

Spirituality the Key to All That Is of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

Spirituality is the key to all that is of God, and it is a very practical matter that requires a new and altogether other constitution.

Scripture: John 3:3-4, Romans 8:14, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 1 Corinthians 6:17, 1 Corinthians 15:45, 2 Corinthians 4:6, Hebrews 12:9

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "True Spirituality"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the importance of spirituality as the key to understanding all that belongs to God. He emphasizes the necessity of being reconstituted as spiritual beings to grasp the things of God, highlighting the gulf between the natural and the spiritual. The sermon delves into the counterfeit spirituality that often masquerades as true spirituality, cautioning against relying on external rituals or forms for spiritual growth.

Transcript

"So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam a life-giving spirit.... The first man is of the earth earthy: the second man is of heaven" (1 Cor. 15:45,47)

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 5:24).

"He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1. Cor. 6:17).

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God... Ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:14-15).

"Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" (Heb. 12:9).

"Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man" (1 Cor. 2:14,15).

Spirituality the Key to All That is of God

A fragment from that last passage will do as the key to our consideration. "He that is spiritual." A spiritual state is the key to all that is of God. Spirituality is the door, and the key to the door, beyond which lies everything that relates to God. Without spirituality, there is no way through, the door is closed. The word "cannot" stands written as an impassable barrier - "cannot understand or receive the things of the Spirit of God." In reality, our lives are set in a realm of things spiritual. God is Spirit, therefore the supreme Reality, the supreme factor, the ultimate environment of this universe - God - is Spirit. Man, in the deepest and truest nature of his being, is spirit. He has a soul and a body. Evil forces in great power encircle man on this earth, and they are spiritual forces. But more, the entire temporal order is constituted upon spiritual principles and meanings. The visible things are but symbols of spiritual things; the seen things are types of unseen things. God has constituted this whole universe, in every aspect and detail, upon a basis of spiritual principles; they are tokens of something more than themselves. If God, Who is Spirit, makes anything, He makes it with a meaning, and that meaning is given to it by the mind of God. It takes its deepest significance from God Himself, therefore its deepest significance is spiritual. It is unnecessary, I am quite sure, and would take a very long time (although it would be tremendously profitable as well as interesting) to follow that out, and look at this seen, tangible, temporal universe and track down its spiritual significance; but it is a very simple line of consideration. We know how, right through the Bible, these things of creation are used to represent spiritual things. The sun, the moon, the stars, and every other created thing embodies some spiritual thought, meaning and law, so that, when we come to the revelation of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, we find a whole comprehensive and detailed counterpart, in a spiritual realm, of what we have in the temporal realm; a new creation in Christ Jesus with its initiation by God, Who said, Let light shine out of darkness, and who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Here is the new creation act, the new fiat for bringing in a spiritual order, which, in a spiritual way, reproduces all the laws which lie behind the creation of the natural order. We cannot follow that through now, but bear it in mind. It is a very strong and very full realm by which we can recognise really what God is after through and in and by all things.

If we were only to come down to our own personal physical makeup, and had we the knowledge of our own physical bodies sufficiently, we should be able to trace spiritual laws operating through and through in almost every part. I am almost tempted to yield to the fascination of such a consideration, but I will leave that to more expert people. But there it is; God has constituted our very bodies upon spiritual principles; we are, in ourselves, a material representation of spiritual laws, and when the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle, speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ, He is not only using an illustration, He is saying that a whole system of spiritual laws which operates in the physical body of an individual, operates in a spiritual way in the spiritual Body of Christ, the Church. Just as the violation of any one of those laws or principles of the physical brings about an unbalanced state which will lead to disintegration and finally to death, so in the Church the same laws obtain: violate any one of those laws, and you render the Church unbalanced, it will move to disintegration and out of its realm of vital things. I must not be detailed.

I am stating this, that the key to everything that is of God is spirituality. Here in 1 Cor. 15, the Apostle is saying much about the spiritual side of things, and amongst those statements he says concerning the body that not that which is spiritual is first but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual. We might observe, by the way, that when he used that word "natural" he really used the word "soulical." That which is first is the soulical body and afterward that which is spiritual, indicating that the ultimate and final thought of God is the spiritual. The Apostle leads on very clearly to show that this body, this soulical body as such, is going to be changed. But there is a germ - the spirit is the germ - of a new body, and that spirit will be clothed with a spiritual body. It is something that we cannot wholly understand, but we can

