

'Worshipping in Spirit and in Truth'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the need for authentic worship in spirit and truth, returning to the foundational principles of Christianity as taught by the apostles and Jesus.

Scripture: John 4:23

Topics: "True Worship", "Return to Foundations"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the need for true worship in spirit and truth, highlighting how early Christianity began to deviate from its foundational principles established by the apostles. He points out that the apostles' later writings were corrective, aiming to bring believers back to their original position in Christ, as seen in the letters of Paul and John. Sparks stresses that worship is no longer confined to specific places or rituals but is centered on a genuine relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. He warns against the legalistic tendencies that have crept into Christianity, urging believers to focus on the essence of worship rather than mere forms. Ultimately, he calls for a return to the foundational truths of the faith, where Christ is the center of all worship.

Transcript

I think it is understood that in these meetings I am not giving formal addresses. I am just seeking to bring you to the foundation principles of the work of God. There is one thing that we must be prepared to recognize and accept. It is this: That before the apostles had finished their work on this earth, Christianity was beginning to move away from its foundations. That is, Christianity was moving away from its first position; and, therefore, the later ministry of the apostles was very largely corrective. Their ministry at the end was a ministry of adjustment to the first position. In their first writings, they were mainly concerned with getting life into line with Jesus Christ. They were seeking to bring these converts to Christianity into adjustment to the Lord Jesus. In their later writings, they were concerned with adjusting back to the Lord Jesus. It was not very long after the apostles had gone, that all those things came into Christianity with which we are familiar today.

Christianity became organized into an ecclesiastic system with "Bishops" and "Archbishops" leading on to a Pope. The vestments and ritual of later Christianity came in just about that time. People who were in authority were put there, not because they were spiritual men, but for other reasons. This tendency was already beginning to manifest itself before the apostles had finished their ministry. It is very important for us to take note of this, because we have inherited a Christianity which is not true to the beginnings.

Now take what may be the Last Letter of the Apostle Paul, that is, the Second Letter to Timothy. Of course, there are lots of things in that Letter that we all like very much. We like Second Timothy two fifteen, "Give diligence to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of God." But we do not always recognize that those words contain a corrective. They may be a call back to the original position. Of course, we very much like, "Thou therefore, my son, endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." But we do not always recognize that that goes with: "Fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. 6:12). The battle of the soldier of Jesus Christ is the battle for the purity of the faith. That is, the purity of Christianity as it was in the beginning. We have to read Second Timothy in the light of this truth. It was written because people were not behaving themselves properly in the house of God. Paul said that he wrote that Letter that men might know how to behave themselves in the house of God. There was misbehavior in the house of God. And you know that Timothy was, probably, an elder in the church of Ephesus. That was a terrible thing to say to Ephesus. Think of all that you know about Ephesus. And then, Paul said, even at Ephesus men are not behaving themselves properly in the house of God.

Later on we shall touch upon some of the things that had to be corrected. But for the moment, our point is that even so early as that, things were beginning to deviate from their original position. The Last Letters written in the New Testament were the Letters by the Apostle John. He wrote all his Letters and his Gospel probably after all the other apostles had gone to the Lord. I suppose we all like the Letters of John. And I suppose we like John's Gospel perhaps better than most. But have you really noticed the character of John's Letters? He begins his First Letter with these words, "That which was from the beginning." It takes them right back to the beginning. And then the letters have to do with correcting doctrine and correcting character. They are departing from the original teaching. And they are departing from the original standards of life. Now, note again, John was probably writing his letter to Ephesus. Then, when you come to his Book of Revelation, the Lord begins with Ephesus. And he says to Ephesus, "Thou hast left thy first love." You have moved away from your original position. I think I have said enough to prove that at the end of the New Testament writings, on the one side, things were beginning to go away from the original position. And on the other side, the apostles were concerned with bringing the believers back to the first position.

