

Battleground of the Two Humanities

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing the difference between the old humanity and the New Humanity, and the need to let go of the old and seek the wisdom and power of God in the New Man, Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:13, Philippians 3:14, Colossians 3:10, Hebrews 12:2, 1 John 3:2

Topics: "The Nature of the Church", "Transformation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the spiritual battleground between the old humanity and the new humanity as depicted in the letters to the Corinthians. He highlights the necessity of relying on God's power and grace, acknowledging that true spiritual growth comes from conforming to the image of Christ rather than adhering to worldly wisdom or practices. Sparks points out that the church's purpose is to express Jesus Christ, and warns against the dangers of allowing the old humanity to infiltrate the new life in Christ. He encourages believers to focus on the person of Jesus and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, leading to a greater measure of Christ in the church. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep reflection on how much of Christ is present in individual lives and the collective body of believers.

Transcript

Lord, Thou knowest that this very act of prayer as we pause at this point is our acknowledgement and confession that we cannot go on without Thee, and we have no wish to do so. Lord, for the speaking of Thy truth, for the reception, understanding, and obedience, we need Thee; we cannot do without Thee. We rest back upon Thy faithfulness, Thy mercy, Thy grace, and we believe that trusting in Thee, Thou wilt not fail us; and we shall come through by the help of God, so be it. And seeing that it is so, the glory will be Thine alone through our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

We in these hours are being occupied with the climax of humanity as represented in the appearing in this world of God's Son in human form, and we have reached the point in these meditations where we are at present occupied with the battleground of the two humanities, that battleground being particularly focused in the two letters to the Corinthians; that is their place in the sovereign ordering of God. Other letters have particular aspects, but here in Corinthians we find the focal point of the great controversy between the old and the New, the first Adam and the last Adam, the one humanity and the Other.

Let me say here before we proceed that our consideration may seem to be very much of a destructive character, hard, exacting, not pleasant at all to our old humanity. These letters are drastic; and as we have

said, devastating to the old humanity; and the apostle is really hitting very hard, saying some very strong things--while in love, yet being very faithful. I do want to very definitely point this out that the apostle took that attitude and handled the situation as strongly, forcefully, radically as he did, not because he wanted to hurt anybody, not just because he did not agree with these people, but because he had seen--he had devastatingly seen the Lord Jesus in Glory. This man's whole life and ministry were actuated by what he called "the heavenly vision," and he had seen the greatness, the immensity of the significance of Jesus Christ in the whole economy of God in this universe.

Beyond Paul's power to explain and express (for he exhausted all language in his attempt to do so), Jesus Christ for him had appeared and was continually in his heart being revealed in such magnitudes as to make him feel that anything that gets in the way of our attaining must be ruthlessly dealt with. He said: "Brethren, I have not attained, I am not already complete, I press toward the mark, the prize of the on-high calling." What was it?--

Utter conformity to the image of God's Son--

the real apprehension in his own experience of

the wonder and glory of Jesus Christ--

to attain unto that was the all-consuming object

and passion of his life because he had seen!

Now my point this morning is not intended to be destructive and negative and only against. If we are seemingly being very hard on this old man, it is with the positive always in view; it is unto something--unto the image of God's Son. Now having said that, let us proceed with this battleground of the two humanities as gathered into these two letters to the Corinthians which we will only be able to touch so lightly and so imperfectly this week, but I think sufficiently to indicate a great deal more which you will grasp.

The Expression Of Jesus Christ

So here we are in the midst of the whole business of the New Testament, the transition from one humanity to Another and that where Christians are concerned. You must remember these letters were written to a local assembly, and while individuals in the assembly are picked out and pinpointed and spoken straightly to about their conduct, their behavior, their manner of life, it is the assembly that the apostle is concerned with and what a local assembly should be as an expression of Jesus Christ. That is the only object for the existence of any local assembly--the expression of Jesus Christ. The apostle was concerned with that nucleus in Corinth of the whole Body of Christ, and I think that it is very impressive that down through twenty centuries in ever widening circles from nation to nation, country to country, to the farthest bounds of this earth, the ministry to the Corinthians has expanded and today it is dealing with us. A local assembly ought to take on that character and not just be a localized thing. It ought to have a universal significance, to say something. Oh, that every local company of the Lord's people said something for all time and for all eternity and to all the world as to the meaning of Jesus Christ!

