

The Law of Renunciation

by T. Austin-Sparks

The law of renunciation is the principle of letting go of self and all self-interest, and trusting God to provide and guide us.

Scripture: Genesis 22:18, John 13:8, 2 Corinthians 5:9, Philippians 2:5, Philippians 3:8, Hebrews 11:24

Topics: "Self Denial", "Christian Humility"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the importance of renunciation and selflessness in following the example of Christ, who humbly emptied Himself and became obedient unto death for the glory of God and the redemption of mankind. The sermon emphasizes the need for believers to renounce self-interest, ambition, and possessions in order to be vessels for God's work and blessings. Through the law of renunciation, illustrated by the lives of Christ, Paul, and Moses, believers are called to let go of personal desires and ambitions, allowing God to work through them for His glory and the benefit of others.

Transcript

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5-11).

"Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:8-9).

"By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" (Hebrews 11:24-26).

In this message we shall be occupied with the realization of the Lord's full will, unto which He has called us. We have already considered that great law of realization and fulfilment, the law of the government of

the Word of God. We were able only just to touch the very fringe of that matter, and I can only trust that it at least introduced you to a new consideration, and that, because of that emphasis, you will have a much closer and more devoted regard for the Word of God in every matter of your life. All those who have been of service to the Lord to others have been people of the Word, and not just of the letter of the Word, but of heart relationship with the Word of God. All who have in any way fulfilled the function of spiritual leadership, like Joshua, have, as we saw, been based so strongly and utterly upon the Word of God. It has been like that all the way through, but the greatest Servant of all, the Lord Jesus, was meticulously careful that in everything He moved according to the Word. The Scriptures had such a place in His whole life, conduct, teaching and work, that He became known as "the Word of God". The Word is not only something written in a book. It has to become personal, personified in life, in character, and in every way if we are going to be of use to others, to be able to fulfil any responsibility at all like those men in the beginning of the Church in Jerusalem and in Antioch, who were men who waited on God for His Word. They did not organize the Church, nor did they decide upon programmes, plans and schemes. They never introduced anything until they had waited upon the Lord for His Word about it, asking: 'Is this according to what is revealed?' That is the only way of the growth of the Church and its building up.

Well, as you see, that opens a very large door, but we are not going any further with that matter. I just re-emphasize that a binding law of spiritual progress in the individual life, in the church life, local and universal, is the absolute government of the Word of God, to the law and to the testimony. If it is not according thereto, then there will be a hidden peril in it.

So we go on now to another law of this progress in the will of God unto its ultimate realization. We must remember that we are called unto this. It is inherent in our calling, and not something extra to the Christian life, nor something optional in the Christian life. It is fundamental, intrinsic, in the Christian life. So is what we are going to say now about another law of the will and purpose of God in our calling, and it is what is presented to us in the Scriptures which we selected for this purpose out of many others and what I am going to call 'the law of renunciation'.

THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

In Philippians 2 the Lord Jesus is presented to us in terms of the great renunciation. He was equal with God, but, as the margin says, He regarded that not as something to be grasped, or held on to, tenaciously gripped, but He "emptied himself". He made the great renunciation in heaven.

The Apostle Paul has caught that mind, which he exhorts Christians to have. He has seen the point! It came to him in the great encounter with the Lord at the beginning of his Christian life. He saw, and then all the other things, however great they were - and they were many and they were great, as he tells us in that Letter to the Philippians - lost their grip on him, because something else had a grip on him, and he says that he made the great renunciation, perhaps not in the same dimension as the Lord Jesus, but for him it was everything, as it was for the Lord. Our everything may not be as great as was the Lord's everything, but if it is everything, well, that is full and final. Paul says that he counted all these things, this catalogue of advantages which were his by birth, by upbringing, by training and by acquirement, as refuse. He renounced them all. And by the great renunciation of his Master and of himself the Church has benefited through all these generations - and that is the point we have to come to before long.

Then we read of Moses, though we could have mentioned many others in that chapter 11 of Hebrews. We picked out Moses, who renounced all that he had in Egypt, the learning of the Egyptians, the court of

Pharaoh, and all the advantages that were there. He made the great renunciation. Why? Again, because of the people of God.

THE DISTORTION OF GOOD INTO EVIL

Now, that is the point, but before we come to its application, let me remind you that one of the clear marks and traces of the devil and his handiwork is the distortion of good into evil, of good things made into bad things. Satan CREATES nothing, for he is not a creator, but he attempts to turn what has been made for good into bad. Hence you have a whole list of paradoxes in the Bible, and it is fascinating to follow them through, but I am not going to do so. I will just give you a hint. There is a whole list of paradoxes, of seeming contradictions, and they are in this realm of good things in Divine intention turned into bad things.

