

The Governing Law of the House of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Church exists to set forth the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, minister to the glory of God, deliver others from spiritual death, and be a present expression of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Scripture: Ezekiel 47:1

Topics: "Spirituality", "The Church as the Body of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the spiritual house of God is governed by the principles of life and spirituality, which are essential for manifesting the exaltation of Jesus Christ. He explains that spirituality involves being governed by the Holy Spirit, leading to a life that reflects Christ's supremacy and glory. The church exists not only to glorify God but also to minister life to others, serving as a vessel for God's elect and expressing Christ's presence in the world. Sparks challenges believers to ensure their lives are a true reflection of these spiritual truths, highlighting the importance of corporate life in the church as a living expression of Christ. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper commitment to embodying the life and spirituality that God desires in His house.

Transcript

READING: Ezek. 47:1-12; 1 Pet. 2:4-5

We are not going forward now with a further consideration of the major features of the spiritual house of God, but are leaving that for another time. We are going to bring those features already considered to the measuring line of their own governing law, which is that of life and spirituality. "Living," "spiritual," they are two great words in this passage - "a living stone," "living stones," "a spiritual house," "spiritual sacrifices."

Lest anyone should be in difficulty about that second word, spirituality, let us stay for the briefest moment to say that spirituality just means government by the Holy Spirit; but a government by the Holy Spirit in such a way as to make us one with the Holy Spirit in all His standards, in all His ways of looking at things, deciding about things, so that, being one with Him, we are not at all influenced or affected by natural judgments, natural standards, natural considerations, but ours are all the Holy Spirit's judgments and values and ways of viewing things. That in brief and comprehensively is what is meant by spirituality, a constituting of us according to the Holy Spirit, which means on the other hand, the ruling out of all that is merely and purely of our own natural life, mind, heart and will.

Well now, let us look at these four features of the spiritual house of God, which house we are if we are the Lord's, and look at them in the light of life and spirituality.

The Exaltation of the Lord Jesus

The first with which we were concerned was that this spiritual house of God exists for the purpose of setting forth, proclaiming, manifesting the exaltation of the Lord Jesus as God's Son, the exaltation of the Lord Jesus to the throne of the Father. It is for that the Church exists, and it is for that we exist if we are of the house of God. But that is not just a truth, a doctrine to be proclaimed. That is not just a part of the Church's creed - "Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high." That is not just one of our convictions, as we say. That is something which has to constitute us spiritually and has to be expressed by means of life. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus is, before and above all other things, a matter of life. It was when He was exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, it was when God made Him both Lord and Christ, it was when He was actually seated at God's right hand, far above all rule and authority, principalities and powers, that the Holy Spirit came out from His presence and made that which was in heaven, a spiritual reality in the Church; and that reality was marked and demonstrated and proved and evidenced by the mighty power of His ascended life. We have to be spiritually constituted on the basis of Christ's exaltation. That is to say, within us something has to be done which brings about in us a living spiritual oneness with the exaltation, the Lordship, the supremacy of Jesus Christ. It is not to remain something outside of us, however true it is. We have to be that in fact; and, as we have pointed out, the impact of the early believers upon this world, upon those around them wherever they were, was the impact of the FACT, not the doctrine, not the teaching, not merely the statement, but the FACT that Jesus Christ was exalted. That came home upon the situation because that fact has its supreme significance in the spiritual realm, and we know quite well that all that is visible, all that is here on this sentient creation, has behind it a spiritual order.

Never has that been more clearly manifested and demonstrated than in the present world situation. There is a spiritual order of things which is driving on, mastering, manipulating everything. It is, as many have been saying for the past months, Satanic in its background. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus finds its first registration there, and it is not until the registration is made there that the foreground is really affected. To arrest men, to arrest a course of things, to bring the yoke down upon situations, to harness developments in the seen, you have to get behind and register some superior reality against those forces which are creating these things.

Now, that is spirituality. The Apostle Paul said much about this sort of thing, and we have his language by which he expressed this reality. For example, "the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4). He did not actually use the word, but it is quite clear that he meant that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual, getting behind the situation: and you know what he was dealing with at the moment when he used those words.

Here were Corinthians who were seeking the advantages of natural wisdom, natural learning, the wisdom and the power of this world, in order to give them position, influence, standing. They were carnal in their quest for carnal weapons by which to gain ascendancy in this world. That led the Apostle to that great discourse on the foolishness and the weakness of this world's wisdom and this world's strength, and he said that, to overcome this world, you want something more than this world's weapons, this world's men.

To overcome the carnal, you must have something more than carnal weapons, and the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God. In other words, they are spiritual. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood in the form of wisdom and worldly power, "but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Therefore our weapons must be spiritual, and spirituality means fundamentally the ability to get behind the seen, the tangible, to the unseen, the invisible, the intangible powers of evil, and to register your superiority there: and that superiority is the exaltation of the Lord Jesus far above all rule and authority and principality and power.

