

The Rights of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the profound implications of Christ's embodiment of God's rights and the contrasting spirit of Antichrist in the lives of believers.

Scripture: Colossians 1:13

Topics: "Faith in Trials", "The Rights of God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of understanding the rights of God through the lens of Christ, the Church, and the Antichrist. He explains that Jesus embodies God's rights and serves as the ultimate answer to the questions of existence, while the Antichrist represents a spirit that opposes God's interests. Sparks highlights the importance of spiritual intelligence and the necessity for believers to recognize the divine purpose behind their faith. He warns of the intensifying spirit of Antichrist in the world and calls for a faith that trusts God unconditionally, even amidst trials. Ultimately, the sermon challenges believers to align themselves with God's rights and purposes in their lives.

Transcript

There are three short series of passages of Scripture in connection with each of these to which I would direct you at the outset.

The Christ

Col. 1:13-18; Heb. 2:5-10,16; Eph. 1:22; 4:10.

The Church

Eph. 1:22; 2:14-16; 3:20-21.

The Antichrist

1 John 2:18-22; 4:2-3; 2 Thess. 2:3-10.

There is a preliminary word that I want to say before I come directly to the matter of the Christ, the Antichrist, and the church. The apostle John by the Holy Spirit, at the opening of his Gospel, calls Jesus, Son of God, the "Logos". The apostle Paul calls Jesus "the wisdom of God" and "the power of God". Those titles have a special significance. That significance is that Jesus is the embodiment of divine

reason, divine ideas. Behind everything in this universe, as we know it, there are occasions, causes, reasons, explanations, meanings, things which demand answers, and the Holy Spirit's work, among other things, and one of His primary works, is to reveal those meanings, those reasons, those explanations, and lead us to the why and wherefore of things in the mind of God. All that explanation is bound up in the very Person of the Lord Jesus. He is the personification of God's reason, the explanation and the answer to the things which lie behind this universe. God's answers are not verbal answers, God's explanations are not in words. God's full answer is in a Person, and it is therefore the revelation of Jesus Christ which gets behind everything and gives us the key to everything; that answers every question and imparts all the knowledge that is necessary for us to have in order that we may come into perfect oneness with God.

Now, you may ask why I say this. Well, the answer is that, in the development of sonship, God wants His own children to be intelligent; not just to have intelligence and knowledge for the sake of having, but because this spiritual intelligence is life and is power. The knowledge of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is life, and it is power. The revelation of Jesus Christ is a thing before which all the power of evil is destined and doomed to go down, and it is likewise that which is to bring in, in a final way, the condition which is wholly according to God's original thought. When He is fully and finally manifested, there is something which will happen in the realm of evil, on the one hand, so that it is nullified, its end is reached, while, on the other hand, there will come in that condition which God intended should be.

Now you see the importance of having explanations, the importance of recognising that there is a reason for everything, a meaning in everything, and that the Lord Jesus has come to bring, in His own Person, the meaning of things to light. God does not want us just to accept the acts of God; He wants us to know the meaning of His acts. He does not want us just to see the events; He wants us to have the explanation of those events. The all-inclusive act and event of God is Jesus Christ, and we are not to accept Jesus Christ just as a fact. We have to know what He means, and that in every direction, in every realm. This knowledge is purely of a spiritual kind, and, as I have said, is going to operate tremendously in two directions, one against evil, the other to bring in the state which expresses God's own thought. Now, that may all seem very high-flown and difficult, but what I am wanting to get at, and what I want you to grasp before we go on, is that there is something which lies behind all that we read in the Word of God. There is something which lies behind the fact of Christ, an immense thing which lies behind Him, a reason. There is that which lies behind the church. The church is the answer to something, the explanation of something. The church is the embodiment of a divine reason. We have to know what that is. Now that applies to everything that we have in God's Word. We have not just to see that there is something said, stated, presented; we have to ask the question, What is it, as great as the mind of God, which lies behind that? What is it? Therein lies the realm of our spiritual education, illumination, instruction. That is the sphere of the Holy Spirit's function, to make that known, and when God has a people in full intelligence in that spiritual way, He has got something which to Him is of tremendous importance and value. Now you will see how it bears upon what follows.

We go on, then, towards some consideration of the Christ, the Antichrist, and the church. I want to condense those vast things into as small a compass as I can. So, to begin with, I would say that there are three things which are common features in each of these.

1) A type of creation

Firstly, a type of creation. It goes by the name of man. Jesus Christ is a type of creation; Antichrist is a type (I am going to vary the word) of creature. Antichrist is not created as Antichrist, but is a type of

creature, now as existing, of course, in the more general sense, a type of creation, of being. Then the church, the Body of Christ, is a type of creation, "one new man", a new creation. So you see that first thing is characteristic of all three.