For a long time I used to wonder why the Gospels were written so late in New Testament time. Because Matthew, Mark, Luke and John came first in the New Testament binding, as we have it. Because they are the First Books bound up in the volume of the New Testament, we are inclined to have the impression that they were the earliest writings. I want to correct that, if that was your idea. These four Gospels were written after many of the Epistles were written. I used to wonder why that was? Why should these writers of the Gospels go right back to the earthly life of the Lord Jesus after all these marvelous revelations had been given? They have received the wonderful unveiling of the risen and ascended and heavenly Lord. They have received the wonderful revelation of the Church, which is His Body. They had come to see something of the eternal counsels of God. And when they had received all that, they went right back to His earthly life of thirty years. Now, for a long time I used to wonder why it was like that? It seems to me like coming from heaven to earth, like coming back from eternity to time. I did not understand that. So I went over to the Epistles, and for many years, I was wholly occupied with the Epistles. I was taken up with these eternal counsels of God. I was taken up with the spiritual Body of Christ, the Church. And I almost entirely lived in the later writings of the New Testament. And yet the fact remains that these men wrote those Gospels after many of the Epistles had been written. Now you see I had a question, and for a long time my question was not answered. I did not understand why the Gospels were written so late. And although they

were later than some of the Epistles, the Holy Spirit put the Gospels as the First Books of the New Testament.

Now, for you, here is the spiritual law. The Holy Spirit is not always very concerned with chronology. Chronology is one thing, spiritual order is another thing. Have you got that? The Holy Spirit is always concerned with spiritual order. Well, here was my question, but I have had that question answered in my own experience. Later, the Holy Spirit led me right back to the Gospels.

Now I want to put in there some other things, and this is a very important thing. You see, when I started reading the Bible, and especially the New Testament, I did what most other people do. I read the Four Gospels as the story of the earthly life, work, and teaching of Jesus. It is a very interesting story of how He was born a little baby in the town of Bethlehem, all about the shepherds and the wise men and the star and all those things. That is very interesting. And then how He grew up in the carpenter's shop in the town of Nazareth. Then how at twelve years old He was taken up to Jerusalem to the temple. Then how He came to Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist. And He went about the country healing people's sicknesses and helping them in their troubles. How great crowds of people followed Him everywhere, because of the help which He could give them, usually in the physical way. Then how the rulers became jealous of all this, and they took council to put Him to death. It is a wonderful story of how He was condemned and crucified, then how He rose on the third day. All that makes up a wonderful history. Of course, that is how I read the Gospels. I got those standard works, books on the earthly life of the Lord Jesus, very interesting books, and that is all it was to me. And I thought that when Jesus died and rose again that was the end of the Gospel.

Now we go over to Acts. Now we live in the Epistles! I have come to see that is all wrong. Everybody can read the Gospels in that way. I suppose any unconverted person would be interested in reading the story of the earthly life of Jesus, but we have failed to recognize that no one can really understand the Gospels until they had passed into the experience of the Book of the Acts. That is the experience of Pentecost. You know even the disciples themselves did not understand that until after Pentecost. They did not understand the work and the teachings of Jesus when He was on earth until Pentecost. I can fill a whole hour now in showing you that. They were moving all through the earthly life of Jesus with a closed heaven. That was the trouble that the Lord Jesus had with them. He said: "Have I been so long with you, and yet thou hast not known Me." And all the way along, His trouble was that they just did not understand what He was talking about.

And because of that spiritual blindness, instead of seeing that in His crucifixion all the Old Testament was fulfilled, they were all offended. About His death, He was always saying to them that the Scripture might be fulfilled. And when it came to that, He said, 'This is just what I had been trying to tell you all the time.' But they did not see it, and therefore, they were all offended. They all forsook Him; and you know the position that they were in when you look at those two men going to Emmaus. They said to Him, we had hoped that it should be He Who should redeem Israel. All our hopes are disappeared. Our faith has been mistaken. See how blind they were. It was not until He opened their eyes that they saw. Now my point is this, No one can understand the Gospels truly until they have received the Holy Spirit, and have come into a true deep experience of death with Christ, burial with Christ, and resurrection with Christ. Because that experience, not that doctrine, that experience brings an open heaven. When I came into a new experience of resurrection union with Christ, and of a new life in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit began to lead me back to the Gospels. He began to show me the real meaning of the Gospels. The Gospels had become a new life in a new way. Now all that is preparation for what we are going to say.

