

# The Corporate Expression of the Heavenly Man

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The corporate expression of the Heavenly Man is the Church, which is one with Him in life, resources, mind, and nature, and is intended to grow and increase in the fulness of Christ.*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 3:17

**Topics:** "Unity in the Body of Christ", "Gifts of the Spirit"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the concept of the Church as the corporate expression of the Heavenly Man, Jesus Christ, highlighting the unity and interdependence of believers as members of His Body. He explains that the Church is not merely an organization but a living entity that shares in the life and purpose of Christ, governed by the Holy Spirit. Sparks stresses the importance of recognizing our interrelatedness and the necessity of each member for the fulfillment of God's purpose. He also discusses the gifts given by Christ to the Church for its growth and maturity, underscoring the roles of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in building up the Body of Christ. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a renewed understanding of our identity in Christ and our collective responsibility to maintain unity and express His fullness in the world.

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## Transcript

Reading: Eph. 3:17-21, 4:1-10.

The fact that the Lord Jesus is the Heavenly Man is touched upon at various points in this reading. Here in chapter four we have the statement that "He... ascended far above all the heavens..." while all that follows in the chapter is related to the present expression of the Heavenly Man as here in the world.

We have already noted this feature in John's Gospel; for we have there seen the Heavenly Man in person as both present here in the world and at the same time in heaven. We now meet with it again in Ephesians, but this time in a wider sense; for here we have to do with the corporate expression of the same Heavenly Man in His Body, the Church.

These two are one, not merely by their relatedness, but by their very life; one in their resources, one in their mind, one in their consciousness, one in their nature, one in the laws of their life, one in their purpose, one in their method, one in their times. There is nothing which relates to them as the Heavenly Man in

which they are not one. It is not just the oneness that springs from an understanding or an agreement, but that which is the result of being one in substance, one in essence.

Again, we are speaking of Christ as the Heavenly Man, and not of Him as God. In this corporate expression, it is not a case of the Body acting for the Head, of the Church acting for the Lord. There is no independence nor separate responsibility. It is the Lord Himself continuing His own life and work in and through His Body; the whole is one Man. Not that the Lord has given up a personal identity and ceased to be a separate person, but as out from His very heavenly manhood He has given His own substance, His own constituents, His own life, to constitute a Body which is so one with Him, in this utter way, as to be part of Himself. That is the Body of Christ as set forth here. That is the Heavenly Man corporately expressed.

The Body, the Church, was never meant to be something in itself, but from eternity was always intended to be "the fulness of Him That filleth all in all." Therefore it has no existence apart from Him, nor has it existence apart from God's purpose in Him. These facts, simple as they are in statement, are very profound, and very searching in their meaning. They govern and determine what the Church is. Nothing which bears the name "Church" (in the New Testament acceptance of that term) and is not the continuation of His Son in this universe, exists in the thought of God.

Now this involves several things, and these are presented in the chapter we have before us.

#### One Life in Christ

Firstly, this involves the one life that by the Holy Spirit is in all the members of Christ. "There is... one Spirit"; "Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit...." There is the one life by the Holy Spirit. Only thus does Christ come to His fulness in His Body, does the Church fulfil the Divine thought for its existence, come to the Divine end.

We have already sought to see how the Heavenly Man in person was in every detail governed by the Spirit, inasmuch as upon such a government depended the fulfilment of the whole revelation of God concerning Him. All the Scriptures which had gone before pointed to Him, and waited for their fulfilment in Him, and He was to be the fulfilment of all those Scriptures to a detail. It would have been an impossible, overwhelming, crushing responsibility to have taken that on mentally, to have felt a consciousness every instant of His life that He was responsible for everything that was written in the Scriptures. To have had that on His mind would have been an intolerable burden impossible of bearing. He would have been the most introspective person that had ever lived. Every moment He would have been asking: Am I doing the right thing? Am I doing it in the right way? Am I doing what I ought to be doing according to that Book, that standard? But His life, being governed by the anointing, being under the control of the Spirit, meant that He spontaneously, and by the inward consciousness that was His through the Holy Spirit as to what was, and what was not, the mind of God, did fulfil the whole revelation.