2) A power, a principle

Secondly, a power, a dynamic, a principle. When we speak of principle, we mean some working thing, some governing thing, and all three of these come under that denominator also. Christ is a power as well as a person; a power, a dynamic, -- if you will allow me to say it -- a principle. That is not taking anything away from His personality, but He is an embodiment of a principle of God in this universe; a law, if you like; something which governs in a mighty way; He is a power. Antichrist is a power, a force, a principle, an active element. The passage in 2 Thessalonians 2 makes it perfectly clear: "whose coming is after the working (the Greek is "after the energising") of Satan with all power (dunamis)". Antichrist is a power.

The church, which is His Body, is a power. It is not only the aggregate of individual members, it is something which registers spiritual force and energy in the spiritual realm. Of course, if the church were only a mere organisation, a congregation, it would not matter to Satan or anybody else, but when constituted by God, it is a power, it is something to be reckoned with in this universe. Would to God it were living more fully up to that divine conception and need. Nevertheless, if there are but two or three gathered into the Name, representing the church in a true Holy Spirit oneness, there is a registration of power in the unseen realm.

3) A kingdom

Thirdly, a kingdom, a dominion. Christ is a type of creation; Christ is a power; Christ is a kingdom. "The kingdom of the Son of his love"; all those passages in which we read of His being put above all, being in pre-eminence, with all things under His feet, all this speaks of His kingdom, His dominion. But the Antichrist also represents a kingdom, a dominion, and the church, the Body of Christ, carries that same significance; in union with Christ, it is a kingdom. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The church is "the fulness of him that filleth all...". Then what is man? "Thou madest him to have dominion"!

Now these things I think are perfectly plain and perfectly simple, but they only lead to other things. There are other things which are bound up with these. The first of the issues is no less a matter than the rights of God.

The Recovery of the Rights of God

With the Christ, the one all-inclusive issue is the rights of God. He is the very incarnation and embodiment of those rights. You ask now the meaning of Christ? Get back behind the fact of Christ, behind the Person, behind the Christ presented to us, whom we accept personally, whose teaching we accept, whose work we accept and wonder at, the facts of whose life and death, resurrection and ascension we believe in; get back behind it all, and what is the meaning? What does He mean? Why Jesus Christ? The answer is, "The rights of God in this universe". Now that goes to the heart of our first point about Christ, namely, of His being a type of creation; a kind of being, a man, in whom the rights of God take the entire place of concern and devotion. Here you have a Man, "The man Christ Jesus". "There is... one mediator... between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). "What is man... the son of man?" "We see Jesus"! or in the familiar designation of 1 Cor. 15:45, "the last Adam". Here you have a type of creation, and the

explanation of that particular type of creation is the rights of God. He is a Man whose spirit, being in living union with God, is governed by God's Spirit, and all in relation to God's rights. He is governed by God's Spirit. He is governed in His mind, His heart, His will, His reason, His desire, His choice, by the Spirit of God in relation to God's rights.

Now you see the challenge came there right at the beginning. The assault was made upon the first Adam, to get him to use his mind, his reason, his desire, his feelings, his will, his choice, as out of relation to God, apart from consideration for God, in an unrelated and independent way, putting back what God had made known as His mind, and acting apart from and behind that. Of course, the object of the adversary was to rob God of His rights as they were bound up with that man, and from that time onward God's rights were taken from Him in that creation, in this creation, in this universe.

The whole story of the Old Testament, as of the New Testament, and of all the ages, is the terrible story of the battle for the rights of God. Through seer and prophet, and every divine representative, the conflict was concerning the rights of God in this universe; rights which were being stolen from Him, rights which He was not being ceded; rights which, being His, were not recognised, but were taken and employed for other ends, for another purpose, for another kingdom. Here in the last Adam you have one whose spirit, being in living union with God, brings Him entirely under the government of God's Spirit, and the whole explanation of Jesus Christ is the rights of God. I am not forgetting His deity. Do not misunderstand me. I am speaking of Him now as the representative Man, the Son of Man. He is the One who gives God the full and final place, whose sole business is that connected with the rights of God; and these, through Adam's failure, have become a matter of conflict. So that in Him as the last Adam, the representative Man, all has to be perfected through sufferings.