see something of what it is like when we remember that the forty days after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus were used precisely for this very purpose - to demonstrate and establish the nature of a spiritual man in his final and full constitution, visibly, as well as spiritually. There is no doubt that in those forty days the Apostles were convinced that Jesus was alive, that they had seen the Lord; they were left without a shadow of doubt - nothing could shake them on that matter. But what a Lord, what a difference! - an absence altogether of some things with which they were familiar. He was there, and He was there in a positive presence - not a ghost, not a disembodied spirit, but a full Manhood; and yet how different! He was using the forty days to show what the end of God is for man, the nature of things when God reaches His end. "Afterward that which is spiritual." God's final, ultimate thought is the spiritual, and I want to emphasize that for this purpose - that I am not talking about vapours and shadows and spooks and ghosts, and things floating about in the air. I am not talking about atmospheres, but about something very real - if I may use the word, very concrete - when I talk about spirituality. It is something very practical. The Lord Jesus sought surely to show that after His resurrection. "Children, have ye any meat?" He can make a fire of coals, He can cook fish on it, He can break the food and distribute it and He can eat with them, and yet in a moment can be out of sight. Dismissing time and geography, He is in one place and then in another far off, but He is real. Do not let us think we are talking about spirituality as something unpractical, mythical, abstract. We are going to see that it is a very practical matter; first that which is natural, and afterward, as the final thought and the goal of God's activities, that which is spiritual. The end and the eternal will be spirituality; we shall be in the full sense spiritual. Well, that is a general statement.

Temporal Things Governed by the Law of Vanity

Now let us get down to it more and more closely. We begin, then, by recognising that the world of things temporal is only a shadow of another, that it has no abiding qualities or values in itself. It is governed by the law of vanity, vanity meaning simply that it cannot of itself realise its own destiny. It will reach a point, and from that point turn back and in upon itself; its efforts, its groanings, its travailings, never issue in a final realisation of its intention. Nothing of it, by its own properties, can realise Divine purposes and ends. It is very important to recognise this.

As we get closer to this matter, we see how it applies specifically to Christian work. Oh, how many things are gathered into organised Christianity with the idea of making for effectiveness! The idea is that, if you can have these things, you are going to get results. Money - oh, how much could be done if only we had money! We must have the money! I ask you, how was it in the book of the Acts? Was anything done? With all the money today, how much is done of an abiding, eternal, spiritual value? If only you can get names and titles on your programmes and advertisements, you are going to effect something! Are you? If you can get reputation, scholarship, learning, ability, physical strength, business acumen, the work will be effected! Will it? I want to say that not in one of these things, nor in all of them put together, in themselves, is there any spiritual value, and there can be a very vast amount of spiritual value without any of them. God has taken pains along both lines to prove that. Along the line of their presence in abundance He has proved their spiritual futility; and along the line of taking the weak things and the despised and the foolish and the things which are not, by something which was nothing in itself He has through the ages demonstrated His own power and done mightily fruitful things for eternity. Well, that is simple and obvious, and it is only one more contribution to this fact, that it is spirituality that counts, that is the effective thing, the thing that gets through, and nothing else. The learning, the money, and all the other things may have a place, provided they do not govern, provided they are subservient to what is spiritual and are never banked upon as the things which are going to do the work: provided it is never assumed that if you have these things, a great

work for God can be done; God will make evident the folly of that assumption. A whole range of things is employed by organised Christianity to secure Divine ends, but it does not work. Well, that is the first thing that we note in connection with spirituality.

Our Reconstitution as Spiritual Beings

We proceed in the next place to recognise that for spiritual - that is Divine, eternal, ultimate - purposes, we have to be reconstituted on a spiritual level and basis. That, of course, is the very heart of John 3. Nicodemus is interested in, and concerned about, the Kingdom of God, wanting to know about it, and has come to the Lord Jesus by night, evidently to talk about it. He had, like all other Israelites, an entirely temporal conception of the Kingdom, an earthly idea. It was formal, an official matter. The Lord Jesus does not waste any time at all with that. He simply brushes it all aside, ignores it, and says, "Ye must be born anew." "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." That is elementary, but we are coming to this fact, that, in order to know anything at all about the things of God (and I take the Kingdom of God to be that realm in which all that obtains is of God, that which belongs to God) we have to be constituted according to God. Nothing is possible until we are reconstituted on a new principle, until we are, in other words, constituted spiritual beings in a new way. The very beginnings of things in relation to God are that they are a new and altogether other constitution, just as absolute as would be the reconstituting of us to live a fish's life - and perhaps more so. We have to begin over again. For the very first thing of God, that is necessary. I know that I am not saying anything that is new in itself to you, but I feel very much that there has to be a reconsideration of the whole Christian conception of things if we are going to have effectiveness.

