

The Only True Emancipation From All Forms of Legalism Is to See Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

The true nature of Christianity is a spiritual movement from heaven, not a legal system imposed upon God's people, and the only way to be emancipated from legalism is to see the Lord Jesus.

Scripture: Galatians 1:15

Topics: "The Significance of Christ", "Emancipation from Legalism"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that true emancipation from legalism comes from a genuine revelation of Christ, as exemplified in the life of the Apostle Paul. He argues that Christianity is not a legal system but a spiritual movement, rooted in the inward revelation of Jesus. Sparks highlights Paul's transformation, where he was liberated from Judaism upon seeing the significance of Christ, and stresses that understanding Jesus is essential for true freedom. The sermon underscores that legalism obscures grace and that the essence of Christianity is found in the resurrection and life of Christ, not in the law. Ultimately, Sparks calls for believers to seek a deeper understanding of Jesus to experience true liberation.

Transcript

Read: Galatians

We continue with our consideration of this great fundamental question as to the true nature of this dispensation. The question being: Is Christianity a legal system or a spiritual movement from heaven? We have seen that this question became a very serious battleground right at the beginning. It was on this question that Stephen was martyred; and his great successor, the Apostle Paul, became the focal point of this battle. So with the Letter to the Galatians before us, we are seeking to see what the apostle had to say about this. In as much as he was made the very center of the controversy, we have to consider the apostle himself. So far, we have looked at the source of his apostleship. He said that it was not from men, nor from a man, but by revelation of Jesus Christ - an apostle of Jesus Christ and God the Father. Then we went on yesterday to consider the great crisis behind his apostleship.

This morning we are going to consider the constituting of his apostleship. We turn then to the Letter to the Galatians. Chapter one, and verse fifteen: "When it was the good pleasure of God, Who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the nations" (ASV). It was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son in me. And then

the well known words in chapter two, and verse twenty: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God."

Now may I remind you that the thing of importance for us is that this spiritual experience of the Apostle Paul contains all the principles of this new dispensation. If we ask the question, "What is true Christianity?" Then the answer is found in the spiritual history of this man, the dispensation in which we live is founded upon these principles. So that which constitutes this dispensation is that which constituted the apostleship of Paul. After emphatically stating that he did not receive it from men, not even from those who were apostles before him, he goes right to the heart of this matter, and he says, "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." So this dispensation is founded upon an inward revelation of Jesus Christ. If you and I want to know what it is that we are supposed to be in, it is that.

Our true Christian life rests upon an inward revelation of God's Son. The Apostle Paul had come to see the immense significance of the Son of God. Here is a man who was absolutely intoxicated with Jesus Christ. In everything he saw Christ. And as we said yesterday, in this very short letter of Galatians, the name "Jesus Christ" occurs no fewer than forty-three times.

First, "IT PLEASSED GOD TO REVEAL HIS SON IN ME." And then, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." In that Cross of Christ, one man, Saul of Tarsus, has gone out. The Cross has dismissed one kind of man. And the resurrection has brought in another kind of man; and that other kind of man is Christ. So Christ takes the place of Saul of Tarsus. This is foundational, the basis of this whole dispensation. What an immense difference it would make if we saw Christ as Paul saw Him; it is hard work for our imagination to do that.

Paul had come to see Who Jesus of Nazareth was. You remember that on the Damascus road, when he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" Jesus answered, "I am Jesus of Nazareth." He did not say, "I am the eternal Son of God." He did not say, "I am God Who became incarnate." He said, "I AM JESUS OF NAZARETH." And Paul was on the ground, he was helpless and blind. The brightness of THAT GLORY had laid him to the earth, and the very first sensation that this man had was, "This glory, this power, Jesus of Nazareth? Jesus of Nazareth, all this?" I say it is very difficult for us to understand. You remember some of the things that Paul wrote later about Christ? When he wrote his letter to the Philippians, he spoke of Jesus as, "before times eternal, existing as equal with God." He said, "He was on equality with God." And then, when he wrote his letter to the Colossians, he gave a matchless picture of Christ. He says that, "He was before all things, and all things were created through Him, whether things in heaven, or things in earth, whether principality, or power: all things had been created by Him, and through Him, and in Him all things consist. It was the pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fullness dwell." And that is Jesus of Nazareth. You see, Paul had come to see the significance of God's Son.

