

The Heavenly Man--the Inclusiveness and Exclusiveness of Jesus Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Church must be conformed to the image of Christ, with nothing but what is of Christ being allowed, in order to be the fulness of Christ.

Scripture: John 8:23, Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 15:47, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 1:10, Ephesians 2:6, Philippians 3:20, Colossians 3:11, Hebrews 12:2

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Inclusiveness of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the dual nature of Jesus Christ as both inclusive and exclusive in God's plan, highlighting that all things are summed up in Him. He explains that while Christ encompasses all that is necessary for divine purpose, only what is of Christ is ultimately accepted by God. The Church, as the corporate body of believers, is called to reflect Christ as the Heavenly Man, transcending earthly distinctions and embodying a new creation in Him. Sparks urges believers to recognize their heavenly identity and to strive for a life that is fully aligned with Christ, as only that which is of Him will endure in the end. The sermon calls for humility and dependence on Christ, acknowledging that true effectiveness comes from being filled with Him.

Transcript

We have under consideration a phrase from the Letter to the Ephesians, "ALL THINGS IN CHRIST": "...unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ..." (Eph. 1:10). That is the great general vision that is occupying us, and we will now begin to break it up into its parts.

To begin with, it is supremely important that we should recognize that there is one basic and all-governing factor with God, which is a supreme matter for our knowledge, and that is the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Everything intended and required for the realization of Divine purpose and intention is in, and with, Christ, not only as a deposit, but all is Christ. That is the inclusiveness of Christ.

Then, on the other hand, nothing but what is of Christ is accepted or permitted by God in the final issue. That is the exclusiveness of Christ. However God may seem in His patience and long-suffering, in His grace and mercy, to be bearing with much, even in us His people, which is not of Christ; however much He

seems for the time being to allow, it is of supreme importance that we settle it once for all that God is not really allowing it. He may extend to us His forbearance, His long-suffering, but He is not in any way accepting what is not of Christ. He has initially said that it is dead to Him, and He is progressively working death in that realm. So that in the final issue, not one fragment anywhere that is not of Christ will be allowed. Christ excludes everything that is not of Himself. That is God's ruling of the matter.

The Church to be what Christ was and is as the Heavenly Man

In view of what we have just said, it is of the utmost importance for real effectiveness that we should realize that the Church is intended to be what Christ was, and is, as the Heavenly Man. Only that which is of Christ, the Heavenly Man, is eternally effective. Therefore, the more there is of Christ, the more effectiveness there is from God's standpoint. That means that what was, and what is, true of Him as the Heavenly Man, as to His being, as to the laws of His life, as to His ministry and His mission, is to be true of the Church. (When we speak of the Church, of course, we speak of all the members as forming the Church.)

Do you notice that we are speaking of Christ as the Heavenly Man, and not of His co-equality with the Father in Deity. We are not saying that the Church is to be, in the same sense as Christ, God incarnate, occupying the place of Deity; we are speaking of the Heavenly Man. Christ was, and is, a Heavenly Man. The Church in Him is also a heavenly man, one "new man." It is not to be thought of as Jew and Greek, circumcision and uncircumcision, bond and free, a combination of earthly elements, of various aspects of human life as here on this earth. These and all other earthly distinctions are lost sight of and set aside, and one "new man" is brought in, where "Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

Christ has never been, in His essential nature, of the earth. He had a relationship to Israel, a relationship to man here; He has a judicial relationship to this earth, but in His essential nature He never has been earthly. He is the Lord from heaven. He takes pains to stress the fact, and to keep it clearly in view: "...I am from above..." (John 8:23).

Now as Christ in His essential nature never was of the earth, neither is the Church. The Church has never been an earthly thing in God's thought. That is where the gap is bridged. Paul takes you right back, and shows you that the Church is in the heavenlies before ever the fall took place. In Christ we are made to bridge the gap created by the fallen ages. Before the world was, Christ existed with the Father, literally and personally. The Church existed in the foreknowledge of God before the world was, though not literally in the same way that Christ did; that is, this is not a reincarnation, but, in the foreknowledge of God, the Church was as actual before time as it is now, or ever will be. Whenever Paul speaks of the Church, he always speaks of it as though it were complete. He never speaks of a completing of it. Much has to be done to add the members, to bring it to its numerical completeness, and its spiritual and moral completeness and perfection, but while Paul has much to say about spiritual growth and increase, he yet speaks of the Church as though it were already completed. He is viewing it from the heavenly, eternal, Divine standpoint, from the standpoint of the foreknowledge of God. There in that foreknowledge of God, and that foreordaining according to foreknowledge, the Church existed as a complete whole with the Father and the Son before times eternal. Then came the break, the gap, the dip down; but in Christ it is bridged, and the Church is seen as a continuous thing in the heavenlies, above it all.

The Church is seen as being literally formed in this dispensation, but it is as immediately translated to heaven. Immediately we come into Christ, we are seated in the heavenlies in Christ: "God... when we

were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with Christ... and raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies..." (Eph. 2:6). It does not say that we are to be placed there at some future date. Before ever we believed, we became a heavenly people from God's standpoint. We were cut clear of this world, translated out of this kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love, and ceased to be earthly, immediately we came into Christ. We are lifted right back on to the level of the original purpose, and linked up with the first thought of God in Christ. We become the corporate heavenly man, even as He is the Heavenly Man in person.

We are called upon to recognize our link with the eternal and the heavenly, and to take things up from there. There would not be that terrible anomaly of "worldly Christians," if only this were apprehended. Look at all that has to be dealt with because of failure to keep the testimony pure for the Lord's people. Worldly Christians! What a contradiction to the Divine thought! How impossible it is to accept anything like that! Let us repeat, we are called upon to recognize our link with the eternal and heavenly, and to take things up from there. It is not the case that we are struggling, working, striving to be a heavenly people; not aiming at such a state, and hoping that at some time it will be realized, but we are a heavenly people, and we must take things up from that standpoint.