Now what was true of Him personally has to be true of Him in the corporate sense. Here is a revelation concerning Jesus Christ which has come out of the eternal counsels of God, a revelation of vast meaning, a destiny, a great spiritual, heavenly system summed up in Him, and which is to be expressed, to be wrought out, to be realized in Him corporately as in Him personally. But how is it possible for us to fulfil it, to realize it, to attain unto it; for it to have its fulfilment and its expression in us? Only on the basis of the one life by Holy Spirit in all. That is what gives force to the exhortation in this very letter to "...be filled with the Spirit." That gives the real meaning and value to the whole teaching concerning the Holy Spirit--the

receiving of the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit--because only so can that which has been produced by the mind of God, concerning His Son, and which is to have its full realization in the Body of Christ, be reached. How necessary, then, for us all to live in the Spirit. It is not enough that some of us should live in the Spirit; it is important that all should do so, and that none should walk after the flesh.

#### An Inter-related and Inter-dependent Life

The second thing, which is really a part of the same truth, but with perhaps a rather closer application of it, is the need for a recognition of, and diligence to keep, an inter-related and inter-dependent life. It is something to be recognized first of all, to be taken account of, and then something we are to be diligent to maintain. That is to say, all the members of Christ are related; there is an inter-relationship. We are not so many separate parts, fragments, individuals, we are all related; and not only so, but we are all dependent on one another. For God's end, for God's purpose, we cannot do without one another. On any level other than that we might be able to do without one another. If we were living on any natural level, we could perhaps say of some people, that we could do without them, but when we come into the light of God's purpose, then we are governed by an inter-dependence. We find that we need one another, that we are dependent upon one another, in respect of God's fulness. Of this fact we have a clear indication in the words "strong to apprehend with all the saints." We cannot apprehend apart from the rest. No one of us will ever be able to apprehend the whole. We need the strength of all saints to apprehend with all saints.

This is not only a statement of fact, but a truth by which we are immediately put to the test. Do we say: Well, we have seen the Body of Christ, we have seen the Church! As to whether we have seen that aright, will be proved by whether we realize our inter-dependence. If any one of us should ever take the attitude that we can dispense with another member of Christ, or be of that spirit, such a one has not truly seen the Body of Christ. Maybe there has been a seeing of something, but not the Body of Christ; it has not been seen that this Body is to be the fulness of Christ. For that fulness all saints are needed. The Lord Jesus in His own way, His own parabolic way, was putting His finger upon principles and laws all the time--"See that ye despise not one of these little ones..." (Matt. 18:10); "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least..." (Matt. 25:45). This is not just a community kind of thing, a fraternity; we are face to face with a law, when it is said that it will take all saints to come to, and to express, His fulness. If we have seen the Body of Christ we must have seen the inter-relatedness and the inter-dependence of all members, and must be living on the basis that the Body is one.

The Apostle exhorts to diligence in relation to that. We must recognize that the Body is one, and then give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit. I expect the Apostle, by the time he wrote his letter, well knew how much diligence that required. He was beginning to see how easy it was for Christians to dispense with one another, to take the attitude that they could do without one another, or without certain ones at any rate; how easy it was for them to fall apart, to take a careless attitude, to be anything but diligent in keeping the unity.

This maintaining of the unity is a positive thing. It represents a being on full stretch for something. It is not just a case of our desiring it, wanting it, of our considering it to be the best thing and even necessary, but of our applying it. It takes application to give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit.

This is what is meant by being "renewed in the spirit of your mind," which, again, is unto the putting on of the "new man," the corporate Heavenly Man. Thus in the passage before us, the practical exhortation immediately follows: "Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbour: for

we are members one of another." The renewing of the spirit of the mind works out in each one speaking truth with his neighbour, in the putting away of all falsehood. Why tell yourself a lie? We would not do that deliberately. What would be the point in my telling myself something that is not true? What would be the sense of my left hand doing my right hand an injury, seeing that ultimately both must suffer? Similarly "we are members one of another." In the other mind, the mind of the old man, which is mentioned here, there is a lack of this sense of corporate life, this inter-dependence, this inter-relationship, where it is recognized that everyone is necessary, indispensable. You can put people off in that realm; you can get rid of them, can gain your end, gain an advantage by just suspending the truth. But here we are dealing with one entity, and that entity must not be conflicting, must not be different things but one thing. We must be renewed in the spirit of our mind by putting on this new corporate Heavenly Man.

These verses are worth our noting again in the light of what we are saying:

"...If so be that ye heard Him, and were taught in Him, even as truth is in Jesus: that ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth. Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbour: for we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:21-25).

That is the new mind of the "new man," which is renewed in the spirit on the principle, the law, the reality of inter-relatedness and inter-dependence.