Now just think of that again: Existing on equality with God; the instrument and the heir of all creation by the will of the Father; all things being put into Him by the appointment of the Father; He had to have the preeminence in all things, and on-and-on. This was the One Whom Paul, or Saul of Tarsus, and his friends and his nation crucified. Persecuting and crucifying God manifest in the flesh. Persecuting and crucifying the One Who created all things. See how vast this One is! Now here is a little man who is crucifying Him! Can you enter into that? Can you realize at all WHAT this man felt when he saw Who Jesus of Nazareth was? No wonder Paul wanted to be liberated from a system that could do that. Paul's whole being cried out, 'Let me be emancipated from a thing that can do that. Let me escape from a system

that can do that.' No wonder this word "liberty" was such a big word with Paul. And no wonder Paul was so angry about this system. In this letter he says, "If we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel than that which we preached, let him be anathema." And he said it again. He said, "I repeat that." How angry he was! The Gospel was the Gospel of God concerning His Son. Nowhere in all his writings, with all that he had to meet, is Paul found to be so angry as in this letter. He seems to throw all discretion to the winds. He completely discards all compromise. And he says, 'There can be no compromise with a system which can have this effect.'

Legalism always crucifies Christ afresh BECAUSE legalism cuts out the greatest word in Christianity. The word over the door into true Christianity is the word: "GRACE." Legalism always wipes out "Grace," and puts in its place "LAW."

Grace is the chief word in the vocabulary of the Christian. Do you notice that where legalism reaches its fullest expression, it always puts the crucifix in the place of the empty tomb? The badge of the Christian is the empty tomb. That is 'Life from the dead.' The badge of legalism is a crucifix, 'a dead Christ.' Legalism always brings death, and the chief thing about Christ is resurrection. It is Life from the dead. This was something that Paul came to see when it pleased God to reveal His Son in him. And he said, let me get out of all this legalistic system. Jesus of Nazareth Whom we crucified is alive. He has been revealed alive in my heart.

The only true emancipation from all forms of legalism is to see Christ. Not all the forces in this world would have emancipated Saul of Tarsus from Judaism. The only thing that did that was seeing Jesus. And so, I repeat, the only thing that will emancipate us from all forms of dead legalism is to really see the Lord Jesus. And that would do it. It does not matter what you are bound by - a dead traditional Christianity, or any other kind of bondage. If you truly see the significance of the Lord Jesus, you will be emancipated. We must not go about telling people that they must come out of this and that. Whatever it may be, it is not our business to tell them they have got to come out of that and come into this. Let me emphasize that, that is not our business. If you do that sort of thing, you will only make matters very much worse. A great deal of mess and confusion always follows that sort of thing. Anyone who says, Now you must leave that and you must come into this is going to make trouble - trouble that will not glorify the Lord Jesus.

The thing that will do it for anyone is to really see Jesus. It is not our business to preach the church in the first place. You hear what I have said? It is not our business to go about the world preaching the church. Whether it be the Church universal or the church local. We are NOT commissioned to go and preach that. We shall never know what the Church is until we have seen Jesus, because Jesus is the Church in corporate expression, or to put it round the other way, the Church is the corporate expression of Jesus. We can never understand what the Church is until we understand Who Jesus is. Otherwise, the Church for us will be something so small, so limited, so exclusive. Jesus is not like that. How great He is! How wonderful He is! Paul says: "The Church is the fullness of Him That filleth all in all."

Now the Apostle Paul was the greatest teacher of the New Testament time on the matter of the Church. But his knowledge of the Church was the result of his seeing God's Son. You see the simple beginning of it. Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Saul might have said, "I am not persecuting you, Lord, I am persecuting these Christians." If he had said that, Jesus would have answered, "It is the same thing. I and these Christians are one body. You cannot touch a member of My body without touching Me." How true that is in the physical body. You take off your shoes, and you walk across the floor, and you come across a pin, and it pricks your little toe, the farthest, smallest extremity of your whole body. And you

quickly lift up your foot. It hurts you. How do you know it hurts you? Because that farthest extremity of your body has a relationship with your head. When you say that has hurt me, you are saying it with your head. You see the point, you cannot touch the remotest part in the human body without touching the head. The whole nervous system of the body is centered in the head. So Jesus would have said, "It is the same thing. Touch one simple child of Mine and you touch Me." I think Saul of Tarsus never got a bigger surprise than he did when Jesus said that. When it was shown to him that to touch any of the simple Christians on the earth was to touch the glorified Son of God, that was the beginning of his understanding of the Church.