A local church is intended to have the values of Jesus Christ, which are never capable of being just localized. They must--not by their effort, organization, machinery, or anything of that kind, but because they are that--they must have an expansive influence beyond themselves and beyond their own time: spiritual values. Now I want to get to this matter of how that is reached and what it is that makes the Lord's

people like that, both individually and collectively.

You see, the heart of this whole matter is not a system, either of teaching or of practice. It is not an ecclesiasticism: that is only another word for church order. It is not that or any of the things which Christianity has become, not all the accretions and the developments and the forms, but the heart of this whole thing is the Person--the Person of a Man with a capital M. Manhood is God's great thought from creation. He has put His supreme value upon this form of creation --humanity--and bound up all His interest with a kind of humanity that He wants to possess to represent Him. "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." What is an image, what is a likeness? a representation. God said: "Our image, Our likeness, a representation of Us." But I am afraid the representation is more or less very poor at Corinth. God expressing Himself in a species called humanity--to that He has committed Himself and all His interests; and if you want to know really what the Holy Spirit's coming and operation is for, it is just that--To Get Hold Of A Mankind After This One Man.

So it is a Person; always focus your eyes on the Person, keep your eyes on the Person. The New Testament is all about that. It is always the Person, and this Person is repeatedly saying and affirming: "I Am." Whatever the capacity, Shepherd or Door or Vine, these are only aspects of His Person, of what He is, "I Am." He has stepped right into the arena of history and is the only One Who is allowed to do it, to say: "I Am." Tremendous things are said concerning this, and God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness not by, but in a Man of His Own choice. The judgment of this whole world is going to be on the ground of Christ. Not what sins you have committed, more or less what you might call small or big. No, that is not the ground of judgment. The ground of judgment is where do you stand in relation to Jesus Christ, and how much of Him is there. He will judge the world in the Man. Now think about that. It is the Person which we must keep all the time in view as we proceed!

This Man is utterly and absolutely different from the whole race of humanity; hence, as we have seen, because of that immense difference, there has got to be the undoing of the one in order to make room for the Other. God's full and utter beginning all over again is with this Man. You notice that this implies or indicates that at the time the Lord Jesus came into this world, God had considered and decided that the human race had become big enough and large enough to wind it all up. Here is this great multitude, Jews and Gentiles, filling the world that then was, and it was enough to represent the whole world, a race, a great race. Then the Lord God said: "Finish and We will start with One Man all over again, One Man, the last Adam, a New Race." The whole humanity is set aside and a New Race brought in by its first Man, "the Firstborn among many brethren."

Here in these letters to the Corinthians, as we have pointed out, we see the tragedy that can come about amongst Christians, Christians as individuals and Christians as a company. The tragedy is because of this one thing, because of a carry-over of that old rejected and discredited humanity into the realm of the New. This is a terrible tragedy. See, the Spirit of God has caused this to be written in Corinthians. It is unpleasant reading, and I do not like reading a lot of this letter. When I read what is here, when I read about what they are doing in this Christian assembly, that there is such a thing as incest in a Christian assembly (and all the other things, some of which we shall touch upon); when I read, I think--what an awful tragedy amongst Christians.

You are not going to tell me that belongs to Corinth two thousand years ago alone. Are we not meeting this in Christian companies continually, adultery and what not? It is a terrible tragedy when you ignore that great gap that God has placed by the Cross between one humanity and Another, when you do not

recognize how utter is that cleavage which the Cross has made. When you bypass the Cross in this matter of human life, you are in the way of tragedy, the tragedy of your whole spiritual life and testimony. This is very testing. The Cross is more than a teaching, a doctrine-- it is a terrible setting forth of the great thing that God has done and is after; though, on the other hand, a very glorious setting forth, for here is the New Man introduced. And we must keep Him in view even while we speak about this tragedy, and the battleground of these two humanities.

