

The Heavenly Man as the Source and Sphere of Corporate Unity

by T. Austin-Sparks

The heavenly man as the source and sphere of corporate unity is found in God's satisfaction and rest in His Son, and dwelling together in unity in Him.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Divine Blessing"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of unity in Christ as the source of divine blessing, drawing from Psalms 133 and Ephesians 4. He illustrates how the concept of Zion serves as a unifying center, where believers, despite their differences, come together in Christ, leading to God's satisfaction and rest. The sermon highlights that true unity is achieved when personal interests are set aside for the sake of Christ, allowing the blessing of the Lord to flow among His people. Sparks calls for a deeper understanding of living in Christ, where the anointing abides and fosters a community of love and support. Ultimately, he urges believers to seek this unity to experience the fullness of life and blessing commanded by the Lord.

Transcript

Reading: Eph. 4:1-16,30-32; Ps. 133.

Here we have a Psalm which, on the one hand, presents an imperfect or partial entering into the spirit of the blessing of which it speaks, and, on the other hand, a prophecy; a type and prophecy of the full blessing to come, and a present but imperfect enjoyment of the meaning of the blessing. As a type and prophecy of the full blessing to come, it indicates the basis of the blessing, and the wonderful beneficent elements of the blessing. Read the Psalm backward and you will at once see what the basis is: "...there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." Where was the blessing given? "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"--"...there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." Between the first and the last verses the beneficent influence and effect of the blessing is seen, which blessing is based upon two things. One of these is brought to our notice in the preceding Psalm. You will recognize that these are "Psalms of Ascents." That, again, speaks of the partial enjoyment of the meaning of the blessing. The people are going up to Zion; they are in caravan, in procession, coming up from the distant parts with their eyes and their hearts all toward Zion in expectation,

in hope; Zion the city of their solemnities; Zion the joy of all the earth; Zion the unifying centre of all their life; Zion in the ways of which they were but which was also in their hearts as a way-- "...in whose heart are the high ways to Zion" (Ps. 84:5).

The Unifying Centre

Now you see Zion is there as a great unifying factor. People from all directions are coming in procession. Some have joined the caravan at various places as it has moved on from its most distant point, and they find that although they may never have met before on earth; although they may only just have come into touch with one another for the first time in their lives; although their paths may lie far apart in ordinary life, their sphere of life and service be divided and separate, Zion makes them a unity. Immediately the thoughts of Zion are in their hearts, immediately they think of Zion and move toward Zion, all scatteredness, separateness, divisiveness passes out, and they are as one man. Zion has unified them.

Now let us mark what is brought before us in Psalm one hundred and thirty-two.

"Surely 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 Mighty One of Jacob.... Arise, O Lord, into Thy resting place; Thou, and the ark of Thy strength.... This is My resting place for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread" (Ps. 132:3-8,14,15).

The first factor in the basis of the blessing is God's satisfaction, God finding His satisfaction: "Arise, O Lord, into Thy resting place...." Here we have the Lord coming to rest in His House. This is not to be interpreted mentally in a literal way. It is a case of the Lord having a ground of perfect satisfaction, the Lord having things according to His own mind, His own heart, the Lord just finding what He has been seeking all the time: "This is My resting place for ever...." The Lord has been provided with that which answers to His own heart's desire, and it is therefore possible to say to Him, "Arise, O Lord, into Thy resting place...."

David's concern was that the Lord should be satisfied first of all. You will notice from the passage we have quoted that he sets aside all that is his own. With David, the Lord takes first place.

Christ--God's All and Ours

Let us carry that over to the New Testament for interpretation, for it is there that we shall find the spiritual meaning. We are meditating upon "ALL THINGS IN CHRIST," and amongst these things, and by no means least, is God's satisfaction, God's coming to rest in His Tabernacle. That is what was in point when the Spirit, descending in the form of a dove, lighted upon the Lord Jesus. The dove returning to her rest in the Ark typified the Spirit coming to rest in Christ, the satisfaction of God: "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). I find My rest, I am perfectly satisfied, here I have all My desire. So the Spirit as a dove, the symbol of peace and rest, lighted upon Him. The Lord Jesus answers to all the desire of God's heart, and in Him God enters into His rest.

When you and I set aside all our interests, and focus and concentrate all our concern upon the Lord Jesus, so that He has first place, has all, we have provided God with His rest in our lives, thus paving the way for the blessing. "There the Lord commanded the blessing...." Where? Firstly, where He found His rest, His satisfaction, His joy. The Lord does not bless you and me as our natural selves. The Lord will not

bless my flesh, nor your flesh. The blessing of the Lord comes to rest upon His Son as within us: "...the anointing which ye received of Him abideth in you..." (1 John 2:27).

Remember that the blessing of the Lord, the anointing, the precious ointment, is upon the Head. It comes down to us only as from the Head, by way of the Head, and it is when Christ by His Spirit has come to rest in us that the blessing rests there. The blessing rests upon Him in us, and that is why it abides. Thank God, it abides. This, if we do but recognize it, is one of the chief blessings of our life in union with the Lord. We in ourselves do not abide for five minutes! We can be as changeable as the weather.

