

The Three-Fold Law of the Cross

by T. Austin-Sparks

The three-fold law of the Cross is a universal law of nature that brings life, liberty, and enlargement through death, surrender, and loss.

Scripture: John 12:24, Romans 6:3, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 2:12

Topics: "Surrender and Sacrifice", "The Cross"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks expounds on 'The Three-Fold Law of the Cross,' illustrating that true life comes through death, liberty through surrender, and enlargement through loss. He emphasizes that Christ's life is not confined to His earthly ministry but continues to thrive post-resurrection, demonstrating that believers must also embrace the Cross to experience the fullness of His life. Sparks highlights the necessity of dying to self and worldly ambitions to allow Christ's resurrection power to manifest in our lives. He encourages surrendering our desires and understanding that true freedom and growth come from yielding to God's will, even when it requires significant sacrifice. Ultimately, he reassures that through loss, we gain a richer, more profound relationship with God and His eternal purposes.

Transcript

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." John 12:24.

In these words we have the three-fold universal law of nature which is also the three-fold law of the Cross. This three-fold law is (1) Life through death. (2) Liberty through surrender. (3) Enlargement through loss.

1. Life Through Death

The supreme illustration of this law is in Christ's own case. The real life of Christ is not the life of the three and a half years in which He trod this earth, but it is the life which He has been living in all the world since Calvary. It is an open question whether the record of those three and a half years would have survived or would have taken the place in the history of the world which it has taken, were it not for the romance of His continued activities and triumphs world-wide since His crucifixion and resurrection.

It is this romance that has attracted so much attention to that brief span of His life and teaching on earth, and which has created the world's literature relative to "The days of His Flesh." The greatest truth about Him is that "He was dead but is alive again."

That life through death has controlled the world ever since and has made the world realise that, in spite of most determined efforts to destroy it, here is something which is indestructible. Great world systems, cults, and even empires have exhausted all their resources to blot out the Name and the continued vitality of Christ. But it is they which have perished; He still lives on victoriously.

We never receive the real life of Christ until we too have been to the Cross. The real divine life - the life of Jesus Christ - is only known by what it does in men and women in making them live on a plane which infinitely transcends the human level.

Christ said of Himself that He had "come to scatter fire on the earth," and that He was "straightened until it was accomplished." A baptism was necessary in order that this divine fire or life might be liberated, and the "straightening" of Himself destroyed. He groaned, "Oh, that it were already accomplished." This baptism was a baptism through the passion, and it was through the Cross that He looked for the realisation of all His world-wide mission. The "fire" was to become world-wide in the members of His body. It was thus essential that they should be identified with Him, and identification with Christ is only found at the Cross, where such passages as the following have their deepest meaning:-

"I have been crucified with Christ and yet I live and yet no longer I but Christ liveth in me." Galatians 2:20.

"Having been buried with Him." Colossians 2:12.

"We were baptised into His death." Romans 6:3.

"For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." Romans 6:5.

"Like as Christ was raised from the dead, so also we." Romans 6:4.

If we are going to manifest that life of Christ, and if that vital indestructible something is going to bear its powerful testimony in the world, if that divine life - that very life of God Himself - indestructible, victorious, is going to bear its mighty witness and make itself felt in the world in the members of His Body, it is only through their oneness with Him in death and resurrection.

Until we know this oneness, our Christian life will count for little. We must take our place in one initial, all-inclusive reckoning with Him in death to the old self, and the old world with all its ambitions, desires, programmes, ideas, and standards, and then allow that death to be wrought out in us daily in order that the resurrection life may be increasingly manifest in us. The life of God cannot come into the old creation, it is the new creation life.

Not only does this apply in the case of ourselves as sinners, but it is a law which works out in every other relationship of Christian life. Take the matter of the knowledge of truth, in spiritual education. We come into the school of the Spirit to be taught. This school differs from the educational institutions of the world, where we go to have a certain amount of knowledge imparted to our brains. In secular education we can be crammed with a vast amount of theoretical knowledge, but the Holy Spirit's method is to have things wrought out in our very beings so that they become us and we become them.