The Battleground Is Between Two Men: "the natural man" and "he that is spiritual"

Now we must spend a little while getting our position, as is represented by this First Letter to the Corinthians in particular. Their position (and what might be our position) is undoubtedly the position of many Christians today. What is the position in which the apostle, or the Holy Spirit through the apostle, puts the Corinthians? I wonder if you have noticed that in this First Letter to the Corinthians, Israel's history in the wilderness is mentioned fourteen times, as it is recorded in Exodus to Deuteronomy, and is pinpointed in a very particular way. Here the Corinthians are shown to be in that period between Egypt and the land. That is their position spiritually; that is, they are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and have come out under its covering. The Corinthians are there, and the apostle takes note of that as he introduces the letter unto the "saints." Now you revise, if necessary, your mentality about that word "saints"; it simply means the "separated ones," those who have come out unto God. That is all! That is a saint, one who has come out to God, been separated, redeemed by precious blood, positionally separated and out. How? They are redeemed by precious blood.

In First Corinthians, chapter ten, Paul says: "I would have you know, brethren, that all our fathers were baptized into Moses in the cloud, and in the sea." Baptized--the Corinthians have been baptized and had come under the regime of the Spirit, the Cloud, the regime of the Holy Spirit. These are Christians positionally, if not conditionally. Positionally they are separated; they are baptized, but they are in the wilderness as we find them here in Corinth. They are Christians positionally, they are under the regime of the Holy Spirit, the era of the Spirit; they are in the Kingdom of God, and if the Kingdom of God means the Sovereign rule of God, as it does!, they are under the Sovereign rule of God. They are positionally in the Kingdom of God--not in the general sense of Divine Sovereignty of the Universe, but in a more particular sense of Divine Sovereignty. Yes, they are all that, and they are experiencing supernatural activities of God; objectively supernatural things are happening to them.

Paul says: "Corinth, you come behind in no spiritual gift." All the gifts are there--"supernaturals." (Nestle's Greek Interlinear). Later, the apostle in answering one of the ten questions that they present to him says: "Now concerning the spirituals...." Now let us move slowly, carefully, for these are all truths that were Israel's while they were in the wilderness between Egypt and the land. Yet, with all that was true of the Corinthians, the apostle had to gird himself up and gather himself together and make one positive resolution. To these people with all this, he said: "I determined, I have made up my mind, to know nothing amongst you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." To Christians with all this, redeemed by the precious blood, positionally separated unto God, within the Sovereign rule of His Kingship and His Kingdom, and objectively knowing much of His sovereign, supernatural activities in their history--to them the apostle has to say this categorical thing: "To you I have made up my mind, I resolved, I determined, that amongst you it shall be nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." What is all this about? It is this cleavage in chapter two between what the apostle designates "the natural man" and "he that is spiritual"; and the battle is between the two. That is the battleground, between these two men.

I wonder if you people in this country ever have time to sit down and think. I know your tremendous activity, but I wonder if you ever have time to just sit down and think. Now I would recommend something to you, for your own need, for your own quiet time, not for public reading or anything like that, but I would recommend to you that translation of the New Testament in The Amplified Bible. If you remember, the translators of The Amplified Bible state in their introduction: "Our object is to get inside of the original language which is so much richer than the English and has so many shades of meaning that no English words can convey and give that amplification which is true to the sense and meaning of the original language. It takes a lot of words and a lot of shades to explain the Greek there, the original language, and so we have given the amplification which is true to the sense of the original language." (A paraphrase of the Amplified statement). Now you will need a lot of patience to read that, but if you would sit down with that Bible, you would be searched and illuminated as you think your way through clause after clause of your New Testament.

Now, why am I saying all this? Because I look at Christians today, and I think many have not read their New Testament. My word, look at Christendom! Here (as in the Corinthian letter) there is an utter contradiction; they are not seeing, yet they hold this New Testament as their charter.

