

The Criterion of Livingness

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Criterion of Livingness is the essential evidence of life, which includes freshness, growth, reproduction, relatedness, persistence, and purpose.

Scripture: Psalm 92:14, Isaiah 43:19, John 10:10, John 15:5, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:10, Revelation 21:5

Topics: "Freshness in Faith", "Livingness"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the true criterion of livingness in the Christian life is not found in doctrine or theology, but in the evidence of life itself, which includes freshness, growth, reproduction, relatedness, persistence, and purpose. He illustrates that life is characterized by continual renewal and vitality, contrasting it with mere existence that lacks freshness and adaptability. The sermon highlights that true Christian life is marked by a divine freshness that reflects the nature of God, urging believers to shed old forms and embrace the newness that comes from a living relationship with Christ. Sparks calls for a recognition of the vital signs of life in both nature and faith, asserting that genuine life will naturally express itself without the need for artificial enhancements.

Transcript

Having laid a foundation, and given good ground for the conclusion that life is the horizon of God's work in nature and grace, we take a phrase from that introduction as the key to much more - that is, the Criterion of Life. So we proceed to consider the main points of the criterion of livingness; that is, the indications and evidences of life. If life is the first and last issue, and the predominant element, apart from which there is no proof of God in anything, it is important that we should be able to discover its presence by its essential evidences. The real test is not in doctrine, theology, orthodoxy, or any of the other matters associated with Christianity, but in livingness; to change the language - vitality, potency, effectiveness.

Some of these major evidences of life are:

1. Freshness. (The simplest.)
2. Growth.
3. Reproduction.
4. Relatedness.

5. Persistence.

6. Purpose.

1. The Criterion of Freshness

It would be a drab world if there were no Springtime. It is not life, but only existence where there is no freshness in being and experience. Sameness is a deadly thing. Where trees never shed their leaves and produce fresh ones; where things seen and heard never convey fresh values and meanings; such like conditions in nature or in religion are no evidence of life. Indeed, they are a contradiction to life. Nature shouts against such a state, and every Springtime holds a festival of freshness.

The human body, in normal conditions, rebuts the idea of no freshness. The seven pounds of an infant all pass away. In seventy years, ten times does the fabric of the physical body change. Death is the failure to produce a fresh body. Life is ever shedding outward garments. Its onward march is strewn with discarded forms. Once the cells become rigid and set, life declines or withdraws. Life makes an imperative demand for adjustableness. When and where there is failure to fall into line with life, life will leave those concerned behind, however much theory they may have. When anything has served its purpose it may be left behind as waste matter unless it is vitalized by fresh purpose.

A study of the word 'New' in the New Testament will quickly convince that Christianity is essentially characterized by freshness. Although there are two Greek words translated 'New' - one meaning something that was not before, and the other something recent and fresh - the same idea of freshness is contained in both. Hence: A new commandment; a new creation; a new man; a new nature; a new corporate man (the Church); new things; a new name; a new song; a new Heaven and a new earth; new Jerusalem; all things new, etc. The vitalizing principle of all is life - Divine life; but never apart from the Person, Who is the Life.

This freshness is true freshness. It is from the life within, and is the expression thereof. This is true of natural life in the creation. The lobster, crayfish and crab shed their shells frequently. A lobster only two inches long has moulted ten times, and a ten-inch lobster has changed its shell twenty-five times. But he has not changed. The shell is reproduced from within, not imposed from without. Life produces it.

Herein lies a fundamental difference between the Christianity of the early days and that of so much of later and present times.

In an effort to depart from 'ruts' and traditional forms, and to get 'life', many resources are adopted. To be 'original', 'different', 'unusual', 'extraordinary', 'unique', much stunting is resorted to, 'attractions' are framed. All such subterfuges and dressing-up only betray the absence of true life. True life has a way of making itself known. When there is life there is never a need to put on anything. The life which is life indeed forces off dead things, whether they be in character, conduct, or forms. Like Abraham, Moses, David, Elisha, Paul, John, there is fruit in old age, and their fruit abides.

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