

The Release of the Lord

by T. Austin-Sparks

The speaker emphasizes the need for a new reformation in Evangelical Christianity, focusing on the Church as the Body of Christ and the importance of a new heavenly apprehension of the Church.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:23, Ephesians 1:19

Topics: "The Body of Christ", "Spiritual Reformation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that true spiritual enlargement often comes through straitening, highlighting that human efforts can lead to artificial growth devoid of spiritual reality. He argues that God often begins at a point of zero, where human hope is lost, to demonstrate His power and purpose through the Cross. The sermon critiques the reliance on human ingenuity in church leadership and missionary work, advocating for a return to a Spirit-led, organic understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ. Sparks calls for a reformation that prioritizes Christ's presence and purpose over institutional structures, suggesting that true evangelization is about the increase of Christ's presence in the world. He concludes that a new revelation of Christ is essential for overcoming the limitations of organized Christianity and achieving spiritual fullness.

Transcript

That enlargement through straitening is an abiding law of the Kingdom of the Heavens in this age is a well-known truth. Its implications are various and its instances are numerous. One of its too oft-unrecognized implications is that efforts at enlargement in a really spiritual realm only result in an artificial inflation, with all the weakness, unsatisfactoriness, and instability of all that is not spiritually real. True development is not the work of man, of his ingenuity, acumen, efficiency, resource, drive, cleverness, or enthusiasm. The very law of which we are speaking has its strength and vindication in the fact that God begins at zero. When, humanly speaking, there has remained no hope and it has been fully recognized that only God could do the necessary thing, it has often been proved that that was just the situation that He had been taking pains to bring about.

"He hangeth the world upon nothing" is an abiding principle from the standpoint of the natural man. It is always a salutary thing for the Lord's servants to pass their eye over the Scriptures and review the zeros of man and the intervention of God at that point. Such a survey must ever lead to a recognition that God is speaking in all ages in the terms of the Cross, and that there, all-inclusively and forever, has been established the Divine law that the "flesh profiteth nothing"; that the "natural" (Greek: soulical) man

"cannot" in the things of God; that the first Adam species and race has been wound up and finished. That is the comprehensive "first Adam" zero, and at that point an entirely new order is instituted; and this is one in which God is personally resident and dominant by His Spirit. Henceforth for all Divine purposes the indispensable condition is a new creation, a "Last Adam" personally and corporately.

Surely it is a justifiable inquiry to make as to whether the above qualification is the one supreme consideration in all choices and appointments in the service of God.

In our missionary boards and directorates what has been the basis of membership? Has it been missionary interest on the part of Christian men, plus business ability, financial resource, circle of influence, a name that obtains confidence? In our church councils and committees, has it been by popular vote governed by any one or more of human considerations? In our methods has it been thought that an efficient organization, machinery, plant, "interest" would secure the end?

Or has it honestly and truly been that, all other things given a secondary place, the Lord needs first of all such as, being full of the Holy Ghost and faith, know above all things what "prayer and fasting" mean? When in the primitive and free method of the first days the Spirit said, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them", it is a blessed thing to realize that it was not said to such as were living in comparative ease and comfort, or whose occasional or second business it was to attend to these things, but to such as "ministering to the Lord and fasting" were experimentally sharing the great spiritual cost which would fall to those who would be sent forth. It is so easy to issue instructions, give orders, make plans, manipulate lives, pass decisions, when these do not immediately involve those who do so in the spiritual cost and anguish and conflict. We think that no one ought ever to be in such a position who has not gone just as far in the cost and sacrifice, and who is not just as fully abandoned with all that he has, as those who go forth "for the sake of the Name". The Lord's ways are equal, and any inequality is unrighteousness, and ties the hands of blessing. The Holy Spirit is free to take the initiative only in so far as the holy constituents of that Name are the foundation of the purpose, policy, methods, means, motives, and lives of such as are associated with holy things. This is abundantly established in all the Scriptures. Sometimes this Divine principle is demonstrated by the reaction to its violation in the breaking forth of judgment; sometimes in reverses and defeats; sometimes in stagnation and arrest; sometimes in the abortion and miscarriage of labours.

In the New Testament we can find nothing which corresponds to the later and more modern Missionary Society. Then the Church was an organism which, by the very nature of its life-energy, was reproductive. For it is an essential and inherent characteristic of life that it reproduces. That which does not reproduce is an end in itself. But there is all the difference between reproduction by life and multiplication by imitation, as in either mass production or serial production. The Lord's intention was that everything should be Church-wise, not society-, organization-, or "mission"-wise.