Now, why is this? The answer is in a phrase. When Paul wrote this First Letter to the Corinthians speaking about the condition there, he pinpointed and said: "When you do so and so, are ye not 'as men'? You say, 'Must I not be as men?'" No, not after a certain humanity, that man is not allowed in here to be "a man." The Cross has stripped him of that manhood, "...you have put off (and the Greek language again is) you have taken off the clothes; you have put off the old man and his doings and have put on the New Man," and so there is a manhood that is not allowed in here at all.

"Are ye not as men?" Paul says: "You are talking like men, as men talk; behaving as men behave; and it is not allowed, that kind of humanity is not allowed." That man is an intrusion, and he is under a Divinely imposed embargo; and this second chapter indicates the embargo. "The natural man"--that is the man, and "he cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them." Would to God that Christendom would imbibe that. This natural man is an intrusion into the place where he has no standing with God; it is an assumption which has led to a presumption. It is presumption for us to come into this realm of the New Humanity with ourselves, to bring ourselves in in any way. You see the strength of this natural man is shown here in this chapter two, and I am keeping close to the text although I do not quote the actual wording. It is the truth that is here: the strength of the natural man in his proceeding is of himself. The apostle is talking about power, and these Corinthians had a great idea of power-politics. Power! Yes, power is all right if it is the power of God; but their idea of power was the world's idea of power, and their power was of themselves which meant that it was of the world.

Now we bring in the Other Man, and what is the Other Man saying about this? Go back to John 5 where He says: "The Son can do nothing out from Himself"--the Son of God can do nothing out from Himself. And this great servant Paul, who wrote the Corinthian letter, said: "Of mine own self, I can do nothing; when I am weak, then I am strong; I glory in my weakness that the power of God, Christ, may encamp upon me."

The strength of the power of this old creation, this old humanity, is utterly undercut in the New Humanity. And, whether you have reached it yet or not, if the Spirit of God gets hold of you--and you want Him to, perhaps you pray that He will--but let me tell you, you are in for something; if He really gets hold of you, the day is coming when you will feel utterly helpless in yourself. You are at the end of all your ability for

anything in yourself, and you will come to the place where you will say: "Lord, if you don't..., this is the end." All this power idea for which the first Adam made his bid--to be as God, powerful in himself--all that has been undercut in the New Man, "Christ crucified."

Power? dear friends, keep the positive in view that the power be of God. Unto these Corinthians, the apostle states: "I was amongst you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." Why? He answers the why--"that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

The Way The Old Humanity Does It: A Realm That Is Not Allowed

Wisdom is another great word in this second chapter; it speaks of the wisdom of this world, the wisdom of men, (and that quest for wisdom, wisdom and their philosophers, that was almost lust with the Greeks and with the Corinthians). "Wisdom" is "the power to judge, to discriminate, to determine, and to decide"; but the wisdom in their procedure was of themselves in Corinth. Their wisdom was their own and the wisdom of this world.

There is something here that I confess I do not understand, something beyond me. To this Corinthian assembly, the apostle comes down on one of the other points of this carry-over. If any of you have a matter, do not ask a worldly man with worldly wisdom to decide your affair; that is the way the old humanity does it. Now you in Corinth ought as an assembly in the New Humanity in Christ to have an ability that this world has not got in the matter of wisdom and judgment. And here is the thing that I do not understand; it is this phrase: "Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" Have you thought about that? Oh, I thought they were superior beings to ourselves; obeying God in everything, but the time is coming, the apostle says, "when we shall sit in judgment upon angels." We shall judge angels, and he uses that here to show that there is Another Kind of Wisdom altogether from the wisdom of the best in the old humanity --Wisdom he says which is not "of this world," for in Christ He "is made unto us" the Wisdom of God.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, and, therefore, the spiritual man ought to have the power of judgment, discrimination, discernment, and understanding that even a magistrate in this world has not got. Yes, this humanity in the New Man is very different! However, the Corinthians brought in this old humanity, their worldly wisdom, for their driving force was of their own souls in Corinth. It was soul force, and that is the principle of this world. Soul force--that is something to dwell upon. Soul force--have we not in this last part of the age seen what that can do?! Yes, we have seen it extended to literally terrible, frightening proportions, soul force in the nations. That soul force is with us all, but I am not going to start on soul and spirit. I am beginning to feel that there is a little too much being said about that. There was a time when it had a real point, it has that today; but it has become a subject, a fascinating subject, and we want to be very careful not to be taken up with subjects. But here is the fact that at Corinth, the driving force was soul force; it was not the force of the Spirit. These people were clever people, they were intellectual people, they were efficient people; but it was in a realm that is not allowed.

