

The Matter Which Is of Supreme Importance Is: 'Christ Fully Formed in You'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christ being fully formed in us, and that spiritual maturity is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

Scripture: Matthew 7:29, 2 Corinthians 3:6, Galatians 2:20, Galatians 4:6, Galatians 4:19, Colossians 3:16

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Christ's Formation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the paramount importance of having 'Christ fully formed in you,' as articulated in Galatians 4:19. He explains that the true battle of the Christian faith is not about systems, doctrines, or forms of worship, but rather about the fullness of Christ's presence in believers and the Church. Sparks contrasts the immaturity of spiritual children with the responsibility and understanding of mature sons, highlighting that the Holy Spirit's role is to facilitate this growth. He urges believers to reflect on their spiritual suffering and ensure it is for the sake of Christ's formation within them, rather than for personal grievances or issues. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a focus on the spiritual maturity that comes from allowing Christ to be fully realized in our lives.

Transcript

We come to this last morning of our consideration of this great question. That is, the great question as to the true nature of the dispensation which came in with the Lord Jesus. We have this morning therefore to gather up all that we have been saying into one matter. We have covered a lot of ground, but it all amounts to one issue. It is not a matter of one system over against another. That is, it is not a question of Judaism over against Christianity. It is not a question of legalism over against spirituality. It is not a question of the Old Testament over against the New Testament. And it is not a question of Paul over against his enemies. All these things have come into our consideration, but they are not the special issue. The great battle which began with the coming of the Lord Jesus, and for which the Apostle Paul was a chosen instrument, is not the battle for a special interpretation of Scripture. It is not the battle for a particular form of doctrine. And it is not the battle for a particular form of worship. It is a much bigger battle than all those things.

And so we have this whole letter to the Galatians which touches all these things gathered into one word. The whole letter, and all that has to do with it is gathered into one verse. It is, so far as words are

concerned, a very short verse. But you see that it is a very big verse. It is in chapter four, verse nineteen, "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you." One slight alteration or correction ought to be made in the translation. The word "formed" ought to be translated "fully formed." So that the verse should read, "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be fully formed in you."

So you will see that this whole battle with all its aspects is gathered into this matter of Christ being fully formed. It is nothing other, nothing less, and nothing more, than the question of the formation of Christ in fullness, the formation of Christ fully in individual believers, and the formation of Christ fully in the Church. So you see, that brings the whole matter down unto one question. Christ is the test of every man and of everything. Christ is the test of the Church and the churches. Christ is the test of every teaching.

Whether a thing is right or whether it is wrong is decided on this one point. How much of Christ is there in it? How much of the Spirit of Christ do you find in it? You can reduce all your questions and all your problems to that one thing. It is always a matter of how much of the Spirit of Christ do I find either in this people or in this teaching or in these things? I do want you to take special notice of that, because it is the deciding factor. It was the deciding factor in the churches in Galatia.

In this verse which we have read, the apostle does not say that I am travailing for one system over against another. He does not say I am travailing for one teaching against another. He does not say I am travailing for one form of worship against another. He does not say I am travailing for one meaning of the Church and the churches against another. He does not say I am travailing for Christianity against Judaism. He does not say I am travailing for spirituality against legalism. Paul did not say any of these things or all of those things put together. It was a very much greater concern than all those things. He says, "I am again in travail until Christ be fully formed in you" (Gal 4:19, ASV). You remember that on more than one occasion we pointed out that the name, "CHRIST" occurs forty-three times in this short letter. Therefore, that is the key to everything. We have just been singing a hymn which we sing very often here, "Christ only Christ." And that was Paul's concern.

Now that brings us to the greatest thing that has ever been revealed by God to man. And it is centered in one word in this letter. Six times the word, "Son" or "sons" occurs, and that which is meant by sonship is the greatest thing that God has ever revealed to man. Paul began with that. In chapter one, he laid the foundation for the whole letter. And he says, "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." That was the thing that upset the whole life of Paul. That was the thing that made the great change in him as in the dispensation.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the foundation of everything. So Paul laid the foundation by saying, "God revealed His Son in me." Presently in the letter he will say this, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts" (Gal. 4:6). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sonship in the believer. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Son of God. And so the Holy Spirit coming within constitutes the believer a son of God potentially.

Now do you notice the word that the apostle uses, "My little children." If you were able to read the Greek, you would notice something about that. The apostle does not say, my great big son. He does not even say, my sons. He says, "My little children." And there are two different Greek words used. Children means someone or something that is born, but has not grown up, something that is still very small and immature. Another Greek word is used for son, and it relates to those who have grown up. Now you can see how this

whole letter turns upon that difference. He says, "O foolish Galatians!" He meant - you are like silly little children. You have been born but you have not grown up. You have made the beginning but the full formation of Christ has been arrested. And so he says the Holy Spirit is given to us with the intention of bringing about the full formation of sons.

