

# The Spiritual & Natural Man - Part 4

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being transformed by the renewing of one's mind and being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, in order to resist the enemy's attempt to spoil the spiritual man.*

**Duration:** 32:33

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:1-11, John 17:14-16

**Topics:** "Natural Man"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness as described in the Gospel of Matthew. The speaker emphasizes the significance of this event in the context of Jesus' mission of redemption. The enemy, Satan, is determined to spoil and undo Jesus, just as he did with the first Adam. The speaker highlights the battle for the spiritual man and the ultimate criterion for judgment being the measure of Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

If you are not acquainted with the fact, may I remind you that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things.

He himself is judged of no man. And Paul, when he opened this letter addressing the Corinthians, told them that he had definitely resolved that his presence amongst them would be with one object only, and that he would know nothing among them save Jesus Christ and him crucified. We have been seeking to understand, I trust a little more clearly and fully, the difference that Jesus Christ and the knowledge of Jesus Christ makes as to the kind of person that we are, and to which category we belong.

Of these two mentioned, the natural man and he that is spiritual, we have been looking at this Jesus Christ with a view to seeing what it is about him that is of this category and nature, type, called he that is spiritual. What that means. Remembering that the word has a lot to say about being conformed to his image.

So I think we shall see further as we proceed this evening. Now we left the Lord Jesus this afternoon on the father side of the Jordan, the heavens open and the Holy Spirit lighting upon him. And the voice of the father attesting him as his beloved son.

We saw that this image to which we are to be conformed is one that stands on altogether new ground. Altogether new ground. The ground where the cross has been made effective in the life, and the ground where God himself can commit himself, can freely say, as is the effect of this announcement from heaven, this is my ground.

To this ground I can commit myself. This is what I desire and must have for the fulfillment of my purpose. As we saw, it was from that moment the Lord Jesus entered upon his great life ministry.

And it was as though the father said, now I have got the ground upon which I can proceed with my great purpose. And my ground is a man of this kind, after this order, a spiritual man. Or a man of the Spirit.

But it is very significant, much more than interesting. It is impressive that no sooner had God got his ground in his kind of man, his spiritual man, his man of the Spirit, no sooner had God obtained that ground, and declared himself as committed to that ground, this is my beloved son, no sooner than there is a reaction, a tremendous reaction from hell. And the very next thing in the course is that temptation of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness with which we shall be occupied for this little while this evening.

You wanted, of course, it is in the Gospel by Matthew, chapter 4, then was Jesus laid up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And you know the rest of the temptations and what happened, and how the Lord Jesus, this man of the Spirit, emerged triumphant. And I repeat, how impressive and significant and instructive it is in this whole setting of which we are occupied.

The whole setting of this different, altogether different kind of man as God's opportunity, God's occasion, God's ground, the enemy reacts to that like this. In this determined, persistent, and very subtle way, I say in the whole setting, it is most impressive. It is as though the enemy, Satan, who appears on the scene so quickly after these happenings, as though he said, We must spoil this man.

We must undo this man. We must do with this last Adam what we did with the first. We must change him.

We must change him, or our whole cause is lost. All our work is undone. All our hope perishes if we cannot change this man and conform him, conform him to the man that we have made, the man Adam that we have made, racially, conform this one to that, or all is lost, our cause is a lost cause if we can't change this man.

If we cannot get him off this ground, onto our ground, if we cannot bring him from the spiritual man ground to the natural man ground, then we are lost, we are undone. That's the issue, and I say again, how impressive, how significant, for undoubtedly, that was the matter in hand in the wilderness, the battle over the spiritual man. And if you know anything about spiritual pressures and spiritual conflict, if you know anything about the antagonisms, oppositions of the powers of evil, you know quite well that the object is always to try and provoke the natural man.

Is that true? To provoke you, on that side of your being, to assert the old man, and take natural ground. Do you understand that? How true it is. And I remind you again, that with the Lord Jesus, this was right at the commencement of his great mission in this world.

His great mission of redemption, redemption of man, to redeem man from Adam's grace, and Satan's dominion, right there, at the very commencement of that mission, this happened. As though, as though, the enemy was saying, we must frustrate and thwart the success of that mission. We must be taking man off of our ground, out of our kingdom and dominion, onto this other one.