The Church declined, and for many years it almost ceased to be a worldwide reproductive organism. Only in very limited ways and in remote quarters did any reproductive vitality function. Then there came the missionary renaissance, and because the Church was both out of order and out of position, the Lord blessed and used the secondary means of "Missions". He has indeed used and blessed this means, and through it has brought home to the Church its responsibility. But while we would attribute everything to this means that should be recognized, and it is not a little, we are bound to recognize that it has severe limitations and is responsible in the long run for much that defeats its own ends. It is now an open question whether there is any future in such countries as India, China, etc., for the professional missionary and

organized missions. The days for taking in something systematized from another country may well be numbered. Indeed, we know positively that there is a movement in such lands to eject and exclude professional missionary work and workers. The day is coming, if it has not already dawned, when it will be just by means of people living as people - living people - with a passion for Christ among these nations that reproduction will take place spiritually. That in itself will be but a return to the original position.

But we were speaking of the Church. It began in Jerusalem, and while its representative members went and deliberately preached in other places, certain features have to be observed. The scattering of believers (mainly by means of persecution - a Divine providence) paved the way for the reproduction of the Church in what has been called "The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church" (Roland Allen). It was the expulsion of life, not the conceiving of a "plan", "movement", "enterprise", etc. Neither was it a missionary committee in the Church, or Council, Board, etc., apart from the local church. As the churches multiplied, so they in turn each became a direct evangelizing instrument, so that Paul could speak of those who were with him thus: "Whether any inquire of... our brethren, they are the apostles of the churches" (II Cor. 8:23). There is no denying the fact that where there has been the closest approximation to this original basis, there has been, and is, the widest expansion and the best taught and spiritually strongest churches.

The fact is that while, because of the Church's failure, God owned and used a secondary means, He has never abandoned His original and primary thought, and with that thought He has irrevocably and inseparably bound up spiritual fullness. All other and lesser ways must stop short, and after reaching a certain point find that limitation, spiritually, characterizes the work and its results. Many other things may also indicate that all is not well. We can perhaps best explain all this by looking at the reason why Church-wise is God's primary and ultimate way.

Everyone will agree that in the intention of God everything appertains to His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fullness dwell" (Col. 1:19). "God hath summed up all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). "That in all things He might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18) When God's end is reached, Christ will be all in all, and "fill all things".

But while Christ retains His own personal and individual identity, He has bound up with Himself in organic oneness His Church, which is "His Body". As the personality is hidden within the physical body, and gives that body its true character, its distinctive character, and the personality of the being is its mystic but real value, so Christ is linked with, and the very reality of, the Church. This Church-Body was "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). It is "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (I Pet. 1:2). For it He gave Himself (Eph. 5:25-26). God purchased it with His own Blood (Acts 20:28). It is "the fullness (completion) of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23).

We are thus made to see that all God's interests in His Son are Body-wise and therefore of a corporate nature. He sent Saul of Tarsus into Damascus to get the answer to his inquiry through the Church. Later He ratified his apostleship and sent him to it in and by the Church. The laying on of hands in both instances was an act of identification with the Body; firstly in union, and secondly in ministry. Nothing in those days was personal, independent, or separate from the Church. Everything was on Body-ground.

This eliminated personal authority as such. This ever and always found the Holy Spirit ready to judge, direct, and empower. Elders were only representative members of the Body. They were not officials or ecclesiastics. Theirs was a spiritual function for which they had to be "full of the Holy Ghost". This "Body"

consciousness was a great reality and meant a very great deal in every situation. In serious crises - physical, circumstantial, spiritual, and temporal - it meant that need was registered in the Church and prayer was made. Those concerned acknowledged that the crises were triumphantly negotiated and passed because of the cooperation of the Church.

Evangelization was not just the salvation of so many individuals or the establishment of so many churches. It was the increase of the measure in which Christ was, and is, present in this world. It was "the building up of the Body of Christ" - "the completion of Him". It is because things have been, and are, things in themselves - evangelization, "soul-winning", "church"-building, teaching, etc. - that so much limitation exists, and after so many centuries the world is so little touched and Christians are so unsatisfactory.

WE ARE CONVINCED THAT A NEW HEAVENLY APPREHENSION OF THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST, WITH WHAT THAT IMPLIES AND DEMANDS, IN THE REVELATION AND POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO THE SOLUTION OF THE GROWINGLY FELT NEED IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF CHRISTIANS.

The missionary problem, and many another problems, can only be so solved; but it can and will be solved thus.

There is very much prayer being made, and appeal being pressed for revival. It is said and believed that if there should take place a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God, all our difficulties would be overcome, our defects and deficiencies made good, our mistakes transcended, and so on. Reference is made to such events in past times and the inferences or conclusions drawn. We would be far from denying the truth of this as to the actual period of its duration, but we do feel that a too superficial deduction or conclusion results in a delaying or staying of what God is really seeking.