Take the matter of ambition. Ambition indeed is the parent of many evils. Look at what ambition in the world leads to! There are so many ambitious men and women who, to realize their ambition, will tread upon all principles and will ride roughshod over all sensibilities. Ambition is a driving force to get, to be, to master, to dominate, to rule, and have we not in our lifetime seen something of that? My, these ambitious people whose names we could mention, who have thrown the world into the most distressing and awful state! Literally multitudes have been murdered for one man's ambition! We need not dwell upon it, but that is what ambition can be, and it has come into the Church of God. Men, as Peter calls it, "lording it" over God's heritage, wanting to be something in the Church, and to have power. They are just fulfilling some secret ambition, and perhaps do not mean it or realize it, but others do.

Well, here is something that is evil, BUT God created ambition! It is a Divine thing. Our translations do not help us too much in this, but Paul said: "We make it OUR AMBITION... to be well-pleasing unto Him" (2 Corinthians 5:9 - R.V. margin). Paul, you have redeemed a bad word! You have salvaged something that has gone astray, that the devil has captured and turned to his own use, for it was ambition in Satan before his fall that led to that fall, and he, like a serpent, has injected that poison into human nature. Surely we should keep that word 'ambition' out of the sacred language? No! It is something Divine.

We could go on with a whole lot of paradoxes and contradictions like that. Paul gave us a list in one place: "As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10). Those are paradoxes, are they not?

Here, in this very chapter, Philippians 2, and in this very consideration of the great renunciation, we are in the presence of one of these things which have been distorted. Satan has taken hold of something that God created and put into man and into His universe. What is it? The desire to acquire, to possess, to have. It is not wrong in itself to have, to acquire, to possess. Do you not have many battles over this very matter, whether you ought to have this, and whether it is right to possess that? In your very nature there are the traces of this Divine thing, this acquisitiveness. Yes, God put that in. The Bible is full of it. We were looking at Israel earlier, and what a lot the Lord said to them about 'having!' 'I will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey, and this is for you to HAVE. I mean you to have it, to be a wealthy people. It is all for you. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon I have given to you.'

Over against that there is the great renunciation. Is that a contradiction? Renunciation is a law of having - the Lord Jesus let go, and He was given. He renounced, and was endowed with all the fullness of heaven.

Satan, then, uses this Divine thing, twists something which is of God and is quite right in its own nature, and gives it this distortion to make it an evil thing, so that in this world now we have this terrible

assertiveness, this wanting to get control, to possess, to have.

WHAT IS IT FOR?

The answer to that question is the answer to the paradox. What do you want it for? And, you see, it is just there that the enemy has done his work by introducing the selfhood power, this drawing to self, having for self, holding for self, prizing it for self. So when we read: "He emptied HIMSELF", there is the whole story of redemption in the emptying of self, and of the wonderful issue in this universe along the line of the redemption - what man is going to have by God's gift and what we may have now by His gift in a spiritual way. Every blessing of the spirit in the heavenlies in Christ and the fullness into which we are called in the will of God comes along the line of the conversion of self, this turning round from self to God.

Now please do not let that principle work wrongly! This is where Peter slipped up, because he was not converted at the time. I know I am going to be challenged on this, for I have been, but there is a real sense in which Peter was not converted until the Day of Pentecost. We will not argue that out, and you can say what you like about it, but when the Lord came with the basin of water and the towel to Peter in order to wash his feet, Peter said: "Thou shalt never wash my feet!" Then the Lord said: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (John 13:8). 'Oh, well', said Peter, 'I want the part.' Do you see the point? In a very few hours after that it was proved that it was really Peter who was in view, who wanted all that he could get, even of Divine things. And when I say that you will get a great fullness if only you will learn the lesson of renunciation, be careful as to your ambition for fullness! WHO is it for? WHAT is it for? Is it for self, or is it for the Lord?

GOD'S VINDICATION IN THE CREATION OF MAN

The principle lying behind Philippians 2 is just this: The Lord Jesus let go of all that He had of heavenly glory and equality with God, not for Himself, for it was His already and there was nothing whatever that He need do to enhance His own position and rights, but for the vindication of God in the creation of man. God created man and took a tremendous responsibility in doing so. Have you not often felt bad about this? Oh, some of your natures are better than mine, but sometimes I have been tempted to think: 'Was God justified in creating man, collectively as he is today?' I think of the history of man, and, really, it hardly bears thinking about! But God did it. He took the risk and the responsibility of making you and making me. I have to turn that back on the Lord sometimes and say: 'Lord, You made me! You gave me a being! It was by Your law that I came into being! It was Your responsibility!' Well, that is helpful sometimes, but we will leave it.

