

The Nature and Dynamic of Ministry and the Nature and Purpose of the Church

by T. Austin-Sparks

The nature and dynamic of ministry is rooted in the revelation of Jesus Christ, which is the source of all true ministry.

Scripture: Galatians 1:15

Topics: "Purpose of the Church", "Nature of Ministry"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound nature and dynamic of ministry, asserting that true ministry is the outshining of Christ from within believers, not merely a function of teaching or preaching. He highlights the Apostle Paul's transformative experience on the Damascus Road as the source of effective ministry, which is rooted in a personal revelation of Jesus Christ. Sparks further explains that the Church's purpose is to embody this New Humanity, reflecting Christ's presence and glory in the world. He challenges conventional views of ministry and the Church, urging believers to recognize their inherent calling to minister Christ in their daily lives. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of the Church as a collective expression of Christ, transcending institutional boundaries.

Transcript

What more can we say and how better can we say than: more of Thyself. O show me hour by hour more of Thy glory. O my God and Lord, more of Thyself in all of Thy grace and power, more of Thy love and truth. Incarnate Word, answer that prayer in this hour. We ask in the Name of the Lord Jesus, Amen.

In our consideration of the great transition from one humanity which has been exposed, discredited, judged, and set aside to Another Humanity which has been tested, perfected, and installed in glory in our Lord Jesus Christ, we have come at length in the closing hours of this time together to the all-governing vision in the light of which this transition becomes both clear and very practical. And we saw yesterday that with the Apostle Paul to whom this vision, this "heavenly vision" as he called it, was the secret and key to his whole life ministry when he saw the Lord Jesus risen and glorified, four things became clear to the Apostle Paul in that vision. These four things we have mentioned: Firstly, the place and destiny of man in the Divine economy. Secondly, the nature and dynamic of ministry in this dispensation. Thirdly, the nature and purpose of the Church now and in the after-ages. And fourthly, the immense significance of Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and exalted, all this in these three things.

Now yesterday we were occupied with the first of these four things. This morning we proceed to the second, the nature and dynamic of ministry in this dispensation, and whether we shall get to the end of the fourth is with the Lord.

The Apostle Paul said: "It pleased God, ...to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the nations." Now we must stay for a moment to ask and answer one question: "What do we mean by ministry?" Perhaps we need a revised version on this matter of ministry, for, immediately, when the word "ministry" is mentioned, people's minds automatically think of someone with a Bible in their hand standing up and teaching out of the Bible or someone preaching the Gospel to the unsaved or someone having been shut up with their Bible, studying it and making some notes and coming out into public and giving the result of their Bible study. Something like that is usually associated with the word "ministry." As I speak of ministry in this dispensation, some of your minds at once may think of someone with Bible in hand upon a platform or in a group, teaching and preaching. I trust the Lord is going to revise that concept for you entirely before we are through this morning.

The New Testament has two things to say about this matter of ministry. It does speak in Ephesians about special, personal gifts for ministry in the Church. He gave, the ascended Lord "gave some, apostles; some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." These are specific personal ministry gifts in the Church, and please put a circle around that word "in." There are these personal ministry gifts in the Church; however, the New Testament has much more to say about the ministry of the Church Itself, and the Word says that these personal gifts in the Church are for the purpose of enabling the Church to fulfill the ministry --to do the ministry, to be the minister of Christ.

Now you remember the passage: "and He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of the ministry." Do not put any break in your sentence: "the perfecting (of the Church, the 'making complete,' of the Church) unto the work of the ministry." I heard Dr. Campbell Morgan once say in this very connection in this passage: "and God help the minister whose Church does not fulfill the ministry...." And it is with this second thing, the ministry of the Church Itself, that we will be occupied this morning.

I am not going to talk about apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, these specific ministers, but about the ministry of the Church; and the two letters with which we have been mainly occupied this week (the two letters to the Corinthians) have in view, very clearly and emphatically so, the ministry of the Church. All that the apostle is saying is with this background of the fulfillment of the Divine ministry in Corinth, and as those letters are a vehicle down through the whole dispensation to our own time, it is what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church about its ministry.

In the First Letter of Corinthians, the apostle is dealing with all those things which either frustrate or spoil the ministry of the Church. In the Second Letter, he comes out very clearly and emphatically on the matter of the ministry as he uses these words: "seeing then that we have this ministry"; and you must remember that the apostle is writing to a church, a local church, he is not just talking about his own ministry. Paul has much to say about that, but here he is speaking of the Church's ministry and the "we" is the Church at Corinth: "we have this ministry"; and the associated phrase is: "we have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay"--is that only Apostles? No, the "we" is corporate; it is all of us. We shall come to that again presently, for what we are really concerned with this morning is the ministry of all believers, or the ministry of the Church.