The ideas of doing God's work, and of what His work is, are very often far from the truth. The ideas of the means by which God would work are very often largely outside of the pale of God's acceptance. We are concerned with real spiritual effectiveness, are we not? Then we have to learn the secret of it; that is what we are after. There is a crippling, paralysing "cannot" resting upon the natural, the soulical man, where the things of God are concerned; and yet how much of that soulical life is employed and relied upon in Christianity today to secure spiritual ends! If only you can get high-tensioned atmospheres, a good deal of stir and movement and emotion; if only you can get certain conditions brought about by a forceful, powerful personality with its impact upon the people; then you will get results! And a great deal of result is obtained, but it is not spiritual, it is not abiding and eternal. But unfortunately, the consequences are not limited to that. There issues ever more and more this great tragedy of people having tried and been disappointed and determining never to try again. The world is strewn with people who have had an experience and no more. Oh, the devil is clever!

We are saying that there is an unbridged gulf between the natural and the spiritual, and there can be no carry over; and yet in the Christianity of our day, there is a tremendous carry-over of the natural to the spiritual. We find the realm of God's things is simply full of natural elements, and they are all paralysing the spiritual. There has to be a tremendous removal of all this smother and cover of natural elements - men coming in with their drive and their ideas and conceptions and ways. It is killing the work of God. Until that is really dealt with in the power of the Cross of our Lord Jesus and all set aside, and God is free to do His own work by His own means along His own lines, there will be no commensurate result. God's means and God's way is spirituality from start to finish, the impact of a spiritual constitution. Yes, there is an unbridged gulf between the natural (the soulical) and the spiritual, and there can be no carry over. Look at the fact. It is so often very striking that a person of very considerable natural acumen, learning, intelligence and ability in this world is nothing in real spiritual things, though he be a Christian. Are you not often up against

that? A Christian man may be tremendously able in business affairs and most acute in his business transactions, full of intelligence and worldly wisdom, able to carry the weight of an immense concern, to be the driving force of a great business, a man of weight and consideration in this world, but when it comes to spiritual things he may be a babe. You speak about the things of the Lord, and that great brain is altogether beaten by the simplest things of the spiritual life. You can get nowhere in talking about the Lord. I am often amazed as I meet and talk with Christian men who are carrying great responsibilities and who have undoubtedly great abilities, and when you talk about spiritual things they are unable to say anything, to make any contribution; you are talking in another realm. And yet they know they are born again, and they have been so for a long time. What is the matter? Well, there is a gulf. They have all that greatness on the natural side, but they are very small on the spiritual. All that they have of intellectual ability and equipment, and power in every way to handle big things naturally, serves them in no stead whatever when they come to handle the things of God; whereas somebody who has none of it, in the realm of things spiritual is a giant, a teacher. Well, that is a common-place in our experience.

But it comes right back to this, that there is a gulf, and there is no real bridging of this gulf, there is no carrying from one side to the other. The word "cannot" stands there. Here the word is not about the unregenerate, the grossly sinful. It is the Christian who is still natural, living on the basis of his soul, rather than in the realm of his renewed spirit. The natural man "cannot." That is the closed door in things spiritual. Whatever he is in things natural, in things spiritual he is a babe or a fool.

Counterfeit Spirituality

Now we come to the next thing, the recognition that there is a false and counterfeit spirituality which is purely soulical. It looks like spirituality, and passes for it, it assumes to be spiritual; but it is false, it is counterfeit. We find it in mysticism, and mysticism can go a very long way to simulate what is spiritual. Aestheticism so often looks like spirituality and has been mistaken for it. There is a vast amount of religion that thinks it is spiritual and claims to be, and yet it is purely aesthetic or mystical or soulical; it is not spiritual at all.

There is a soulical insight which is the counterfeit of spiritual apprehension. It is purely psychic. Have you met people who see through, and get an insight into things in a remarkable way, and yet they are not spiritual people? They have a psychical insight, their souls are highly tuned to things which are not ordinarily apparent. We have often been impressed with this and puzzled by it. They can talk about the devil, the spiritual system, use the Bible language; they can talk about things of the Bible and get behind the actual written language, in some remote kind of way getting out interpretations which are not obvious.

There are certain national constitutions which are peculiarly characterised by this very thing. I believe the Galatians were like that. If you trace the history of the Galatians, you will see that this is the peculiarity of a race. The people of Gaul, from whom the Galatians came, are like that. There is something psychic about them, and it looks like spiritual insight and understanding. It is false. You can have it in its extreme form; you can have it in more moderate forms.

