

The Issues of Love

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the all-inclusive outcome of an all-inclusive love, which is life in its fullness, and explores various issues related to love, including suffering love, discerning love, uncompromising love, and distinguishing love.

Scripture: Psalm 25:14, Matthew 3:17, John 1:4, Romans 5:5, 1 Corinthians 15:50-55, Ephesians 3:18-19, Philippians 3:21, 1 Peter 5:10, Revelation 2:7, Revelation 3:21

Topics: "The Power of Love", "Overcoming Through Love"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the centrality of love in the Christian life, illustrating that all spiritual issues hinge on the quality of love we exhibit. He discusses how love, particularly the love of God, is foundational to experiencing fullness of life, overcoming death, and achieving spiritual authority. Each of the seven churches in Revelation is addressed with the call to overcome through love, highlighting the transformative power of love in our relationship with God and others. Sparks concludes that the ultimate goal of our faith is to embody this love, which leads to eternal significance and union with Christ. The sermon serves as a reminder that love is not merely an emotion but a vital force that shapes our spiritual destiny.

Transcript

In our previous meditation, we arrived at the consummation in the book of the Revelation, and we were taking note of the wonderful truth that is in the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation, the whole question is the question of love, love relating to many things, but all a matter of love.

We now go on to the issues of that love. Here we do really come up against the vital point that, while the Lord is seeking in His people that love - love like His own - there are tremendous things hanging upon it. It is not just an optional matter: everything hangs upon it. That is what arises here when the Lord says, "To him that overcometh." You know that is said to each of the seven churches. Even where the Lord has not to point out any serious delinquency, He still says, "I see big issues bound up with this love, and everything hangs upon it." So we will spend this little time in looking at these great issues found in that final word to each, to all, to us - "He that overcometh"; or "to him that overcometh."

LIFE IN FULLNESS

Ephesus; and again we remind ourselves that the challenge there relates to the all-inclusiveness of love, the first love, and so, when we touch the matter of love in its fullness, we expect to find an all-inclusive

issue. That is to say, we expect to find that the thing which is bound up with an all-inclusive love is an all-inclusive outcome, and we are not wrong in that expectation. Here it is - "To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God." Here, with love after this kind - the love of God, the love of Christ, the love of the Spirit - is bound up the whole question of life in its fullness: and what an issue that is! There is a reference to the tree of life in the Paradise of God. It is a backward look as well as a forward one. It takes us to the beginning and then to the end. We shall find that tree of life right at the end of the book of the Revelation as the ultimate thing. It was the first, it is the last; therefore it is all-comprehending, this matter of love.

But you have to look back to the beginning to see what a tremendous issue it was and is. God, having first created the heavens and the earth, and all things, then created man and set him in that garden, and in the midst of the garden placed the tree of life; and everything of the creation and everything of man and everything of the Divine heart-purpose was centered in that tree. It was the tree of life. That is more than the animal life, more than the human life, more than the natural life. That kind of life, the animal, the human, the natural, was all there, but there was a life that was not there except as represented by the tree. As constituting a test, symbolically it was there, but its real significance was spiritual and unseen. And when man failed in this matter of reciprocating the love of God, and doubted and questioned and disbelieved and disobeyed - all of which is the contrary of love - God made it impossible for that man as he was, in that state, to have that other life; and therefore the creation faded like a fading flower, was disrupted, and man came under the terrible shadow of judgment and death. Says Paul, "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men" (Rom. 5:12). For the very creation, for man himself, that life was essential for God's purpose. Man never received it, and he lost it on the ground of lost love, failure in love.

Now look at the Lord Jesus. He came in the fullness of times. God sent His own Son, the Son of His love, and when the Son stepped out from His hidden years into the open, to assume definitely His great life work, the heavens were opened and God said, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17). And John said of Him, "In him was life" (John 1:4). Here He is, the embodiment of a new creation, in whom is that life which Adam missed. It is here in Him. "In him was life," that other life, that different life, that Divine life. It is in Him, and God says of Him, as embodying a new creation, "in whom I am well pleased."