In spiritual education something like this happens: One day being in the spirit, something said, or something read, or by the voice of the Spirit within, you see some wonderful piece of truth and it breaks upon you with all the force of a new revelation. Something you knew in theory before now breaks upon

you as a wonderful divine unveiling. You lay hold of it, perhaps go to prayer and thank the Lord for it and feel that you are possessed of a great treasure which is going to be of infinite value in your life. You do not want to lose it, it has brought you such joy.

But after a time it goes! It seems to die and go from you entirely, all the power of it and the joy of it seems to depart, it has become a faded vision.

Unconsciously to yourself, it may be, your life begins to move out along strange lines, things in the nature of severe trial come upon you, a situation of great difficulty arises, and you feel that by sheer force of circumstances you are being carried to despair and to death.

At this point, the only thing that occupies your questioning mind, is that "truth" which had apparently passed away.

In your extremity it grips you and you make one desperate appeal to it, whereupon it comes to life and proves its vitality in bringing you through, up, and out to victory. What really has happened?

You received a revelation of some vital phase of truth. Good! But that truth had to be wrought out in you so that it became you. It was only mentally apprehended before, and in order that it might become your very life you had to be led into such a place of death that only this truth could save you.

So it has become part of your spiritual life and after that you never lose it. It is truth you know, and have proved, and whenever you are led to speak of it to others, it immediately gets home, it is a living thing, alive from the dead in your experience. This is the only basis of effectual testimony. The grain of wheat in which you could not see the life, although you believed in its possibility, goes down to the grave, then the surrounding forces and elements of God's providence begin to work upon it. It is quickened, it germinates, and nothing after that can resist its upward climb.

Take this law again in the matter of service for the Master. We have to die as workers as well as sinners. It is an awful experience when death lays hold of our service. When, as a worker, as a preacher, we go down to death and by sheer force of circumstances, adversity, fruitlessness, spiritual ineffectiveness, we throw up our hands in despair and say, "I am at an end, I have finished."

Here comes the test of ourselves and our service. How much was it a matter of popularity? Were we out to make a name for ourselves? Was it a matter of reputation? Did it matter whether people said nice things about our work, that is, did we feel pleased and flattered? Or did it matter if they said nasty things, criticised, distorted, or detracted, and we went home and had a bad time?

How much were we in the business?

Before the test came, of course we should have said, "I have no such personal ambitions, it is not my interests I am seeking." But when we go down to death and the door of service seems to be closing upon us, then we are laid bare as to our motives, as to our feelings, as to whether we are more concerned for our name than His.

From all this self-life we have to be emancipated before God can use us. We have to get to the place where it does not matter in the least what people think, or say, or do, so long as God is satisfied and we are in the way of His will.

This is the way of peace and this is the way of victory. But we have to go down to the realm of death, the "I" has to be slain. It is just in this measure in which that "I" has been crucified that Christ in the power of His resurrection can be revealed.

To one who asked George Muller the secret of his service, he said: "There was a day when I died, utterly died"; and, as he spoke, he bent lower and lower until he almost touched the floor - "died to George Muller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will - died to the world, its approval or censure - died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends - and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."

Then again have we not seen this law at work in great enterprises for the Kingdom which have most certainly been initiated by God Himself, as well as in smaller pieces of service to which He has undoubtedly called us.

That piece of work at some time in its history goes down to death. It may seem that all its effectives are being destroyed and that there will be nothing of it left. Then there comes a swing of the pendulum and from the very lowest depths of the grave of this buried piece of work there is an uprising by the quickening life of God.

Many servants of God have seen the work to which they were sure they were called, go this way. For some mysterious reason it seems that God takes the work down to death before it can live with abiding vitality and victory. Perhaps it is just that the human life must go out in order that the Divine life might come in.