What have been called revivals have really, in the Divine intention, and in their very essence, been reformations. The high tides of spiritual life have invariably had the effect of making ridiculous many of the things of which the Church was proud, making puerile many things formerly considered essential, ruling out many things prevailing, and generally upsetting the accepted and established system of things. Barriers have gone down; secondary things have been removed from primary place. Indeed the whole standard of estimates has been changed and turned about. This is true not only with regard to great "revival" times, but also in times when the Lord's people of all connections and complexions have met on purely spiritual ground, as at great conventions.

Now the point is this. If the Spirit of God so either ignores or transcends so much that marks the Christian system, and makes it as though it counts so little (and the Holy Spirit never compromises on what is vital and really of God), does it not mean that He calls for a reconsideration of very much that obtains? There are several ways of putting this. For instance: The nearer the earth and its temporal life Christendom has got, the more and greater have such things as ritual had a place... Formality and such like externals have always been the marks of low and poor spiritual conditions, and the measure of importance given to them is always an index to spiritual measure. On the other hand, a deep, strong, pure spiritual state has always been marked by simplicity. History proves this beyond a doubt, and tides of the Spirit are outstanding evidence of it. One thing is patent: it is that in such times the Holy Spirit does not revive and stimulate these religious things; He very largely negatives them. Does it not, then, become necessary for us to see and take note of the effect of a Holy Spirit movement, and by His works does not the Lord call for some adjustment in this matter?

Our present point is that we have very much evidence borne by the Spirit of God in true spiritual movements that He has weighed this whole matter as it now exists and has written it off as not only unimportant but definitely obstructive and limiting. We can reason both ways. To get away from the lesser things we need a mighty visitation of the Spirit of God; this, and this only, will do it. Most people agree to this, and we have heard very much said along this line. What has always perplexed us is that while things of this kind have been so repeatedly and strongly stated, the implication seems never to have registered itself with sufficient strength as to result in practical adjustments. So, on the other hand, if we seriously faced the things which the Spirit of God has again and again ruled out when He has had His way, would not the way be opened for a more permanent high level of spiritual life, fullness, and effectiveness?

Is not reformation an essential part of revival? Does not the Lord call for certain drastic adjustments before He can "open the windows of heaven"? Are we able to agree that what is needed is not so much a "visitation" of God in a passing wave of revival, but a reformation which will make possible a new level of life for, at least, a long time to come?

IS THERE NEED FOR A NEW REFORMATION NOW?

If so, what is the nature of that reformation?

I. Evangelical Christianity has very largely become resolved into a crystallized and set system of doctrines. Those doctrines are the Deity of Christ, His Atoning Death, His Bodily Resurrection, His Ascension and Exaltation, and, with some variations as to time and manner, His Personal Return; the Person of the Holy Spirit; the inspiration and absolute authority of the Bible, etc. These things are rightly and truly basic and governing, and must be maintained in purity and fullness. But when we have said all that could and should be said for them, we are far from having solved the problem of the Church's spiritual life and power. Orthodoxy and "soundness" never was the sign of spiritual life. Indeed "Fundamentalism" as such can be as cold, hard, cruel, bitter, dead, and ugly as the Inquisition, and it often is so. Its weapons are often completely carnal, and it does not hesitate to resort to physical force. This may be its extreme form, but even where these truths are held without these particular features, there is more often than otherwise a rigid legalism resulting in hardness, suspicion, prejudice, and exclusiveness of spirit. Many divisions have followed, not the faithful stand for the truth, but some enforcing of some aspect of a particular truth - hair-splitting. The doctrines of Christianity have become something in themselves, and because this is so a host of unhappy, unholy, and unnecessary elements have gained a strong place in Christianity. Christianity is not necessarily or inevitably established when the sum of its doctrines or tenets is enunciated and assented to. Here 'the letter may kill' rather than make alive.

II. Evangelical Christianity has become a system of denominations, sects, and sectional organizations. In fairness and righteousness, we must remember that many of these had an honourable beginning. As to denominations, in not a few cases it was a conscientious stand for some particular doctrine, doctrines, or form of expression, costing very heavily, that brought these into being. And so with many other institutions, movements, missions, and organizations; some divergence from the truth, or some failure in the responsibility, obligation, and purpose to which Christianity is committed resulted in the rising up of these specific and varied activities. It is no small history of devotion, heroism, sacrifice, and service. The story can fill a library. We take nothing from it. That is not our object. What we are saying is that many of these things have now become so largely something in themselves and are often ends in themselves. It is the thing with which so many are bound up; and here again all the unhappy elements, rivalries, jealousies, competitions, suspicions, etc., have their occasion. The effect of much of this is to make organized

Christianity the enemy of Christianity, and a menace to the real work of the Spirit of God.