In the morning we may be one man, and in the afternoon another, and in the evening quite another. We may be as many different people in the course of the week as there are days. At one time we feel splendid spiritually and think we shall never, never be down again, but it is not long before we are right down. We vary like that; we become familiar with every movement that this human life is capable of knowing. If we live in that soul-life of constantly changing moods, oh, what a distressing life it is.

But the anointing which you have received abideth. Why is this? Because it abides upon Him, not upon us, and He is "the same, yesterday, and today, and for ever." There is no changing on the part of the Lord Jesus in us. With Him, there is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning. Oh, the changes that sweep over our lives because of the changeableness of this human life; but there He is in us ever the same. We may have a thousand moods in as many hours, but He never changes, He is always the same.

The anointing abides upon Him in us. Oh, that we should live in Christ, live in the anointing, live in that unvarying fact of God in Christ, unchangeable. He does not love us in the morning and turn against us in the afternoon. However we may feel it to be so, such is not the case. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Our moods would lead us to conclude that today the Lord loves us, and tomorrow that He is against us; today that the Lord is with us, tomorrow that He has departed from us.

That is our infirmity. That is of ourselves and not of the Lord. The Lord is not us, in that way. The Lord is not our moods, our feelings, our sensations, or our lack of sensations. The Lord is the same always, the same faithful, unchangeable God, and the anointing abideth. It does not come and go. It does not rise and fall. It is not in and out, up and down, one day this and the next day that; it abides.

The enjoyment of that is only possible when Christ is the focal point of our lives. God comes to rest in His Son, and finds His satisfaction there. You must come there in order to find God's rest, and then the blessing is there. The Lord commands the blessing in the place where He has His rest, that is, in the Lord Jesus. But then Christ is in you: "...Thou, and the ark of Thy strength." That is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Christ as God's Rest in the Heart

So then, the first aspect of the basis of the blessing is that of our knowing God's rest in His Son, Jesus Christ, in our own lives. He Himself put it in language which had to be more or less symbolic, or parabolic. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29). "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (verse 28). We know what that means in the spirit. When we were children we may have thought it to be a word for labouring men in life's labours and toil, but we have come to know that this labouring and being heavy laden has mainly to do with these changeable moods of ours. We are labouring against the current, the tide, the stress of our own instability, our own uncertainty, our own oft-doubting and questioning, our

feelings: and it is a labour when you live in that realm! The Lord Jesus says, "...I will give you rest." How will He do this? Well, He will come into you, take up His abode in you as the seat and centre of the deepest satisfaction, and you need have no more question. Are you straining and struggling over the question of whether the Lord is satisfied with you? You had better cease from it, because He never will be. If you are looking and longing for that day when the Lord is going to be perfectly satisfied with you, you are looking for a very distant day. If you are hoping that some day the Lord will be very pleased with you, and then you will be very happy, that day is not coming this side of glory. What we have to realize--and it is a truth so often repeated, and yet not grasped enough by our hearts--is that the Lord is never going to be satisfied with us as in ourselves, but He is already perfectly satisfied with His Son Whom He has given to dwell in our hearts as the seat of His satisfaction, and we are accepted in the Beloved. Then the blessing comes. We see how the blessing works out.

Dwelling Together in Unity

Now we come to the second aspect of the basis of the blessing.

"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1).

We have seen it in the illustration, the foreshadowing, namely, of Zion uniting all hearts, making all one, drawing away from everything personal, everything sectional. Now when the heart is centred upon the Lord Jesus, we have the greatest power and dynamic against division, against separateness, against everything that keeps us apart, and when the Lord Jesus is our central, supreme object, and it is toward Him that our hearts go out, then we come into a unity. You cannot have personal interests and at the same time care for the interests of the Lord. David makes that perfectly clear. "The tabernacle of my house," that is one thing; and if I consider that, then I shall not be set upon a house for the Lord; if I am set upon that, then I shall not find a place for the Lord's rest. If I am seeking to satisfy my desire, giving sleep to my eyes, and slumber to my eyelids, then the Lord's interests will take a second place. But when I set myself aside, with all that is personal, and I am centred upon the Lord, and when all the others do that too, we shall find our perfect uniting centre in Christ. That is what it is to dwell in unity.

Now Ephesians four is the great New Testament exposition of Psalm one hundred and thirty-three: "There is one body...." Read the passage without the italicized words: "...Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... one body, and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is over all, and through all, and in all" (verses 3-6). Oneness in Christ as a body fitly framed together is what is portrayed. How is this perfect unity reached? By all that is individual and personal being left, by the Lord being the focal centre, and by our giving diligence to maintain the unity in that way; keeping all personal things out, and keeping Christ and His interests always in view: "...till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man...." (verse 13). Dwelling together in unity in that way, is the result of His being the sole and central object of all our concerns. This is not visionary, imaginative, merely idealistic, it is very practical. You and I will discover that there are working elements of divisiveness, things creeping in amongst us to set us apart. The enemy is always seeking to do that, and the things that rise up to get in between the Lord's people and put up a barrier are countless; a sense of strain and of distance, for example, of discord and of unrelatedness. Sometimes they are more of an abstract character; that is, you can never lay your hand upon them and explain them, and say what they are; it is just a sense of something. Sometimes it is more positive, a distinct and definite misunderstanding, a misinterpretation of something said or done, something laid hold of; and of course, it is always exaggerated by the enemy.

