

The 'Parchment', the 'Pen', and the Purpose

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Holy Spirit is writing a life of Christ on the inner life of believers, reproducing the life of Jesus Christ in their spiritual experiences.

Scripture: Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 3:3, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 4:19, Ephesians 1:18, Ephesians 4:10, Colossians 1:27

Topics: "Transformation in Christ", "Living Epistles"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is actively writing the life of Christ within believers, transforming them into living epistles that reflect Jesus' character and experiences. He explains that this inner transformation requires being born again, as only the spiritual man can receive and understand the workings of the Holy Spirit. The sermon highlights that the experiences of believers are opportunities for the Holy Spirit to teach them about Christ, and that true knowledge comes from the heart rather than mere intellectual understanding. Ultimately, the goal is for believers to embody the testimony of Jesus, living out His life through their own. Sparks encourages the congregation to recognize their role as 'People of the Way', following the path of Christ in their daily lives.

Transcript

"For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

"He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things" (Ephesians 4:10).

"My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be fully formed in you" (Galatians 4:19).

"...to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

"...being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh" (2 Corinthians 3:3).

It is very important for us to recognize just what those last words are saying. What is the meaning of 2 Corinthians, chapter three and verse three? To begin with, we can break it up into three things.

Firstly, it says that the Holy Spirit is writing a life of Christ. Secondly, this writing of the life of Christ is in the inner experience of believers. Thirdly, this biography of Jesus Christ is for all men to read. Is that perfectly clear? Well, let us break it up again.

THE PARCHMENT

We will begin with the parchment. You know that the New Testament was written originally upon parchment. At one time the Apostle Paul asked someone very particularly to bring his parchments to him, and probably they were his epistles. Now he says that the Holy Spirit is writing a life of Christ on parchment, but this parchment is the inner life of believers. He says: "Not in tables of stone", and although he does not actually say so, he means that it is not on parchment. The writing material of the Holy Spirit is the inner life of believers. The born-again believer has a new inner life upon which the Holy Spirit can write, but the one who is not born again is not suitable parchment for the Holy Spirit. The Apostle said quite a lot about that in the first letter to the Corinthians. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them" (1 Corinthians 2:14). In other words, the natural man is not suitable writing material for the Holy Spirit, and it is only the spiritual man who is suitable for the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus said this to Nicodemus, who was very familiar with the parchments of the Old Testament. He knew all about those manuscripts, but the Lord Jesus told him that he was not suitable material for the Holy Spirit. He could not receive Him, and therefore he could not understand what He was doing. The Lord Jesus told him: 'You must be born again, for you must be a new man to understand what the Holy Spirit is saying.'

This new man is made alive to the Holy Spirit and is sensitive to Him. We have here a tape recorder, and all that is being said is being received because the tape is sensitive. If anyone coughs in this meeting we shall hear it for months, and perhaps for years to come! So it is with the spirit of the new man in Christ. The Holy Spirit is writing a life of Christ, and I do trust that we are all going to be very sensitive to Him in these days.

THAT WHICH IS BEING WRITTEN

The next thing that we note is that the spiritual experiences of believers are a repetition of the life of Jesus Christ, and it is upon that statement that our morning meetings this week will be founded. It may take you some time to understand it, but I do want you to recognise what this word is saying. The Holy Spirit is writing a biography of Jesus Christ, and it is a spiritual biography, written in the spiritual life and experience of believers. All that which was true of the Lord Jesus, excepting His deity, is going to be written in our spiritual experience. That is a tremendous statement! And it is going to be a tremendous thing to recognise. You have spiritual experiences, things come into your spiritual history; but if you understand what the Holy Spirit is doing, you should realise that He is writing something about the Lord Jesus, and that something that was true of the Lord Jesus is being reproduced in you.

You will recall the passages which we read: "Foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son... Christ fully formed in you... that he might fill all things." Our spiritual life belongs to the "all things", and your spirit is one of the "things".

Let me repeat: The Holy Spirit is now writing a biography, the life of Christ, in the spiritual history of the Lord's people.

SONSHIP THE BASIS OF ALL GOD'S WORK

The first great thing about the Lord Jesus was His Sonship, and the Holy Spirit is writing sonship in us. Remember that sonship always relates to God's purpose, for it is the beginning and the end of His purpose, which is in humanity. While Jesus Christ, as Son of God, is God Himself, sonship relates to humanity. It is in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus that His Sonship is manifested. You see, I am leaving deity aside, for the deity of the Lord Jesus is not something that will be reproduced in us, but, leaving His deity aside, the Holy Spirit is writing His sonship in us. The little fragment that we read said: "That he might be the firstborn among many brethren", and by new birth we receive the gift of sonship.

So, sonship is the basis of all God's work. It begins in Jesus Christ, and then it is carried on in the born-again believer.

THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

We often use the word 'testimony' in relation to the Lord Jesus. The 'testimony of Jesus' is used in various ways, but it is not a system of doctrine. It is the continuation of the life of Jesus. You can have the doctrine of the testimony and not be an example of the life of Jesus. Our basic word says that we, as living epistles, are to be read and known of all men, but WHAT are all men to read and know? Is it a system of doctrine? Is it a form of Christianity? It is not one of the many things that are said about it, but just Christ going on living in His people. We sing:

"Thine be the glory, risen, conqu'ring Son!"

and we put everything on that! He is the risen, glorious Son of God, reliving His life, by the Holy Spirit, in us.