The Nature And Dynamic Of Ministry

Part One

Now having said that, we can proceed to a consideration of the nature and dynamic of ministry; and once more referring to the apostle, a particular apostle who is writing these letters, let us remember that Paul is a representative or example ministry. That is how he speaks of himself throughout these letters, and what was true of him as to ministry, he was saying, has got to be true of the Church. He did not put it in just this way, but this is very clearly what he is saying: "What is true in my ministry, as to its Source and its Nature and its Power, has to be true of all believers, and of the Church." He is a representative minister, not an exclusive one; he may have dimensions beyond anyone else's, but that is just his representative character. The Lord is saying by this man Paul that here you have an example of what ministry is and how ministry is produced and what the principles and laws of ministry are, and, inclusively, what the background of ministry is. That is how you must look at the apostle (as a great minister quite true) but as in principles, a representative minister.

As Paul begins, he goes right back to the Damascus Road, to the beginning of his Christian life and ministry, for you will remember that it was there, right at the commencement, when the Lord met him on his way to Damascus that the Lord gave him his commission: "to whom I send thee" (Acts 26:17). Paul goes right back to his conversion, to the beginning of his life in union with Christ, and he says this: "as to life, as to vocation, as to ministry, that I might proclaim Him among the nations, God revealed His Son in me." Here you have the Source of everything! It is this vision of the Lord Jesus that is the Nature of the ministry, that is the Source of the ministry, that is the dynamic of all true ministry, for all true ministry in this dispensation issues and proceeds from an inshining of Divine Light revealing Jesus Christ. "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." That gives us a secret.

Saul of Tarsus is on the way to Damascus, and on the way he saw a Light from heaven. That is objective, something that blinded him from without. That Light turned out to be the Glorified Lord Jesus, and Paul is saying here in this fragment to the Galatians that he not only objectively saw that Light and that Glorified Man, but also something happened inside of him. Inside of him, he said: "Jesus of Nazareth Whom I am on the way to persecute and Whose persecution has become the one passion of my life--Jesus of Nazareth, that impostor (as I believe) that evil man, that deceiver--this is He?! He has been here amongst us walking the streets of Jerusalem, of Galilee, up and down the country, that same One has now appeared to me, that same One, not a different One--only in appearance and in knowledge, but the same One. What does this mean?!"

That inshining carried with it an overwhelming significance in the life of Paul, and so away to the desert he went to live and to dwell upon this; and that Light which has shone on him was shining in him, and he was seeing the significance of Who?--God's Son! True, but he was seeing Jesus of Nazareth, the Man Glorified--the Man having reached the ultimate of God's intention for man. Paul thought within: "Because I knew Him as a man, whether I saw Him in the flesh or not, I knew Him--all about Him as a man amongst men; and human eyes could not discriminate between Him and other men, only there was something about Him that was different, but He is a Man amongst men, and this is that same Man--transfigured": this he had to think in the light of that inward revelation.

People who know the Greek here know that this Word: "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me," is a subjective-objective. Paul could say: "I saw objectively, but I also saw subjectively," and until that

happens, dear friends, we are not in the way of effectual ministry. You may be seeing by what is said to you throughout this week, you may be seeing in a sort of objective way, everything objectively, and that is very wonderful; but has it broken through from the objective to the subjective where you can say: "My word, I have never seen it like that, I have never seen Him in that way." This "objective-subjective" seeing is what happened to the apostle, and it was the beginning both of his Christian life and of his ministry; and they both went together.

Brethren, do you know that you as a believer, as a Christian, are constituted for ministry from the day of your new birth? Do you know that you are ordained a minister the moment you are regenerated into this New Humanity? Do not wait for the day when someone will ordain you to the ministry. Oh, no, your calling of God is from the beginning unto ministry. About this, Paul said that it was, it corresponded to, what happened at the creation. Paul said in Second Corinthians, that great letter of the ministry: God Who said, "Let there be light, let light be," has repeated that Divine fiat in a spiritual way in our hearts, "has shined into our hearts";--God has said in these darkened human hearts, "let light be" ...shined into our hearts with what object?--"to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." For those of you who have heard this before and have heard me say it before, bear with me if I may just stay for a moment with that word "glory." Yes, it was objective glory with Saul of Tarsus which he saw, but what is that glory? What is the glory of God?

