

The Incorruptible Characteristic of Union With God as Father

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the incorruptible characteristics of union with God as Father, emphasizing the significance of this relationship in the life of Jesus and its implications for humanity.

Scripture: Matthew 18:20, John 10:30, John 14:10, John 14:23-24, Acts 13:37, 2 Timothy 1:8-10, Hebrews 2:5-6, Hebrews 9:14

Topics: "Union with God", "Incorruptible Life"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the incorruptible characteristics of union with God as Father, illustrating that true value in life and service is measured by intrinsic worth rather than superficial margins. He highlights that Jesus exemplified a life filled with intrinsic value, fully united with the Father through the Holy Spirit, and that this relationship was the source of His strength and the reason for His sufferings. Sparks argues that humanity was created for incorruptible life, which was lost through disobedience but restored in Christ, who provides a place for God in our hearts. The sermon challenges believers to evaluate how much of God is reflected in their lives and to ensure that their relationship with Him is one of fellowship and love, devoid of any margins of worthlessness. Ultimately, the test of our lives will be how much of God we have allowed to come through us to others.

Transcript

Reading: 2 Timothy 1:8-10

We came in our last chapter to the point where we were found committed to investigate, to enquire, and seek to know, what were and what are the incorruptible characteristics of the life of the Lord Jesus, because the real value of life, the real value of work, of service, in the sight of God and heaven, will be on the same basis as was His.

Sometimes, in connection with our printing work, we have samples sent to us from different firms, and recently I had some samples of stocktaking sheets, which could be supplied with narrow or wide margins. While these were lying on my desk, they said something. Stocktaking with narrow or wide margins. What is in the margin? A wide margin of surplus, in the stocktaking, that does not stand for any value, and a small area of intrinsic worth, or a large area of the intrinsic and a very narrow margin of the worthless? For there is going to be a great stocktaking. Yes, we all have to go the way of the stocktaking of life and of

work, and then there will arise the question of the width of the margin and what is in it. Of all that life has contained, of all that we have done and have had and have used, have expended or drawn in, how wide will be the margin of that which just did not matter or count in the light of heaven and eternity? That is a very serious matter, and it surely is a way of bringing us back very forcibly to this important consideration. God is after no margin at all, but the whole page filled with that which is of intrinsic value. God does not want to have to draw lines and say, 'On the one side of that line there is so much that is more or less good; on the other side no good at all'. He wants no lines, and if the Lord has His way - and, mark you, He does seek by every means to have His way in this connection - He will get as full a measure as we will let Him of real intrinsic value.

With this preliminary word, let us go on. We have said that the Lord Jesus is the great example of a life without any margin, a life reaching wholly to the edge, on every side, full of intrinsic value, and that such a life has an explanation. He, then, was the embodiment of the incorruptible. Life and incorruption were embodied in Jesus Christ in terms of Manhood, as Man. We are now leaving out of our consideration His Deity, His Godhead. It would not need to be discussed at all in this connection. Very God of very God leaves no room for discussion or argument concerning incorruption. But when it comes to man, it is another matter. And so we are concerned with Him on that side of His person and personality in which He is called the Son of Man. This whole question and issue of the incorruptible is therefore a human question. It is a matter which relates to and concerns man.

Man, or Man-hood, is a big and specific thought of God. The idea of Man, of Humanity, was born in the mind of God. He is a peculiar creation in the mind of God for a special purpose. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says "Not unto angels... But... What is man?" (Heb. 2:5,6). 'Not unto angels... but man'. This is not a matter, then, which concerns angels and it is certainly not a matter of abstract and unrelated ideas. There is a testimony which has to be found in the concrete expression of man and manhood. The Bible makes it perfectly clear from beginning to end that the idea connected with man or manhood is that of representation, representation of Divine thoughts. "In the image of God", in the likeness of God - that is representation, and that idea in relation to man runs right through the Bible. The question all the way through is - Does man, or does man not, fulfil the purpose of his being, which is to represent God, to express God?

Now, man was made for incorruption, for incorruptible life issuing eventually in his glorification. If that is not understood at once, just hold it for the present as a statement. Man was made for incorruptible life, so that at length he might be glorified, might be endowed with Divine glory. I am not going to argue that from Scripture; those of you who know your Bibles will at once be able to support the statement - those of you who do not, go and read your Bible! But man missed the purpose of his creation, he missed the incorruptible life by his disobedience and unbelief, by his rebellion against God, his self-will, his pride. He missed his incorruptible inheritance or heritage. He is no longer a candidate for glory in his natural condition. Glory is not possible for man as man is found outside of Christ. But Christ came, and in His coming fulfilled a work by which the destiny and purpose of man was recovered and secured. That is, in Christ incorruptible life is recovered and secured for man. Christ was a man who could not be corrupted, and, therefore, because He could not be corrupted, corruption was kept out of the very stream of His life. It was not possible that He should see corruption even in the grave. "He Whom God raised up saw no corruption" (Acts 13:37): that is the statement of Scripture. He was incorruptible in His life and therefore triumphant over corruption in His death. So Christ was constituted on incorruptible characteristics, and we are now going to ask what they were. In the ensuing pages we shall say something about the first of these

incorruptible characteristics of Christ, which are to be reproduced in those who are in Christ by faith.