Perhaps that is not very encouraging to us, but that is because we are trying to get it all at once. No, this is a whole lifework of the Holy Spirit, and then, after this life, there is that wonderful parenthesis, that interval between this life and the next when we shall all be changed. So we are back at the beginning: "Foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son", and we are being "changed into his likeness" (2 Corinthians 3:18). That is going on through this life - or, it ought to be! - and then there comes the interval when we leave his world and we awake in His likeness.

So the testimony of Jesus in this world is not only that Jesus is alive, but He is alive in us.

Now let me repeat: The life of the believer is intended to be the history of Jesus Christ rewritten. "Ye are an epistle" - or a biography.

THE SCHOOL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

That leaves us with two things. It brings us into the school of the Holy Spirit, where we are learning our lessons, but we are not learning them from a book. We are learning them by what the Holy Spirit is doing in us, which means that when we are in His hands everything that comes into our spiritual history has in it a lesson about Jesus Christ.

So the second thing is that we have to look at our experiences and ask: 'What have I to learn about Christ in this? In what way does this experience provide the Holy Spirit with an opportunity of teaching me something about Jesus Christ?' Sometimes we cannot understand what the Lord is doing with us! We

cannot see the meaning of an experience, but if we are really in the hands of the Holy Spirit, our experiences are going to lead us on to know the Lord better. Therefore we must not reject our experiences; we must not think of them as unnecessary, we must not rebel against them, we must not think that they have no meaning, but we must take every experience into the presence of the Lord and say: 'Now, Lord, You must teach me what You mean by letting me have this experience.' That is the foundation of this ministry: learning Christ, but not just in our heads. You may have your heads and your notebooks full of information this week, but it has to go down deeper. The New Testament speaks about "the eyes of your heart" (Ephesians 1:18).

So often at the beginning of a conference people come to us with a lot of problems and questions and they would like to take all our time getting answers to their problems and questions. They are not always very pleased when we say: 'Wait until the end of the conference, and perhaps you will have no more questions to ask!' If the Holy Spirit is with us He is going to enlighten the eyes of our hearts, and we are going to see with our hearts. That is the best way to see, and the only way.

You know, a mother sees in one way, and a woman who has had no children sees in another. When our eldest daughter was a little baby she was in her pram, crying very loudly, and a lady came along and said: 'What is the matter with her?' She had not got a wedding ring on. My wife said: 'Oh, she is tired', and the good lady said: 'Well, why does she not go to sleep, then?' The mother understands what someone who has not the heart relationship cannot understand.

The best knowledge is heart knowledge. That word: "The eyes of your heart" is sometimes translated: "The eyes of your understanding", and understanding is the best knowledge.

Now have you got this clear at the beginning? You see, during this conference I am going over the life of Christ and will take up a number of His experiences and will try to show you how those experiences are reproduced in believers so that we become the living biography of Jesus Christ, for that is what those words mean.

I would like you to think about this. The four Gospels have a literal biography of Jesus Christ, but they were written AFTER the epistles. They tell us of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus, but when you have that you have not got everything. Indeed, you have only a very little. The epistles were written in order to show us that all that which was in the Gospels has to be made real in us. I have always had a question about going to the Holy Land! If you do not agree with me, well, that does not matter! But, you know, I have been to the Holy Land spiritually. I have seen so much of it in my inner life. I do not need to go to Mount Calvary, for I understand much more of Calvary by not having gone there. I need not go up to the high mountain of the Transfiguration, for I have seen that in my heart. All these things that happened to the Lord Jesus only happened in a temporal way, in order to lay the foundation. The Holy Spirit had not come down then, so in the Gospels He was only writing a historic life of Jesus. He was not writing the inner spiritual experience of that history. That is what He came down to do, and that is very much better than going to Palestine. Well, go to Palestine if you want to, but remember that the Holy Spirit has come to write Palestine in us, and we are going to think about that this week, if the Lord helps us.

Are you clear about what I have tried to say? "Ye are an epistle [or biography] of Christ... written not with ink... not in tables of stone", and we may add, 'not on sheets of parchment, not by the finger of man, but by the Spirit of God, who is writing upon the tables which are hearts of flesh'. Does that give you a new idea about what is happening? Remember, then, that if you are in the hands of the Holy Spirit, He is trying to

write the life of Jesus Christ in you so that all may be able to read.

The Christians in the early days were known by different names. They were known as Christians, and by other names, but one of the names by which they became known everywhere was: 'The people of the way.' I wonder where that name came from, and how people got that idea? Was it the Christians' different way of life? Yes, perhaps so. Was it their teaching and their practice? Yes, perhaps. But was it because Jesus said: "I am the way", and the Christians were going the way of Christ, and people saw that they were going that way? Perhaps that was what it was, and that is what it is meant to be. These people were going the way of Jesus Christ, and not trying to follow His example. That may be important, but they were going that way because the Holy Spirit in them was taking them that way. The Lord Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. There is, or should be, in us an inward urge to go in a certain way, and that way is the way of the Lord Jesus - and in that way we learn Christ. We are 'People of the Way'.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-parchment-the-pen-and-the-purpose/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net

