

# The Changed Position of the Companions

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The Letter to the Hebrews is an appeal for companions of Christ and a heavenly calling, emphasizing the importance of God speaking through His Son and the significance of suffering in spiritual knowledge.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9:7, John 1:12, 2 Corinthians 4:7, Hebrews 2:1, Hebrews 11:40, Hebrews 12:11, Hebrews 12:26-27

**Topics:** "Companionship with Christ", "The Transition from Earthly to Heavenly"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the Letter to the Hebrews as a divine appeal for companions of Christ, particularly during a time of crisis for the Hebrew Christians. He highlights the transition from the old earthly system to a new heavenly calling, urging believers to recognize that God is actively seeking companions who will move forward with Him. The sermon underscores that God's communication is centered in His Son, Jesus Christ, who embodies the fullness of God's message and purpose. Sparks warns that just as the old system was shaken, so too will earthly systems face upheaval, calling Christians to embrace their identity in Christ and the transformative power of suffering. Ultimately, he encourages believers to trust in God's discipline as a sign of His love and to seek the deeper knowledge of the Lord through trials.

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## Transcript

As a subject, we have pointed out that this is a key to the whole of this Letter to the Hebrews, which is an appeal for companions of Christ, and for companions of a heavenly calling. We have also said that this Letter is a summary of the whole of the New Testament. In making that statement, of course, we provide you with a very large field of consideration. We simply have to say that all that is in the New Testament is gathered in some way into this Letter. Therefore, all that is in the New Testament is gathered up into this one thought: God is seeking companions for His Son in a heavenly calling.

We are now going to dig more deeply into this Letter, always with this one thought in mind: It is companions of Christ which are in view.

Let us say one brief word about the point of view taken by this Letter. We understand that it was written and given to these Hebrew Christians at a time of very serious crisis, when a whole system which had existed for many centuries was about to pass away. The whole system of the Old Testament, from Moses onward, was about to go. After the writer had put down all that is in this Letter he put over it a quotation from the Old Testament: "Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that

have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain" (Hebrews 12:26,27 - quoted from Haggai 2:6). By quoting that Scripture and putting it at the end of this Letter, the writer indicated that this was just about to take place, and he proved to be right. It is evident that this Letter was written just before A.D. 70.

The Roman legions may already have been gathering around Jerusalem, and we know from history what happened. The city was besieged and destroyed, not one stone of the temple being left standing upon another, and the whole land was desolated. The priestly service ceased and all the functions of the temple came to an end. The whole country was put into a state of utter desolation, and from that day, even until now, that system ceased to be.

And this Letter was written because the Lord knew what was going to happen and because, in the Divine plan, the time had come for it to happen. Always read this Letter in the light of that great historic crisis.

That was the dark side of the story. But you will notice that this Letter is just full of that 'better thing' which had taken the place of the old, and we shall be dwelling upon that 'better thing' as we go along. As the people of an earthly calling were being set aside this great Letter of a heavenly calling was presented to them.

Before we go further with the Letter, let us remember that its message abides for us. It would be a very blind person who today could not see that another such event is very near. There has been built up on this earth another great system of Christianity. It is very earthly as a system, and, just as the hearts of the Jews here were very much bound up with their system, so in our time multitudes of Christians are just bound up with this historic Christianity. I do not claim to be a prophet, but there is much in the Word of God which points to the time when this whole system will be shaken. It is very impressive that in our lifetime we have seen this in a small way, when churches have been destroyed, congregations scattered, and it has not been possible to go on with the old forms. People have had to find the Lord for themselves without any earthly helps. They have had to get their help from heaven and not from earth. We have seen this happen, in a comparatively small way, on at least two occasions. The Lord has smitten the earth on two terrible occasions, with not so many years between them, and it is not difficult to see that it could happen again on a very much bigger scale. That event may not be very far off. We Christians speak of the coming of the Lord. That is our hope and our salvation: but we must remember that the coming of the Lord is going to be accompanied by a terrible judgment upon this earth, when everything that is not heavenly is going to be shaken, so shaken that it will just collapse.

So this Letter has a real message for us. As was said to the Jewish Christians at that time: 'Your whole system, in which you are so bound up, is going to pass away', so this Letter says to us today: 'All the earthly system is going to be shaken, and shaken out of its place. But there is a better one coming' - "God having provided some better thing" (Hebrews 11:40).

Well, that is the standpoint of this Letter. I am sure we can see that it is very applicable to our time. We are not just studying a book of the Bible which relates to many centuries ago. God is the eternal God and He speaks to all time, but the message is intensified as we get nearer the end.

Now we are going to see further this transition from the earthly to the heavenly. In the terms of the New Testament, and of this Letter in particular, it is the transition from an earthly, historic Israel to a heavenly, spiritual Israel. So we are going to look at the beginnings of Israel in both cases.