We have been hearing in the second session about the God of glory appearing to Abraham. What is the glory of God? The glory of God is His absolute satisfaction with anyone or any situation. When God is satisfied, something emanates from Him. We know that in simple ways in Christian experience. If there is something over which you may have had a battle, a real battle, and you have got through to what the Lord has been trying to get you to and the battle is over and you are responsive wholly to the will of God, what happens? There is such a sense of blessedness inside. The fight is finished, the battle is over, there is rest and peace and joy within. Now that is glory because it is on the way to that ultimate accomplishment of the whole will of God in a Humanity when the glory will be universal. Yes, the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" just means this: because the Lord Jesus was so satisfying to the very nature of God that there was about Him something of peace and rest and joy. He carried with Him the satisfaction of God. "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him": that is the glory.

Do not think of glory just as this objective, shining, blazing something, but think of it as shining into your hearts. Oh, how can I explain it?! It is just this--that inside we have come to the place where we are satisfied with the Lord Jesus and meet the satisfaction of God. "Not what I am, O Lord, but what Thou art--that, that alone, can be my soul's true rest. Thy Love, not mine, is glory." Paul said: "God carried out this New fiat in my heart, and in your heart, Corinthians. He shone in. He said, 'Let light be, and there was light.' " It was a Light that was never on land or sea, "the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Now that is the spring of ministry, and what is the ministry? What do we mean by ministry? Well, ministry is the outshining of Jesus Christ from our lives, and you do not need to have gone to convocations; you do not need to have any artificial or mechanical means. You may study your Bible, and you may give the most wonderfully organized and arranged Bible readings; but the question is, is that ministry?

Are you emanating Christ?

Are you transmitting Christ?

Is Christ coming through your teaching?

Are people sensing Christ and not your study, not your library, not your commentaries, not your versions, not your translations. But the point is, where does this come from, where did we get it, how did we get it???

Brethren, I am not saying that Bible study is wrong, but I am saying that through it all, has Christ appeared?! and is He appearing?! You may be a minister, a preacher, a Bible teacher of renown, and it may stop there; but the whole question is whether I am officially that or just a humble member of Christ, without any public gift at all, without any human ordination, I can be ministering Christ, in some way ministering Christ, and that is the ministry. That is the source of all true ministry from beginning to end. Here the apostle is making it that. Paul is saying: "It began in me and is going on in me, and all that I have to say to you believers is what I am seeing of the Lord Jesus, a growing, inward unveiling of God's Son."

The Growth Of Ministry Is Through "Afflictions"--"Consolations"

Now the question arises, how does the ministry grow, proceed? In these letters, and especially in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, we have the answer; and it is going to touch us quite deeply, acutely I think, on this matter of the procedure of ministry, of the growth of ministry. How will this be? Will it be by more study, more books? Oh, no, dear friends, that is not the way of a growing, continuing ministry; and the ministry has got to grow all the time, deepen and enlarge all the time, but how? Please read again your Second Letter to the Corinthians, and before you have gotten very far, indeed almost immediately in that letter, you come on some words which are repeated again and again. What are they? "afflictions"; "consolations."

Underline those words right at the beginning of the Second Letter. And in that connection the apostle brings forth his own great experience: "I would have you know what befell me--so great a death. (He had the sentence that it was death.) But we had the sentence of death. We despaired of life. We were pressed out of our measure." Then, and right through that letter, the apostle is constantly striking that note of sufferings, sufferings, sufferings.

"We Have This Treasure"

which is this ministry,

the revelation of Jesus Christ

in our hearts.

"We have it in vessels," and I like the literal translation of "fragile clay," capable of being broken and smashed. "Beyond our measure of endurance, even unto despair, we despaired of life," and then he will give us a couple of catalogues of his afflictions.

Now you ought to sit down brethren, and think about that if you are thinking about ministry. My, you ought to think about all that Paul himself met, encountered, and went through from center to circumference. At the center what do you find?--unfaithful, disloyal, and treacherous brethren; and moving out from that center in ever enlarging circles, there are many implications in this letter, as well as statements, of what people were saying about him: "He was not a true apostle. He is not one of the twelve. He never saw Jesus after the resurrection. He is not a true apostle; he is an imposter. He is a deceiver. He is just going

around cadging, getting money from Christians." These are all implications; a whole list of them. This is implied. It is there.