God had got to be vindicated in His creative responsibility, and, therefore, He had to save this man that He had made. Further, He had to be glorified in this man, and there is no salvation and no glorification while man is a selfish creature. Selfishness spoils everything and robs of all glory everywhere. Therefore that deep thing had to be touched and dealt with, not theoretically, not doctrinally, not theologically, but actually, and there is no way of dealing with anything ACTUALLY except by taking it and destroying it in your own person and work, and being the opposite yourself by a mighty, deep work of God. So the motive that led the Lord Jesus to the great renunciation, the letting go, was the vindication of God, the justification of creation and the making possible of man coming to that glory in fellowship with the Father in heaven for ever. It was outward, first for His Father's vindication, and secondly for man's redemption from that twist that the devil had brought in and by which so much mischief had been made. It was your salvation and mine from some THING that the devil had planted in the race which was a contradiction to what God

meant. All that was outward, and not for the Lord Jesus Himself.

Now read His life again. All that is included in this description in Philippians 2: 'He emptied Himself... He humbled Himself... He took the form of a bondservant... He was found in fashion as a man... He became obedient unto death' - and the most shameful and ignominious form of death that the world has ever known! It has always been known that crucifixion is the worst form of death possible. But He went right down to that! That is letting go of self and all self-interest, is it not? That is renunciation! And all that was for the Father first, and was why He was always speaking on this earth of 'My Father... My Father'. It was for the vindication of the Father, and for the redemption of man unto glory, the transformation and transfiguration of humanity.

OUR RENUNCIATION

Now, dear friends, you and I are in the way of this. Have you not noticed that the Lord's dealings with us when He gets us in hand, when He really does get a purchase upon us, are along this line? Again and again in the course of our Christian experience we come up against a situation where it is: 'Are we going to hold on or let go?' Are we going to let go? Can we let go? Can we really renounce? We are stuck until that is settled! We just cannot get past it. It may be an incident in our life, or it may be what we might call a small thing in comparison with other things, but there it is. 'Must I let go? Shall I keep hold? Shall I get this bone between my teeth and worry it to death, and not let it go?' I must repeat: there is no way on until that thing is settled.

Have you not, on the other hand, experienced what it means when at last, having sought the grace of God, you let go and say to Him: 'All right, Lord, my hands are off. I am not just resigning.' Be careful about becoming resigned to your fate! That is not the will of God. There must not be a negative or passive attitude, but a positive one: 'Lord, if this is what You want, You have it, and I believe You have a purpose in bringing me to this position of letting go, of renouncing.' When we get there something breaks in, and all that we had been wanting we get! It is strange that it works like that, but what about Abraham and Isaac? Could Abraham not have held on? Could he not have argued with God? Could he not have supported his tenacity about Isaac by reminding the Lord of what He had said? Oh, yes, he could have built up a tremendous argument against offering Isaac, but he came to the point of the great renunciation. He let go to God, and what did he get? He not only got Isaac back, but he got a nation! "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). It was from inward to outward.

You see the range, the tremendous potential of renunciation? We have picked Moses out from all those mentioned in Hebrews 11, and he could have argued with the Lord on the ground of sovereignty: 'Well, Lord, Your sovereignty ordered that when all the babes were being slaughtered I was spared, and that girl of Pharaoh's came along that day. It was in Your sovereignty that I was rescued and taken right INTO the palace and brought up in Pharaoh's house, educated according to the wisdom of the Egyptians. Your sovereignty was in this!' But the point was - he left it all, and it was a big 'all'. He renounced it all. Why? Because he had become converted, not in the New Testament sense, perhaps, but converted. He turned round, inward, to people. His race, the people of God, were, as we know, on his heart: "Choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God" - and there you have his motive: the people of God. 'What I may lose does not matter so long as the people of God get the benefit and the blessing.'

Do you see the point? Christ was repeating Himself in these men's lives on the one principle of renunciation; and because He, the Son of God, made the great renunciation, "wherefore" - and what a

'wherefore'! - "God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on the earth" - and here is a peculiarity - "and things under the earth". You know, things like that are said quite often in the Bible, but the third dimension, "things under the earth", is left out on other occasions when the heavens and the earth are mentioned. I will leave that for you to think about! But in THIS case the underworld is also going to bow to Him! His renunciation means that the full dimensions of the universe are affected. What a range is affected by the ability to let go unto God!

I think I hardly need say more than that. To let go is one of the most difficult things that you and I have to learn! The Lord Jesus was "meek and lowly in heart", and meekness is just selflessness, the outward aspect of life. Not having things for ourselves, but thinking how much others can gain if we have to lose them, and if by OUR loss the Father can gain what He ought to have and the people whom He has created may be benefited.