He is the Son of God's love, He possesses the life which no man had ever before possessed, He is the answer to all God's heart, God finds His perfect pleasure and satisfaction in Him. But look at Him. What do you see? Well, in this world amongst men, He appeared outwardly no different from any other man. There were repeatedly hints of something unusual about Him, which at times were dimly discerned by others, but these related to His nature and character and not to His outward appearance. Apart from this, men saw nothing different; even those closest to Him saw nothing. But there came a day of which it is written, "And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart. and he was transfigured before them and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light"; and all this was accompanied by the same voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 17:1-8). Not a different Christ, not a different Son, not another, it is the same One. The life had been hidden, and now it blazed out. The life had been a secret thing, and now it was divulged. The life that was in Him was now seen to be what it was. What a transfiguring life! His whole body transfigured, aglow, a gleam with Divine glory. Everything about Him was glory, the glory of heaven, the glory of God, and it was just the nature of the life that was in Him being given an opportunity to express itself. And that is a parable and a prophecy; for does not Paul tell us that the day is coming

when this body of our humiliation shall be fashioned anew that it may be conformed to the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21), when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, this mortal put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory? (1 Cor. 15:50-55). The life which we have received in Jesus Christ is that kind of life. That is the extra life that Adam never possessed, and you see it is all on the basis of love, Christ's love for the Father. His was a love which was unto death, that would battle through the hordes of evil forces: that, in obedience to the Father's will and for our salvation would cause Him to give Himself into the hands of the evil forces and say, "I am at your mercy, do your fell work; this is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). All this He was ready to do in obedience to the Father's will.

The Cross was right in view, and when on that mount Moses and Elijah appeared, they spake with Him of the exodus that He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. They were speaking with Him about His Cross. He was already under the shadow of the Cross, had already accepted it in principle, already yielded by every test to the will of the Father. Love was triumphant already in Him. He was going all the way, and the Divine love and the glory broke out. This is the inclusive note from Genesis to Revelation. Love is always linked with life and life with love - that kind of life.

Is this to you merely a beautiful theme, a lovely song? Does it matter to you whether you have a body of glory? Or is it just a negative matter with you, that you will be glad when you have done with this one, and that is all there is to it? Have you no concern for the glory that is to be? Are you not interested in that great and marvellous statement that we have been called unto His eternal glory (1 Pet. 5:10), to be glorified together with Christ when everything of death shall be fully and finally quenched and destroyed, and life - that Divine, uncreated life, that unique life of Christ - shall show what it is, manifest its nature, its qualities? The very glory of God is in His life. It is a big issue, the issue of life.

We know something of glory of this life even now; it is not reserved only for the end. It is not so much in our bodies, perhaps - although sometimes the Lord touches even them with a touch of the powers of the world to come and revitalizes them with His own life - but we do know the whole question of life and death in our spirits, our souls, and what a difference there is between life and death! To sense death, to know something of death inside us, in our spirits, in our souls, to be touched by, or to be in an atmosphere of spiritual death, is an awful thing. But what a glorious thing it is to be in an atmosphere of Divine life! It is glory in our spirits now. For those who have to live in a world in which there is nothing of the Lord at all, it is all spiritual death, whether it be secular or religious, and it is a horrible thing. But it is a grand thing when you can escape that and find yourself in the presence of the Lord amongst His people and taste something of life. That is glory of a spiritual kind inside. But think - that is going to be manifested in its fullness for our whole being, including our bodies! It is the prospect, the calling, of the people of God, and it is all a matter of life.

But that life is based wholly and solely upon this matter of love. If you touch anything that is other than love - if you touch hate, animosity, suspicion, prejudice, criticism, jealousy, envy or any other thing that is contrary to love - you touch death. It is horrible. When you meet somebody who is eyeing you, not sure of you, suspicious of you, oh, how helpless, how hopeless, the situation is; you cannot get on, you are glad when you have passed, but you are sad. You have met with a touch of death. You touch love in another child of God coming out to you, and oh, what a prospect fills the air, what possibilities arise! There is a way through, everything possible where there is love. That is the issue which bounds all, and that is why you begin with the tree of life.