Paul goes on to say: If any man has suffered, "I more than them all." And then he speaks of the many times he was in prison, of how many times he received the stripes, and how many times he was in the deep and shipwrecked, a night and a day in the deep, of how many times he was in hunger and in nakedness and in peril--in sea, on land, from robbers and fellow-Christians. It is a terrible double list that he gives in these chapters of Second Corinthians. Read them again, and no wonder that word has such a large place at the beginning of the letter--"the afflictions of Christ which abound unto us, that the consolations also may abound." That is the ministry, those periods when even men like this man Paul, perhaps the greatest minister that Christ ever had, will say: "I despaired. I despaired of life, I was pressed beyond my measure of endurance." That is how the ministry grows.

If we really say to the Lord, "Lord, make my life a ministry of Christ," this is how the ministry grows, this is how it goes on. This is how to be an effectual minister. This is how the ministry proceeds, deepens, and becomes more fruitful. Believe me, dear friends, if the apostle is representative of ministry and if we as servants of God are to be spiritually fruitful--if really true ministers of Jesus Christ, there will be in the background of our lives the secret sufferings, a hidden history with God under His hand.

If you are going to be a true minister of Christ, ministering Christ, He is going to take you into some deep experiences with Him, very deep experiences, where you will discover something that is going to be of great value to others; for it is the crucified and suffering servant of God who is really the fruitful one, the one of whom you can say: "That man is not talking out of his library, from his books, that man knows what he is talking about--he has been there. He has been in it. This has come out of the travail of his soul." Read 2 Corinthians again in the light of how the ministry grows. Oh, I speak and say these things to you, but God only knows how I hold my breath, for we do know that if the Lord has done anything at all, it has been by a hard way. It has been by the "afflictions" of Christ that we might know the "consolations" of Christ; and, as the people of God, what do we want? information or consolations?

I know what your answer is over that, but I want you to notice that this is something terrific in the whole cosmic realm, for ministry is not just limited to the people amongst whom we move. This kind of ministry is "cosmic ministry." What do I mean? I mean this: the god of this age had blinded the minds of the unbelieving, lest as a precaution, as a move, a strategic move, lest the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God should shine upon them. If our gospel is hid, it is hid in them that are perishing in whom the god of this age had blinded.--What is such a ministry? It Is The Undoing Of That Devilish Work Of Spiritual Blindness. All spiritual blindness is not just natural, it is satanic, and you have got to have something that strikes there beyond the merely natural condition, that strikes right home to the source of that condition, "he hath blinded."

Satan is "the god of this world," and the trouble at Corinth, as the whole of the First Letter shows, is that the world has laid its deadly, paralyzing hand upon those people. The world and the old humanity lie under a curse. Does that sound strong, brethren? But have you never said, "this accursed self." It is this accursed self that is in the way all the time. Yes, that humanity lies under a curse from the beginning, and this world lies under a curse which means that that humanity and this world can never go through to God's end as it is. The end of that humanity and of this world is what? destruction, removal right from the Face of God. Paul saw this as to the Corinthians, the natural man intruding, and this world--its judgments, its standards, its conceptions, its values, its ideas--amongst these people in the church; controlling,

influencing--the world of Corinth had come into the church at Corinth--in its mentality, in its manner, and in its procedure: how the world does it... that was at Corinth.

Yes, our natural man lies under a curse, our old humanity lies under a curse. It cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God because God has put His veto on it. It is vetoed, and this world is vetoed as to God's things. And who has done it? The god of this age, the prince of this world; and when God breaks in, He said: "Let there be light," because darkness is not of God; it is of the devil. And here we have it in the spiritual part: "he hath blinded"--the god of this age, blinded and brought into darkness this old humanity; and when God says, "Let there be light," the work of the devil is undone and the judgment is removed and that should be the effect of ministry.

The ministry of Christ should be out of darkness into Light; and you remember the commission to the Apostle Paul at the beginning, "To whom I send thee, to turn them from darkness to light."--The right translation in the Greek language is: "That they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive an inheritance." This is ministry, the turning from darkness to Light, from the power of Satan unto God, to have an inheritance which they lost in Adam. It is very full. That should be the impact and influence out of our presence as ministers of Christ.

When Christ was present, He did say a lot of things; He did preach, mostly to His disciples, preparing them for their work ahead; but it was not only what He said, it was as much His personal presence. He would come somewhere and He had not said anything, and demons would cry out: "I know Thee Whom Thou art; the Holy One of God." They could not hold their peace. His Presence dragged them out. His very Presence was an exposure of man, an exposure of Satan: His Presence, and that is the ministration of Christ.--

O Lord, make us ministers, make me a minister, as far as I can bear it, that the impact, the registration, the influence may be people moving into the Light, really seeing the Light in an inward way. The Light--not of truth, or even of Scripture to begin with, but through Scripture--the Light of Jesus Christ.