Do you notice how the Letter begins? It begins with one word: 'God'. You can put a big ring round that word. God stands over the whole content of this Letter. Everything in it must be viewed from God's standpoint, not from man's, or from the world's, or from the earthly standpoint. It is God who is speaking, and all that is here is what God is saying. God stands over all that this Letter contains, and no one is allowed to say that this thing is of man. As we move through the Letter we have constantly to say to ourselves: 'God is saying that. This is not the interpretation of man. This is God speaking.' The great transition which is marked by this Letter is God moving forward. God is going on. God is in charge of everything. And the Letter says: 'The companions of the heavenly way are those who are moving on with God.' The appeal of the Letter is: 'Let us go on, because God is going on.'

The whole of the old Jewish system was something which had settled down, and in a very real sense it had gone to sleep. God is not the God of the spiritually asleep. The appeal to Israel was: 'Awake, thou that sleepest!' That system had gone to sleep, had settled down and had become an end in itself. It was not moving on with God. That was the trouble in the days of the prophets. And this Letter says: 'God is going on. The companions of Christ are those who are going on with God.'

Do remember this: that a true, living Christianity is a 'going on' Christianity. It will never stop going on, in this life or in eternity. It says: "Of his government... there shall be no end" (Isaiah 9:7). So we begin with God, and we move on with God.

This Letter is God expressing Himself. That is in the very first statement in the Letter: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son". Here, then, we meet with a God who is expressing Himself. He is here declared to be a speaking God; He is not a dumb or silent God. He is a God who has always been speaking and is speaking now. So, right at the beginning, this Letter declares God to be a God who speaks. And then, to analyse it further, He is spoken of as being a God who speaks with a purpose. He is a God of purpose and is speaking concerning His purpose. He spoke in times past "in the prophets by divers portions". He speaks now in His Son, and here there are two very important things to note.

In times past God spoke in many parts, by many prophets. He said one thing through one prophet and another thing through a different prophet. All the prophets were parts of God's speaking. No one prophet said everything. You can look into the prophets and see that every one of them had a specific aspect of God's message. "In many parts", is the word. His final speech in Christ is the gathering up of all the parts into completeness. God's Son is the complete speech of God - all the parts are brought together in Him. That gives this Letter a very, very big place, does it not? It says that now, here, God is speaking in fullness in His Son.

And alongside of that is the appeal "to give the more earnest heed" (Hebrews 2:1), because this is so much fuller than anything that God had ever said before.

Then it says that in times past God spoke 'in many ways', not only in different portions, but in different manners. It would take too long for us to go back to the Old Testament to see all the manners in which God spoke. He spoke by a thousand different means: sometimes by words and sometimes by acts. The manners were indeed 'divers'. However, the statement here is that at the end He speaks in one way, one all-inclusive way, and that is in His Son. God's Son is His one inclusive way of speaking at the end. On the one side, no one is going to get anything from God apart from Jesus Christ. God will absolutely refuse to speak other than in His Son. If you want to know what God wants to say to you, you have to come to His

Son. On the other side, in Jesus Christ we have all that God ever wants to say.

I want to say that especially to young Christians. I have been reading and studying my Bible all through the years, and I tell you quite honestly that today this book is altogether beyond me. I would never come back to this Letter to the Hebrews if that were not true. I have preached and lectured on this Letter for years, but today it is far beyond me. Should I say 'the Letter to the Hebrews'? I would be more correct in saying 'the Lord Jesus who is revealed in this Letter'.

Yes, we have far more of God's speaking in His Son than we have yet come to understand. We have nothing apart from Jesus Christ, and we need nothing apart from Him.

We said that this letter presents God as a God of purpose, and it goes on to show that His purpose is centred and summed up in His Son. That is set before us at the beginning of the Letter in three ways.

Firstly, in the person of His Son. Just look at this: "At the end of these days (He hath) spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance..." You notice that the whole of the first chapter is occupied with presenting God's Son. God is speaking concerning His Son, as to who He is. What a great Son this is!

Then it presents the Son in terms of redemption. "He made purification of sins". That is just one phrase, but many chapters follow to explain what that redemption is. All these chapters on priesthood and sacrifice have to do with that one clause. God is speaking in His Son concerning redemption.

In the third place He is speaking in His Son concerning glory. The Son is "the effulgence of his glory", and He is going to bring "many sons unto glory" (Hebrews 2:10), because "when he had made purification of sins, (He) sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high". God speaks in a Son whom He has now glorified and sat at His own right hand.

But God does not speak in His Son and leave it there. You will notice that in chapter two He brings man into this, and this Letter has a wonderful message for man: that all that God has put in His Son is for man. God speaks in this Letter of the finished work of Christ, the work which is made complete for man.