You end with the tree of life, but it is in the garden, the garden of Divine love. That tree can only thrive in the soil of love. These are very practical matters with a challenge. Do not forget that while you need people to love you and show you love, so that your spiritual life may grow and you may be released from smallness and pettiness and limitation and be enlarged, other people need your love to the same end; and you are not going to enlarge other peoples' spiritual life by criticizing them, by eyeing them. You are going to help their spiritual enlargement by loving them with the love of God.

This is inclusive; it includes everything else. We are not surprised, therefore, that when at Ephesus the matter of first love is raised, which is love inclusive of all the features of love, the all-inclusive question and issue arises, namely, that of life.

NO SECOND DEATH

You are able then to pass on to break it up with what is said of the church in Smyrna. The issue of love triumphant in Smyrna was to be that the overcomer should have part in the first resurrection. "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." What is the second death? Briefly, it is that death where there is no recovery. It is the door finally closed, where there is then a distinct and abiding separation between God and man. All goes out in the second death: it is the end. There is no hope beyond that door, no possibility of life. But here in Smyrna, of him who is triumphant in love it is said, "He... shall not be hurt of the second death." Fullness of death shall be broken and defeated and deprived of its prey. Love means that you will never be allowed to be touched by that ultimate despair of separation from God. That is no small thing. If the end on that dark side is to be without hope, where God is lost and the soul has gone out into the everlasting desolation, never able to find God, it is a big matter that we should never be touched of that. And love triumphant, this kind of love in Smyrna which is suffering love ("Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life") means that, although it may cost you your earthly life, you shall never be touched of the second death. You may know the first death, in this sense, that you may go into the grave, and that maybe at the hands of murderers; you may have a martyr's grave, you may die because of the opposition and suffering that is heaped upon you; but that is only a first kind of death. There is a much deeper and more terrible death than that, and if you are faithful unto that first death, you shall not be touched of the second. You will find you will be amongst those who have completely conquered death. Now, whatever it means to you to have to exercise the love which suffers long, remember there is a big issue bound up with suffering love. You who are putting up with things for Christ's sake, who are enduring, who are suffering in any way in love for the Lord, by that suffering love you are in the way of cheating death in the end. You are undermining the power of death, you are destroying the very touch of death. Perhaps that wants explaining, but there is the fact stated, that by suffering we conquer death.

A DEEP, SECRET LIFE WITH THE LORD

We come now to the issue of love triumphant in Pergamum. It is remarkable that to this church that had come into a state of compromise from their failure to detect the inroads of evil, because of the low condition of that love for God which should normally be alert and sensitive to things injurious to God, it is remarkable that to them this word is addressed, "To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it." But I can tell you in a word what it amounts to - that there is some inner fellowship with God to be known which is not the common lot of people; some inner knowledge of God which is a secret thing to be possessed, which means a very great deal. It is something to have a personal, inner,

secret knowledge of the Lord, a knowledge which other people, not having, do not understand at all; you know the Lord in your own heart and you are enjoying something of the Lord in yourself; but you have to have it to yourself, it is your own secret. Is there not something in that for believers now? "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him" (Ps. 25:14). There is a mysterious something in the inner life of some children of God and in their walk with the Lord; they have a secret. They can never make other people understand it, it is a mystery to others, but there it is. It is their blessed possession, and oh, what it means to them! And that is what is here. Hidden manna, a white stone, a new name written thereon, His own name; "I will set him on high, because he hath known my name" (Ps. 91:14); and that distinguishes people who know the Lord in some more inward and some deeper way than the majority. It is not the ordinary kind of knowledge to the Lord that is here.