III. A peril is discernible very early in the Church's life. It was in the nature of, on the one side, a giving preeminence to one side or direction of Christian interest; and, of course, on the other side, suspicion or reservation where this preeminence was not recognized. For instance, there was a strong Jewish strain in the Church and the tendency, at least, was to give preeminence to preaching the Gospel to the Jews. When the Gentiles came increasingly into the picture, these reservations and suspicions became almost acute, even between apostles. The Holy Spirit, who fortunately had a large enough place and way then, was able to negotiate this dangerous passage and resolve it into a unity. But the tendency has persisted, and with the lowering and lessening of spiritual life, the peril has passed into an actuality, and an established one at that. Evangelization of the unsaved has become something in itself, and often ends with itself. There is often no vision beyond this. If there are Christians who are not exclusively or primarily engaged in evangelistic work, they are often regarded with suspicion and reservation, even worse. Frequently the evangelist has no room for, or interest in, what is beyond the work of saving souls.

"Man looketh on the outward appearance; God looketh on the heart"... fairly sums up the governing standard of so very much in Christianity. "Man looketh on the outward." How things appear and appeal; how things impress and carry weight; how things attract and secure support; how things imply success and obtain influence. In this direction there is room for all the publicity, commercialism, competition, vainglory, display, and much more with which we have become familiar in Christian work. It is sad to see how many things the Church must have when its spiritual life is low. And it is very joyous to note how little is necessary and how many things are absent when spiritual life is high .

What is the nature of the needed reformation? In a sentence, it is all that which is bound up with a new and dominating conception of God's purposes, object, and method. When we ask what that is, the answer is a MAN! We are taken by the full revelation in the Scriptures right back into the Divine counsels before times eternal. There we are allowed to see the resolve that this universe should ultimately be centered in and governed by a Man. But not just officially, as by selection, choice, appointment arbitrarily. The determination was governed by character, type, nature. It would be a certain kind of man. He would embody all the Divine features, manifest them, and determine all values by that standard alone. That Man would eventually have "all things" gathered into and summed up in Himself on the basis of His nature. He would also "fill all things" in the same way. Thus, not by an institution, organization, movement, scheme, would God reach His end, but by an organic being. One of the supreme necessities of the Church is to either recover or have given a new and mighty realization of the significance of Christ in God' s universe. Everything hangs upon our apprehension of Him.

But when we have said this we have not said all. The fuller and further revelation of Scripture shows that in those same Eternal Divine Counsels the fullness and completeness of that Man was to be realized in a corporate way, so that eventually God' s universe would be centered in a "One New Man"; universal and countless, yet one and individual in the sense that He would indwell all, and He is one and indivisible. This corporate entity called "His Body" was "foreordained to be conformed to the image of His (God' s) Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). This sets forth God's object, and shows His method. The Divine object is not an institution, a religion, a dogma, a fraternity, an organization, a system of doctrines, a set of works and activities. It is a spiritual man, an organic spiritual body .

Now, to resolve into one issue all that has been stated and indicated, what does it amount to? Just this: if Christ in His personal significance and in His corporate expression were really dominantly and

overwhelmingly present to the eye and heart of the Church, on the one hand numerous things which now limit, hinder, retard, weaken, and defeat the Church would fall away and just cease to have any place of government; and on the other hand there would be the effects, if not the event, of "Pentecost"; i.e. life, power, victory, fullness, and great joy with real fruitfulness. What we need, we repeat, is not the transient event of "Pentecost" but the abiding effects; not only revival but reformation.

Whenever and wherever by a new revealing of Himself, His purpose and method, the Lord has secured those who have moved out on to the ground of Christ only and in fullness, they have always had to meet a great and painful cost. Usually it has been their own brethren in Christ who have exacted it. Fake charges of "forming a new sect"; "seeking a name for themselves"; "dividing the people of God"; becoming "extreme"; "thinking they only are right"; etc., have been leveled at them, and they have been "cast out". The truth is that, in many cases, they have only taken the ground which everybody knows is the ground of spiritual fullness; where questions of "church connection" and orders, etc., are never raised, where such things as joining something or conforming to a special teaching or practice are never mentioned, but "Christ is all and in all"; and the one concern has been that He should have what is His ground and way of continuous increase .

How difficult it is for organized Christianity to believe that anything very much of real value can go on without machinery, publicity, and all the framework of organized work! May it not be well to pause and consider whether God's mightiest and most fruitful works in nature and in grace are not done hiddenly, quietly, unobtrusively, and in many cases, done before anyone knows about it? What of the resurrection of nature every springtime? The law of God's highest work is the biological - the law of life; it is organic.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-release-of-the-lord/>

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