

The Spiritual & Natural Man - Part 1

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the true nature of Christianity and choosing the spiritual man over the natural man.

Duration: 55:18

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 2:1-8, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:22-24

Topics: "Natural Man"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of letting go and surrendering to God's will. He uses the example of Jacob, who tenaciously held on to what he wanted throughout his life. The preacher highlights that relying on our own determination and strength is not enough to fully connect with God. Instead, the Christian life requires learning how to let go and trust in God's plan. The sermon also explores the concept of transformation and how trials and adversities play a role in shaping believers into a new kind of humanity.

Transcript

Meditation at this time, I want that we should read from the first letter to the Corinthians and chapter two, chapter two of the first letter to the Corinthians, and I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the mystery of God, for I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Howbeit we speak wisdom among the perfect, yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world which are coming to naught. But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory, which none of the rulers of this world knoweth. For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

But as it is written, things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God, which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged.

But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. And one fragment from the second letter, and chapter three, and I want to condense this eighteenth verse of chapter three, but we are transformed into the same image.

We are transformed, that is, we pass from one form to another. As I have moved about amongst Christians in many parts of this world, and in many situations, one thing has been growing upon me more and more strongly. In the presence of a great deal of confusion amongst Christians, and many complications in Christianity, the thing that has become stronger and stronger with me is the need that Christians should really know what Christianity is, really what it is that they are in as Christians.

That sounds perhaps rather drastic, but I am quite sure that a very great deal of the trouble, and I think we all agree there is a good deal of trouble in Christianity generally, a very great deal of the trouble is due to a failure to really understand what Christianity is. And it may seem strange that I should come to speak to you, mostly experienced and more or less mature Christians, about the true nature of Christianity. Well, if you feel that that is presumptuous and hardly called for, be patient.

And I think before we get very far you will feel as I do. Although we know a good deal about Christianity as it is in the New Testament taught, we too are very often in difficulty ourselves. For the simple reason, or the ground reason, we have not really grasped the meaning of what we are in.

May I say this to you, and a moment's thought, I am sure I will make you agree, that this major part of the New Testament, particularly after the book of the Acts, I mean all these letters which make up this larger section of the New Testament, it is all bearing upon this one thing, to make Christians understand what Christianity is. And if that created the New Testament, and it was all to Christians, surely we have to conclude that even New Testament Christians needed Christianity explaining to them. That even then there was this necessity of just defining the real nature of that into which they had come.

Well, begin with your letter to the Romans. Was that necessary for Christians? And it was written to Christians. And what was it written for? To put them right in the matter of Christianity.

Apparently, those people were not quite clear in their position, in their lives, in their hearts, as to the implications of that into which they had come by faith in Jesus Christ. Proceed, as we are going to do, into the letters to the Corinthians. And what are they? Set over against a background of real confusion and contradiction, as we know, in Corinth, those letters were written, really, to try and make those Christians understand what Christianity really is.

And so on and on through the New Testament. That is the object of it all. That we, with all who believe in the Lord Jesus, should really have a clear understanding of what this is.

The meaning of the name we bear, the meaning of that which we believe, into which by faith we have come, by the grace of God. And we can gather it all up in this simple statement, that the whole Christian life is an education as to what Christianity is. Is that true? Do you not sometimes stand in the presence of some situation, some difficulty, some trial, some complication, some perplexity, some experience, and say, what does it all mean? What does it all mean? I am a Christian.

I put my faith in the Lord Jesus, by trusting Him. I am His. But, but, I do not understand what it all means.

My experience. Why I am going this way? Why this has come my way? Why my life is such as it is, in these many things that are so full of mystery and perplexity? What is it I have got into? Is this, is this Christianity? Is this really what I have to expect and accept? If so, I need understanding. I really do need enlightenment.

I need help, as a Christian, for this thing is often beyond me altogether. All right. That is the setting.

Is that true? Well, if there is anyone here this evening who has never been that way, who has never had a moment like that, whose path has been so nice and smooth, and everything so right, and perfect, and well-adjusted, and without any kind of trouble, I think I will excuse you if you like to get up and go home. I have nothing to say to you. So, I must assume that if you do not go out, you agree.

And I think that is true. Well, now, what is it? What is it? What is the point? The point at which these words, in 2 Corinthians 3, 18, are focused. We are transformed.

We Christians. And it is the present active tense. We are being transformed, a process.