A Relationship Established By The Holy Spirit

The first, then, of these characteristics was His union with God as His Father - a simple statement, but oh, how much was in that union with God as His Father! We are aware how often He used that word 'Father', and how often He said 'My Father' and then 'the Father and I'. His enemies saw the point; they were not slow to pick on what they thought was heresy and blasphemy. 'He makes Himself equal with God' (John 5:18). That union between Him and the Father was of such a kind that their relationship was absolute and final. That relationship was established by the Holy Spirit. I am speaking now of Christ as Son of Man. The relationship between Him as Son of Man and God as His Father was established by the Holy Spirit. In His birth He was begotten of the Holy Ghost. In His work He received through anointing the Holy Spirit. In His walk, it was ever in and by the Spirit. In His Cross, He offered Himself up by the eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14); and we can complete the circle by saying that it was through that eternal Spirit that He was raised. The Holy Spirit initiated, maintained, and consummated that relationship with the Father. That union with the Father was the governing thing of His whole life. At every point, at all times, He referred and deferred to God as His Father. All His works were out from the Father. "The Father abiding in Me doeth His works" (John 14:10). His words were out from the Father. "The word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's Who sent Me" (John 14:24). You are well aware of that. Everything for Him was out from the Father, by way of this union, this oneness, and this was the very occasion of all the conflict in His life. It was the very point of all the attack and assault of the enemy. The one thing that the Evil One and all the evil powers were ever focusing upon was this oneness and fellowship with the Father, in order to try somehow to drive in a wedge, to get that relationship ruptured. That was the point of the attack all the time, and that is very significant. If an enemy concentrates all his attention and all his resources upon any one point, it is clear that he regards that as the point upon which the whole thing will collapse, everything is gathered up in that one point of concentrated attention; and it did not matter which method the enemy used of the many ways which he did use - whether open antagonism or friendly suggestion or subtle subterfuge or bribery or any other means - that is the point. 'If only I can get between these two somehow, the Father and the Son!' I say again, that was tremendously significant.

The Relationship The Explanation Of Suffering

That union, then, that relationship, was the explanation of all His sufferings and His testings - indeed, of the whole ordeal of His life. Would He, on any consideration, with wonderful offers, bribes or threats, or the presentation of a dark shadow of suffering, the awful anguish of the Cross; would He, on any consideration, let go, violate, the principles of that union? - and to maintain it, to preserve it, to adhere to it, was no small, light thing for Him. For that one thing, the most terrible cost that ever a man has paid in the history of this universe was paid: the cost of that dark moment of the Cross when everything seemed to have gone out of His universe. There was not one glimmer of light even from the Father's face while He was under that test. Yes, this was a costly thing, because there was something involved in it. There must have been some very great issue involved in this union. There was nothing superficial about this. It must have been something unspeakably great that was bound up with it. What was it?

Providing God With A Place

It can be answered in one brief sentence. Primarily, it was the issue of providing God with a place. Go back to the first man. God created that man in order that He might have a place in that man and in all his

seed; and not just a place, but THE place. In a sense God's place had been taken from Him. God had been rejected and put out of His place with man. He still remained sovereign Creator, of course. He still remained Ruler and Lord, the original Owner, but there was a difference. Let us look at it like this. Pardon the descent to such a low level to try to illustrate such infinite and holy things.

Here is a landlord. He builds a house and he is the owner of that house. In kindness and friendliness he lets that house to some people, and to begin with the relationship is quite a happy one, so happy that he is able to visit that house and is welcomed and has a place in the family; they are always glad to see him. But someone comes along while he is not there and begins to say things about him that are unworthy and that are scandalous, begins to defame him, to insinuate motives, make suggestions, with a view to getting him out of his place in that home and that family, and this evil one succeeds so well that no longer has he a place in the heart of that family. He is still the landlord, the rightful owner, and all the law is on his side, but there is a difference between being a landlord and having the law on your side, and the thing being yours and having a place in the heart of the family. That is what I mean. God lost His place. He is still sovereign Owner of this universe, He is still Lord, and one day He will assert His legal rights over His creation. But do you think that is good enough? Within His creation He wants to have a place.

There is all the difference between sovereignty and fellowship. The union between Christ and His Father was not the relationship of a sovereign and a subject. He did not live that life and do that work under the sovereign government of God. God was not just acting sovereignly in the case of this Man - doing His own will, asserting His own rights, claiming His own place, demanding His own recognition and carrying through His own programme in a sovereign way. No, it was all on a very different footing from that. It was fellowship. God can do a lot of things with us and through us and by means of us in a sovereign way, but that is never, never good enough for God. He wants us in fellowship, He wants a place, not as sovereign and as despot, but as Father - FATHER. That is the significance of the word on the lips of the Lord Jesus. He taught them to pray, "Father". The significance, then, of the relationship between Christ and God as His Father was that God had a place, a place in the heart of a Man.