The Test Of Ministry Is In Its Eternal Value

That is all I have time to say this morning about ministry--unless I add this word, again from Corinthians--the test of ministry is in its eternal value. Now the Apostle Paul associates the two things: Affliction and Eternal Value. He says, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while..." (now do not stop there, get your conjunction) "...while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; (passing, transient) but the things which are not seen are eternal." The test of our ministry is perhaps not going to be what we see in our own lifetime, but what is afterward, going on to eternity.

When you get to glory, do you not want to discover that you meant far more than you knew you did? That there was a great deal more value in your being here than ever you saw. Oh, this soul life of the old humanity does want to see, it is always doing things to see, to see the result, to see the value. "While we look not at the things which are seen." I think perhaps this is one of the most testing words in the Bible to the old man. How can we live on what is not seen and what is in the eternal future and be satisfied? Oh, that is not the old humanity, but it is the New--the eternal value of ministry.

The Nature And Purpose Of The Church

Part Two

Now for a little while I will go on to the next thing: the nature and purpose of the Church, now and in the ages afterward; and here again, we need a revised version of what we mean when we speak of the Church. Through the years I have talked and written much about the Church, but on this very matter of the Church I find that I am being forced to a revision, not to abandon what has been said, taught, and believed, and acted upon, but as we go on, a great deal of what we did at the beginning, of what we called our Church teaching, a great deal has, shall I say, broken down?!

Now, brethren, what are you finding about the Church today? To begin with, you may be looking around everywhere and saying: "Where is it? Is this the Church? Well, this does not come up to Ephesians; far from it, it is very much like Corinthians." So, what is the Church? What is its function now and in the ages to come? The Apostle Paul always linked these two things together: "Unto Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus through all ages, forever and ever"--the function of the Church afterward, as well as now.

What is the Church? Of course, there are various symbols of the Church. The Church is called "the House of God," it is called a "Temple," it is called "the Body of Christ," it is called "the Bride," and so on. You may ask, "Are these different things?" No, they are only aspects of one thing. Each of those definitions or designations or titles is only a functionary aspect of the Church. The House of God--the place where God lives. The Temple of God--where He is worshipped. The Body of Christ--the vessel of a Personality. The Body of Christ is a function, a many-sided function of the expression of the Personality. The Bride--is the expression of the affectional relationship between Christ and the Church: "Christ loved the Church, gave Himself for it... so ought husbands to love their wives...." The Bride is the affectional relationship between Christ and His Church. These are all symbols of the one thing, but what is the one thing of which these are but aspects? And that is what we have got to come to, that is where our revision of mentality has to take place.

So, what is the inclusive designation of the Church? "One Man"--You have it in that great Church letter of Ephesians where "He has broken down the middle wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile (racially the old human divisions, compartments) He has removed the division and has made "of the twain one new man." The inclusive designation is a Man, "One new man,"--a New Humanity. It is the aggregate of the New Creation people, men and women, Jews and Gentiles (not remaining as they are naturally, Jews and Gentiles) but just one New Man, one New Humanity: that is the Church! And which Humanity is it? That touches on the function: there is the nature.

Oh, do take this to heart, dear friends, for I do not intend to offend anyone, but what is God doing? What is He after? Is He after making a new institution called the Church, a new ecclesiasticism, something that has a denominator amongst men like the individual denominations or the non-denominations? Is God doing that? Is that what God is doing? (This is where we need a mental revision, a heart revision.) No! He is not in it. No, He is not doing that, He is only with the people, not with the thing. But God is doing in the spiritual way what He did at the beginning. He is saying and proceeding, proceeding with His concept: "Let Us make man, let Us make Man." The Church is the One New Man:--Let Us make a Man, not an institution, or any of these things that the Church is called. God said: "Let Us make a Man," and that is what he is doing with you and with me. God is not trying to make of us any of these many things that Christians are called and the names by which they go. He is just getting to work on us to constitute us "the Man."