If we inquire as to the nature of His being made "perfect through suffering", the answer is in one word, "He... suffered being tempted." Now, the channel of the temptation may vary from time to time. At one time it may be His physical condition, and this may be one of hunger, as at the beginning of His career, or it may be, as at the end, the dire agony of the cross. At another time the means of the temptation may be of a different kind. The temptation may come along the line of some spiritual concern, disappointment, -- we cannot cover the whole ground of the temptations of Jesus Christ, the forms of temptation, of trial, of testing, so many were these. But it was the trial that was the suffering to Him, the tempting was the suffering: "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin". He is being made perfect through the sufferings of temptation; temptation to impatience, for example, to bring in His kingdom along popular lines by using the powers at His command. How many were His temptations! By these means He was made perfect.

Now when you get behind the temptation, and you ask, Why tempted, what is the point, what is the meaning, what is the reason? The answer again is, He has come solely for the rights of God to be recovered and eternally secured against any further possibility of their being lost. Every temptation was an effort to get Him away from that ground of God's rights. "This is my beloved Son"! There is a statement made by God. Thereupon a situation of severe difficulty arises, and over against the first voice we hear a second, "If thou be the Son...". There is an "if". Whence does that "if" derive its strength? From the circumstance in which He is at the moment. Oh, there is a strength in temptation when you are physically exhausted! We all know that. We know how much easier it is for the enemy to gain an advantage at a time of physical exhaustion, whatever may be the cause or occasion. But combined with that, you see there had been a time of spiritual experience, and those who know anything about spiritual experience, know that it takes its toll in the physical realm and leaves open to the assault of the enemy. Well now --

temptation to act from Himself independently in self-will, self-preservation, to vindicate Himself. If Thou be the Son of God, do something! You are in necessity, you are in need, you are in difficulty; it is in your power to do something, and if you do that, that will prove that you are that somebody. You see it is all this subtle "if" question. The point is, can such a One who has come expressly for the rights of God, allow anything in Him to raise a question about what God has said, what God has affirmed, about God? If? If? Now you and I may have had many "ifs" and many questions. You and I are only in the course of things, but we know quite well that what God is seeking to do with us is to eliminate the "if"; that is, to get us steadily moving to the place where, no matter what the conditions are, we have no "if" about God. The power by which we shall reach that position is the power of the absolute triumph of the Lord Jesus on that same ground. He succours those who are tempted because He, having been tempted, has triumphed, has been made perfect through such sufferings. But He had no man to succour Him in temptation. He passed into it and met it all in an utter way upon His soul. Would He move from His ground of God's rights? God has a right to be believed: that goes to the foundation of the universe. God has a right to be believed; God has the right to be trusted; God has the right to be obeyed; these are God's rights in God's universe. Under dire conditions, the Lord Jesus fought out the battle of God's rights and has become the perfected Man after God's own heart, a type, the first fruits, the first-begotten among many brethren, the One who, having been made perfect through sufferings, is bringing many sons to glory. Here is Christ, the type, and you see the type of man God is after.

Antichrist -- A Spirit as well as a Person

Now, just for a moment in passing on, you want to know what Antichrist is? On that point, namely, the type of creature, the type of being, the type is just the opposite of the Christ. All-inclusively, it is that which has no concern for God's rights, no consideration for God's place, but rather acts towards its own ends: and, beloved, this is where the application becomes so personal and so solemn; where it is so practical. Antichrist is, before all else, a spirit. We shall probably speak more fully about Antichrist later, but I want you to notice this, that John speaks of Antichrist in three ways.

First of all, he speaks in the general sense -- antichrist: no article at all -- "...antichrist cometh". Then he speaks in the collective sense and says there are many antichrists. But he further speaks in that particular sense of the Antichrist. Do you mark that? Then he says this, "Every spirit... this is the spirit of antichrist." Antichrist, then, is basically a spirit, and that is the spirit which works contrary to the course taken by the Christ. He has taken a course of utter and unreserved abandonment to the rights and interests of God, no matter what it costs, even up to the last, the pouring out of His soul unto death, -- "not my will, but thine". All is bound up with God's rights. The spirit of Antichrist is that which works contrary to that and has interests that are not the interests of God; self-interests, ends which are not God's ends: and -- will you suffer this word? -- the spirit of Antichrist has oft-times actuated children of God. The spirit of Antichrist is in our fallen nature, and we know it well; we know the conflict concerning the rights and the will of God.

