

This Ministry - Part 2

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the difference between the Old and New Covenants, highlighting the ministry of the Spirit, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the nature of the kingdom and church in the New Dispensation.

Duration: 50:55

Topics: "Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the difference between the dispensation of the law under Moses and the present dispensation of the new birth. The speaker emphasizes that the people of God in this dispensation are different from those in the past, as they experience a personal relationship with God through the new birth. The sermon also highlights that the Church in this dispensation is not an institution or hierarchy, but rather the person of Christ and the extension of His presence in believers. The speaker concludes by emphasizing the ministry that believers have as a result of the revelation of Christ in their hearts.

Transcript

We are gathering our thoughts around the fragment in the second letter to the Corinthians, chapter four, and verse one, seeing we have this ministry. For our present purpose it is necessary to read a section from chapter three and verse four. Such confidence we have through Christ to God, Lord, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

But if the ministration of death, written and engraven on stones, came with glory, so that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly upon the face of Moses for the glory of his face, which glory was passing away, how shall not rather the ministration of the Spirit be with glory? For if the ministration of condemnation is glory, much rather doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. Verily, that which hath been made glorious hath not been made glorious in this respect by reason of the glory that surpasseth. For if that which passeth away was with glory, much more that which remaineth is in glory.

Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness of speech, and are not as Moses who put a veil upon his face. The children of Israel should not look steadfastly on the end of that which was passing away. Their minds were hardened, for until this day at the reading of the old covenant, the same veil remaineth, unlifted, which veil is done away in Christ.

But unto this day, whensoever Moses is read, a veil lieth upon their heart. But whensoever it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with unveiled face, reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit. Therefore, seeing we have this ministry.

Thank you just to turn to the letter to the Romans, chapter 2, verse 27. Shall not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge thee, who with the letter and circumcision are a transgression, transgressor of the law? Verse 29. He is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, not in the letter.

Chapter 7, verse 6. Now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were holden, so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter. And to add a very familiar clause for the moment, chapter 1 of the letter to the Ephesians, verse 17. God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

Coming back to our basic fragment, this ministry, you will have noticed that what the apostle means by this ministry is very largely, or partly, defined and explained in the immediate context. There is a follow on from chapter 3 with therefore. Therefore.

That links up with what he has been saying about Moses and the veil. And it is, I think, focused in those words in verse 6, who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the spirit. For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

That is a tremendous fragment. Indeed, it is the terminal point of two entirely different dispensations and economies. The phrase, the letter, represents a past dispensation.

The music economy. The spirit represents the present dispensation. And the economy of Christ personally.

The whole section is full of vivid contrasts between those two dispensations and those two economies. Paul, as you see, distinguished the difference between these two by, on the one side, the glory that faded. On the other side, the glory that surpasses and abides.

The glory that faded was connected with what Paul means by the letter. The glory that surpasses and abides is connected with what he calls the spirit. So that this ministry about which he is writing and about which we are thinking, as committed to us, is resolved into one word.

That is, spirituality. That word defines the nature of this present dispensation. It covers a lot of ground.

It includes a lot of things. Indeed, it includes everything in this dispensation in the purpose of God. First of all, it relates to the people of God.

The people of God are different in this dispensation from what they were in the past. In the dispensation of the letter, the dispensation of the law, the economy of mercy. It is the difference, and it is a very great difference, between the historical, the sacerdotal, the sacramental, the ritualistic relationship with God which obtained under Moses, and the new birth of this dispensation.

It is all the difference between those two things. That whole system of Moses, comprehensive as it was, and wonderful in many respects, containing all the vital principles of God's mind for his people, nevertheless fell short in this one tremendous thing. It fell short of new birth.

It never brought about regeneration. And that's the difference where the people of God are concerned. In that dispensation, there was a people of God, but their economy was that, as I have said, of sacraments, rituals, and all that kind of thing.

In this dispensation, God has a people, but the fundamental, basic, characteristic of God's people in this dispensation is that they are born from above. New birth has taken place. And that's a very great difference.

You can have all the other without this. If you have this, you comprehend all the other in spirit. The other is in letter and killeth.

This is in spirit and maketh alive, in the first instance, by birth. By new birth. This is the spirit which giveth life.

And we know, I trust we all know, that that is true in this initial respect. The spirit giveth life in new birth. We are able to attest that.

Put our seal to that and say, well, at any rate, that bit of the Bible I know to be true. The spirit giveth life to a new entity. A new person.

By new birth. And Paul here points out clearly that it is the difference between two covenants. The old covenant, which was of the letter and wholly outward.

