Spirit. Surely that should be a great comfort to us, and a great help.

The Word of God Never to be Set Aside

But there is a danger of which we need to beware. What we have said does not mean that we can take up a course of trying to walk in the Spirit, and neglect the Word of God. We cannot say: Well, to walk in the Spirit is all we need and we shall be according to the Word of God; we need not bother about that. There are a lot of people who live in what they call their "spirit." They "get it from the Lord." They get something, and act upon it, and afterwards it is discovered that it is a direct violation of the Word of God. How often we have met that. People get things "from the Lord," and do something which they think they got from the Lord, and it is as clear as possible that the Word of God is positively against what they have done.

Thus the matter needs safeguarding. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom..." (Col. 3:16) as a basis for the Holy Spirit. If, however, you are doing that you will not always have the exact passage to hand to govern the thing of the moment, but the Holy Spirit will be making good in you what He knows to be the Word of God, and holding you up. How true that is. Some of us have found that our natural memories have in great measure broken down. Very often a misquotation of Scripture does not touch doctrine at all, but the point is this, that there is a governing Intelligence which makes us know the Word of God, though we may not be able for the moment to give a particular passage in its exact phrasing or call it to mind. We are governed by it if we belong to the Heavenly Man. "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). Here is the Heavenly Man governed by the Word of God, inasmuch as there was life in Him.

What is true of the Head, is to be true of the members. If we are joined to the Heavenly Man, we become parts of that corporate Heavenly Man, and that same life is in us, and we shall walk by the Word. We shall be governed by the Word through the Spirit of life that is in the Word, and that Spirit of life is all-knowing, all-intelligent. I wish that all the Lord's people lived on that basis. It would save us from all that deadly heresy-hunting kind of thing; from always being suspicious, little, doctrinal watch-dogs, keeping a look-out for anything that is erroneous, and producing a blight of death over everything. If we were but living in the Spirit, we should know in our hearts whether a thing were right or not, without projecting our analytical

minds into things; the Spirit would bear witness in our hearts. That would be life and salvation. The other is a miserable existence for everybody.

Now you see the Heavenly Man, eternal life, and the Word governing throughout. What a difference there is between being governed by the letter and being governed by the Spirit. We may have the book; may possess all the letter; and may be constantly exclaiming, "To the law and to the testimony!" We may thus become very legal, checking up on the letter all the time. The Lord Jesus did not thus act, nor did the Apostle Paul. Zealous as they were for the Scriptures, for the Word of God, utterly governed by the Word of God, the thing which mattered with them was the living Word. Said our Lord Jesus: "...the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life "; "...the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). We can kill with the letter. We can kill with the Word, as the Word. Surely we want to be delivered from dealing with the Scriptures as words, as letters, and to be brought into the place where it is the Spirit in the Word giving life. What a difference there is between those two realms. One leads to nothing but death, paralysis, to the chilling and blighting of everything; the other leads to a positive condemnation, to judgment which is necessary to slay the thing that is evil. It does not leave things in that blighted state without any meaning, which is all too often the case when it is merely a thing of the letter.

So you get the twofold aspect of the Word unto growth in Christ. Firstly, the Word is a Spirit-breathed utterance. That is what the Word of God must be, and not just something that has been written. Secondly, the Spirit of life associated with the Word. This raises a very big question, a question that perhaps it is almost dangerous to open in public in these days, and to answer which maybe would require a good deal of explanation. The question is this: How far is the written Word, as it stands, the Word of God? This Book can be taken hold of and the same fragment used in fifty different ways at the same time. The same passage of Scripture can be the basis of a dozen different things, all of which are mutually exclusive and contradictory. Which of these dozen or fifty is the Word of God? You can take Scripture as the letter like that, out from this Book, and you can say: This is the Word of God! How are you going to prove it? All these different people take the Word of God, and get a different meaning with a different result, act in a different way, and justify a different course, and the same Word has brought about terrific conflict and opposition between different sections of people. How far is it the Word of God as it stands? My point is this, that I believe that something extra is necessary to make that the Word of God in truth, in fulness, and that is the Spirit of life in it. That Spirit of life (we are thinking of the Holy Spirit now, not an unintelligent abstraction) must Himself use, and apply, that Word, to make it the Word of God. I do not believe that you can get any Divine result by simply quoting scripture as scripture. The Holy Spirit has to come into that Word, express Himself as in it, and make it live before you get the Divine result, because of the object in view. A living Heavenly Man is not made by mere words, even though they be words of Scripture. That is what people have tried to do. They have tried to make the Church by words of Scripture, constitute the Church by what is here as written, and so you have half a dozen different kinds of churches, all standing on what they call the Word of God, and the thing does not live. It is a living, Heavenly Man that God has in view, and to produce that, the Spirit must operate through the Word. "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life," said the Lord to His disciples. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." On the part of Peter, the spokesman of these latter words, this was a word of discrimination. The scribes and Pharisees had the Scriptures. They claimed that everything they had and held was in the Word of God. Ah yes, but they knew them not as the words of eternal life. There is a difference. This life is in His Son. It has to be in a living relationship to the Lord Jesus that the Scriptures are made effective.