Subtle, deep, terrible, battle for the spiritual man. And what is it that is right at the heart of this? Well, note again, this is the beginning of the mission. In the wilderness, with the devil himself, and the temptations, the three temptations which you know and we are not going to deal with particularly, you know them, right at the beginning, this is the point.

And the nature of those temptations, you pass from the beginning, right to the end, right to the end, when this spiritual man is about to complete the mission on the cross. And as he does so, he is in a prayer battle, a tremendous prayer battle, about, not himself this time, but about the others. The men whom thou hast given me.

And what is the word constantly re-carrying through John 17, that great final outpouring of his heart, concerning these who are to be the spiritual men, whom he wants to be spiritual men, and the prayer is all that, that they shall be spiritual men. What is the word constantly re-carrying? Do you notice it? The world. The world.

The world. I am not of the world, he says. They are not of the world.

The men whom thou hast given me out of the world. And so on. In the wilderness it was the battle with the prince of this world and the spirit of this world.

Look at the temptations. Take as too much of my time to dwell upon each one, but look at those three temptations, and it is as clear as the bright daylight, that this is an attack along the line of the spirit of the world. And what is the spirit of the world? Can it be summed up in one word? One term? It can.

It can. Whether you fully grasp the meaning of the word I use, I'll define it afterward. But the one word which sums up the spirit of this world is ego.

Selfhood. Self-interest. Self-realization.

Self. Oh, what a comprehensive thing that word ego is. Fill it out.

Ego-dism. That's the spirit of this world. That is the very spirit of Satan who said at the beginning, I will exalt my throne above the clouds.

I will be equal with the Most High. I. Ego. So, save thyself, says he to the Lord.

Realize thyself. Draw to thyself. Assert thyself.

Consider thyself. And if you don't, you'll lose everything. You'll lose everything.

You'll lose your life, you'll lose your kingdom, you'll lose a following. Those are the three temptations, Mark. Your own life.

Your own kingdom. Worship me. All the kingdoms of the world shall be yours.

Your own kingdom. Your own following. Cast yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple and all men will say, this is the Messiah.

Come down from heaven and you'll get your following. They'll come after you. Centered in self, so is the world.

And if only we can get this man onto that ground, we've captured everything and defeated all his mission. And so the Lord prays that great final prayer as he moves to the cross, those whom thou hast given me, out of the world. I pray to keep them from the world.

I am not of this world. And they are not of this world. Do you follow that? It is very clear.

This is the battle. Spiritual man, the natural man, you come back to your first letter to the Corinthians and read again. And what are you in the presence of? At Corinth, the inroads that the spirit of the world has made into the church of Corinth.

You read all the things there. The apostle has to mention. And every one of them in some way is an expression of the spirit of this world.

Church is undone because the world has been given its place. The wisdom of this world, says the apostle to them. And all the other things there are just marks of this world where these Corinthians are seeking their own interests, their own ends, drawing to themselves.

Making themselves, self, the criterion in its gratification. It's all there, isn't it? It's all there. The world in Corinth is broken into the church and so the apostle has to draw this distinction between the natural man who is actuated by self-interest and the spiritual man, like Jesus Christ.

There's no personal interest. Great, great fragment of Philippians 2, he emptied himself. Look upon him, form of a servant being found in fashion as a man.

Coming back on that, perhaps in a minute, he emptied himself, let go. The selfless, spiritual man. And he said to those at Philippi, let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.

The selfless mind. Keep them from the world. It's a heart cry of the Lord Jesus because he is fully acquainted with the immensity of the issue.

He has fought this battle to such a point of exhaustion that God had to send an angel to strengthen him after this battle. So deep is the meaning of this issue. The spirit of the world and the spirit of Christ.

The natural man and the spiritual man. As soon as the Lord gets anything that really is spiritual. Shall I put that in another way? It's the same thing.

As soon as the Lord gets anything that is really, genuinely of Christ, there will be a terrific battle to spoil it. Isn't that true? Oh, look at Christendom. Look at Christianity.