The new covenant, which is of the spirit and inward. That's what he means in his references to circumcision, for instance, because that was the sign of the covenant with Abraham. But the new covenant has now been instituted.

And according to Jeremiah 31, the new covenant is, I will write my laws in their hearts, and on their minds will I write them. The new covenant is inward, whereas the old was outward. This people, Paul argues in his various writings, this people is the people of the spirit in this respect, that circumcision is a thing of the heart and not of the flesh.

He is a Jew who is not one outwardly, but inwardly. The difference between the dispensation of the letter and that of the spirit is in these two covenants, that there has been something done in the heart, which is the spiritual and inward counterpart of the sign of the covenant in the old dispensation. Again, as we so well know from Paul, where the people of God are concerned, the difference of the dispensation is that of wax and of grace.

We need not spend time with that. We are so familiar with it. All this is encompassed by the very first aspect of this changeover in the dispensations.

It begins in relation to the people of God. But then it also, in the second place, relates to the Holy Spirit. There is all the difference between the Holy Spirit's presence and work in the old dispensation and in this, that in itself is a subject for more than an hour.

Because you will call to mind what a lot of time and a lot of care the Lord Jesus took to make his disciples understand this great difference between the old dispensation and the new, as to the Holy Spirit. His emphasis and reiteration in that day, in that day, in that day. And it was invariably when he, the Spirit, has come.

That's the day. Well, this is that day. And it's a tremendous changeover from, again, the outward operation of the Holy Spirit and periodic visitations and in-workings in men by the Holy Spirit, and then departing to the presence of the Holy Spirit within abidingly.

That's the feature upon which the Lord put his emphasis. He shall abide with you for the age. He shall be in you.

Tremendous changeover. It is this that defines what Paul means by the Spirit as over against the letter. Spirit is the Spirit of life as different from legalism.

Well, we could say that the law was given by God. If you like, we could say it was given by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Yes.

But it was a legal system. Now, the Holy Spirit does not work legally in that way. The Holy Spirit is now the Spirit of life.

Legalism is only another phrase for the letter, which kill it. But the Spirit that give it life is the Spirit of life. It's a tremendous difference in economies and dispensation.

Then in the next place, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and revelation. We have to put our quotation marks round that word truth because it represents a particular and peculiar thing in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus said, The hour cometh and now is when the true worshipper shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

He was making a statement about a peculiar characteristic of this dispensation. The Spirit of truth and the Spirit of revelation as differing from symbolism without understanding what it meant and reality in the understanding of God's mind. Two different dispensations.

That's tremendous. They had it all in type, figure and symbol. But it is perfectly clear that they did not understand.

I think it's a tremendous thing that Moses said about this habit in the book of Deuteronomy. A late statement by Moses. He said, Even to this day the Lord hath not given you eyes to see and a spirit to understand.

After all, after all, you're in the book of Deuteronomy. You've got all the history. You've got all Exodus.

You've got all Leviticus. You've got all Numbers. You've got it all.

And even to this day hath the Lord not given you eyes to see and a spirit to understand. They had all. But they simply saw it with natural eyes, observed it objectively.

It was something like that. And they understood none of its meaning. Now truth, in the New Testament sense, is not just symbolism.

That is not the truth. That's only representation. That's not the truth.

It's not the true thing. Jesus was indicating that when he said to the woman of Samaria, Thou comest when neither in this mountain nor at Jerusalem shall men worship God. In the temple here in Samaria nor in the great temple in Jerusalem.

That's not the true thing. That's not the true thing. It may be a symbol, a representation, but it's only that.

It's not the truth. We've come into the dispensation of the truth, which is that which is spiritual, and not only in symbol and in type. The dispensation of the spirit.

The dispensation of the meaning of things. The meaning of things. Yes, the meaning of all the symbols and all the types.

The meaning of everything that God had foreshadowed in that objective way. We now, by the Holy Spirit, have come into the meaning of things. When you come into the meaning of things, you can dispense with the childhood object lessons and pictures.

You've got the reality and the meaning. That is the characteristic of this dispensation. The spirit of truth and of regulation.

That's a very challenging thing, dear friends. It's a very challenging thing. It's a sweeping thing.

It is almost a terrible thing. One would be tremendously misunderstood, perhaps certainly very, very hotly taken up, if one were to apply that. If it is true that it is the spiritual and the meaning, which is the true, and that is the characteristic of this dispensation, there is something terribly lacking when people cling to or revert to an Old Testament form of representation in outward things of ritual and sacerdotalism and all that.

