

The Need for a New Apprehension of the Gospel

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the urgent need for a deeper understanding of the Gospel to foster spiritual maturity and address the current inadequacies within the Church.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:8, Ephesians 4:11

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Understanding the Gospel"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the urgent need for a new understanding of the Gospel, suggesting that the current spiritual state of the Church is inadequate and shallow. He reflects on the historical absence of significant movements of God and argues that the Church must move beyond elementary teachings to embrace a deeper, more mature comprehension of sonship in Christ. Sparks asserts that the Gospel is not merely about salvation but about the transformative process of becoming a new creation in Christ, culminating in spiritual maturity. He highlights the importance of the Church's growth and unity in faith as essential to overcoming spiritual challenges and fulfilling God's purpose. Ultimately, he calls for believers to recognize the profound significance of the Gospel and its implications for their lives and the world.

Transcript

I am just going to talk for a moment out of my heart, because I do feel that we are in a very perplexing, but very significant, situation at this time. There is a sense in which it does seem that the Lord is not doing very much. I mean there are not very manifest movements of God on the earth along certain lines in which we look for God to be moving. I do not mean that He is doing nothing, that there is nothing going on. I believe there is, and in parts a very real work of God is going on. But, speaking generally, there is no great movement of God in an outward way spiritually. For a long time such forms of Divine activity seem to have been suspended.

We think back to Wesley, and even to Moody, and then see that at a certain time a whole galaxy of great Bible teachers was raised up. We have all the names of the men of a generation ago. They have all gone. There are no movements like that, and have not been for a long time. Moreover, the situation has changed so much that I do not believe that if all those men came back today, they could meet the situation. Something has happened. The situation has not only changed but it has become much deeper, and the need is for something more than has been during these past generations, something more potent and

something deeper. The need is such as to require something from God of a new order. It was there, of course, in New Testament times. I am not thinking of something extra so far as the New Testament is concerned, but I am wondering very much whether this whole matter is not largely one of a new apprehension of what the Gospel is.

We have a very widespread situation the world over today amongst Christians which is an altogether unsatisfactory one, and I think most leaders and responsible people realize that. I think ministers and missionaries are aware that the state of the converts and the Christians is altogether unsatisfactory and inadequate. It is a real question sometimes whether many of them have really been born again. The spiritual life of the Lord's people is a very shallow thing, speaking generally, a very poor thing. And surely today it is manifest that the Church generally is failing to register itself with any impact upon the world situation. Why this apparent hiatus, this suspension of any general and impressive working, any working that is adequate to the situation - God seeming to be doing nothing? Oh, I believe that He is doing something inwardly, but that is not what I am talking about. Why does this situation obtain?

Well, I say, I wonder whether it is not because there has to be a new apprehension of the Gospel. I believe that it really is the demand of a late hour in the dispensation, that we have advanced in this dispensation toward the end so much that the Lord cannot any longer accept the elementary. He must have the mature; He must have the fuller. Everything surely along the line of intensification, as we see it, demands that.

How did God decide to solve the whole problem of this universe after the chaos and ruin resultant from the working of Satan, and men's complicity with him, and the entrance of sin? How was God going to deal with this whole situation? By Himself coming right down in the form of man in terms of sonship and begetting a new race of beings as sharers of His own Divine life; not His Deity but His Divine life, partaking of His own Divine nature, becoming as a family His own moral and spiritual reproduction in the universe.

I say that is infinitely - may I use the word of God? - infinitely ingenious. There is wisdom about that that is profound. Not a working from the outside to try and remedy and patch up a broken down situation, not a dealing with the thing objectively at all, but Himself coming right into it - God incarnate, God manifest in the flesh in terms of sonship; that is, in generic terms, to reproduce after His own kind. That is a secret which God kept hidden through ages and generations. God had that secret.

What is the Gospel? It is Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh in terms of sonship, brought through to glory to generate a new race after His own kind, to bring many sons to glory. That is it in brief. Oh, that is something very much more than getting your sins forgiven; that is very much more than justification by faith. It is that, but it is infinitely more than that, and all the other things included - the deep, deep inner secret of God, how He is eventually going to have triumph in His original purpose. "The faith", according to the New Testament, is sonship, and it is in relation to sonship as an inward, spiritual reality brought about by this work of God in generation which is the occasion of all the conflict.

Yes, the fact of sonship is there through new birth, but sonship is something more than birth; sonship is maturity. It is so clear that the New Testament shows that the continuation unto the full growth of sonship is as vital and as important as the beginning of sonship; that is, the bringing of the Lord's people to full spiritual growth is as important as bringing them to new birth. That is where there has been a breakdown.

Today, and for a long time, evangelical leaders have put all the emphasis, or the main emphasis, upon getting people saved. They are interested in that more than anything else, and that is the direction of their main occupation. With what result? That we see a most unsatisfactory state among Christians, and that

too in the face of the fact that the very existence of the New Testament itself is the evidence that to bring converted people to full spiritual growth is as important as bringing them to new birth. Why have we the New Testament, with Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and all the other letters, occupied with the fight of the faith to bring believers to full growth? Every one of them is a battleground. All these letters are battlegrounds, and they all have to do, not with the conversion of the unsaved but the going on of the saved - the terrific fight of sonship. Why? Because the issue is not that babes are going to oust the powers of darkness, but full grown believers. The Church has to come to maturity.

So the Apostle says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.....and He gave some apostles, and some, prophets," and so on. What for? "The perfecting of the saints.....till we all attain unto the unity of the faith.....unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:8,11-13). The unity of the faith, the fullness of Christ. You see, that is the thing that comes to light. It is just as important for the seed or the family or the Body to come to spiritual full growth as it is for it to be begotten at all. That is a tremendous thing. The mystery of the Gospel is not just getting people born again. The mystery of the Gospel is the fullness of Christ, and that only begins at new birth. This is the disclosed secret, this Gospel, and it is the occasion of the tremendous, unrelenting conflict, a cosmic conflict with principalities, powers, world-rulers of this darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies (Eph. 6:12). That is where the wrestling goes on.

Beloved, the focal point of the conflict is the spiritual advancement of the children of God toward full growth, and by any means whatever the enemy will seek to interfere with that. He is striking right at the heart of this thing all the time by every means in his power. God will reach His end; He will come in, in His Son in terms of sonship, to take up residence within those begotten of Him, and will grow in them, increase His measure in them, until at last, brought to the unity of the faith, they become a mighty embodiment and revelation of God Himself. Not in Deity, but in what He is spiritually and morally in this universe - conformed to the image of His Son, a living expression of God's own thoughts - to fill His universe. The enemy is out against that, and every little step in that direction is challenged; the spiritual growth is countered all the time. He is striking at God's Son.

Oh, that we could get a fresh glimpse of the immense significance of the Gospel, the Gospel of God concerning His Son Jesus Christ, God's secret! I like to dwell upon that. If you sit down in the presence of the world situation and try to sort it out and find the solution to it, it is beyond us altogether; but all through the ages God has been perfectly at rest about this whole thing, about the issue. He was able to say, I have the secret of the whole thing, I have solved the whole problem, I have the means in hand; in the end My method will absolutely succeed!

And the secret? Why, it is just this: "I will go down Myself in terms of sonship and will generate a new race through faith, and that new race will be brought eventually to spiritual full growth; which simply means that then I shall fill all, I shall occupy all the space; there will be no room for anything else at all." That is the issue for every Christian life. It is whether God is going to fill the whole space or not, or whether we are going to have a bit. All the time that is what is going on.

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