Now we come then to that adjustment, which our spiritual life demands, and we are going back to the beginning. We are going to begin in the Fourth chapter of the Gospel by John. This chapter, as you know, contains the talk which Jesus had with the woman of Samaria. At a certain point in that talk, the woman said these words to Him, as we have them in verse nineteen. The important part of this whole chapter is these verses nineteen to twenty-four. The woman saith unto Him, "Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus saith unto her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." You turn to chapter five, verse twenty-five, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." Now I wonder if you recognized the tremendous things that are contained in those words. First of all, they represent a complete change in dispensation. Up till now, it had been Jerusalem and Samaria; that is, it had been the temple in Jerusalem and the temple in Samaria. These temples represented a whole historic order of things. It was a matter of a special place in Samaria or in Jerusalem, according to whether you were a Samaritan or a Jew. If you were a Jew, Jerusalem was the center of everything. In the temple there, you will find God and no where else. The order of things in the temple of Jerusalem was everything, and you would never find it anywhere else. The priests and the sacrifices and the altar and everything, that temple was the center of all things.

So it was for the Samaritan in the temple in Samaria. Now Jesus says this tremendous thing. The hour cometh and now is, when neither in Jerusalem nor in Samaria, neither in this special place nor in that special place. Everything is not going to be centered and contained in some special places. The worship of God is no longer going to be in a certain form. Neither - nor! That is wiping out with one stroke the whole dispensation. That is a tremendous thing. Suppose you were to write on the blackboard and fill the whole blackboard with all your doctrine and your practices, how things had to be done. You said that is Christianity. Someone came along with a wet sponge and wiped the whole thing out and said, 'That is nonsense; that is not it at all.' What would you do with that one? You will crucify him. That is what Jesus did. He wiped out the whole dispensation with one stroke of His hand. Then He puts something else in its place. What did He put in its place? God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

All that old system of things may be very real to you, but it may not be the "truth." It may only be a system of symbols and types, and that is not the truth. You may become wholly occupied with what is on the surface, and what is seen. What you hear with your natural ears, what you see with your natural eyes, and you may not understand the meaning of that at all. It is the meaning which is the truth, not the things in itself. The very center of everything for the Jew was the ceremony of circumcision. That was the sign that you were a Jew and a true Jew. You could never be a real Jew unless you had been circumcised. The Apostle Paul says this: Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing. Hear the Jew saying that. You are not surprised that they try to kill him. Now it is not the thing, and dear friends, in Christianity baptism takes the place of circumcision; but baptism as baptism is nothing. In Ethiopia, the Christians are baptized every year. You could be baptized every day if you like. You could be baptized every hour of every day, and it may make no difference. If you go to the Lord's Table every week, it may make no difference. You can take up all the forms of Christianity, and really know nothing about it. That is what we are going to come to in our morning study.

When Jesus said, "Believe Me, the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth"; that need not be fixed in Jerusalem nor Samaria nor Antioch nor anywhere else. "Whosoever two or three are gathered into My name, there I am." John three and verse sixteen is the universal word for our salvation. "Whosoever believed in Him," that includes everybody called to salvation. Matthew eighteen, verse twenty is another side of things, there you come to the Church. And you have another universal word for the Church. It is not in this place nor in that place; it is not on this ground nor on that ground. It is not Church ground; it is Christ ground! Whosoever two or three are gathered into My name, worshiping in spirit and in truth. The dispensation has changed. It is the very first correction that is needed today. Christianity has become very largely a legalistic system. You must do it here! You must be here! You must do it in this way, or you are not the Church. The Lord Jesus had wiped this out in the beginning. He says the only ground that is necessary is in spirit and in truth in Me. Christ has taken the place of all other systems. CHRIST IS THE ONLY SYSTEM. But we have got to learn Christ.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/worshipping-in-spirit-and-in-truth/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net