I need you; you are indispensable to me. I can never realize my destiny, the purpose of my being, apart from you. What, then, is the point in my telling you lies? If there is someone without whom our destiny, the purpose of our being, our whole objective is impossible, is lost, and, in the face of such a fact, a deceptive, lying relationship, what a contradiction! That is the force of the words here. "We are members one of another," therefore we must have a one mind; and speaking truth one with another is a mark of the "new man," the Heavenly Man who has only one mind. Lies all speak of contrary minds.

#### Gifts in Christ

The third thing that this implies is that for the progressive realization and expression of this Heavenly Man in time and in eternity, the heavenly Head has given gifts.

"When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (...He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)" (Eph. 4:8-10).

There is the Heavenly Man in person as the heavenly Head, giving gifts among men for the progressive realization and expression of Himself as the corporate Heavenly Man.

Now we must break that up and look at this parenthesis in verses nine and ten. It carries with it this fact that He descended before He ascended. He did not have His beginnings here. Of course we know that, but this is the argument of the Apostle; His origin was not here. By His ascending it is to be understood that He first descended. There is the Heavenly Man coming down and being here among men, the Heavenly Man in incarnation; He came down out of heaven. Having descended, He ascended, that He might fill all things. The whole universe is to be filled with the Heavenly Man.

Now you have to get that background before you can understand and appreciate what follows about these gifts. In relation to that filling of all things by the Heavenly Man, there is to be the increase of the Body.

This chapter is all of a piece. Christ is not here as separated from His Body. Here the Heavenly Man in person and the corporate Heavenly Man are brought together as one in purpose. Earlier in the letter the Apostle has shown how before times eternal, in the thought of God, this Heavenly Man has come out of heaven to be found here, but whilst here, is still in heaven. Now He personally is to be the universal fulness, and that fulness is to be by the Church: "...glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of the ages." In relation to that universal filling there is to be this increase of the Body: "...in Whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord...." In the Letter to the Colossians there is a very similar word:

"...And not holding fast the Head, from Whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. 2:19).

He is to fill all things by His Body, which is His fulness. Then the Body must grow, the Body must make increase, the Body must add to its stature, until it comes to the full measure of Christ. Now with a view to this increase, the heavenly gifts are given by the Heavenly Man to this heavenly Body.

Then I want you to notice another thing. These gifts are themselves a measure of Christ: "But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7). The gifts are a measure of Christ, and therefore they are all intended to produce the fulness of Christ, to lead to that fulness. In their own way they represent a fulness of Christ ministered in the Body. They are to make up the full measure.

Having seen that, we are able to look at the gifts mentioned.

#### Authority in Christ

"And He gave some apostles..." (it does not say "to be" apostles). Then we need to know what the apostle represents as a measure of Christ. What is his value in bringing the fulness of Christ by way of the Body, the Church, the corporate Heavenly Man? It is impressive to recognize that the apostle stands first on account of the value associated with the apostle. What are apostles? There is one word which expresses the meaning of apostles, and that word is "authority." Authority comes first.

We know that grammatically speaking the word means "one sent." But look again to see its signification in the Word of God. Take the word wherever you find it and see what is in it. Look, for example, at the parable of the house-holder who planted a vineyard. He sent unto them his servants to receive of the fruit. They came with his authority, and the wicked husbandmen, in slaying the servants, wholly repudiated the master's authority. You see, the application to Israel there is so piercing. The point of the parable is that they were refusing to acknowledge the authority of God in Christ. When the owner of the vineyard comes himself to deal with the situation he will miserably destroy the husbandmen. On what ground will he do this? Because he did not get his own personal gratification in the fruits? No! Because they had refused to recognize his authority in his son--"...he sent unto them his son...." Wherever you find the "sent" of the Lord, you find the authority of the Lord. That is an apostle.

As you carefully consider the matter of apostleship, you will see that everything that constituted an apostle represented what made for authority. An apostle was a specially constituted servant of the Lord. There was a very rigid law governing apostleship (so far as the Twelve were concerned), that an apostle must have seen the Lord in resurrection. He could not be an apostle if the Lord had not appeared unto him, for he had not had first-hand knowledge of the risen Lord. That first-hand knowledge of the risen Lord

invested him with an authority. It was a matter of the Lord having Himself appeared unto him.