You have to ask this major and fundamental question, have they seen after all? Do they know the Holy Spirit and it's just there that there is this tremendous up, rise of indignation when you use the word regulation. Well, here it is. He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and regulation in the knowledge of Him.

Paul is only saying that he would grant to you to see the meaning of things, the meaning of things, and be saved from the mere outward representation of things. Well, that's the second thing about the changeover. And you see, all this is included in this phrase, we have this ministry.

We're defining this ministry. And this is it. It's the ministry of an entirely different kind of person from those who were the people of God in the old dispensation.

And it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in an entirely different way as within the life of such people, particularly and peculiarly as the spirit of truth and of regulation. In the third place, this connects with the kingdom. The kingdom.

In the old dispensation, the ideas of the kingdom were those which were entirely temporal, earthly, and by force, by outward force, force of arms, that's the old dispensation, literally fighting with flesh and blood to establish the kingdom. A temporal kingdom with a throne on this earth and a political regime like the other nations, but a bit better, certainly above them. An earthly thing is the Old Testament situation where the kingdom is concerned.

And that whole mentality was the mentality of the people of God then. It was carried over into the New Testament and it was with that that the Lord Jesus probably had his greatest difficulties where his disciples and followers were concerned. This mentality.

And this is a part of the new dispensation and the new people and the new spirit that the conception and mentality of the kingdom is entirely changed. Entirely changed. In this dispensation it is not temporal.

It is spiritual. That to you does need no emphasis, I'm sure. Kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven is a spiritual thing in this dispensation.

And yet, and yet, in saying that, it's set right over against some of the greatest Christian so-called systems on this earth. That is, the tremendous contrast between the true church of Christ and that false one of Rome and Rome's sisters. That is a temporal thing.

A political thing. An earthly thing. And a thing which will be established by force of arms, if need be.

Standing at nothing, persecution and crushing to establish what it would call the kingdom of God. But no. No.

The kingdom is not like that. It is not like that. It is spiritual, not temporal.

No. It is heavenly, not earthly. It is divine nature.

Not force. Divine nature. Righteousness.

Holiness. Peace. Purity.

And such like the kingdom and patience of Jesus. This kingdom is the kingdom of the divine nature. And oh, what a contrast it is with that other which is so hateful in its moral or immoral life.

Using that word in its largest sense. Once more, this changeover, this difference between the letter and the spirit relates in the fourth place to the church itself. Here, very little need be said.

All that is necessary is to underline one thing. Church in this dispensation is not an institution. It is not an earthly system.

It is not something national. It is not sectarian. It is not denominational or interdenominational or undenominational.

The church in this dispensation is a person. It is Christ. And it is the extension of that person.

That is the church. It is not a hierarchy at all. It is certainly not a clerisy.

It is, as I said, the extension of Christ of the person. That is, a people, a people in whom Christ dwells. In whom Christ is Lord and over whom Christ is head.

That people, no other is the church. It is not a name. It is not a name.

Far better to avoid all names. Immediately you put names on something that is the church. You bring it to earth and divide it from all others.

Not a name. It is not a tradition. It is not a place.

And it is not a form. It is a people whose basis of life and sum total of life is Christ himself. The church is Christ.

This church is not something that you can see in its entirety. It is not apparent. It is no use going here and there looking for it to find it.

You may find a greater or lesser approximation to it here or there but you will not find this church in fullness anywhere on this earth. But wherever you find Christ in men and women there you have the church at least in its foundation. And the measure of the church depends upon the measure of the Christ.

There you have the church at least in its foundation. And the measure of the church depends upon the measure of the... Well, you've heard that so often. But we are redefining this ministry.

This ministry. Of course you have a very large context for all that I have just been saying. You realize, don't you, that the letter to the Romans is just occupied with this.

The letter to the Galatians is Paul's mighty, shall I say, sledgehammer upon this changing dispensation. And the letter to the Hebrews is the classic in the New Testament on this difference in economies from the mosaic to that of Christ from the past to the present. Well now, we can come for a few minutes to this great illustration that the Apostle takes up and uses.

Moses and the veil which he put on his face. This is not so easy to interpret as might be thought. Because Paul changes his own position on this matter as a close observer recognized and he has in so doing created a bit of a problem.

However, we tackle it. Let's analyze it. There was a derived reflection of God's glory on the face of Moses.

And I put that very carefully a derived reflection of God's glory on the face of Moses. It did not come from within Moses. It was not the glory of Moses.

It was borrowed glory. It was derived glory. Albeit, it was the glory of God which he carried on his face from the divine presence from the mountain.

