

Christ Corporate Is the Church

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of returning to the fundamental principle of Christianity, which is the presence of Christ in the Church.

Scripture: John 4:19

Topics: "The Nature of the Church", "The Presence of God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the essence of the Church is Christ Himself, arguing that Christianity has strayed from its original simplicity and has become entangled in human systems and control. He highlights the importance of worshiping God in spirit and truth, as Jesus taught, and warns against the dangers of man trying to impose his own understanding on divine matters. Sparks points out that the true Church is not defined by geography or human structures but is formed by the presence of Christ among believers. He calls for a return to the foundational principle that the Church is Christ corporate, and that the presence of the Lord is the ultimate measure of any church's validity. The sermon concludes with a reminder that in times of shaking, only what is rooted in the presence of the Lord will endure.

Transcript

Reading: John 4:19-23; Exodus 25:8:

"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 at 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.'"

"And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them."

In the Gospel by John, chapter 1:14:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

We are seeking to get right back behind all that Christianity has become to its fundamental principle. I think we all recognize that Christianity has become a great buildup system. And very soon after the

apostles had gone to the Lord, men began to put their hand upon Christianity. They put its truths into a set system of creeds. They put its testimonies into a form of ritual. Somehow or other man must put his hand on things. From the day when Adam put his hand on the tree of knowledge of good and evil, man has always wanted to put his hand on the things of God. That is, to bring the things of God into his own control. We use our hands in order to bring things under our control.

But when it comes to the things of God, that is a wrong use of our hands. Man has always been doing that. The Philistines put their hands on the ark with disastrous results for themselves. Uzzah in the days of David put his hand on the ark; and the Lord smote Uzzah [so] that he died. And for the time being everything came into confusion in Israel. The ark of the testimony had to be turned aside. The whole progress toward God's end had been brought to a standstill. And even David was angry with the Lord. All the results were man putting his hand in the things of God. It has always been like that. And it is like that in Christianity.

Christianity began in a simple beautiful living way. It was all in the life and the liberty of the Spirit. And while the Holy Spirit has His hand on things, everything is all right. Now men came in and they took hold of Christianity and the result is what we have today. There is no place where there is more confusion than in Christianity. The Lord's testimony is under arrest. It is in limitation because man's hands are upon it. Man has brought it under his control. That is always a dangerous and a disastrous thing. The Lord's attitude is like this. 'I will keep My hands off until you take yours off. While your hands are on My things I will leave it to you.' And things go from bad to worse. Now I think we all recognize that. The more a man or any man puts their hands on the things of God, the more confusion there is. When man brings the things of God under his control and dominates them, that means trouble. That is why the Lord so often had to weaken man and make man know his own weakness. Paul, the apostle, was a strong man naturally. And as Saul of Tarsus, he put his hand on the things of God. And then the Lord met him and smote him. And in the end, the apostle said, "I will glory in my infirmity and in my weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Now let us take note of these things as we go along. I am not concerned about giving you a great mountain of teaching. It does not matter to me how much I give you or how little. The important thing is that you take note of every little bit. And what I have just said is a very important thing. Let me say to my brothers, and sisters, be careful how you put your hand on Divine things. Be careful how you try to bring the things of the Spirit under your control, it may be that the Lord will smite you if you do that. If you do that, you will only bring confusion into the church. With all this tremendous confusion, the system of Christianity exists because man put his hand on Divine things. This brings Divine things within the compass of their own mind, and to say: 'This is how it has to be done. This is what we must do and this is what we must not do.'

Now as we so often said, Peter started doing that, when the Lord showed him that he has to go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. Peter always took the position that Jews had nothing to do with the Gentiles. When the Spirit told Peter to go to this home of the Gentile, Peter said, "not so, Lord"; he put out his hand, and he said, "Now Lord, You are wrong and I am right; You must come into line with my Old Testament understanding." That was a very critical day for Peter. And it was a very critical day for the Church. When Peter took his hands off, it became a wonderful day for the Church.

So we have got to get right back to Christianity as a system as we know it. And get right to the first simple spiritual principle of Jesus Christ. And we said yesterday that this passage in the Gospel by John, chapter

four, verse twenty-three takes us right back to the beginning. It is the beginning of a new dispensation. Jesus said to the woman, "the hour cometh, and now is." Then He dismissed the whole system that had existed up to that time. It was the whole system of Judaism according to the Old Testament. In one sentence, He dismissed the whole dispensation. And He introduced an altogether new order of things.

What did He mean? Because when He said the hour cometh, and now is, He did not mean literally just an hour and so many minutes. He meant that it was the first hour of the new day. With this hour an altogether new day has come. What is the new day? If you would have asked Jesus to put it into a short sentence, He would have said, 'Well, I am here.' The hour is not just a matter of time but a matter of PERSON. The new dispensation is the dispensation of Jesus Christ. Christ is the new dispensation. I am here, He said. You go through that Gospel of John. He is centering everything in Himself. I am the Way; I am the Truth; I am the Life; I am the Shepherd; I am the Vine; I am the Resurrection. IT IS A PERSON. It is that which lies behind everything. Christianity is Christ. Christ is Christianity. That is where it all begins and it never departs from HIM. The development of the Christian life is only the development of Jesus Christ in the life.