2. Liberty Through Surrender

"Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free."

The whole of Isaiah 53 is a wonderful exposition of this truth.

Here is the suffering Servant of Jehovah. By His own consent He is taken into a many-sided captivity. He has emptied Himself to become obedient to the death of the Cross. He has surrendered His divine rights, and has made Himself of no reputation, but is allowing Himself to be the plaything of all evil forces, in order that going down under them on the human side, He might tear them asunder and rise in transcendent victory over them, far above all principalities and powers.

The Cross is a picture of captivity on the human side. "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." "Cannot" is the ruling word of the Adamic race, but the Cross is the instrument or means by which the complete emancipation is wrought by Christ for Himself as the representative and inclusive Person of the new race.

When the Cross has done its work there is liberation from all human limitations, and Christ breaks forth from the grave in a way which gives Him the mastery of the whole situation.

Those who have been identified with Him in His death are raised by Him to a life on a supernatural level, and through them He achieves such things as were before utterly impossible.

There is no human explanation of the accomplishments of Christ through the ages since Calvary. The human side has been totally inadequate. This is true intellectually, socially, physically, constitutionally in

the case of by far the greater number of those who have been used in these transcendent achievements.

They have been the transmitters to the world of things which "Eye saw not, ear heard not, things which entered not into the heart of man," but which God revealed to them by His Spirit. The work done, the range covered, and the undying nature of their services has been in every way utterly out of proportion to the human resources. Not only so, but as we have already pointed out, everything that the devil could utilise, stir up, and rally to their undoing and defeat has only borne out the fact of the supernatural and limitless nature of the work.

3. Enlargement Through Loss

Refer to Isaiah 53 again. Here we see the Redeeming Servant of God going into desolation. The whole picture is one of desolation. He is alone, despised and rejected - terrible aloneness - His Cross has cost Him everything. His own brethren do not believe in Him, His nearest disciples do not understand Him, and yet how did that wonderful chapter close? "He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days; ...He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

From that point of the losses of the Cross and its promise of "seed," we move on to the ultimate vindication. "Behold a Lamb as it had been slain, in the midst of the Throne," and around Him "great multitudes which no man could number, out of all nations, and tribes and peoples and tongues." There is the gain, the countless multitude, the result of His travail.

The practical application is this: Very often it does seem that God requires a lot of us; that this Cross makes tremendous inroads, tremendous demands, and sometimes forces the demand to the point of pain, when we have to hand over to Him something very dear. We seem all the time to be giving, giving. It seems that the law of sacrifice is tremendously at work. But this is the road and the law by which, and by which alone, the infinite and transcendent gain can come.

There is the Devil spreading out before the Lord, "all the Kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof," and saying, "all these will I give Thee, if -" and this is the subtle significance of it - "if you will only keep off that Cross." Satan knew what the Cross was going to mean, namely, that he would lose the world kingdoms and that Christ would have them by that Cross. So in effect his words meant, "Keep off that Cross, and I will give you everything."

But said the Master, in effect, I am going to the Cross and I can afford to reject your offer for the time being. So He went by the way that led to the Cross, rejecting the world, denying Himself, and there, according to His own words. "The prince of this world was cast out," and He gained more than the Devil could have given Him. He gets the kingdoms of the world after all, by letting them go.

Are you prepared to let go in order to obtain? Let go the temporal for the eternal, the transient for the abiding, the earthly for the heavenly, the present glamour for the ultimate glory? This is the way to possess all things. Christ now has received of His Father's hands eternal fulness, and by our union with Him through the Cross, even these lives may become transcendentally rich and unspeakably full.

Some of us have proved that the things that we were most loath to let go - but which at length we gladly yielded up - have come back to us with a greater fulness or have been the way of an enrichment transcending anything we before knew.

The compensation is overwhelming as at the Cross we lay our treasure in the dust, "the gold of Ophir with the stones of the brook," that the Almighty should be our treasure.

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