You remember what we said in the beginning: "He called them (man and woman)--He called them man." Here in this (and, sisters, be careful how you take what I am now going to say, for "there is neither male nor female") it is a Man, that is, it is a Humanity. I cannot explain to you, because I do not know, what that Humanity is going to be afterward in glory, but Jesus answering a certain man's question about marriage and repeated marriages, (whose wife a certain woman would be afterward out of all she had married) said, "Ye do err... in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels." It is a kind of Humanity that is different. Oh, the questions will arise, "Shall I know my husband in heaven, shall I know my wife in heaven?" Yes! But we shall know in a way in which it is far better to know, however precious may have been the human relationships, husband and wife, wife and husbands here--yes, precious, very precious; but is it not better when a husband and wife know each other in the Spirit than in the flesh? Is it not lovely when they flow together from one Spirit, one vision, one objective that their united lives manifest Jesus Christ in the home and in the neighborhood?! There is something very precious about that.

I had a son, and the Lord took him about three or four years ago; and as my son, we had a good relationship, there was not strife between us as father and son, no difficulty at all; and he and I had such spiritual fellowship that I could open my heart to him as fully as I could to anybody, and more than to most people--for he was not only my son, but he was my spiritual friend. Brethren, you know what I am talking about. That is how we are going to know, and it will be a better kind of knowing. Do not worry, then, whether you know your husband or your wife. Oh, you will: "Then shall I know, even as I have been known by the Lord."

The Vocation: The Emanation Of Christ

Now we must move on. The vocation of the Church now and in eternity is going to be just the emanation of Christ. It is now intended to be that, and God help us to be that. It is not this and that and one or more of a hundred things that are the idea about the Church today, but it is just this one thing, the presence of a different kind of Man, in the individual and collectively. Let us take it universally.

Are you not impressed with how Peter, having passed through the great transition from the old Jewish humanity, got right through:--after his battles with the Gentiles at Cæsarea, and Cornelius' house, after his battle down at Antioch when James and the elders came down from Jerusalem, when Peter withdrew himself from eating with the Gentiles ("dissimulation" Paul called it). When he got through it all, and thank God Peter got through it all, what did he say in the opening of his letter?--"To the saints, scattered throughout Pontius, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." Peter says: "Ye, Galatians, Cappadocians, Asians, Bithynians, you are all scattered. The dispersion has taken place, and you are all scattered, you saints, and yet you are a spiritual house, One House. Not so many houses, but One House. Everywhere." What is this? It is where the Lord is dwelling, in men and women.

The Church universal according to the Divine concept is just One Man in the earth. How we discover that when we meet somebody we have never met before and they are the Lord's. It is wonderful!--until you begin to ask or they begin to ask what you belong to. If you just talk about things of the Lord, One Man, One Blessed Man, it is like that. Well, that is very elementary; it is very simple, but that is what the Church is universally: that is what the Church is locally.

When people come into the local company, they do not come in and say, "Well, this is how they behave, this is what they do; they have baptisms, they have the Lord's table, and they have this form of worship."

No, these things may be all right, they may have their place, they may be a part of a Divine order, but what is it they are to meet?--not our baptism, not our Lord's table, not our method of procedure, not our technique, but "God is in this place!"--they meet the Lord. They may not be able to put it like that, they may not be able to define it or explain it, but the impress is: "There is something there, these people have got life, these people are in the good of something that you will not find anywhere else. It is the Lord." Oh, that all our local companies were just like that, in whatever way we go on, the thing that impresses is: "The Lord is here, the Lord is here."

I have moved out from the universal to the local company, and now I am going to move down to the individual. To the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul said: "Do you not know that your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit? He dwells in you." I am a microcosm of the Church (or intended to be), and each one of you is intended to be a microcosm of the Church. Now what is it? What is true of the universal Church collectively is to be true in our case, it is to be Christ that people meet when they meet us individually. What broke upon this man Paul's heart was not something that he studied up, read up, or worked out in his mind, but he saw Jesus as Lord (and He is a lifetime of seeing). Paul began to see, and to go on to see, what the Church really is. And I will say this, brethren, you do not know anything about the Church if you have not seen Jesus Christ--however much you have read and talked about it, if you have not seen Him, you do not know what the Church is. It is not a thing, an it. But if you have seen Him, it is a Him, it is a Person Who is dwelling in persons--that is the Church! I think that is enough this morning. Very much more could be said, but time has gone. Let us pray...

Make the truth live in us, O Lord. May that Divine fiat take place, light shine into our hearts, and the eyes of our understanding be enlightened that we may see light in Thy Light. For Thy Name and Glory and Satisfaction's sake, Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-nature-and-dynamic-of-ministry-and-the-nature-and-purpose-of-the-church/>

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