Now the whole Bible is occupied with that one concern; that is the issue arising all the way through. God is seeking to have a place in the heart of man - somewhere where He has a place, not just as sovereign Creator, but in terms of fellowship, in terms of love, in terms of delight to have Him. The Old Testament is full of that in type and illustration. He seeks some place for His Name, where His Name is loved, some place where He can meet men on the ground of fellowship and love. The New Testament brings that out into bold relief. Its beginnings contain links between the Old and the New. Christ, as Son of Man, is the inclusive Link. Here again is the law of incorruptibility. There is that which will go through to eternity, there is something there that Satan cannot destroy, there is something there that death cannot annul, there is something there that is so precious to God that it will appear again for ever. When all that is capable of corruption has gone, the love relationship as between Christ and His Father will abide. Oh, what a difference between this and much of the relationship with God that exists in general.

This, of course, is clearly seen to be the idea of the New Testament as to the INDIVIDUAL. What is God after with us? It is just that - to have a place in our hearts, on the basis of love and of fellowship. "My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23). "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). That, too, is the idea concerning the NUCLEUS - that they, little companies of two or three, should give Him a place. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I" (Matt. 18:20), and "I come unto you" (John 14:18). And it is the New Testament idea of the whole CHURCH. What does the Church mean in the Divine thought? Just a place for God in love relationship, in

joyous relationship, in perfect fellowship. That is the idea of the Church.

So then, if Christ meant anything, He signified the coming of God into this world in terms of fellowship. And this is an eternal issue. If we could project ourselves into the ages of ages, the eternal hereafter, and see the nature of things, the very nature of things, as it will be then, we should find it was just this: a perfect harmony between God and man, so harmonious that it is all music, there is no discord, there is no strain, there is no shadow, there is no suspicion, there is no prejudice, there is no fear. All those things have gone, with the corruptible; the incorruptible remains; and in this first instance the incorruptible is this - fellowship with God. It is this KIND of relationship. It is an ETERNAL issue. I underline 'eternal' because that is only another word for the incorruptible.

The Test Of Everything

Therefore, the test of everything with us will be: How much of God really came in by our having been here? That is a fairly thorough-going test. It may sound very exacting, but it is just this - how much of God came in by your and my having been here? How much, afterward, will it be possible for others to say, 'Well, through that life I came to know God, I came to fellowship with God, to enjoy more of Him'?

Yes, that is testing and that is discriminating. The test of everything, of all our teaching, is, how much of it results in more of God - not more of knowledge, not more of mental apprehension, but how much more of God. Two of us were talking one day. We were talking about certain men of God of the past, and their life-work and teaching, and at the end this is what we agreed - that, although there were those things in their teaching which we did not feel able to accept, they themselves have left us a heritage, they have given us a deposit of God, there is something of the Lord that has come through them to us; and THAT is the thing which marks their life for us. It is not that they were great teachers, not that they were great organisers of Christian work, not that they were great missionary statesmen, but that somehow they have passed to us a deposit of God; God has come through them to the enrichment and enlargement of our lives.

That is the test of everything. For me, at least, it is a terrible test - one that I wonder whether I can face. Is it going to be like that - that after all the speaking, after all the teaching, there is a heritage of the Lord Himself left behind? Teaching, truth; the truth of the Church, the teaching of the House of God - all very well in themselves; but oh, let us be careful of any of these things AS SUCH, of putting the emphasis upon the TRUTH of the thing, the TRUTH of the House of God, the TRUTH of this, that and the other! Beware of your emphasis. The emphasis is - what is the House of God for, how does it work out, what is the issue of all the teaching about it? The issue is this - that God comes in. His place is provided, He is there. We may have meetings, and all the rest of the paraphernalia of Christianity, but if it does not issue in this, that the people concerned have more of the Lord Himself, then the whole thing is futile. Yes, with all our exact technique, and the rest - if the Lord is not found there, it is meaningless, it is valueless. All must be related to this one issue - God having a place, and God being there, and God being there without a margin, right to the edge. That is the incorruptible element.

That is what the Apostle says in the passage that we read. "Be not ashamed... of the testimony of our Lord." The testimony of our Lord - what is it? "Who annulled death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel." The testimony of our Lord is His incorruptible life. The testimony of His life, the testimony in His death, of His resurrection - the "testimony of our Lord" is found in that word 'incorruption'.

We have been considering the first of the incorruptible characteristics of the life of the Lord Jesus, which must be reproduced in us. Our conferences will go, our meetings will go, the whole set-up will go, and what will remain will be the measure in which the Lord has come in, the Lord has found an abiding place, the Lord is there intrinsically. That will be the issue. One thing about heaven and about eternity will be that the Lord is there and the Lord fills everything; there is no room for anything else. That was the life of Jesus. He provided a place for God, and there was no other place in His life for anything else at all. Oh, that we might come to that! It will be that, may I say again, which will determine the measure of the permanent, the eternal, the intrinsic value of our lives and of everything - how much there is of the Lord.

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