There is nothing legal about that; that is very spiritual. If we really see the Lord Jesus, we shall be emancipated. Some of us have had that experience. We were in legal systems; our horizon was that system. Then the day came when the Lord opened our eyes to really see the significance of Christ. And that whole system fell away as being all nonsense. No, it is not our business to say, 'Come out of this and that, and come into this other.' The word "must" or "thou shall" does not belong to this realm. That belongs to the old legal realm. The "must" becomes a spiritual thing, not a legal thing. We could say of Paul, there was a mighty "must" in his spirit. I have seen the Lord, and I am seeing more and more of what the Lord is, and this is creating in me this great imperative. "This one thing I do, leaving the things which are behind, I press on toward the mark of the prize of the on-high calling." So we do not say, 'Change your system.' But we do say, 'Ask the Lord to reveal His Son in you.' Then the great work of emancipation will begin.

I wonder if you have noted that whenever God made a new move, He always did it on the basis of His Son. Whether that move was a new phase entirely, or the recovering of something that was lost, He always put His Son in the front. The beginning of the Bible is God creating a new world. And He does it all in and through and by His Son. His Son is the Agent, the Instrument and the Pattern of the creation. Later on, when God was making another new move with Abraham, He constituted the life of Abraham upon the basis of His Son. Step by step He brought Abraham right up to the climax. And what was the climax? It was this, "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, and offer him a sacrifice." That was the climax of Abraham's life. All his life was gathered into that. In that step, Abraham entered right into the heart of God. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." The new move of God with Abraham was on the basis of God's Son.

The next great move of God was with Israel, the nation. The nation Israel is in bondage in Egypt. The emancipation of that nation from that bondage was on the basis of that Passover, the blood and the flesh of the Passover Lamb. God had put His Son right at the beginning of the national life. Having gotten them out of bondage on the basis of His Son, He constituted them in the wilderness on the basis of His Son. The tabernacle in the wilderness was a comprehensive and detailed representation of God's Son. Many years later, when that nation had departed from the Lord, and when every appeal to them had failed, God raised up the prophets. Now some prophets prophesied toward the captivity; and some prophesied as to that which looked beyond the captivity. But both of these sets of prophets always kept the Lord Jesus in view. Isaiah fifty-three is the great picture of the suffering Son and Servant of the Lord; and that looked beyond the captivity. You see, the history of these people was based upon the presentation of God's Son.

The next great movement of God in this world is the New Testament. It begins with the incarnation of the Son of God. It goes on to the resurrection of the Son of God. And it goes on to show that the full meaning of the Son of God is to be manifested through the Church. It is always God's Son in view. Every new movement of God is taken by a fresh presentation of Christ. In the first three chapters of the Book of the Revelation, Christ is seeking to bring back the churches to their former spiritual position. This is a move to

try and recover what has been lost. And therefore you have in the first chapter that matchless presentation of Christ. What a wonderful description of Christ that is! Just read it again, every detail in that description is of some aspect to Christ. It is a symbolic, comprehensive presentation of the meaning of Christ. I think it is perfectly evident to us all, that from the Book of Genesis in the creation, to the Book of the Revelation at the end, God always moves on the ground of His Son.

So we come back to Paul, this is a new and mighty movement of God. It is the emancipation of a people from all the death of legalism. The people of Christ's day were as much in bondage to legalism as Israel was in bondage in Egypt. And the same God Who said to Moses, "I have seen the affliction of My people, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; and I am come down to deliver them. Come now therefore, and I will send you." The same God saw the bondage of the people to that legalistic system, laboring and heavy laden under the yoke of legalism. The same God said, "I am come down to deliver them." And as it were, He turned to Paul and said, "Come, and I will send you." A chosen vessel for the liberation of His people.

So great is this matter with God. Well, all these are gathered into these words, "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." "I have been crucified with Christ" to the whole system of legalism. 'It is true that I am alive, and yet it is not I, but Christ Who liveth in me.' This is one more chapter on this very great question, 'What is Christianity?' Is it a legal system imposed upon God's people? Or is it a great liberating spiritual movement from heaven? The answer is found in this: "Have we really seen the Lord? Have we really seen the significance of Christ?" Only if we have, shall we be a free people. We will leave it there for this morning. If the Lord wills, tomorrow morning we shall deal with what I feel to be one of the most important aspects of this whole matter. It will be the real fundamental difference between the old and the new dispensation. So I suggest that you try to make time to read this letter again before tomorrow.

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