We are in a process of transformation, passing from one form to another. There is a sense in which that fragment, that condensed verse, put into those few words, touches the heart of the whole New Testament, and explains everything. Well, having said that, we come back to the chapter which we read, the second chapter of the first letter.

And this letter, indeed, both of these letters, and I go further, all the letters, but this has an example, a very good example. This letter is built around two contrasted words. They are in this second chapter of the first letter.

Those two contrasted words describe two different types of humanity, two different manhoods. And between the two, firmly and squarely, the cross of Jesus Christ is planted. Look at the chapter and read it again.

Read it in the light of that last statement. When I came to you, I determined, I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and everything afterward rests upon that distinction. The distinction here between these two types, which the cross divides, and says that belongs to one category of human beings, and this belongs to another category of human beings, and there is a cleavage cut by the cross of Jesus Christ between those two, which separates them, and makes them two different species of mankind.

That truth follows right through this letter. You must read the rest of the letter, and the second letter, and as much more of the New Testament as you like, but read through this first letter with that that I have just stated in your mind. The apostle here speaks about a foundation and a building.

It says, other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But let every man take heed how he builds thereon, and then he drives the wedge of the cross right in, right into the superstructure, and he says of one kind of work and works, for every man's work shall be tried by fire, he says. And every man take heed how he builds one kind of work or works, which are the product of one kind, one type of man, of Christian, another kind of work or works, the product of another kind.

The first is going up in the flames and smoke, and will never be found in eternity. It's gone forever. The second will abide, that's the apostle's word, will abide, will abide.

It will abide the fire, the test, it will abide time, it will abide everything and be found in the ultimate structure. Building of God. See, he's applying this principle of the divide.

The divide between two kinds of people, Christian people, and two kinds of work or fruits from each respectively. And the building, he says, as to its eternal value will be determined by who is producing it, what kind of man, manhood, is producing it. Which of the two is producing this building? Building on Christ.

Building on Christ. Think about that. These are not non-Christians.

What an immense amount is being built upon Christ, that's going up in smoke. And I say, it's going to be determined, for every man's work shall be tried by fire, and its real value, its endurance, will depend upon where it comes from. That is, from which of these two types of manhood? Now, you're wondering what the two words are, which define the two.

Well, you've read the chapter, chapter two, first letter. Now, the natural man, he that is spiritual. There are your two words, the natural and the spiritual.

Christians. Not unconverted people. Not non-Christians.

Is it necessary for me to put in all the detail, to confirm and ratify what I'm saying? May I remind you that the Apostle Paul had been in Corinth for two whole years with these people. And I don't know what you think. You had the Apostle Paul with you for two whole years, going in and out, concentrating upon you, what you would have had.

There he was for two whole years, amongst them, going in and out, teaching probably every day, sometime. And he went away. And he went away for five years.

He was away for five years, and then he sent to Corinth to get... He'd heard some things. It's reported by the... them of the household of Chloe. Got a report.

I wish everybody would do what the Apostle did. Not take the report without investigating. He got the report.

But he immediately dispatched a reliable messenger to investigate. To either find the thing was not true, or find that it was. The messenger went and came back and said, it's all true, and worse.

Worse than the report. In five years. The deterioration.

You perhaps were startled by that. Shocked. You say, can it be? Well, remember your messages to the seven churches in Asia.

Remember how those churches began. All of them. The wonderful things in those churches at the beginning.

Read the story of the beginning of the church in Ephesus. My, what a move. What a move.

Against such tremendous antagonism and hostility. They came out clear and brought all their magic books. And the prices given.

Tremendous amounts. They represented human values. Brought them out into the street, perhaps marketplace, or some open space.

And set them all aflame. Burnt the whole lot. Their thoroughgoing devotion.

Where are you with that church in the Revelation? Thou hast left thy first love. Repent. Repent.

Consider from whence thou hast fallen. What can happen? What can happen? Well, I put that in my way of emphasizing this possibility, at least, of declension. And why, why, why? In Corinth.

Why in Ephesus? Why in all the others that declined as they did? Come back to your two men. The two men inside of one man. The two men inside of each individual.

It's not a dividing of a company into this category and that category. But the two things in a person. You know, we are all, if we are the Lords, in some measure, at least, natural and spiritual.

You agree with that? Well, it doesn't need arguing, does it? You know, I know. The question is not whether we are all together perfect. And there is no more of the natural in us.

