

The Foundation Law of God's New Israel

by T. Austin-Sparks

The foundation law of God's New Israel is separation and distinctiveness, which is symbolized in circumcision and represents a heart that is wholly devoted to the Lord.

Topics: "Covenant Theology", "Spiritual Circumcision"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the covenant of separation and distinctiveness, emphasizing the foundation law of God's Israel, symbolized in circumcision. He highlights the spiritual significance of circumcision in the New Testament, representing a heart wholly devoted to the Lord. The sermon delves into the battle for a life utterly committed to God, drawing parallels between the covenant with Abraham and the covenant in heart circumcision. It concludes with examples from Abraham, Hannah, and David, showcasing the importance of a circumcised heart that is set free from all self-interest.

Transcript

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, And as for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generation. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every male among you shall be circumcised" (Genesis 17:1-10).

"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Romans 2:28,29).

"In whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also

raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11,12).

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again" (II Corinthians 5:14,15).

"For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3).

THE COVENANT OF SEPARATION AND DISTINCTIVENESS

We ought to add Scriptures to those, for there are many more which are of the same nature, but these are sufficient to bring us to the point of our consideration, which is the foundation law of God's Israel, the law of God's covenant, and that covenant is symbolized in circumcision. The sign of the covenant with Abraham was circumcision. In the Old Testament it was literal and material. In the New Testament it is spiritual, but the meaning is the same. It is a spiritual law of God's Israel and that law is separation and distinctiveness. He lays down the law that God's Israel is a separate people; separate from all other people, and different from all other people - clearly distinguished from all other people. Did you notice, as we read those Scriptures, that God said to Abraham that He would make many nations out of his seed? Now God is taking out of the nations a people for His Name, something in the nations, but separate from the nations, and that law of separation and difference is the foundation of God's Israel.

We can see God keeping to that law in the Old Testament. It is written that "the God of glory appeared unto... Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said unto him, Get thee out!" (Acts 7:2). Later, Moses was in Egypt, and God just sovereignly took him out before He did anything else. Moses had to be out of Egypt first, and that was a very thorough thing, as you would think if you were out in a wilderness for forty years! Then the Lord set Moses back into Egypt to get the people out, and the Word is: "Out of Egypt did I call my son" (Matthew 2:15). God could not proceed with His purpose until He had got His people to, for there is a place where God will fulfil His purpose, and He will not fulfil it anywhere else. I would like you to put a lot of lines under that statement, for I think it is the key to everything. Let me say it again: there is a place where God will fulfil His purpose, and He will do it nowhere else. God means business. He is a God of purpose, and He is very serious about His purpose, which is a purpose of blessing. To Abram He said: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee... and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:2,3). God's purpose is a purpose of blessing; blessing to the instrument that He will use and to the people to whom He uses that instrument. "I will bless thee... and thou shalt be a blessing". That is the purpose of God, and I say it with a strong voice, because I know that some will say: 'If we are going this way it is going to have to give up everything!' Well, wait a little while - we have not finished yet!

We make this statement: God's purpose is to bless and to make a blessing, but it demands a position. The blessing and the vocation depend upon where we are. Of course, in the Old Testament it was literal. Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees, and God said: 'You must get out of this city. I am not going to do anything here! I must have you somewhere else.' In the New Testament it is spiritual. Where do you live? In Bern, in Zurich, in New York, in London, in Paris, or in some other city? God is not saying to you: 'Get out of Paris!' or any of these cities, but He is saying, just as forcefully: 'Get out!' You may be living in your body in a city, but you may not find your life there. You may have been born there, physically, but now, as a true Israelite, you were never born there. You were born from above.

God's covenant is bound up with this spiritual position, and we must really take serious notice of this. God has made a covenant with His Israel, but that covenant demands that they are out of somewhere and in somewhere else, and for us that means a different spiritual position. God's covenant is a covenant of blessing, of life, of service - that is, Divine vocation - but all that blessing, that life and that vocation are bound up with this matter of spiritual position. Spiritually we are out and we are different. That first Israel is not now in blessing, nor in life, nor is it in the Divine vocation. It is where the Lord Jesus said it would be if it rejected him - in outer darkness, where there would be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, and for these many centuries the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem has fulfilled that prophecy! Why is that? There is one little fragment of Scripture which is tremendous but it has a terrible statement in it: "The covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake" (Jeremiah 31:32). Israel broke the covenant of separation and distinctiveness.

A CIRCUMCISED HEART

Now we come to this matter of circumcision. I can only touch it very lightly, for it is a very delicate matter.

We have seen that in the Old Testament circumcision is a type, or symbol, for in the New Testament it is stated that circumcision of the heart - not in the flesh, but in the spirit - and it just means this: a heart that is wholly devoted to the Lord. By that symbol the seed of Abraham became God's exclusive people for the time being, and everything that we have in the Old Testament about God's wish for this people shows us how jealous He was over those people. God called Himself their husband (Jeremiah 31:32), and there was never a more jealous husband than He! Let Israel have anything to do with any other husband and you will hear the thunder, and the weeping, of the Prophets, God was so jealous for Israel.

Now see what Paul says about the covenant seed of Abraham. He heads this whole thing up into Christ: "Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Galatians 3:16). "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew (or an Israelite), which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit." So Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham, and Paul speaks of the circumcision of Christ.

Let me ask you a question: Has there ever lived on this earth a person more utterly committed to God than the Lord Jesus? He was indeed separated unto God, and different from all others. No one has ever borne the marks of spiritual circumcision more than the Lord Jesus. He was the Man of the undivided heart.