So in this letter, the apostle contrasts the old dispensation with the new on this one point. He says that in the old dispensation Israel was just a nation of little children. And the mark of little children is this: First of all you have to teach them by illustrations and by pictures and by models. And you have to teach them by everything outside of themselves. You teach them by presenting things to them as objects. And you teach little children by saying, now you must do this and you must not do that. If you want to be a good boy, or good girl, you would do what I tell you.

That is how you treat a little child. The difference between a little child and a grown up person is just the opposite. A grown up son does not always need to be told what he ought to do. A truly grown up son is not one to whom his father has to say, 'You must do this, and you must not do that.' A truly grown up son knows inside himself what he ought to do, and what he ought not to do. It does not have to be presented to him in pictures and illustrations. In himself he knows. A son who is really a true son knows in himself what his father would like and what his father would not like. The father does not have to keep on day after day saying, 'Look my boy, this is what I want.' A true son knows in his own heart what his father would have.

It is intuition, not command, and that is the difference. And the difference, therefore, between the old dispensation and the new is one of spiritual intelligence. Because that is the difference between a child and a son. The child does not have the intelligence in himself. The intelligence is outside of himself in other people. But a grown up man has the intelligence in himself. And that is the big contrast that Paul is making in this letter. He says to these Galatians, 'My little children, you are lacking in intelligence. The true mark of maturity, which is spiritual intelligence, is not found in you yet.'

Then another difference between the child and the son is this: A little child has to have everything done for it by someone else. You have to do everything for the little child, whatever that child needs you provide it and you do it. You provide the food. You provide the clothes. You provide the family. You provide the home. You provide everything for the little child. The little child provides nothing for himself. The grown up son is different. The grown up son takes responsibility. The father knows that he can have confidence in that son. He does not have to be worrying all the time as to whether that son will do the right thing or the wrong thing. He is at rest about the son, and he says, 'I know I can trust him. I can put the responsibility on him, he is capable of taking the responsibility.'

Do you see from the history of Israel in the Old Testament, how irresponsible they were? Just look again over their history in the wilderness, and their history after the wilderness. They are having to have everything done and provided for them. They are having to be told everything that they ought to do. It is the law, and the law is written on tables of stone. It is not written on their hearts. They are a very irresponsible people, and neither the servant of God nor God Himself could trust them. Leave them by themselves for one day and they go all wrong. They are like horses. You have to put a bit and bridle on to keep them straight.

You know that is one of the illustrations used in the Scripture. Now growing up in Christ is just altogether different from that. SONSHIP MEANS SPIRITUAL RESPONSIBILITY. Because the Holy Spirit is inside,

you are able to say, 'I know that they can be trusted, I know that the Lord is in them. I know that they know that the Lord is in them. And I can trust the Lord in them.' Do not you wish that all these people were like that? This is the difference between little children and sons. When the apostle says here, that because ye are sons, the Spirit has been given you as the Spirit of sonship. "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts." He was not contradicting this truth of the difference between children and sons. He says when you received the Holy Spirit you received sonship potentially. That is, the Holy Spirit makes the fullness of Christ possible. All the fullness of Christ is in the Holy Spirit in you. But the question is: Are you going to continue as children, or are you going to live in the Spirit and grow up to be full grown sons?

Now the Apostle Paul makes another contrast in this letter. He contrasts sons with servants. And here he is not so much in the first place teaching of Israel and Christianity. He is taking an illustration from Greek life. In the Greek system a servant is one who took the little child of the family by the hand. And took him to the school master. He steered him down the road through all the traffic. He took him across the road and all the dangerous points. He took care of the little child, and did everything for him. And then he delivered him to the one who would educate him. He delivered him into the hands of the principle of spiritual education.

Now Paul says, the law was the servant - intended to take us by the hand and lead us to Christ. As you see, the law has to do with little children. The law does everything for the little child. The law was intended to hand us over to the Holy Spirit, and then the Holy Spirit would bring us to sonship. So Paul makes the difference between the servant and the son. The servant does everything for us on the outside. But the Spirit does everything for us on the inside. So Paul put his emphasis on this, "Until Christ be fully formed in you." The whole character of this new dispensation is Christ in us.

So we are back to chapter two, verse twenty again: "It is no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." The Holy Spirit in us, is with us, in order to make us capable of understanding the things of the Lord. The Spirit is bringing into us spiritual intelligence about the things of the Lord. In another place the apostle will say, "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Before you can have the wisdom and the spiritual understanding, you have got to have the Word dwelling in you richly. It is the foundation of the Holy Spirit's work that the Word of the Lord should be in us richly. We must have a good and thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. It is the foundation of the Holy Spirit's work. The Holy Spirit is never going to do anything apart from the Word of God.