That's not the point. The point is, who is dominating? Who is governing? Which of the two? Here at Corinth, as we see by the letter, it was the natural man that was in control. The natural man in the men and the women.

The natural that had taken ascendancy over the spiritual man. Two words then, here, are natural. And you do doubt that I should tell you that the Greek word is *soliquel*.

And the spiritual. The spiritual. The man of soul.

The man of spirit. Always in conflict. Who is going to have the upper hand? The mastery.

In every one of us. Two are in each person. Now, what is this natural category, this natural species? Well, look at the letter again.

First of all, first of all, the dominance, ascendancy, control of intellectualism. We've read the chapter. Read it again.

The wisdom of this world. The wisdom of this world. That's the thing that's being marked and underscored as a part of the trouble.

The control of intellectualism. The natural reason. The natural mind.

The idea, the idea that you're going to solve the problems of life along intellectual lines. Will you tell me that that is not a peril of Christianity today? It's everywhere. It's everywhere.

It shouts at you from the religious press. You may not read so much of it. It's my business to be familiar with what is happening.

What is happening in the Christian theological world. And I tell you friends that as I receive certain Christian magazines, theological magazines, I find death. They're wearisome to the spirit.

It's all this terrific effort to solve the problems of Christianity by the human intellect. Research and argument and discussion and debate and thesis and what not. Philosophical Christianity.

Try to solve spiritual problems. And what a weariness it is. I put down these papers sometimes.

Can't finish the thing. It's so dead. So utterly lifeless.

And that sort of thing is everywhere. Everywhere. It's thought that if you go to ask seats and seminaries of learning with a clever brain able to put out a convincing argument, you're going to say those are never a greater fallacy.

And this letter to the Corinthians says that. Read the second chapter again. It's saying that Paul is saying Paul was an educated man.

So much so that for two thousand years the best scholars have found him beating them at every point. They haven't mastered him yet. Go to your religious bookshops and look at the shelves on the exposition of the New Testament and you'll find that Paul predominates.

I got a book by one of our leading professors of theology in the university and it was called A Portrait of Peter. And this man with all his learning with to give us a portrait of Peter I opened the book and I found that the first few pages were wholly occupied with Paul. I opened the book and I found that the first few pages were wholly occupied with Paul.

He couldn't get to Peter because Paul was in the way. And the issue the issue of his attempt was well Peter's a great man but Paul very much greater. This man Paul was an educated man an intellectual man a learned man cannot you cannot discredit Paul along that line.

Not at all. He'll beat you every time in that realm.

But listen you Corinthians when I came to you I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom I was with you in fear and trembling I had determined made up my mind come to this resolved position that I would know nothing amongst you intellectual Corinthians save Jesus Christ and him crucified what was Paul's conclusion no use however much I have of the school whatever I may know however I might be able to argue with the learned Corinthians or Athenians on Mars I'll get nowhere along that line with the spiritual situation like this I made up my mind part of the natural man to think that you're going to be able to build up something by intellectual scholastic academic acumen fact is what intellect can build up intellect can pull down what the spirit of God builds nothing can pull down

then look again this is prominent word power wisdom power that's in the chapter power and there at Corinth there was a worshipping of natural power ability to conquer by natural strength you can call it powerism for it was an ism there crush by your superior strength impose something forceful mighty upon people being only strong enough and you can solve all the problems change all the situations powerism natural man's idea of how it's going to be done and then as it is shown so clearly here intellectualism

powerism emotionalism it's a large place going to capture and captivate and master and gain your end by force of emotion stirring of people's feelings playing upon their feelings working working upon them until they make a response almost hysterical and if you do that well thoroughly

you'll get some Christians by that means you'll possibly say not at all not at all it's evident that these Corinthians were very emotional people you see what does the apostle put over against those three aspects of the natural man over against the wisdom foolishness it says through the foolishness of the preaching some might be one the foolishness of the preaching foolishness the great thing with the apostle Paul is foolishness if you like to go through his writings we were fools for Christ's sake counted foolish what did he mean well he didn't mean be simpletons what we immediately take to be the meaning of being foolish what Paul meant by foolishness was the denial the denial that intellectualism can find out God princes of this world and the wisdom of this world did not find out God