Look at the church and the churches over this world. And so, in so many instances, there was a beginning of something pure. Something so good, genuine, true.

And in that beginning there was so much value, so much spiritual strength, beauty, and virtue. Something of Christ. But look now.

Look now. Nothing escapes, friends. Don't you say ever, whether you're at Deel or anywhere else, don't you ever say it can't happen to us.

I expect the church at Ephesus at one time would have said that. It can't happen to us. Oh, no.

Nothing escapes this onslaught. This determined purpose and intention of the powers of evil to spoil what is truly of Christ. They don't care about the formal thing, thing that is just, formal and institutional, traditional, but you get some genuine expression of Christ and there's a battle.

And there will be a battle. And the battle, oh, isn't it true? You do agree, I'm sure you see, isn't it true, the battle always arises on some personal interest, a personality complex, some personal element, the ego. Isn't it always just there that the trouble arises? The natural man to be assertive over the spiritual.

This is history, and up to date history indeed. Now, having said that, and anyone with any spiritual discernment can see how true it is, and I'm only interpreting what you know by both experience and observation. Conflict over spirituality really is tremendous, and having said that, you notice that this whole thing falls into two realms, what we may call the two conformities, the two conformities, to the Romans, the Roman Christians.

In his letter, the apostle said, I beseech you, by the mercies of God, present your bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is, and this is the literal, which is your spiritual service, your spiritual worship, and be not conformed to this world. That's one conformity. But, be transformed by the making over again of your mind, the renewing, making anew of your mentality.

Transformed. Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus. Transformed mind, be not conformed to this world.

Same word, another way it's used by the apostle, in what I have quoted from the Philippians, he was found in fashion as a man, and took the form of a bond-servant. Here we are, taking a form, a fashion. Be not fashioned, is one translation, version of Romans 12, to be not fashioned according to this world.

Don't take on the fashion of this world. Don't fall into line with the fashion of this world. Don't be influenced by the fashion of this world.

Be transformed, changed over by another mind, the mind that was in Christ Jesus. To the Galatians, the apostle wrote, I am my little children, for whom I am again in travail, till Christ be fully formed in you. Back with our word, transformed, formed, fully formed in you.

Now, of course, I can add a lot, and spoil everything by putting on too much. But I'm going to close with one thing. The final criterion, listen, the final criterion, that is, standard of judgment, verdict, conclusion, is, after all, the measure of Jesus Christ.

I sometimes think that the Lord from above must look down with a pathetic look on his face. Pathetic, sometimes perhaps humorous. Well, I remember my first flight by air, my first flight by air.

I've made a good many since, but I remember the first. When I, when we climbed up a few thousand feet, and I looked down on this earth, and I saw people, and I looked at it. Are they people? Or are they maggots? They looked like little crawling things on the earth.

Minute, crawling things. And yet, look at them. They're dressing themselves up.

Some of them are putting on certain kind of garments, and their collars round the wrong way, and their mitres, and their robes, and all this, these little, little tiny maggots on the earth, doing all this. Making such a show in this play, pomp and ceremony, isn't it pathetic? If you see things from heaven, you know what I

mean? See things from heaven, and heaven's standard. The Lord looks down with pity, and says, they make everything of that sort of thing.

Them, it's all. And to me, it's nothing. The only thing that counts with me is just how much of my summer is there.

The only thing. I shut my eyes to all this, all this nonsense, this paraphernalia, this playing of things, this pretending, this make-believe. No, that doesn't exist for me.

They make everything of it. Me, it's nothing. The only thing down there is how much of my summer.

If there's some of my summer behind that sort of thing, all right, I'll fasten upon that, and try to forget all the other. The criterion with God is just how much of this other man, this spiritual man, this son of his. And Paul was so much in line with the mind of God when he said, nothing.

I know nothing. You're making everything of your philosophy. You're making so much of your worldly wisdom.

You're making so much of this and that. For me, nothing of that. That doesn't exist for me.

For me, I am determined to know nothing of all that. So much to you, but only Jesus Christ. Only Jesus Christ.

That's the criterion. After all, dear friends, it's not anything external, elaborate or otherwise, just the measure of this other one, this different one. The spiritual man, Jesus Christ.

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