Do not make too much of human intellectualism. I think one of the most deadening things today is theology as such; I think that is where Christendom has gone astray, intellectualism in the realm of Divine things. The power of the brain has made an awful mess in Christendom. Yes, they were intellectual with the philosophy of the Greeks. They were clever, they were efficient; but this letter is saying, that is out--that kind of wisdom is not allowed in here. There is Another Kind of Knowledge here, and how utter the apostle is in this matter when he says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,

neither can he know them, they are spiritually discerned" by the spiritual; that is the spiritual man--the man of the Spirit. And he says: "As it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

I suppose you at once would think that that must be after this life--what He has prepared for us afterwards. Oh, I do not believe that; I believe that begins now. It is for us now. The things that the eye, the natural eye, the old human eye, have never seen and never can see, the things of the Spirit that have never entered into the natural heart, the old humanity heart, "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit": "hath revealed"--"hath." That is not hereafter: "hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit." You are standing in the good of that--the open heaven, the Anointing Spirit, and God revealing His Son in us; and in so doing He is devastating us, but He is also opening a new vista entirely of possibilities, of wonder. It is like that all the time in our going on. Can you say that is going on in you? Yes, I am seeing in my heart more and more of His Son, not the truth as a theory but His Son; and seeing His Son is undoing a lot of my own conceptions and my ideas and my valuations. It is just making them shrivel up; I see Him to be an entirely New Conception, and in Him I have a new conception of the Church.--

The Church Is A Person Expressed In Mankind

I must reiterate that the Church is not a thing; it is not an institution; it is not a denomination, nor is it all denominations put together. It is not anything like that. The Church is a Person expressed in mankind, expressed in human life. The apostles never went anywhere with the preconceived idea: "We will have a church here; we will set up a church here; we will form a church here." No, they went and preached Jesus Christ; and when people saw God they began to see Jesus Christ, He became the Cohesive Power drawing together, and if they were really on that ground, what did they meet? They met Jesus Christ. They met Jesus Christ--that is the Church, and there is no other Church in the New Testament.

Well, it comes back to this--the natural man cannot see and is debarred from the things of the Spirit, "but he that is spiritual judgeth all things." He that is spiritual has this New spiritual capacity; and it is, as this letter teaches, the increase of that spiritual capacity, of spiritual measure, which is the thing that is the ground of appeal to these people in Corinth. Paul says: "While you talk 'as men,' while you behave 'as men,' are you not babes?" And as in Corinth, so today, we are to recognize that though that natural man should be the greatest brain that has ever been produced--compassing all the bodies celestial and terrestrial, this "nuclear-age" man developed to the dimensions of humanity today--though he be a man like that, he cannot know, he cannot see, the things of the Spirit of God. There is a limit on the natural man. That is how it is, but there is a world, a realm, open to the spiritual man of the New Humanity which is beyond anything else of which the old humanity is capable.

Corinthian Questions: The Enunciation Of A Principle

Now from that point, we begin on these things about which the Corinthians wrote to Paul. At sometime they sent a letter to him with a whole list of questions, and I am not going to try to answer them all; but I want you to note one thing--how did Paul really answer all of those questions? He did answer them, and while he said some things about some of these matters, giving advice and discussing the thing with them, he did not answer them in the form of something that you could put into a book as a book of regulations, as a book of laws. He did not just write a blue print to answer, for example: "Should a woman who has become a Christian and has a non-Christian husband, leave him?" Or the other way: "Should a man who has become a Christian and his wife has not accepted the Lord, should he leave her?" "Should a slave

who has become a Christian, give up his position as a slave and try to be free?" "Should we refuse to eat meat that has been sold in a market, but previously offered to an idol?"