could not find out God could find out nothing to do with God you recalling the whole chapter now the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God neither can he know them neither can he know them the denial that all the wisdom the philosophy of the Greeks as there in Corinth where they boasted of this thing so much never got through the barrier never got through the barrier to find God never could succeed that's what he calls foolishness what he means by foolishness that all this power of mind projected asserted in any way whatever will come up against the barrier and not get through not find God or the things of God it's all written off as foolishness foolishness when the quest for God is pursued along that line how foolish it is and he gives a wonderful almost a startling

example of this the princes of this world's wisdom by their wisdom killed the prince of life not much sense in that is it not much logic in that not much philosophy in that so he puts what he calls foolishness over against their wisdom meaning a positive denial registered by the cross of the Lord Jesus that mere intellectualism can find God and the things of God it cannot because that kind of man cannot he cannot the natural man cannot over against the powerism of this mentality of the natural man the apostle almost glories in using the word weakness says that even Christ was crucified through weakness he always speaking about his own weakness glorying in it what does he mean he means this the denial that this kind of human grip hold force tenacity assertiveness can achieve anything in

the spiritual world my what what a building we are tearing down aren't we let me just put it this way what the apostle means and he says it he puts it actually into words what he means is the ability to let go the ability to let go to relax your your natural tenacity and let go do you know that has been the test of man right from the beginning was it the test of Abraham to let go what even God had given him Isaac the test of this man's real spirituality was his ability to let go was it true of Jacob was he a man of tenacity determination man who would get what he wanted at any price the cost of anybody else's convenience were being going to get it isn't that the issue of Peniel Jabot I will not let thee go as Jacob has been like that all his life holding on tenaciously holding on to what

he wanted what he got or what he intended to have the finger of God touched the hollow of his thigh that time oh you can see he's a cringing man how he meets his brother Esau after that you're not going whether it's Abraham or Jacob or any of the others that we might mention you're not going to get through with God fully and finally by your own natural determination tenacity one of the great lessons of the Christian life is this not true friends one of the great lessons of the Christian life is how to let go to God oh with all the exaltations to be strong in the Lord to endure to quit you like men be strong it does not mean this natural strength it's another kind of strength very different kind of strength and a strength which is only

seen by our ability to let other people sometimes have

their way get what they're after set us at naught hold grip maintain things in their hands to our disadvantage and our real strength is in our weakness I said the apostles put this into words read your second chapter of the letter to the philippians he emptied himself though he was equal with God emptied himself took the form of a bond slave became obedient well has it proved to be the right thing we are being transformed see the point now well we haven't finished yet over against intellectualism, foolishness over against powerism weakness over against emotionalism what the denial that the quest and craving and pursuit of sensationalism will get you there for I believe that was the heart of their their lust for I use that word their excessive desire their outreach of soul for spiritual

gifts always impressive that it's to the Corinthians more than far more than to any other church in the new testament so much said about spiritual gifts these demonstrations this display these things that you could see and glory in because you could see it all out and I am quite sure from what we read you've gone into some of those gatherings in Corinth you would have seen some terrible things shocking things the behavior of hysteria as they made these spiritual gifts as they thought as they thought the ground and nature of their spirituality and they are the most unspiritual church of all balance over against unbalanced lopsidedness in the Christian life you notice one characteristic of these Christians one defect which is written so clearly and so largely here in a letter the lack of

the power of spiritual discernment spiritual perception and the absence of spiritual discernment and perception and spiritual intuition which warns which says inwardly to you in the presence of things don't be carried away don't be thrown off your balance this thing may be alright in its right place under proper control and be careful there's a snare in every spiritual gift and if you make the gift the main thing and not the spiritual meaning of it that thing which in itself may be quite right will lead you into trouble get you into trouble I'm recounting a lot of history you know when I say that perhaps some of the biggest problems that some of us have had to do with in people have been the result of this unbalanced quest for the manifestation and sensational aspects of Christianity our

asylums are full of people who did that well perhaps some of you are not able to understand all this but this is the situation here and I'm only saying it to show that there are these two orders two categories what I have called species of humanity which have their residence within one shell of the human body soul and spirit they're there and the apostle writes to these same people because second letter is only continuation of the first in principle or on the principles we are being changed what's going on what is the process of the spirit of God in the believer what is the meaning of all this that the Lord allows to come our way this discipline this chastening, these trials these adversities, these difficulties these strange things to use Peter's word as though some strange thing has

happened unto you things that seem strange to us as coming from God or being allowed by God what is the meaning of it all to bring about the change the transformation from one species to another from one kind of humanity to another you got that there's something in this trial in this adversity in this suffering under the sovereignty of God there's something

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