And that is said to the people whose great need was discerning love, and the message, therefore, is that if you have this love, you have a secret with the Lord. If this love is in us, this first love, this complete love, this true love for God, we have a secret life with God, God means something to us in secret that He does not mean to everybody. And we are elected to that: not that we are favourites, but through suffering love we come to discerning love. That is the sequence - suffering love, then discerning love. Those who have the deepest and most inward knowledge of the Lord are those who have suffered most for and with the Lord. They have knowledge others do not possess. So you move from Smyrna to Pergamum; from suffering love to discerning love - through suffering to the hidden manna, the mystery of a love-relationship with the Lord in a knowledge which is not common knowledge.

A POSITION OF POWER AND AUTHORITY

Thyatira - seduced and corrupted, calling for uncompromising love. What is the issue of that uncompromising love? "He that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron." Here we are touching a tremendous principle. Do not materialize that for the moment and picture yourself somewhere as a reigning monarch over the nations of this earth, and that sort of thing. That is not what I am getting at.

It is the principle that matters. Here you see, when love triumphs over that state of compromise and mixture and confusion and entangling of contrary things, and comes right out into an uncompromising place of victory, you are in a position of tremendous ascendancy, of power to govern. Test it the other way. You find a compromised life, a mixed-up life, a life with contraries all entangled; some of the world, some true Christianity; some flesh, some Spirit, things which ought never to be brought together.

Will you tell me that such a life has any power in it, any authority, any power of ruling and reigning? Not at all! Was it not just in that connection that the devil through Balaam seduced the corrupted Israel, to bring Israel down from their high place as the ruling nation among the nations, to rob them of their spiritual government, to make them broken among the nations, when God had said, "The Lord will make thee the head, and not the tail" (Deut. 28:13)? That is the principle here.

Love, uncompromising love, brings into a position of power, of authority. You will never pray through so that God comes in and does things if your life is compromised, if there is any kind of double life going on. You may pray until you cannot pray any more, and the Lord will not come in, you will not govern in prayer if the life is mixed up. Love, which brings us out into an absolutely clear, pure, transparent place before God, means we are put into a position of great spiritual power.

What that may be afterward we are not going to stop to say. I merely indicate it. The Church is going to rule in the heavenlies in the ages to come, and in the letter to the Ephesians, where the revelation of the Church and of its eternal calling and vocation is presented to us most fully, love is the triumphant note - "...to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:18-19).

That is set there in relation to the Church. The Church is to come to that place. There are big issues bound up with this matter of love, both that of spiritual power and ascendancy now, and afterward throughout the ages to come that of governing in the heavenlies, when the Church will take the place occupied now by the evil principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness. That is no small vocation. It depends on first love. Such is the lesson of Ephesus and of Thyatira. Right at the heart is love, first love, full love, and the outcome of that is authority over the nations.

OUR NAME CONFESSED IN HEAVEN

Then comes Sardis; and, because of its indefiniteness, the call for distinguishing love, the love that marks you out; not only that you are marked out by love, but love marks you out. Do you think that is a distinction without a difference? Not so. When you come here to this distinguishing love, what is the word to that church? "He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." Is this not distinguishing love, love leading to distinction? - white garments, and his name confessed before the Father and the holy angels. Maybe I can help you by a very ordinary illustration. I have a brother who is an engineer, and I went to see him the other day and found him in his office behind his engineering works where some sixty men, all experts, were busy mostly on government work. I talked with him for some time, and, being an opportunist, and remembering that there was something I needed done to my car, I said, "I have a little trouble with my car; I wonder if you can do something about it?" He came downstairs to look at the car, and then said to one man, "Put that on the lift." He then sent for his chief expert on that side of things, and when he arrived said to him, "This is my brother; if ever he brings his car in here, see to it, please, and see that the job is done properly." "This is my brother" - and the whole sixty men and all the works were at my command! Everything there could be centered in my interest at that moment. "I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." "I will say, 'This is My brother'" - and all heaven will be interested. Love, honour in heaven; our names confessed and honoured in heaven, when love distinguishes us. Oh, we try to curry favour and get service and help and status by being important before men, by putting on airs, by making demands, by being something big. That is the way in which men try to get recognition. But here it says that love is the distinguishing thing in heaven. It is love that makes you a distinguished person there. It is love that will bring you before the Father and the holy angels as one to be taken account of; and that is an issue for now, not only for hereafter. Oh, if only we have this love, the Father will take account of us. "This is my beloved." The holy angels will take account and put themselves at our service as beloved of the Father. It will be because we are not only located in the Son of His love, but in heart-fellowship with what that love means, that we are marked out by heaven.