I cannot tell you how glad I am, that before I ever had a great spiritual crisis, I had very thoroughly studied the Bible. I had studied the Bible systematically right through. I could put on a big blackboard the outline and analysis of every book in the Bible. And I could give Bible lectures, but it was not until I had a real spiritual crisis, that I came to understand the Bible which I knew so well in my head. Then the Bible that I knew became a living Book.

You see that is what happened to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. They were Jews and they knew Jewish Scripture very thoroughly. That is, they knew what was written in the Old Testament. They could have told you all that Moses had written. They could have told you all that David had written. And they could have told you all the prophets had written. But on the day of Pentecost their Bible became alive. They inherited, in a spiritual way, all that they knew in only a mental way. But the Holy Spirit could not have done His work, had they not had the foundation in the Word of God. Do you remember that? Are you reading your Bible thoroughly? Are you really studying the Word of God? Can it be said of you that the Word of God dwells in you richly? (Col. 3:16). If it is dwelling in you, then you have the foundation for

spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Do you notice that was the difference between Jesus and the scribes? Now the scribes were the authority on the Bible. They were the people who had committed the Bible to memory. They knew everything that was in the Bible, which was the Old Testament. And if anybody wanted to have an explanation of any part of the Old Testament, they went to the scribes, because the scribe was supposed to know all about it. Now when Jesus spoke to the multitudes, the verdict upon His teaching was this: "He talked as One having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29). And yet, the people thought the scribes were the authority. But they said of Jesus, "He taught as One having authority and not as the scribes." What was the difference between Jesus and the scribes? He had the spiritual understanding of the Scripture. And they only had the letter of the Scripture. The apostle says, "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

Now we have to hurry to a close. We come back to Galatians four, and verse nineteen, because this gathers up everything. What was it that Paul was working for? What had he given his life for? What was he suffering for? What was he so troubled about with these Galatians? You can rule out a whole number of things, and you can say it was not that, and it was not that. He said, "I am again in travail until Christ be fully formed in you." When he uses the word "again," that is, a second time. He means that I was in travail for your new birth. It cost me a great deal of suffering and pain to see you truly born again. It meant a great deal to me to see that Christ was really planted in you. Your new birth was a travail to me. But now I am having to go through it all again. My real object was not just to get Christ into you, my real object was that Christ should be fully formed in you, that Christ should grow up in you and you should grow up in Christ. And so I am today in travail again because you stopped. You are putting other things in the place of Christ. You are putting form in the place of Christ. You are putting mere teaching in the place of Christ. You are putting law in the place of Christ. You are putting a legal system in the place of Christ. Paul says that just throws me into agony.

I am going to apply that to ourselves. If we are suffering at all, what are we suffering for? If as in the case of Paul we have enemies, those who are against us, and who are working against us, why are we suffering? What is the nature of our suffering? Is it because of something personal? Are they working against us? Is it because of some piece of work for which we are jealous? Is it for some place in which we are interested? And against our way of going on? Is it any of these things? Is that why we are suffering? I say, The Lord deliver us from all of that. The only real and true reason for any spiritual suffering is that Christ is being hindered. We see that these things limit the Lord. They dishonor the Lord. And they will cause spiritual limitation. They are against the enlargement of Christ in us. All our suffering ought to be for the sake of the Lord Jesus, and not for anything else, "Until Christ be fully formed." That is the last word I am going to leave with you for this time.

I know something about your troubles. And I know something about the cause of your troubles. But I am going to bring it back here. Are you and I in travail over things, or for the full formation of Christ? Is all our suffering in our hearts related to the increase of the Lord Jesus? Is it that He may have His fullest place? Is it that He shall be fully formed in us? Have we, therefore, got this true kind of travail - not travail for something, but travail for Christ? I ask you the question, if you are suffering at all, and you ought to be suffering, what are you suffering for? Is it your genuine concern for the honor and glory of the Lord Jesus? Is it that in every one of these believers, from the children, to the young men and women, to the grown up people, that in every one of them, Christ should have a full place? Are we travailing in pain for that?

So all that we have said this week about these contrasts: Legalism and spirituality, Judaism and Christianity, and all these other differences, they focus down upon this one question: THE FULL FORMATION OF CHRIST. How far does legalism limit the growth of Christ in us? How far does our technique get in the way of Christ? It is all a matter of Christ.

So I leave that question with you. I leave that emphasis with you. Now when I go away from you, the one thing that I want to be sure of is that I preached Christ to you, that I was not just giving you Bible teaching. And I was not trying to put you right on the technique of the Church, or the churches. But I was keeping Christ always in full view, and telling you that the matter which is of supreme importance is: "Christ fully formed in you - Christ fully formed in us!"

Source:

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