The Sovereignty of God in the Creative Word

That works, in the first place, sovereignly in the direction of the unsaved. You may take the Word of God as it is written and preach it, but you have to leave the whole matter to the sovereignty of the Spirit. Preach it to a crowd of fifty, a hundred, a thousand, and to nine hundred and ninety-nine of the thousand the thing is as dead as anything can be. They see nothing, they feel nothing, but one in the thousand is sovereignly touched. That word is something more than an utterance, than letters, that word is spirit and life. That is no accident, no chance, but a sovereign act. The Spirit of God has come into the Word in relation to that one. That is the foolishness of preaching, in a sense, that you have to preach, and have no guarantee that the many will be touched by the Word of God. You have to commit yourself to the waters, and believe that God will somewhere come into the Word and touch some life, though the majority should be left untouched. That is the extra element, the Spirit of life in the Word of God, sovereignly acting in relation to the unsaved.

That, of course, is the creative Word, and brings us to see that in the Heavenly Man the Word of God is God's act, and not just God's statement. In the Heavenly Man the Word of God is never a statement alone, it is an act. We say many things, and then we look round for the result, with the thought in our minds, "What is the value of all this?" You have never, never to look for the result of God's Word in the Heavenly Man; it is there. You may not see it, but it is there. The Word in relation to the Spirit of life in Christ is an act; something is done; and when that Word has come by the Spirit of life, those to whom it has been directed by the intelligent Spirit can never again be the same, though they may seem to go on in the old way: "...the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Something has been said; the Word has come, and the thing is done, never to be undone. Sooner or later those concerned are going to come right up against that, and it is all going to be dated back to that hour when the Spirit gave expression to the Word. That is a tremendous fact. That is the value of giving the Word in the Spirit, because it is an act. It is creative. It is something done, not something said. Oh, to recognize that the Word in the Holy Spirit is something done, not merely something said. God's Word is always God's act: "...the worlds have been framed by the word of God..." (Heb. 11:3). The Word of the Lord is a blessing. It is not just saying, The Lord bless you. It is a blessing in itself; it brings the blessing. It is an act.

The Life Principle Established in the Case of the Saved

In the saved there is another side. The first side is creative, sovereign. Now in the case of the saved, where those concerned are the Lord's people, the operation of the Spirit in relation to the Word of God is no longer purely sovereign. In the case of believers the Word is not given with a view to bringing about creation, for that is done. We stand because of the Word of the Lord spoken sovereignly by the Spirit into our hearts, having thus been made His children, begotten by the Word of God. That is a sovereign act, but from that time onward, that which is sovereign ceases and growth is by the Spirit of life in the Word; but upon a basis that there is life in us to correspond to the life in the Word. The life in the one, or in the company, concerned is the basis of growth according to the Word of the Lord, which has life in itself. Take a simple illustration from our use of natural food. No matter how you may feed a corpse, you will get no development, no kind of growth. It is of no use feeding a dead man. There must be some life in a man that corresponds to the life in the food, takes hold of it, works with it, co-operates with it, before there can be growth. That is what we mean by the activity which bears the mark of sovereignty in the main ceasing. The sovereign act is something apart from ourselves; it is the grace of God to sinners who can give nothing back. Now that the life is in us our growth is on the basis of the life within us co-operating with the life in His Word. You can preach to people who have not much light, and preach in the Holy Spirit, and may not

get very much result because of the limited measure of life that is in them. But you get tremendous response to a living word when people are all alive unto the Lord, when there is life in them. Growth comes that way, the life in us corresponding to the life in the Word, forming the Heavenly Man.

The Spirit-accompanied Word imparts life, quickens into life where there is a dead state, and does it sovereignly; but the Spirit-accompanied Word requires a response in the spirit in the case of those who have already been sovereignly brought into relation to Christ through the Word. The same life in the Word governs our lives as governed our new birth. The Lord Jesus was begotten truly of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of life, but by the Word, or through the Word. Now, for the governing of His life, the same life through the Word operated as in the birth; that is, the same life that brought into being must be in the Word which governs the life, to bring that being to full growth. It is the life principle which is so important. It is this newness, this freshness that is of such account--if you like, this originality. Do not misunderstand; we are not using that word in the natural sense. We mean that in the birth by the Spirit of life there is something that never was before; it is original, new. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus. We call it the "new birth." It is not just something fresh, recent, but something that was not before.