Here is something that you and I must dwell upon. Personally, I am constantly brought to this: I have not yet learnt thoroughly to believe what I believe in! I believe in the finished work of Christ, yet sometimes I am just as miserable about myself as any man could be. I am often almost at the point of giving up because of what a wretched kind of thing I am. If there is anything in this world that would cause me to give up the Christian ministry, it is myself. Do you understand what I mean? Oh, how we are discouraged by what we find in ourselves! And so, we don't believe what we believe in. We believe in the finished work of Christ, and that God puts all that finished work to our account. God does not see us in ourselves - He sees us in Christ. He does not see us, He sees Christ in us. We don't believe that! If we really did we would be delivered from ourselves and would indeed be triumphant Christians.

Of course, that does not mean that we can just behave anyhow. We may speak and act wrongly, but for every Christian there is a refuge - a mercy-seat. It has not to be made; it is there with the precious Blood. That has not to be shed; it is shed. There is a High Priest making intercession for us. There is everything that we need. The work is finished, completed. Oh, we Christians must believe our beliefs! We must take hold, with both hands, of the things which are of our Christian faith.

But I know you have problems when I say that: 'What about this old man?' Perhaps you are one of those people who believe that sin has been absolutely rooted out of you and that it is quite impossible for you to sin - well, if you believe that, the Lord bless you! I think you may be tripped up one day and find that there is an old man there after all. But leaving that aside, most of us do know that there are two things in us - there is the new and there is the old, there is the spiritual man and there is the natural man, and this natural man is a very troublesome fellow! What about him over against the finished work? This Letter tells you all about that when it says: "God dealeth with you as with sons" (12:7), and God loves sons. Are you a child of God? Has there been in your history that deep action of new birth? Have you received the Lord Jesus? The Word of God says: "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). If you have received the Lord Jesus you are a child of God. The spirit of sonship has come in and dwells in you.

This Letter says that God loves His sons, and therefore He chastens them: He child-trains them, and 'no child-training', says the Letter, 'for the present is pleasant'. God's dealings with His own family are not always pleasant, and when they are unpleasant there is a little demon sitting on our shoulder who will whisper in our ear: 'You see, God does not love you. He would not deal with you like this if He loved you.' The devil is always out to turn the loving works of God into evil things.

Yes, God is dealing with us as with sons. It is discipline, and it goes against the flesh. The Letter says: 'It is not for the present pleasant.' Indeed, it might have said: 'It is very unpleasant!' 'What father is he', says this Letter, 'who does not chasten his son?'

What I am saying is not easy to say, because I may be exposing myself to the rod. We have enough experience to know that we have to say some things very carefully, because we are often tested on the things that we say. But here is the statement that it is a totally unkind father who never chastens his child. Have you seen children who are never chastened or corrected? Those children are going to have a bad time in this world, as people are not going to like them, and they will discover that. Their parents have spoiled them.

This Letter says that God's love is expressed in His using the rod to His children. He does not always put His good things, His best things, into a nice form. I heard the other day of a little boy who had to take some medicine, and it was not very nice. His father said: 'There are many vitamins in this medicine.' The little boy said: 'Daddy, why must all the good things be put into nasty things? Why can't they be put into ice-cream?' The Lord does not always put the good things into ice-cream. Sometimes the vitamins are in the nasty medicine.

Now that is exactly what this Letter says. God is not condemning us when He deals with us like that. He is working to deliver us. If you think that these talks here are going to save you, you are making a mistake! They are only to explain what God is doing. God never saves by theory. You can read everything that has ever been written on Christian doctrine and still be the same man or woman. God's ways are very practical, and He teaches us by experience. That experience is sometimes very difficult and is called here 'the training of sons'.

May the Lord Jesus just impress our hearts again with these things! God is still speaking in His Son, and His speaking is in order to get companions of His Son. Companions of this heavenly calling and of Christ will go into the hard school and have to learn many hard lessons, but in learning them they will come to understand how great is their inheritance in the Lord Jesus.

I may add this: My experience is that no one really has spiritual knowledge without suffering. I am not speaking about head knowledge. I am speaking about real knowledge of the Lord in the inner life. I do not know of anyone who has come into that knowledge apart from suffering. Perhaps that is a depressing thing to say, but there it is - it is a law in God's Word. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (II Corinthians 4:7), and how poor this vessel is we learn through trial and affliction, but then we learn how wonderful the Lord is. The Letter to the Hebrews says: "Afterward" (that is, after the chastening) "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (12:11). What a wonderful phrase! Those fruits come along the line of chastening and by way of suffering.

So let us ask for that grace which the Apostle had to rejoice in suffering.

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