Now in this fourth chapter of John, the focal point is the House of God. The woman said, "Our fathers worshipped God in this mountain." She is referring to the mountain Gerizim where the Samaritans worship. Our fathers said, 'This is the place where men must find God.' But you Jews said, 'It is the temple in Jerusalem.' All the Jews said, 'If you want to find God, you must go to the temple in Jerusalem.' So that was their idea of the House of God. Now Jesus takes that up in relation to the new dispensation. He says, 'The hour cometh, and now is, when neither in Samaria, nor in Jerusalem.'

Now we come to those two passages that we have read at the beginning. Exodus twenty-five, verse eight says: "Let them build Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." That presents to us the great truth of the whole Bible. It begins the Bible and it ends the Bible. And the whole Bible is taken up with this one matter. In the beginning of the Bible we have God dwelling in men. And the Lord God came into the garden. Showing that God's great desire is to be with men. He made men for this very purpose: That He might dwell among men. Not to be the God far away somewhere that you do not know, but the God Who comes down and dwells with men. That was something always in the heart of God. So that the one thing - all through history - is God's desire to be present with men.

The Bible shows what a wonderful thing it is to be in the presence of God. Oh, when the Lord is present, what a blessed thing it is. And the most terrible thing that the Bible shows is for the Lord to withdraw Himself from men. I expect all of us here know something about that. I mean that the most difficult thing in our experience is not to sense the Presence of the Lord. If, when we have a day, when it seems that the Lord is far away, that is a very very hard day. When we have a day, when we realize the Presence of the Lord, that is the best day in our life. You remember the Lord's servant of old says, "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." He could not contemplate going out without God. The Lord says, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." And so they were able to go on.

Now the Presence of the Lord is always the most important thing. Do note that, because I am going to make a lot of that now. When the Lord said to Moses, "Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them," He was, of course, referring to the tabernacle, the tabernacle in the wilderness. And then God gave them the pattern of all things concerning the tabernacle. And when all things were made according to the pattern, God came down and filled the tabernacle. He PRESENCEDED Himself among the people.

Now we come to John one, and verse fourteen. Here is a little bit of Bible study for you. See if you can trace in the Gospel by John how many allusions there are to the Old Testament. John was a Jew and he was full of the Old Testament. And whenever he wrote, he brought in something from the Old Testament. Now that is a very rich and profitable study. I just leave it to you for the present. He begins his Gospel with, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word became flesh." There, note the word that he uses. "THE WORD BECAME FLESH, AND TABERNACLED AMONG US." That is the original word, He made His Tabernacle among us. In John's mind he was relating Jesus to the tabernacle in the wilderness. And he is saying that as God came to dwell among men in the tabernacle in the wilderness, so GOD HAS COME TO TABERNACLE AMONG MEN IN HIS SON JESUS CHRIST. What is the Tabernacle of God in this dispensation? It is His Son. What is the House of God? It is Jesus Christ. What is the Church? I wonder what you would put down on paper if you were asked that question. If I were to ask you to write down on one sheet of paper the answer to this question, "What is the Church?" I wonder what I should get. I am sure somebody will give me a wonderful system of Church truth. A wonderful order of Church practice. The answer is simple. The Church is Jesus Christ, nothing less than that, nothing more than that. If Christ is in a number of people, it is He Who forms the Church. It is Christ in us that makes the Church, not first our doctrine, not first our practice, not first the way we carry on when we come together: but first of all the Presence of the Lord. The Presence of the Lord in those who are gathered together, that makes the Church.

But note, I have commenced with the Church. And I am thinking of the Church universal, worldwide. There is no geography in the Church. You understand that? It is not in this mountain or in Jerusalem. There is no geography in the Church. There is no time in the Church. We are here at nearly nine o'clock in the morning. In England, it is eight hours earlier. Take eight from nine and you have one. It is about midnight in that country. You go further west and it is earlier still. But that does not exist in the Church. The Lord never goes to sleep. Darkness and light are both alike to Him. There is no day or night in heaven. Time does not exist with Him. I am very glad about that. Well, we will leave that for the time being. We may show that again at some other time, in some particular connection.

We want you to come back to this. Christ is the same at all times in every place. Therefore, the Church is the same. The Church is not American, British, Chinese, Philippine, etc. The Lord does not take notice of that. All that matters to the Lord is that He has a place in the heart, and it does not matter where it is in all the world, or what time it is at all. The Church takes its character from Christ. CHRIST CORPORATE IS THE CHURCH. You have got to prove that Christ is not in me, in order to say that I am not in the Church. And you have no right to say to anybody who has Christ dwelling within, that they do not belong to the Church. Do you understand that? Do you agree with that? We are getting right back behind Christianity to Christ. Right back behind what man calls the Church to Christ.