That is a spiritual thing. The house of God is a spiritual house for that spiritual purpose, namely, to bring home Christ's ascendancy in a spiritual way against spiritual forces. Then the instrumentalities of those evil spiritual forces will in turn come under arrest. It is no use going directly at things. You must strike at the cause of things, and then the things themselves will, according to God's purpose and intention, either be destroyed, or be brought under arrest or limitation, just as the Lord intends.

It is not the Lord's thought to stop wars altogether just yet, nor much else that is going on in an evil way, but there is such a thing as limiting things to the purpose of God; and I do feel, and appeal to you as the Lord's children, that we ought to be engaged in this spiritual registration of the authority and supremacy of the Lord Jesus in the unseen, in the background of present world situations, with the object of limiting things to God's purpose. I believe it is possible for the Lord's people now to take hold of every air raid on this country and limit it, give it God's limitation, and I believe that that is what is happening.

I only use it by way of illustrating my point. It is an amazing thing how things have been limited. We have seen again and again what might have been, and how much the onslaught has been penned in, even where great damage has been done. Oh, how much more might have been, could have been, and the amazement of every day is the limitation that is imposed. Surely that is an encouragement. I believe it is due to something in the unseen which is set in motion through the prayers of the people of God. That is encouraging. Let us be given to our ministry. That is what the Church is for.

Thus the very first thing is that Jesus is exalted above all principality and powers which lie behind this world darkness, and the Church is here, by prayer and testimony and spiritual life, to bring home upon those background forces this superiority of the Lord Jesus. It is a thing, not of words, not of doctrines, not of creeds, but of life, the impact of His ascended life.

Well, we begin there. The principle, you see, the law of the expression of Christ's exaltation, is life and spirituality.

The Ministry of the House to God

The second thing which we were noticing with regard to these features of the spiritual house of God was that it exists to minister to the pleasure and glory of God. It is for God's glory, God's pleasure that the Church has been brought into being, for His satisfaction. And here we bring it right down to this rule: God is glorified and God receives that which is to His pleasure along the line of life and spirituality. You can judge of that by the effect. Wherever you have a real ministration of life, you always have the glory of God, God glorified.

That is, of course, true to the Scriptures. You remember that was the one point which the Lord Jesus made central and supreme in the raising of Lazarus. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of

God"; and as He came through all the doubt and unbelief which stood between Him and Lazarus and approached the situation, at least He silently lifted His heart to the Father. "Father, glorify thy name!" Then He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" The resurrection of Lazarus, the overpowering of death, was for the glory of God, and that was a spiritual thing, that was the triumph of life in Christ. Now, that is the glory of God. It says afterward that many believed on Him. The glory of God is largely seen through the out-working of this principle of life triumphant over death.

Now, that is a big subject. If you go back to the Old Testament, you will see that, in the case of every servant of God, after that servant of God was apprehended by Him, a process of death and resurrection commenced. You can take any one case that you like. Outstandingly, there is Abraham. How significant are the words that mark the apprehending of that servant of God. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2). That sets the standard of God, and in effect says, Now then, it is according to what I am as the God of glory that I am going to deal with you, and the issue of all My dealings with you will be glory to Me! So, no sooner was Abraham apprehended by the God of glory, than this process of death and resurrection set in. It was a process with constant recurrence. Abraham went into a first stage and phase and measure of death, and then, in resurrection, the glory of God was seen. All the way along, there was this experience of death. I am not speaking now about physical death, but of a working of death in his life in a spiritual way; death to things, death to relationships, death to hopes, death to earthly expectations, death to possessions; and every time death worked, there was a resurrection into something larger of the Lord, the Lord coming and making new covenants, giving him fresh revelations. I am El Shaddai! There were all these positive things when other things were going into death, right up to that last great triumph of resurrection in Isaac. Here is death; yes, death to all the promises, apparently, to all the hopes. If Isaac goes, then God in His faithfulness, God in His Word, God in His covenant, God in His promises, has gone too. It was a mighty death to face, and in spirit it was faced, but it was resurrection finally, full, glorious resurrection: and what glory to God!