Let us go back into the Old Testament to that great Messianic chapter, Isaiah 53: "He shall see his seed... He shall see of the travail of his soul." Well, we know more than the Prophet Isaiah knew about that! We have been with Him in Gethsemane in the time of the travail of His soul, and we are with Him, on the other side of the travail. How many are the seed of Christ since then! Dear friends, if ever you are tempted to think that Christians are few, and that we are only a very small people in the millions of this world - open the windows! Look into the book of the Revelation: "A great multitude, which no man could number... ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." The number cannot be expressed in human language - and they have been gathered since the travail of the Lord Jesus. He is indeed seeing His seed! Gethsemane has been the most fruitful garden in all history - and you and I are of His seed! We are born out of His travail and are in the covenant made with the new Israel.

But do remember that the meaning and the value of the covenant depend upon our devotion to the Lord! This is a thing which is so evident: the greatest fruitfulness has always come from the lives most devoted to the Lord, the people of the undivided heart. This covenant has two sides. As we have already said, the New Testament takes many warnings from the history of Israel, and we may fail of all that that covenant means if our hearts are divided and we try to live life in two worlds. Let us look at a little incident in the life of Abraham.

It is in chapter 15, when God came to make His covenant with Abraham and his seed, and something happened which many people have not been able to understand. The Lord commanded Abraham to bring certain things for a sacrifice either to a large altar, or to two altars, for the Lord told him to divide the sacrifices in two and to put one half on one side and the other half on the other side. Now notice that these are two sides of the covenant. On the one side is Abraham and his seed and on the other side is God. God is about to enter into a covenant with Abraham and his seed, but the covenant has two sides. Now notice what happens! The vultures came down to try and steal the sacrifices. How greatly significant this is! All the powers of darkness are against this covenant, and all those evil fowls of the air are out to rob God and His people of this covenant. It says that Abraham beat them off. His rod was busy that day, and the vultures said: 'It is no good. We had better give up and get away from here.' Then Abraham went to sleep and "an horror of great darkness fell upon him". My point, and, I believe, the point of the Scripture is this: there is always a terrible battle with hell to secure a life utterly committed to God. No one who is going to be utterly for Him is easily won.

It may be that battle is going on in this very room. If the devil can prevent you from being utterly for God he is going to make a great big fight for it. Is that battle going on? The battle of the very covenant, the covenant in heart circumcision, a heart wholly for the Lord, a heart that is right out for God. If Satan can prevent that he will put up a good fight. What is your attitude to this? Are you careless about it? God alone knows how much is involved in it. Oh, take the rod of God and lay about these evil forces! Stand for the covenant! And when you have made that stand the evil forces will withdraw, the darkness will go.

There is a change of atmosphere in this story. At first the atmosphere is full of conflict and fear, for it is "an horror of great darkness". There is a battle in the very atmosphere over this matter, but when Abraham has fought the battle for the covenant the whole atmosphere changes and becomes one of victory. If we put the history of many consecrated believers into this story, there would be many testimonies like this: 'My, there was a tremendous battle over this matter! I was full of fears, but I took a stand, and with God's help I came to a decision. I stepped over on to God's side of the covenant and said: "Lord, I am Yours! I am with You!" then peace came, the peace of His victory. I went to bed that night feeling as though I had come out of a great battle, but it was into great peace.'

That is all in this little story in Genesis xv. May be your story! This is something of what means to have a heart that is circumcised, for circumcised heart is a heart set free from all self-interest. Was that true of Abraham? After many years what had seemed impossible came to pass and God gave him a son; and that son was God's miracle. You would expect Abraham to say: 'God gave me that son and I am going to hold on to him. I will never let him go, because God gave him to me.' There was a little boy once, and a baby came into the home. One day the mother said to the little boy: 'We are going to take Baby to the meeting and give him to the Lord.' The little boy's face fell, and he said: 'Mummy, you can lend him to the Lord, but we must have him back again. You know, that is the kind of consecration that a lot of Christians make; they have some personal interest in their consecration. But about that God given gift to Abraham God said: 'Take him and offer him!' Friends, learn this lesson! Do not think that because God has given

you something by miracle you can take it for yourself. I will not try to say what it might be. It might be your very ministry, for there is always a peril of taking our ministry and using it for ourselves. But Abraham was truly circumcised in heart, and the same was true of Hannah. How long she waited for that child Samuel, and how much she suffered! How earnestly she prayed! And then, at last, God gave her the child. What did she say? 'Thank you, Lord. I will never let this child go now!?' No, she said: 'For this child I prayed and the Lord has given me my request. Therefore I have given him to the Lord for as long as he lives.' She, too, was circumcised in heart.

From some of his Psalms we know that the one great ambition of David's life was to build the temple, and he worked and sacrificed for that temple. He said: "I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids until I find out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the Might One of Jacob." (Psalm cxxxii. 3-5). He was collecting private money, as well as material for the temple, for he said: "I have a treasure of mine own of gold and silver" (I Chronicles xxix. 3). Then he received the pattern of the temple from the Lord, and said: 'The time has come, and my life's ambition is about to be realized. The one thing for which I have lived is now going to be mine - but what is that? Someone is at the door. Come in! Oh, it is a Prophet. Yes, my friend, what have you come to say?' 'I have come to tell you from the Lord, David, that you shall not build the house. Thy son shall build it.' What did David do? What would you do? Well, what did David do? He said: 'It does not matter about my disappointment! The thing is that the Lord must have what He wants. My interests are nothing beside His interests.' So he gave everything to Solomon. Perhaps he had seen something more: "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psalm xxiii. 6), and that is better than any earthly house!

We never lose anything when the Lord has everything, and that is what it means to have a circumcised heart. May that be true of everyone!

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