But the point is to begin with it did not come from within Moses. It came from without. But even so being the divine glory upon his face it was something that the natural eye of man could not endure.

That is the first argument of Paul. He changes it in a minute. But note that this derived reflected glory which was not inherent and intrinsic where Moses was concerned.

But only mirrored glory was something that the natural eye of man could not look upon. A veil therefore was used and in the first instance that veil became the symbol of man's visual disability as to God and his things. You get that? It signified man had not the ability the capacity to look upon what was of God.

And that veil declared that. Man's inability or disability in the presence of that which was of God. The veil symbolized that.

But then in the next place that reflected glory faded. And this is where Paul makes the transition which creates the difficulty. It has puzzled many and many interpretations have been given.

But as the glory was fading and Moses subsequently read the law to the people and the glory had gone he put a veil on so that they shouldn't see that the glory had gone. And that's a problem. A difficulty.

It's stated here quite definitely that he put the veil on laterally so that they should not see that the glory had gone. So that when the reflected glory faded the veil took another significance. It became the means of hiding not the presence of the glory but the absence of it.

The departure of it. Now what does it all mean? Well, the law was real. It was real.

It was from God. It contained the mind of God. It was not something unreal.

Yes, it has in it the glory of God. The very law itself has in it the glory of God. But that mind and glory of God became hidden.

It became hidden. These were statements, yes, statements of the divine mind because of a state of the people. A state of the people.

There is no apprehending. Indeed there is no abiding presence of the glory of the divine mind. There was no heart revelation.

There was no capacity for receiving and understanding the mind of God. Therefore the glory could not be present. Now in principle you can see how true that is even now.

If there is not the spirit within as the spirit of truth and revelation and life there may be present a ministry of truth, of the word, of the mind of God but there is no glory. There is no glory. If you dear friends were here tonight as a group of unsaved unregenerate people and I were talking to you like this well if I'm speaking the truth if this is all the truth you'd all be looking bewildered and dark and heavy and wondering what it's all about and longing for the moment to come when you could go home.

No glory. No response. If the spirit is not there there's a veil.

The glory is not there though the truth may be there because of the state of the people but when it shall turn to the Lord the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the spirit and where the spirit is Lord there is a release from this condition and the glory comes in. I take it that as we read this evening that whole section you in your own mind and with your own eye were underlining that word glory.

Glory. The difference you see. Now Paul argues that even today when Moses is read the veil remains simply because of the state of the people themselves but we have this ministry what God has shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We have this ministry it's a ministry resultant from the in shining in other words the revelation of Christ in our hearts it's there in the word but the thoughts of God were in the word that Moses spoke. The mind of God was just as much there in the law as it is in the New Testament. It's the mind of God.

It's the same God it emanates from the same God it is no less truth and meaningful than anything subsequent but you see lacking in a spiritual condition and capacity in the people it went for nothing the veil remains when it shall turn to the spirit the spirit is Lord God has shined into the heart the veil is gone it's removed a ministry of inward revelation of Jesus Christ we have this ministry this is release from the letter and when Paul speaks about the letter killing he does not mean that it is not the word of God something less as to the word of God does not mean that at all he is not contrasting between what God

said then and what God says now he is saying that then it was letter in this sense that could only be given objectively read to the people from the outside but now it is revealed in the heart and has become life so it is spirit now plus the word or the word plus the spirit then it was the letter and no indwelling spirit now we are released into the glory of the unveiled face of Jesus we have this ministry, what does it mean? what does it mean for you and for me? it should mean this that you and I have got the meaning of things they only had the things, we've got the meaning of them that meaning is given to us by the Holy Spirit within not all at once but progressively a mark of the Holy Spirit's abiding and of our life in the spirit is that we are progressing in the meaning of the things of God life and glory and it's like that isn't it like that with all of us no matter how many times we've read it thought we had got it and knew it there comes a new fact that old old truth that old statement those old words and it means to us new life new glory, we never saw that before that's a mark of the life in the spirit that is what we mean and what Paul meant by revelation not extra to the word not apart from the word not our private revelation but what the spirit himself is teaching and showing according to the promise of the Lord himself well now you see, this is what Paul means when he says God has made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant not of the letter but of the spirit the letter killeth the spirit giveth life we have this ministry and therefore seeing we have this ministry even as we have obtained mercy we faint we faint dear friends I trust that although I said nothing new to you you are able to recognize perhaps in a fresh way not in a new way what it is the Lord has called us to what the nature of our life and ministry is may he open the eyes of our hearts and give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation

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