Well, you can take many other illustrations of the truth from the Old Testament and then carry them over in a spiritual way to the New Testament, and see that this is exactly what happened with Christ. God received the full quota of glory through the death and the resurrection of His Son, and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus is the testimony to the fact that death has been engulfed and overpowered. Christ being there sets forth that fact in fullness. But then the principle has to be passed on to the Church which is His Body, and the history of the Church since that time has been just a history of successive deaths and resurrections, and every resurrection has meant some fresh contribution to the glory of God, some fresh expression of God's glory; and what is true of the history of the Church is true in the history of many an individual member of the Church, and probably of some of you. We have known deaths oft, not in the way in which Paul meant, physical and temporal and natural, but in our own life with God we have known what it means to suffer the eclipse of all things, darkness unto death. But that has not been the end. The end has been the God of glory again and again, and it is along this line that God's glory is ministered to, by life, spirituality, and life triumphing over death. We are here for that very purpose. I hope that does not discourage you, but rather that it will help you to recognize that our very being here means that we have to know death again and again to know life. But we do not end with death; we end with resurrection and glory to God. Let us fasten upon that. Even though the deaths may be many, the end is the glory of God. Eventually, His glory will be displayed in His Son, in His Church, in fullness, when death is finally vanquished, not only in Christ, but in and through the Church.

But this is something for present experience. It is a great truth to contemplate, it is a blessed thing to consider; but let us bring it right home. What I feel to be the important thing now, the Lord's desire where this hour is concerned, is that we should come very close to these things in reality; that what we are saying shall not be truth only, but reality in our case. We are the house of God, we are this spiritual house, and we exist for this very purpose, to minister to the pleasure and glory of God, and that is done along the line of life, and that life is the life which overcomes death. So that, with every fresh uprising and experience of spiritual death, we shall write over it, This is not unto death, but for the glory of God! Oh, may He give us grace to do that. It is easier said than done, I know, but here it is. History sets the seal to this, that this is the way in which the Lord is ministered to in satisfaction and glory, by our being the very vessel in which the power of His resurrection is manifested, and that necessitates experiences of death.

The Ministry of the House to the Elect

Then the third feature of this spiritual house is that it stands for the deliverance and life of others, the others being, of course, God's elect, those who are bound up with God's eternal purpose. We are here to serve the Lord in standing over against the persistent and determined purpose of Satan to bring an end to Christ's life in His Church, and the test of the reality, the spiritual reality, of this spiritual house is just in this direction; How much are we ministering to the life of God's people to deliver them from these recurrent onslaughts of spiritual death? That is the test. We have to get right up close to that. It is all very well to talk about these things, but they have to be true really. It should become impossible to deal with these matters merely as the teaching that goes on in a certain place. The teaching may be all right, quite correct, but what of the practical issue, so far as we are concerned as the Lord's people? The test is not whether we have accepted right doctrine: the test is whether we are functioning according to what we are, whether we are really doing the thing which constitutes our very existence. You see, the Church, the people of God, are not one thing, and the truth another thing, and the Church accepts that truth. It is not that. It is that the Church is that truth or it is nothing at all. I say I am a member of Christ's Body. Well then, I can take the attitude that certain truths are the truths which belong to members of Christ's Body, and therefore I accept those truths: I assent to those truths and henceforth I believe in those truths, and I begin to preach them. That is one thing. Another way is that certain truths are realities concerning the members of Christ's Body, and you cannot divide between the truths and the members, and the very existence of those members means that those truths are operating, and if those truths are not operating, you have serious reason to question the reality of the life of that member of the Body of Christ. Something has gone wrong; it is not normal, it is all wrong. I am not saying that if these truths are not fully manifested in us that has nullified our relationship to Christ as members of His Body, but I am saying that if it is the case that these truths are not being expressed, there is something seriously wrong with us as members of the Body and we are a contradiction to the true meaning of our existence. You and I exist for the life of others and if others are not receiving life through us, then there is something inconsistent in our very existence. That sounds very hard, very severe, but that has to come home to me as much as to you. I never talk to you without having myself very much in mind, and I have this understanding with the Lord, that He will make good all truth in my own case or save me from talking about it.

I challenge you, my dear friends, to face this law of your existence. Are you ministering to the Lord's people or are you merely sitting back, or even worse, ministering death? What does your presence mean to the Lord's people? Does it mean life? If so, then the house of God is truly represented by us. If it does not, if it is only neutral or negative or antagonistic to life, then the house of God has broken down where such are concerned. All these things are a matter of life and spirituality, and there is a horrible thing from

which we shall pray earnestly and fervently to be delivered, and that is, talking truth, holding truths, accepting truths, being associated with truths as truths, without having the life of those truths manifested in us. I often fear that is one of the great and distressing things where such revelation exists, that people begin to take up the truths, and they stand for the truths that "Honor Oak" stands for. God deliver us from that way of speech and that mentality. That is not it. Either we are this thing, or, however much we may agree with it and talk about it, we are not it. It is life and spirituality that matters, and we must be much before God that all shall be real in our case; that our presence means that life is ministered, life is passed on. We are the vehicle of life to the Lord's people for their deliverance from the onslaught of death. It was for that Paul besought the believers to pray for him. Oh, this throttling work of the enemy in the matter of ministering life to the Lord's people.