THE LAW OF ENLARGEMENT

That is the law of enlargement. You noticed that I stopped short in the reading from Hebrews 11 about Moses at a certain point, because I am always afraid of this wretched self-interest of ours! It is always there, and ready to pounce upon anything. I did not read: "He looked unto the recompense of reward." The Lord has promised enlargement along the line of renunciation and loss, but we should not be motivated by reward, should we? No servant of the Lord should be motivated by what he is going to get out of his service. "When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants." Nevertheless, we can put a right and proper emphasis upon it because of where we started. Are you following the train of thought? It is God's will for you, for me, for mankind, to be enlarged with all His fullness, to have ALL that He can give, but not selfishly, not for our own use, but for His glory, His vindication, and if you and I get to glory and He is able to give us then of His fullness, endow us with heavenly riches, I am quite sure that we will have found in the discipline of renunciation the right ground upon which to be rewarded. You see, anyone who has really been through this, has been right in that deep and desperate reality of facing the loss of some THING, some possession, something which meant very much to them, indeed, it might be everything to them, might have made or marred their lives, for they have been faced with the question of willingness to let go unto the Lord. It has meant devastation to selfhood, to ambition, but when that devastation has taken place and we come out on the other side, it is all right. There is no battle now, for it is done, and then the Lord has His ground for rewarding, for giving. It is safe for Him to do it.

I wonder how many of you, especially you servants of the Lord, whoever you are, have sometimes said to the Lord: 'Lord, can You trust me with this? Can You trust me with that blessing? Can You really trust me to do this for You? I know my own heart. I know its pride, its acquisitiveness, its love of place, position, influence, and so on, and I'm afraid that if You do bless, I may, all subtly, take some gratification to myself. Can You trust me?'

The Lord is working to get us to the place, dear Friends, where He can trust us with eternal, heavenly responsibility, and He knows when that deep, evil thing in our nature has been dealt with by the discipline of renunciation. It is very true to spiritual life, is it not?

There are so many tensions! Are we not suffering in this life from nervous tensions and strains? Yes! but what is many a nervous breakdown and a lot of this wrong kind of intensity that does us so much harm,

nervously and physically, due to? Not getting what we want! We are not having what we have set our heart upon! God is not giving it to us, or doing it for us, and so we get into this state of tension, strain, in life. Life becomes a strain, and even the Christian life becomes a terrible strain. If you do not know anything about that you are a very fortunate person, but it is true for us all. We meet people everywhere who are under strain. You can see it in their faces. And what is the matter? They have not learnt to let go to God. We know, by experiences that we have had, that when we have come to the place where we let go to the Lord (and I am very particular about saying 'letting go TO THE LORD!'), a wonderful calm comes, wonderful rest and wonderful peace. The battle is over and the strain has gone. That is very true.

The great renunciation made by the Lord Jesus was that He identified Himself with fallen man. Temptation has no meaning at all if there is not something to work upon, and so when the devil came to Him in the wilderness and offered Him the kingdoms of the world, it was no temptation if He had no heart for the kingdoms of the world and could say: 'You can have them. I am not interested in them. The kingdoms of the world do not matter to me at all.' There would be no temptation, would there? But if the kingdoms of this world were the very object for which He had come, there is a temptation, and a subtle one, appealing to the soul life. The Son of Man became identified with man, knowing quite well the temptations of man and man's natural ambition. He was tempted in ALL points as we are, sin apart, but He conquered. How? Not by saying: 'I am not a bit interested in that. That is no temptation to Me!' But by saying: 'I am going to have the kingdoms of this world, but not at your hands, Satan! Not by your gift, and not along your line. I am going to the Cross, and there I will destroy you and get the kingdoms on a proper ground.' So He came in the likeness of man, knowing man's temptations, without the sinful nature, yet with a human soul which can have ambition for itself or for God. In that temptation, then, it was the Father and every word that the Father had spoken which came first. The battleground was: 'Not for Me, but for the Father and for others.'

I wonder if you have followed me? I think we are touching things that are very real in the spiritual life! This whole matter of the Lord's identification with us was in order to save us, and to save us from our selfhood, our self-towardness, by conversion turning God-ward. The life of a Christian, then, is simply the life which is for God. We are tested on that so often, and when we get through we come to rest, to peace, to quietness. The battle is over - until the next time! But that is the way we grow. The next time will be more severe, I am sorry to say, but when you go into it you have learnt something. You do not go into the more severe without the knowledge of what it means, and you are able to say: 'Oh, well, I had something like this before, and I have learned how to get through by the grace of God. This is a bit more difficult, but it is the same principle. I am not going to fight for my own way, nor for my own interests. I am not going to exercise this bulldog disposition of mine to get hold of this and not let go, but I am going to be ready to put it on the altar for God.' The solution comes that way. It is the law of renunciation in progress toward Divine fullness.

The Lord give us understanding and help from His Word!

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