If you turn to the Letter to the Hebrews you will find that the Lord Jesus is spoken of as God's Apostle and High Priest. The very phrase at once carries us back in thought to the writings of Moses, and we mark how it combines what God has set forth in Moses and Aaron respectively. Moses as the apostle, and Aaron as the high priest, represent two aspects of the Lord Jesus. Moses represents authority. From the beginning of God's using of Moses, right to the end, Moses represented the authority of God. The rod which was Moses' rod, became the rod of God, and by that rod the authority of God was displayed. The authority of God was so much vested in him that God was able to say to him, regarding Aaron, "...thou shalt be to him as God" (Exod. 4:16).

We see later how that worked out. When there were those who tried to displace Moses, or tried to take an equal place with him, see how the authority found expression. Moses never had to fight for his position. When the dispute arose touching his position, being the meekest of men, he just said to the Lord, in effect: Lord, am I here by Your authority, or am I not? Have I grasped this position? Have I sought authority, or have You put me here with it? I count on You to let it be known whether my position is of my own taking, or whether of Your appointing. The Lord called the people to the door of the tabernacle and took up the case of Moses, and you know what happened. It was because of what he represented as an apostle.

"All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore..." (Matt. 28:18). Thus an apostle is one who stands in Divine authority for the setting up, and the carrying on, of the Divine testimony. You can see that in Moses. The Lord appeared unto Moses and spake with him face to face. No one else came into that realm. Even though they came up into the Mount, they did not come into exactly the same place as Moses. It was with Moses that the Lord communed and spake as a man speaks to his friend, face to face. Then for ever after, the one thing that governs Israel is this: "...as the Lord spake unto Moses..." At the end of the constituting of the tabernacle, there is a whole chapter in which some seven or eight times this one phrase occurs: "...as the Lord commanded Moses." It speaks of authoritative government by what had come in through Moses, God's apostle. Well, in that authority he set up the testimony, and maintained it; the authority was his to that end.

Or, again, take the Apostle Paul, who perhaps above all others stands out as an apostle, and you see that his commission and his authority was, first of all, for the setting up of the testimony everywhere, and then for the maintaining of the testimony. He says to the Corinthians that, if he comes to them in the authority that he has received, it will go ill with some of them, because he is invested with this authority to maintain the testimony in purity.

Now what does this say to us? It is the Lord! This is the factor of Christ's heavenly authority in the corporate Heavenly Man. That may be administered through individuals. The point is that it is a feature of the Heavenly Man, and is active in the Church. We are face to face with the fact that Christ in His heavenly authority is in the Church for the setting up of His testimony, and the maintaining of it. Where the Lord's testimony is by the Holy Spirit, there the authority of the Lord is, and people have to reckon with that.

Of course, while we have to take these things to heart in our own personal lives, we are saying them as to those who have to instruct others. As the Lord's servants, you cannot have too clear a recognition of how definite is this operation of the authority of Christ in His Body. None can anywhere come into relationship with that corporate expression of Christ, which is constituted by the Holy Spirit, without becoming responsible for the Lord's testimony which is there, and if you violate it you suffer. You cannot just attach

yourself, and escape the implications. If you make a breach of the testimony, of the oneness of the Body of Christ, when you have been brought into real touch with it, and do not put that right, you will die. You may die physically. You may have a tragic end. You will undoubtedly go through sufferings and chastening; because you have not become a member of a movement, something merely of man; you have come into the place where the custodianship of eternal purpose is invested in the Holy Spirit working in the spirit of apostleship, and the authority of Christ is there. This is the precise meaning of those searching words in the First Letter to the Corinthians: "For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep." "Not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:30). You have come into a realm where things are not to be taken as mere doctrine, as an Organization, as something of man with which you can do as you like; you have come to the place where the authority of Christ is an operating reality. It is a terrible thing to get into the House of God if you are not of a mind to become suitably conformed.

That is one side, and a terrible side. But there is another side that makes for heart rest and assurance for those who carry extra responsibility in the house of God, where it is possible to say: 'Well, we have not to bear the full responsibility that properly is in the hands of the Holy Spirit, in the authority of Christ, to meet that which is contrary to the truth, and to the law of the house of God.' We need not be anxious, in that sense, because it is our responsibility. The heavenly Lord has put a functioning of His authority in the Church. There may be a disputing of that authority in the vessel. Hell may dispute, as at Philippi, or at Ephesus, or many another place, and may show its hand in vehement antagonism and resistance. But what is the issue? Every time the authority of Christ triumphs.

The establishment of the testimony throughout the Roman Empire through the Apostle Paul, is a marvellous manifestation of the supreme Lordship of Jesus Christ over all powers. It is not just a case of getting the better of man's mentality, of overcoming prejudice and difficulties amongst men; it is the conquest of the evil forces of hell. Cosmic forces are beaten and broken when the testimony is established through an apostle. It is the fact of Christ's heavenly authority in the Body, by the Spirit. Christ truly expressed in the assembly really cannot be set aside without suffering.