How is that kind of thing to be dealt with in order to keep the unity of the Spirit? Rightly, adequately on this basis alone, by our saying: 'This is not to the Lord's interests; this can never be of value to the Lord; this can never be to His glory and satisfaction; this can only mean injury to the Lord.' What I may feel in the matter is not the vital consideration. I may even be the wronged party, but am I going to feel wronged and hurt? Am I going to stand on my dignity? Am I going to shut myself up and go away, because I have been wronged? That is how nature would have it, but I must take this attitude: 'The Lord stands to lose, the Lord's Name stands to suffer, the Lord's interests are involved in this; I must get on top of this; I must get the better of this; I must shake this thing off and not allow it to affect my attitude, my conduct, my feelings towards this brother or sister!' There must be the putting aside of that which we feel, and even of our rights for the Lord's sake, and a getting on top of this enemy effort to injure the Lord's testimony. That is giving diligence to keep the unity. That is the power of a victory over divisiveness, and is the victory for unity, and there the Lord commands the blessing. That is the way of eternal life. The other way is manifestly the way of death, and that is what the enemy is after. Until that difference is cleared up, all is death, all is withered and blighted. Life is by unity, and unity can only adequately be found in Christ being in His place as the One for Whom we let go everything that is personal. We might not do it for the sake of anyone else. We might never do it for the sake of the person in view. We do it for His sake, and the enemy is defeated. There the Lord commands the blessing.

Such, then, is the twofold aspect of the basis of the blessing. Firstly, God's ground of satisfaction and rest must be equally our own, namely, His Son; and, secondly, we must dwell together therein.

Take the great illustration in the second chapter of the Book of the Acts. Here is the greatest exhibition of the working of this truth that the world has ever seen. "But Peter, standing up with the eleven...." There are brethren together in unity! The Lord also has entered into His rest. By the Cross the Father has found His satisfaction in the Son; the Lord has entered into His heavenly Tabernacle. All is rest now in heaven: God is satisfied, the reconciling work has been done in the Blood of the Cross, peace has been made, and God has entered into His rest in the perfect work of redemption. Now the eyes of all the Apostles are on the Lord Jesus; and as they stand up He is in full view. Peter has left all those personal things behind. They have all left the personal things now, and their whole object is Christ. Standing up now, their testimony is all to Christ, and they are one, united in Him; and there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore, such blessing as was like the precious ointment coming down from the head to the skirts of the garment.

The figure is perfect, as a figure. There is the Head, the Lord Jesus, and the Father has commanded the blessing in the pouring of the eternal Spirit upon the Head. Now as all these members are ranged under the Head, centred in the Head, held together in the Head, the blessing comes down to the skirts of His garment, and it is "...like the dew of Hermon that cometh down upon the mountains of Zion...." That is the effect of the blessing, that is the effect of life for evermore. What is the dew of Hermon? If you had lived in that country, you would know the value of the dew of Hermon. It is a parched and shrivelled land, with everything dry and becoming barren, and then the dew of Hermon comes down and everything revives, everything is refreshed, everything lifts up its head and lives again. It is the beneficent result of the blessing; life, freshness, hope, reviving, fruitfulness. There the Lord commanded the blessing.

Do you see the way of life, the way of fruitfulness, of reviving, of refreshing, the way of blessing? Two things are basic. These are our coming to the place of God's rest in His Son, and our letting go of everything that is of ourselves in the interests of His Son, and finding our all in Him. Thus are we drawn together by our mutual love for the Lord. Oh that we had more of the expression of this. I think that is why

the Lord is bringing the matter before us; not for the message to be merely as a blessed prospect, a word that has a happy ring about it and that gives us a certain amount of uplift while it is being spoken, but for it to be a strong call from the Lord. Do we want the blessing? Do we want life for evermore, life more abundant? Do we want refreshing, and fruitfulness, and reviving, and uplift? Do we want that others also should get the blessing through us? Look at Pentecost. Pentecost is the outworking of Psalm one hundred and thirty-three; for there brethren were dwelling together in unity, centred upon the Lord, and in the Lord, and the Lord commanded the blessing.

There is nothing very profound in this, but it is of no less importance on that account. It is yet another way of bringing the Lord Jesus into view, of showing Him as the centre, as supreme. But, oh, it is a call from the Lord, a serious and solemn call from the Lord to our hearts. The way of fruitfulness, the way of blessing, the way of freshness, the way of joy is to be in this way that is under the blessing of the Lord, because we have found our rest where He has found His, in the Lord Jesus; because the object of our hearts, for which we have set aside all lesser objects, all personal interests, is the object of His own, even His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. There the Lord commands the blessing, even life for evermore.

May He be able to do that with us. Oh, that it might be said in days to come as never hitherto "...there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore," because of these two great governing realities, both of which are centred in the Lord Jesus.

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