An Expression of Christ

Then the fourth thing is that the Church in its corporate life exists to be a present expression of the Lord Jesus Himself wherever two or three are gathered together. I wonder if we have recognized what that word in Matt. 18 really does mean? Here is someone who belongs to the Lord, who is guilty of, or responsible for, something wrong. "If thy brother sin against thee." The margin says that a good many authorities omit "against thee." Thus it would read, "If thy brother sin, go, show him his fault... if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established, And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican. Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven... For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

That little word "for" carries with it a tremendous weight of significance. If thy brother sin and after three successive and varied efforts have been made to get him to acknowledge his sin, there is still a withholding, bring it to the Church. Now then, if he refuse to hear the Church, put him out; let him be as a Gentile and a publican, that is, outside the Church, and in your doing that, it is the Lord doing it. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It is not that the Church has acted as something in itself. The Lord regards that as Himself acting. He is there in the midst, and it is the Lord doing this. The Church's verdict is the Lord's verdict; the Church's decision is the Lord's decision, when the Church is gathered into His Name.

Now we can leave the specific connection of that and take up the principle. The Church exists to be a corporate expression of Christ wherever He is represented. The Church cannot be represented with less than two, because the Church is a Body, and one brick never made a temple yet. It is a corporate thing, and it is to be an expression of Christ there in its corporate life. That is the purpose of the Church, to be an expression of Christ. That cannot be just official, that cannot be formal. It is not that the Church has a session and in its session has an agenda and discusses certain propositions and comes to certain decisions. No, it is something much deeper than that.

In the first place, the Church is spiritual, that is, the Church has subjected itself to the Holy Spirit and has taken the Holy Spirit for its governance, for its direction. It has put its trust in the Spirit of God to register right courses and right decisions through much prayer. It has altogether submitted itself to the government of the Holy Spirit and in that way become spiritual, so that it livingly functions in a spiritual way; not formally functions, but spiritually and livingly functions, that is, its function is on the witness of the Spirit

along the line of life. Issues are raised, difficulties are brought up. How are these going to be met? Well, someone makes a proposition and those who are spiritual feel, Oh, this is death if we take that line! No, we have no liberty to take that line, that would be terrible! It is registered inside. It is not that we have better judgment, but within the Spirit of life says, Do not take that line, that will be disaster! Or someone else may say something and those who are spiritual feel, Yes, that is the Lord's way! It is registered within; the Spirit of life is governing; and that is the basis of the Church's life altogether, and it becomes in that way an expression of Christ, an expression of the mind of the Lord there. The Lord is in evidence along the line, and on the basis, of life and spirituality. But it requires a corporate life for that - "In the mouth of two witnesses or three." That is the corporate principle, you see, at work. I had no intention of going into so much technique about the Church, but it is all to indicate this great truth, that the Church, this spiritual house, exists to be an expression of Christ wherever it is represented by two or three on a corporate basis.

You see, corporate life is spiritual and is life. It is a matter of life. Our union, our relationship with Christ, is on the principle of life. "Unto whom coming, a living stone... ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." Again I say, God is not dealing with us as bricks: God is dealing with us as with living stones. That means that He is treating us as those who have a common life with the Lord Jesus, and our relationship with the living stone is the relationship of one life. It is a spiritual relationship and it is that life which brings about the corporate expression. It is all the difference between this corporate expression on the basis of life, and a society, a club, an institution. You can join a club, you can come into a society, and you may agree on many things with regard to conviction and procedure, and yet not be bound together by a corporate life. But the Church is this latter thing. One life in all the members links all the members with the Head, and thus by that life it expresses Christ wherever it is. It does not just proclaim things about Christ. It brings Christ in and says that here, though it be but in two or three or more, here Christ has come in. It is not a claim made. You see, the Roman church will make that claim, that very claim, that where that church is, Christ is. Ah yes, but there is a difference. It is not just a claim, but a fact borne out, that where these spiritual and living stones are, the Lord is there in very truth and people know it, and there comes about that of which the Apostle wrote. When someone comes in from the outside and things are as they should be, when they are after this kind, the outsider comes in and falls down and says, "God is indeed among you." Ah! that is what we want. Whether people begin to fall literally or not, that is not the question. The point is that inwardly they go down; prejudices, suspicions, fears, reservations go down. One thing rises supreme with them and brings down everything. I cannot get away from it, the Lord is there! If only we would surrender to that and all that means it would be very much better for us. But that is the great matter, namely, bringing in the Lord. The Church exists to bring the Lord into every place, even where represented by but two or three. May this all be true in our case. I am sure our hearts respond to that. Well, let us get to the Lord about it, that so far as we individually are concerned as living stones, it may be true in our case; that we are a ministration of life, a representation of Christ, that we are bringing glory to God, that we are setting forth the exaltation of His Son.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-governing-law-of-the-house-of-god/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net