There is a counterfeit spirituality along that line, counterfeit spiritual knowledge which is simply mystical interpretation. There are people with phraseology and they are not clear, they are involved, and what are they after? They are trying to be spiritual on the basis of revelation, seeing things no one else sees or can see. Be careful! The enemy does simulate every truth in order to destroy the truth. We have to be in a true position, and there is this counterfeit, mystical interpretation.

You can drive typology to an extreme, you can force it to a point where it loses its value and becomes almost ridiculous. Spiritual discernment is counterfeited, and shows itself along the line of premonitions and second sight; it is all soulical. Consecration is often counterfeited by asceticism, a false consecration. The monasticism of the Middle Ages and what remains of it is a false interpretation of spirituality, of consecration. It is purely soulical, and of what real spiritual value is it to anybody?

Life can be, and so often is, counterfeited; exhilaration, even hysteria, is thought to be spiritual life. You know how we are all prone to this. There are times when we get a wonderful exhilaration by a presentation, a prospect opening, and for the moment we feel it is all alive. We give it a chance, we test it out, we wait a while. The thing dies out in us. Where is all the life we had about it? It was merely an exhilaration, something that appealed to our souls and found a response there.

Therefore test things, give them time, take them into another atmosphere and see how they live. It is so easy to get into a false position when there is a hothouse condition, you can get a lot of things springing up rapidly and seeming to be genuine growths. But take them outside and they shrivel up. The things of God do not do that, they survive all atmospheres, they live though death encompasses. His life is not a prey to earthly conditions; it triumphs. Everything can be counterfeited, and there is a counterfeit spirituality along every line.

Note the difference, then, between what is truly spiritual and what is falsely so. Is it not patent that the more the formalism, the ritual, the external order, the less the real spiritual life, food and fulness? You cannot have more formalism and ritual and that whole system of things than you get in St. Peter's in Rome, but I challenge you to be really spiritually alive and in touch with God, and be able to live in that atmosphere. It is one of the things that stands out in my own experience. I always had a desire to see St. Peter's, and I went, and I was glad to get out of the place. It was death, suffocation. But I would not accept that finally. I went back again after years, I have been several times. At last I had to say, That is finished, no more of that! It is not only death, but there is something evil, something that grieves the Spirit of God in you. And yet look at it - see them prostrating themselves, their "adoration," their "worship"; but it is death. That may be the extreme end of things, but that can be graduated and modulated; and let me say without any hesitation, the measure of external ritual and formalism and that sort of thing determines the measure of spirituality. The more you have of that, the less you have of true spiritual life, of real spiritual food. A real life with the Lord is something very simple, shorn of all the art of religion; a few children of God gathered together in something which has no ecclesiastical traditions, no religious embellishments, no external forms, but just a simple meeting in the Name of the Lord: there you have life, power, fulness. I am not saying that things must be shoddy in order to have spirituality: I am saying that the law of life is spirituality.

It works in another way. The nearer to earth we get, the more we ourselves feel our importance. Man is biggest when he is nearest to the earth; he is smallest when he is farthest away. I remember my first time in an aeroplane; at ten thousand feet up, I looked down on the ground that meant so much weary toil to cross. It looked only inches big, the people and animals were like toys. The nearer to heaven you get, the less important are the things of earth. All this religious embellishment is the importance of the earth, of the world. The nearer you get to things spiritual and heavenly, the less of that you want, it all goes; you see how really petty and insignificant it is. See the Church from heaven, and all this that goes on down here is like playing at going to church; it is so small. There is a great deal of difference in the spiritual constitution.

To sum up what I am saying, it is this. Spirituality rightly understood is the secret of all that belongs to God. At the very beginning of our life with God, we have to be reconstituted as spiritual beings. "That which is

born of the Spirit is spirit." "He that is spiritual." "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." But there is a false thing to counterfeit and simulate spirituality, and it is not objective to ourselves, it is made out of ourselves. We make gods after our own likeness, our souls produce their own system, even in religion; and the Spirit produces His system. Said the woman to the Master, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." The Lord Jesus said, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father... God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:20-24). That is only saying, This Mount Gerizim and its temple and the temple in Jerusalem are purely temporal, earthly, the things of men's souls. Men must have something to see, to handle, something they can appreciate by their soul faculties, but that is not the realm of things since I, the Lord, have come. That is the natural, it is past. Now, the spiritual comes - neither here nor there, not a matter of place or things or anything like that on the earth. It is in spirit with the Father.

That is the order, that is the nature and character of this dispensation.

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