The convert, the young child of God, must remember that by his union with Christ he becomes entirely a heavenly part of Christ from the first, linked with everything heavenly and eternal. Everything here is to be as out from another realm. That should be kept in view. We should have a very different kind of believer if that were always kept to the fore. That is God's standpoint, God's mind.

This, then, brings us to the point at which that eternal and heavenly relationship is resumed. It is not the commencement but the resumption in Christ of something that was broken off, interrupted, and which ought never to have suffered such an interruption.

Nothing but what is of Christ allowed by God in the Ultimate Issue

Before we deal with the point of resumption, we will spend a few moments in looking yet further at the implication of what has been emphasized already. Nothing but what is of Christ is allowed by God in the ultimate issue. Now, because that is true, all the activities of God in discipline are introduced and pursued. All the discipline which comes by failure, for example, is followed out. Failure is in the way of God's thought now, a necessity as it were. Lives reach a point, and then are unable to get beyond that point; there is a going on so far in a measure of blessing, and then the state of things changes, the kind of blessing that has been is withheld, and a state of things ensues which has but one issue, that of an absolute necessity for a new position in the Lord. It is not that the Lord blesses what is not of Christ in such a period, but in His grace and mercy He blesses us, in order to lead us on in Christ: then, when we have come to a place where we have a certain knowledge of the Lord, the Lord suspends that outward blessing, and we pass into a time of trial, of conscious failure, defeat, arrest, helplessness, and we are found before long in that realm saying: My need is of a new place with the Lord, a new experience of the Lord, a new knowledge of the Lord. All that has been, has been very wonderful, but it is as nothing now, and the need now is of a new place with the Lord.

That will go on to the end. The experience is not relative to the early stages alone, but continues throughout the course. How many of us have cried, Lord, we need a new position! Why is this? It is the outworking of this law, that with God nothing but what is of Christ is allowed. Only that which is of Christ can be effective, and our experience means that more of the mixture has to go, and Christ has to take its

place. Failure leads to that.

The same thing applies with regard to work, to great movements. The history of a movement is like that of the individual. Even that which has been blessed of God comes to the place where, as a movement, as a collective instrumentality, it knows that the old days have passed, and for that which now obtains, and that which is before, a new position is necessary. Unfortunately so many try to live upon the past, try to go on upon a reputation, a history, and will not confess to the fact that things have changed and that God requires something more. If only they would face up to that, how much more glorious in its effectiveness would be the future, than ever the past has been. But there you have the interpretation of the experience. However it is apprehended by those concerned, the fact remains that God applies this law, that in the end, when everything has been said and done, and when all these present ages have run their course, in God's ages of the ages there will be nothing but what is of Christ. He is seeking to bring the Church to that goal, to be the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. It cannot be the fulness of Christ while anything else is there.

How manifold is the application of this truth! How many a detail it touches, and how ashamed it should make us! If we really do see it, if it really strikes our hearts, we shall be greatly humbled. Inwardly we shall feel thoroughly disgusted with ourselves as in the light of this we think of our assertiveness, of our strength, of our activity in the things of God, of all that has been of ourselves in this realm. The putting forth of strength is only effective in the proportion in which it represents a measure of Christ. We puny folk on this earth stand up and think we are of some account! What insignificant people we are if viewed from the heavenlies! The Lord looks down upon us and sees us trying to make names for ourselves in His things; dominating other lives; trying to exercise our influence with other lives; manipulating, putting our hands upon them. It is all pride, all conceit, all self in some form. The aspects of it are countless. The Lord looks at it and says, No, it is not of Christ; therefore, in the final issue it has to go! That is why He breaks us, and empties us, and brings us down to the place where we cry from a deep, heart-broken consciousness: Lord, unless Thou doest it, it is impossible! Unless Thou dost speak the word, my words are useless! That is why He works in that way. The Lord in His Sovereignty sees to it that we meet with plenty of things to keep us humble.

The Lord keeps us humble through the difficult people He sets around us, and whom He does not take away however much we cry to Him to do so, even though in themselves they are all wrong and an apparent menace to the Lord's interests. They serve to keep us humble and dependent. The Lord does that sort of thing, all in keeping with this law, that everything in us must be of Christ. Christ fills the universe for God. If He sees anything but what is of Christ, it cannot have a place. Only His Son can fill all things, excluding everything else. Oh, how humbly we need to seek of the Lord that there shall be nothing about us that, as of ourselves, presses itself upon others--our manner, our mannerisms, our presence, our conduct, our spirit, even our voice. The Spirit would oft-times check us and cause us to walk softly. None of us has attained to very high levels in this matter, and we are all having to acknowledge failure. The Spirit is dealing with us in that way. If even in our dress, or in any other thing, we come into view as the Lord's children, the Holy Spirit would seek to bring us to a place of sensitiveness, where He can say: That is bringing yourself into view! That is out from you! Now, get covered, get hidden! That thing excludes Christ!

God has determined from all eternity that this universe shall be filled with Christ, the Heavenly Man, through that corporate heavenly man joined to Him as its Head. He is getting rid of the Jew in us, of the Greek in us, and constituting us according to Christ, conforming us to the image of His Son. Blessed be God! the moment we come to the place where the last remnants and relics of what is not of Christ fall from

us, then He will be displayed in us; He shall come to be glorified in the saints. It is Christ Who is to be glorified, not ourselves; yet so close is the relationship that He is to be glorified in us. The Lord hasten the day!

Source:

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