#### The Mind of God in Christ

Now what are the prophets in the assembly? In a word, the prophet is the instrument for the expression of the mind of the Lord, and this is usually set over against the expression of the mind of man. Of very great moment is the injunction we have noted already, "...be renewed in the spirit of your mind..." Because, in the corporate Heavenly Man, the Body, the mind of the Lord is to predominate, to operate, to be supreme. The Lord's mind is the only mind in this "new man," this Heavenly Man. You must be renewed in the spirit of your mind, if you are to come to the Lord's mind. The Lord's mind comes through an instrument called a prophet. He is the interpreter of the mind of the Lord. He brings into the Body the knowledge of the mind of the Lord. That, as we have said, involves the setting aside of the mind of man.

We are thinking, of course, of how the Old Testament prophets are a source of confirmation of what we have just said; for if you examine the point, you will find that they come before the people in relation to the rights of God in His House. Those rights were being set aside by His people. The mind of man was taking the place of the mind of God, and that worked out usually to very great evil, so that before long the very rights of God were denied Him in His own House, amongst His own people.

Take Elijah as an example. Elijah stands out preeminently amongst the prophets in relation to the rights of God, and Carmel is the great crisis as to Baal's rights and God's rights in Israel. Elijah is the instrument for

establishing the rights of God in an utter way, unto the complete destruction of that other mind, represented in the prophets of Baal. Those rights are expressed in terms of God's mind for His people, and so all the prophets bring in the mind of God, interpret it, keep the mind of God before God's people, and do battle in relation to it, that God shall have His place, have things according to His mind.

This, again, is a functioning of the Heavenly Man in His Body, to keep things according to the mind of God. We are not thinking, at the moment, particularly of people whom we may think to call prophets amongst us. We are not thinking of office, but of function. Vital functioning is what is before us, and anyone who is anointed and endowed by the Holy Spirit to keep God's thoughts clear in the midst of His people, to make His people know the mind of God, so that God gets His place and His rights, and all other minds are set aside, is fulfilling the ministry of a prophet. We are so apt to start at the other end, with the technical line of things, that of appointing prophets. Let us look at the function, not the man, and let us see that it is Christ Who is the Prophet, and that in this character He ministers through some whom He gives for the expression of the Divine mind as in Himself. It is quite possible to combine these functions in one individual.

### The Heart of God in Christ

Now what are the evangelists? In a word, the evangelist is the one to make God known through the Gospel, to disclose the heart of God in grace, and the function of the evangelist is to secure material for the expression of the Heavenly Man corporately. Thus we begin with authority in Christ, Christ in the place of supreme authority far above all heavens. Then we have the mind of God in Christ. Here we have the heart of God in Christ. The Gospel of grace is to secure increase by gathering material for the corporate Heavenly Man.

### Resources of God in Christ

We now come to the pastors and teachers. These two are brought together. The material is being gathered, the corporate Heavenly Man is being progressively brought into being and coming to His eternal completeness. Now while the material is being gathered, and the corporate Heavenly Man is being progressively brought together, the next need is for pastors and teachers, and the function here is that of the adjustment and fitting of that Heavenly Man. Adjustment is brought about by teaching, by instruction. The purpose of the instruction is to adjust us, to bring us into our place, into our right relationship, to bring us into an understanding of Christ, of our relationship to Him, and of our relationship to one another in Him. The instruction has to do with such matters as the believer's resources in Christ, and all that is signified by the Heavenly Man. This is the work of the teacher. The pastor is one whose function is to fit, to shepherd, to nurture. Building up by right adjustment to revealed truth is what we have here.

But all does not end there. The apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, the pastor and teacher, are given in order that the corporate Heavenly Man, deriving the values of these functions, shall itself minister to its mutual building up; for the making complete of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ. Mutual building up, mutual ministry, is to result from these gifts. Because we are receiving the benefits of this ministration in Christ to us, we have to make those benefits a mutual ministration, so that the Body builds itself up, increases with the increase of God, each separate part in due measure making increase.

If this sounds like technique to you, may we urge you to get away from teaching, and anything like a system of truth, and get the Lord in view. Keep the Lord Himself in view, and see that the one thing which

governs all is Christ's coming into ever greater fulness of life and expression in this universe by means of the Church which is His Body.

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