There are a lot of questions like that in the letter, and evidently there had been one question about what is today called charismatic, "spiritual gifts." Paul has some things to say about this, but do you feel that he is conclusive in the things that he says? I do not think so. Paul never intended that here, and he never intended to be another Moses writing ten commandments over against ten questions. He had a far better way of answering them than that, if only they would recognize it. In all these things, what was his real way of approach and answer?--the enunciation of a principle. If only you can get hold of the principle, you have got the answers. Please get this, whatever you forget, please get a hold of this: the answer to it all is a principle.

Now I am coming down to that question of gifts, tongues, and so on. It was a problem, a question, at Corinth. Paul had been asked something about it, and so he uses a part of his letter and says: "Now concerning the spirituals...." He says some things about tongues, apparently quite a bit about tongues; but as far as I can see he does not finally answer the question on tongues. However, he does enunciate a principle about it and all the gifts, and he answers it in this way, this is the effect of it, this is really the answer: on the one hand, none of these things--none of the gifts of God, are ends in themselves. If you draw a circle around either one or all of them and say--this is the "know-all and the end-all," you are going to come to an impasse, sooner or later. You are going to find that you are held up, and your spiritual maturity is arrested.

Brethren, however supernatural and precious it might be, beware of an experience becoming the beginning and the end. None of these things are ends in themselves, and the apostle says about this particular thing, and about gifts as a whole as he deals with them, that this is the principle concerning them:--Are They Leading To A Greater Measure Of Christ?

In this letter, the apostle uses a word which I am sorry that the translators have left out and put another one in its place. The word they have used is "edification," and, of course, if you give a very strict explanation or definition of the Greek word for "edification," you will get the true meaning of the apostle's thought. What Paul did say and mean was "for building up." For building up what?--the increase of Jesus Christ. Are these things ends in themselves, wonderful as they may be? Are they leading on to a greater measure of Jesus Christ? Are they building up the Body of Christ? That is the challenge of every gift: How does it minister and effect an increase of Jesus Christ?!

Now they had every one of these things at Corinth and over against them was this low moral level: this poor spiritual standard. Here at Corinth they had the gifts and came behind in no spiritual gift, but where is Christ, where is the increase of Christ? Paul had to say: "I have to speak to you as babes." What the Lord looks for, what must be, is the increase of the measure of the fulness of Jesus Christ. The question is, after all, how much of Christ is in the individual, in the assembly? How much of Christ, and not the obsession with things even though they be the supernaturals, but the captivation of Jesus Christ--because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained;... It must be just the Lord, the kind of Man that He is, the kind of Humanity that He is.

Conformative To His Son

Some of you, and some of us, have gone through deep deep waters, dark waters under the Hand of God. We have cried out and asked, "Why should this come to me, Lord? Does this come to other Christians?"

Why?"--Well, I have only one answer: "He is working all things out to the counsel of His own will"--conformative to His Son. And on the one side, the side of the Cross, this is getting rid of something, breaking down something, emptying you of something; you were too full, you had to be emptied on the other side. You may not see it, but Heaven knows a bit more of the Lord Jesus in your softness, in your patience, in your sympathy, in your understanding, in your heart going out for others and for the Lord. And I suppose I ought to say that the most perilous thing that the Lord could allow for us is for us to know how good we are getting. Is that not true? I will have something more to say about that later on. Shall we close...

Our Lord, there is so much here; it does need Thy covering, and Thy handling, Thy protection. It will need grace in Thy dear people, much grace. Give them that grace to receive, to understand. Protect us all as to just how much it is Christ, not even, not even Christian things. He is our Object and Goal. Be it so for Thy Name's sake, Amen

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/battleground-of-the-two-humanities/>

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