We know the awful conflict arising in temptations to impatience, temptation to do something when God's hand is upon us keeping us from doing anything, not allowing us to do things, but saying all the time, if not in word to us, "Be still." If He were to say it to us in words, of course, it would be a great help to us; but He does not help us in that way, He simply does not allow us. Do something! says this will, says this tempter behind this fallen nature, this rebel nature, Do something! Take it into your hands; you can if you wish: you can do something, you can have something, you can show something; it is in your power: do it! Oh! the temptation along the line of impatience is only one of the thousand ways in which we are tempted, and whenever we yield to that temptation, Antichrist has triumphed, the spirit of Antichrist. I know that it means

much more than that, but I am seeking thus to bring this to its practical application, and not just to have an objective conception of truth. How this thing applies is what matters, and the help that might come to us in this consideration, I think, lies here. "The man Christ Jesus" has on the one hand triumphed in every such temptation as is common to His brethren: on the other hand He is in God's presence to succour us in those very temptations, that we shall be conformed to His image and eventually become the type of creation that God has ever had in mind, in whom there is vested His rights, who will be the custodians of the rights of God in this universe. Now, that sounds an immense thing, perhaps too great; but is not that the very significance of the cherubim all the way through Scripture?

You have in the cherubim representative figures of the whole creation. They are four and four is the number of creation. They are fourfold, embracing the whole creation, and in the cherubim, from the gates of the garden right on to the Revelation at the end, it is the custodianship of God's rights that is in view. There they stand to begin with, with a flame of a sword. God's rights have been violated and they take up the challenge; and then, right through Scripture, until the four living ones are seen at the end, you find the same principle, the rights of God -- they worshipped. And what is worship? What is adoration? Is it not ascribing unto God His rights? Is it not bringing to Him that which is His due? Is it not the recognition of Him as having a right to all things in all the universe? God is after a man, a corporate, universal man, and that is where the church comes in, as one with Christ and over against the Antichrist: and it is not just a case of outward association; it is something wrought right into the heart of every member of Christ. That something is what is true of Christ, the triumph of the rights of God, the interests of God over all selfish, personal, worldly, fleshly interests and concerns. God is doing that with you and with me.

The Practical Issue

Now, I must stop there for the time being. It is only a broad view of things. Beloved, this is not an untimely word. There are other things which we could say, but everybody who has eyes to see and ears to hear recognises that the full, final manifestation of the Antichrist is coming very near. The whole thing is being narrowed down, concentrated. The final issue looms upon the horizon. Oh, then, what does that say to me? What is the value of all this to me? I do not want just to be a student of prophecy, just to know what the Bible teaches about Antichrist. No, what is the spiritual value to me, to you, if we can in any way discern the development of the spirit of Antichrist, the intensification of this thing in God's universe, the heading up of this thing to a climax: and we are blind if we cannot see that today. If I thought it were wise and would in any way strengthen what I am saying, I could give you strings of quotations from up-to-date utterances, in word and by pen, which are the very essence of the ultimate expression of Antichrist: the worship of man, names of men being mentioned in this way: "He is our Jesus Christ and his books are our sermon on the mount." Oh, any amount of that sort of thing. I say we are blind if we cannot see the heading up of this matter. If we see that, there are two things that we may expect. One is the manifestation of Christ. Ah yes, but there is another thing, and that is the intensification of the Spirit of the Christ in the Body of Christ for its conformity to the image of Christ. The Body of Christ is not just some entity, it is the embodiment of spiritual things brought to perfection; and, if I am not mistaken, this thing is true in the cases of multitudes of the Lord's own children, that they are being pressed and pressed and pressed, almost out of measure, as to whether they are going to believe and trust God despite everything that seems to contradict God; whether God is going to be trusted for His own sake, believed in for what He is, not for what He does; not for the deliverance which He works, not for the help that He brings, not for the manifestations of Himself in any way, but because He is. He is God, and, being what He is, He must be trusted, must be believed in, must be obeyed. We must stand our ground and not move, simply because

we believe that God is, and that He is what He is; and that is the test which comes, that is the test which is being pressed home. He allows all sorts of things to happen which look like contradictions of Himself. He takes us by ways which are more than human nature can stand. We are conscious of coming again and again to the point where our ability to go on and to endure is at an end. We are in the final test. It is the whole question of faith.

Faith! That is where Adam broke down; that is where God's rights were lost; that is where Satan scored and triumphed, and on that point God is going to get back His rights. It is all focussing down to one point, namely, faith. The final issue for the saints in this dispensation is the issue of a faith which is faith indeed, without any bolstering up, any supports, any kind of help; faith which is only succoured by the Son of God through the Eternal Spirit and not by anything else. Are we in that issue? I think we are. And, so far as the spiritual principle is concerned, it is a terrific battle with Antichrist, so that the saints, the very elect, if it were possible, would be moved from their ground and carried away.

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