In relation to the Word it has to be like that. The Word must come with all the force of something that never was before. There has to be a sense of Divine originality and freshness about it that is bringing to wonder, amazement. Again, you can test that. When the Word is in the hands of the Holy Spirit, though you may have read a passage a thousand times, and have had something from that word, you can come back to it again and say: Well, I never saw that before! Why, this is alive with meaning and value beyond anything before! There is all the difference between that, and the stale stuff that we put into books as the result of our Bible study. The Lord would have His ministers in the realm where their handling of the Word of God is in life. It is the Heavenly Man being governed by the heavenly life in the Word, so that everything is constantly new, constantly fresh, constantly original.

How true that is to experience. There have been times when we thought we knew all about a certain thing in the Bible; we have talked about it tremendously, and it has been our theme for a long time. Then a period of time has elapsed when we have left it, and the Spirit of the Lord has led us to that again, and it is as though we have never seen that truth before. We find that we can come back to the old themes, as they are called, with such a newness. Other people may not realize what is going on in us. They may hear what amounts to the old things again, but they say: 'There is such a new meaning, a new grip, that it is quite clear the Holy Spirit has not finished with that matter, and has more to say to us about it.' We have to be careful how we react mentally to things like that. We are so often tempted to take this attitude: Oh, well, I have spoken of that so often that people must be tired of it! The Holy Spirit is saying: You say it again; do not take any notice of what they think; if they have heard it a thousand times, you say it! And when you do so, there is something done which, with all the earlier utterances of the same thing, has never been done before. Be careful of pigeon-holing anything in the Word of God, and saying that we have exhausted that. If you are dealing with the themes of the Bible, as such, you may as well pigeon-hole the whole thing right away. If you are moving in the Spirit with the Word of God, there will never be a time when any part of the Word of God becomes obsolete. It is the same new life that never was before, which came into us to constitute us a part of the Heavenly Man, which is so governed by the Word all the way along, unto constant increase, constant growth.

Remember, then, that it is a matter of life. Remember that doctrine comes out of life, and not life out of doctrine. The Church comes out of life, and not life out of the Church. It is not attachment to doctrine, nor attachment to the Church, but attachment to the Heavenly Man in a living way that is the vital necessity;

and then you will get the doctrine and the Church. In the Word as we have it, the doctrine came after the life. The Church existed before the doctrine of the Church was given. Attachment to the Heavenly Man produced the doctrine of the Church. The Church came about by a living relationship, not by taking up a revelation of what the Church was, and seeking to put it into operation. Life comes first of all, and where life is found the rest will follow. It is of no use trying to impose the doctrine of the Church, or any other doctrine, upon people, if they are not alive unto the Lord. The Lord knows what He is doing. You cannot go about the world anywhere, not even amongst Christian people, with your full doctrine, your full revelation, and have the assurance that, as you give it out, they are going to leap to it. You have to go where the Spirit leads you, for the Spirit knows exactly where there is a sufficiency of life to have prepared the ground, and what can respond to that which you have to give. How we would like to go out into the world and talk to all the Lord's people of what He has shown us, and give them the revelation of the Body of Christ! We should go and organize great gatherings and get people together, only to find that they look at us blankly and exclaim: This is strange doctrine! You cannot do it like that. Increase has to be on a basis of life; because doctrine does not come first, but life. You cannot get the Church by trying to get it! There has to be life, and life by its working forms the Church, becomes the realization of the Church. The reversal of that order only leads to Babylon.

What is Babylon? Babylon represents the loss of the authority of the Word of God as a living thing. It was in the reign of Jehoiakim, the king who took his pen-knife and cut up the Word of God, that Judah began to be carried away into Babylon. When he repudiated the living authority of the Word of God, all the vessels of gold and silver were carried off to Babylon. It is a parable. It means that the Lord's people come into bondage, into captivity, into death, are out of the place of the Lord's appointment, and the Lord's ministry is not going on in life, because the vessels have departed, have all been taken away. Right up to that time they were going on with their sacrifices, going on with their Levitical order. But that is not the point. You can have the form of things, the system, and yet go to Babylon. It is the Word of the Lord as a spiritual and living thing, which keeps you free, clear, strong, out of Babylon.

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