Now, having spoken of the Church, we are going to speak of the churches. What are the churches? Here we have got to do a lot of rethinking, and make some very big adjustments. Do you know that most people think that the apostles had the idea that they have got to get out to the nations and form churches? They believe, for instance, that the Apostle Paul's business was to go out and form churches everywhere. The real object of Paul was to go out into Asia and into Bithynia and into Galatia and form churches. Their idea was, we must have a church everywhere. Do you believe that? If you think that, you are all wrong. Now do think seriously about this. Because this is going to revolutionize our whole thinking.

What did Paul and the apostles believe was their work? It surely was not to bring churches into being. They believed that their business was to bring Christ into every place. Will you tell me where in the New

Testament you have any apostle arriving anywhere saying, 'Now, we have come to form a church. The Lord has sent us to this place in order that we may form a church.' Well, you will spend a lot of time trying to find anything like that in the New Testament. It is not there. There are lots of other things that are not there, which we think are there. Things we have come to teach as being there, and they are not there at all. That is not there; you get back to the Gospel. "And Jesus sent forth His apostles two by two." And it says, "He sent them into every place, where He Himself would go." He has never changed that principle. He does not send us to form churches or set up Christianity. He sends us before His face to bring Himself there. That does not mean that churches have no meaning. But that brings us right to the point. What are churches? They are just people gathered into Christ where He Himself is. The supreme thing is this eternal thought of God, the Presence of the Lord. The Presence of the Lord, that is the purpose of anything that is called the church. And that is the only Purpose.

You remember in the Old Testament, there was the tabernacle or there was the temple. And when the Lord withdrew from the temple, it was no longer sacred. It did not matter to God one little bit whether it existed or not. It was just an empty shell. The Lord is not a bit interested in that. That is what the Lord Jesus meant when He said that in the temple at Jerusalem, "Your house is left unto you desolate. The day cometh when there will not be left here one stone upon another." That is how sacred this thing is to God when His presence is gone. It is no different from any other piece of stone. That is what the Lord meant when He came to the churches in Asia. He said, 'I know all about your works and your labour. I know all about your Christian doctrine. I know all about your services. But repent, and do the first works; or I will remove your lampstand out of its place.' The thing has no longer any meaning or purpose when the first thing has gone.

What is the first thing? It is not teaching and doctrine. It is not certain Christian practices. It is not continuation, of your meeting. It is the Presence of the Lord. The first thing was, when they came in from outside, they said: "God is with you." It says they fell down and said, "GOD IS WITH YOU." Go back to the Old Testament when the Lord filled the tabernacle and the temple, It says that; even the priest had to go out. They could not stay in the Presence of the Lord. They were but men. And they were sinful men. And men as men have no place in the Presence of the Lord. Oh, what a thing men have made of Christianity. In Christianity, man has made man everything. Sometimes I go to some places. I am introduced to the congregation. The one who introduces me says, 'Mr. Austin-Sparks, the great Bible teacher from Europe.' And then a lot of other things. My heart sinks; I feel ill. I have to stand up and say, 'Do not take any notice of that. I am nobody. The Lord is everything.' Man has no place in the House of God. We come into God's House in our own importance, in our own strength, putting our hands on things, our minds on things, our wills on things. We are changing the whole nature of the House of God. The Lord will be limited there. Indeed, He will not have a clear way for Himself. This Jesus Who was the very presence of God says, "I am meek and lowly in heart."

So I finish on this note, I have said we are here to get instruction on the foundation. I am trying to be very faithful with you. The day is coming when everything is going to be shaken from heaven. Christianity has suffered a terrible shaking on the main-land China. And now the system of Christianity is practically gone. And the only true thing that remains is what is of the Lord in the heart of the men and women. That kind of shaking is going on all over the world. The Bible says it is going to be so. Christianity is going to have a terrible shaking. And only what is the Presence of the Lord will remain. Perhaps the meeting will go, and be impossible. Perhaps Christian fellowship will be exceedingly difficult. Perhaps the preaching of the Word will be suspended. Perhaps all the externals will just disappear. And then the only thing will be, have

we got the Lord? Do we know the Lord? Is the Lord with us? Be sure! that is something that the Lord will bring about. He very often does that with the individuals. If our Christian life rests upon things outward, the Lord will separate us from them. He very often does that. And then the big question is, how much of the Lord have I got? That is the ultimate thing, because that is the first thing. Do remember, dear friends, that **THE TEST OF ANY CHURCH IS THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD!** Not whether it is here or there; not whether it is done this way or that way. But just how much we find the Lord there. Just how much men find the Lord there. And to have the Lord in a larger way means having men in a very small way.

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