

'That the World May Believe'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The only way to achieve true Christian unity is to start anew, with a focus on the Cross of Christ, and to apply it at the root of our being and system of things.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:10, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:14

Topics: "The Cross", "Christian Unity"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the current state of Christianity has established a flawed basis for unity, focusing on organizational interests rather than the sovereign headship of Christ. He argues that true Christian unity is impossible under the present conditions of division and self-interest, which stifle the church's mission. Sparks calls for a new beginning centered on the Cross, which he identifies as the only means to achieve genuine unity among believers. He stresses that this unity must transcend denominational and personal interests, leading to a Christ-centered consciousness that fosters true oneness in the body of Christ. Ultimately, he asserts that the Cross must be applied deeply within our lives and systems to overcome divisions and manifest unity.

Transcript

We have said that Christianity as it now is has set up an entirely false basis -- an impossible basis -- of Christian unity, and divisions among Christians are viewed and judged from a standpoint which is utterly wrong. That standpoint is the one that views the whole question in the light of the system which Christianity has become. It is no longer the all-dominating EXPERIENCE of the absolute sovereign headship of Christ over a living spiritual organism, His church; but it is now a matter of churches, missions, movements, enterprises, organizations, with their respective memberships, clientèle, officers, funds, etc. It is very largely what in the world is termed "vested interests", in localities, countries, areas, personalities, personal interests, proprietorships, and so on and on. The supreme concern for the SPIRITUAL measure of Christ is governed by all this, instead of governing it or making it completely subservient, if not unnecessary. Realism and honesty demand that we face facts and do not deceive ourselves with false hopes and expectations.

An expression of Christian unity in any adequate way is absolutely impossible while the present position obtains!

We have got to start all over again. Until we do, the mission and testimony of the church is going to be increasingly sabotaged by suspicions, prejudices, ostracisms, and factions. This smoke from hell will stifle

and paralyse, and bring increasing limitation, so that Christianity -- yes, evangelical Christianity -- paralyses itself. The disagreements on points of doctrine, interpretation, the taking up of one point and enlarging it to eclipse ninety-nine other wholly acceptable points on the one hand, and the wearing of blinkers regarding many unscriptural things to get benefits from a small proportion of what is good, on the other hand, is a case of putting the hand upon the ark by those who have no spiritual rights for governing the Lord's interests, and by their limited spirituality are both standing in the Lord's way, and ministering to this enemy-action to fill the air with questions as to "soundness" and "safety".

We have said above that a new beginning is the only way to an adequate expression of unity. WHAT is that beginning, and WHERE is it to take place? This is a much happier line of enquiry and presentation than that wallowing in the morass of the facts, causes and nature of divisions.

The Starting Place and Basis of Unity is the Cross

Is it the dark shadow of legalism threatening to strangle, or actually strangling, the life of the church as in the letters to the Romans and the Galatians? Then see how the Spirit of life leads the apostle to bring the cross into full view as the only but sure means of deliverance!

Is it the many-sided carnality, the reasserting of the natural man, even unto the realm of the spirituals as at Corinth? Again, see how "Christ crucified" is the EXCLUSIVE remedy!

Is it petty jealousies and standing for rights as at Philippi? Then see the humbling of Himself by Christ, and "obedience unto death, yea, the death of the cross" which is presented as the example for victory! So it ever is: a vital union, a union with Christ in His death which has also become a critical experience in believers, in "ministers", in "workers", and in "the work", is the one and only ground and way to an expression of unity.

We shall have to die, not only to the world and to ourselves, but to our work, our denomination, our mission, our enterprise or our movement, AS SUCH, and in all have only one object which obliterates all other interests and consciousness; that is Christ, His increase and fullness! The "I" of Galatians 2:20, which is supposed to be crucified with Christ, covers a much larger area than a merely legal death, or the legal aspect of Christ's death. It touches the whole matter of religious and traditional relationships, as the context shows. Paul was really saying that the "no longer I" meant his death to the Law and its ordinances, which meant Judaism as a system which had been transcended by Christ. The Cross not only makes Christ superior to "Christianity" (as we know it) but completely subjugates it to Him.

The church -- according to Paul's statements -- is no combination of nations or nationals, or classes, or denominations; it is not "inter" in any respect, it is "uni"; it annihilates ALL, and brings up "ONE NEW Man", only one, and entirely new -- as Christ is the FIRST of a "new creation".

This has to find its very beginning in a new consciousness of a new-born child. Not this-or-that-conscious, but Christ-conscious, and "all one in Christ" CONSCIOUS, not mere doctrine or slogan. Until this ground is really taken or occupied, and Christ-consciousness just does transcend our religious connection or tradition-consciousness, there will remain inner and outer divisions.

The Cross is a mighty power, and it has to be applied right at the root of our being and of our system of things.

The question is as to whether our measure of Christ is really so much bigger than our particular Christianity-complex that the latter fails to affect us in our attitude toward Christ's own, just because they are His. This is the only way of manifested unity.

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