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Philadelphia marks the call for steadfast love, and so you expect in the issue of steadfast love to find something that would correspond. To Philadelphia the word is - "He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from

my God, and mine own new name." "A pillar in the temple of my God."

Again, do not materialize, for later we read, "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb are the temple thereof" (Rev. 21:22). A pillar in the place where God dwells, a pillar in the house of God, the place of God's abode. A pillar, a strong thing, carrying responsibility in the very house of God. Steadfast love has that issue. "And I will write upon him... the name of the city of my God." He shall have the franchise of the heavenly Jerusalem. He is a man of substance, a person that counts, he is carrying weight, he is a freeman of the new Jerusalem.

"And mine own new name"; which means "I commit myself to that man." Are these things too big to grasp? They are not exaggerations, but that is what is implicit in this statement, and all who are of the character of Philadelphia, marked by steadfast love, become a strength in the place of God's dwelling and in His interest. They are people that count. Job said of his days before his affliction that when he went out everybody took account of him and bowed down to him and honoured him.

To be not self-important, but from heaven's standpoint, with that kind of importance that is humble, meek, altogether without arrogance or pride, to be of great importance to God, in the presence of God, important in the Church which is the new Jerusalem - love is the thing that must characterize us. Do you desire in a right way to carry weight, to signify something, to be really a strength in the things of God, to stand before the Lord as one who counts for something? Do you want that?

Do you know the way there? I wonder what you think it is. Do you say, "Oh well, if I study, if I get a lot of teaching and Bible knowledge, and am always busy in the Lord's work, I shall become something"? No, not at all! In the dealings of God with you, you will find you will be emptied and brought down to nothingness in yourself, until you reach the place of pure, selfless love for the Lord for His own sake. Oh, there is a difference even in loving the Lord - whether it be for what He can do for us or for His own sake.

You do not want to be loved because of what you are able to do. You want to be loved for your own sake. When it is like that, and we get away from all our ambitions, all our craving for recognition and reputation, and we love the Lord for His own sake, we have attained a place of tremendous importance - pillars of strength in the things of God, in the temple of God, in the presence of God. Love is the key to all spiritual significance.

SHARING HIS THRONE

And finally, Laodicea; poor Laodicea, with its mediocre kind of testimony, neither hot nor cold, and the demand, therefore, for fervent love with no mistake about it, burning love, love at white-heat. What is the issue hanging upon love like that? "To him that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne." You have reached the highest place now - throne-union with the reigning Lord. All that that may mean we can never describe. Were we to start, we should never be able to tell it; but it must mean something that the Lord should say to people on this earth - "On certain grounds you shall sit with Me in My throne, you shall have the place that I have, you shall share with Me the position to which I have come." It must mean something tremendous. And He says that is related to victory over mediocrity in the matter of love. When you have this kind of love, fervent, full, strong love, you will come to the place of uppermost ascendancy, the place in the throne.

You may not remember all I have said, the detail may go from you; but remember that in the Revelation the last times and the last things are in view. If you forget all the details, remember this one thing, that the

ultimate, the supreme issue of our life and union with God is bound up with this question of love. How great, then, in importance is this question of love. How great, then, in importance is this question of His love being shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. What a wonderful thing is His great love wherewith He loved us, when it is found in us. It is both toward us and should be in us. The Lord make it so!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-issues-of-love/>

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