

The Light of the City

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Lord desires His people to know the state of light and clearness that He has in view, and to be perfectly honest and open before Him.

Scripture: Revelation 21:10

Topics: "Light and Darkness", "Purity in the Church"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of light in the context of the heavenly Jerusalem, illustrating the ongoing battle between light and darkness in the spiritual life of believers. He warns against the infiltration of false doctrines and pagan elements that compromise the purity and clarity of the Church, urging believers to seek absolute truth and transparency in their lives. The sermon highlights that God's purifying work is essential for the Church to reflect His glory and that the enemy's tactics often involve creating doubt and confusion among God's people. Sparks calls for a return to a state of crystal clearness, where believers can stand confidently in their faith and testimony. Ultimately, he stresses that God desires a pure and unfeigned love among His people, which is foundational for the manifestation of His light.

Transcript

READING: Rev. 21:10-11,18,21; 22:1; Gal. 4:25-26.

The word "clear" occurs on more than one occasion in those passages, and synonymous words are there, such as "pure gold," "as transparent glass." These words suggest the idea of light. They are associated with that light which is spoken of in connection with the heavenly Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, her light like unto a stone most precious, a jasper stone.

In speaking of the light of the Lord's heavenly people we are touching again a very solemn, and serious, and important feature, something which has a tremendous history associated with it. The entire history of the Lord's people, and of the spiritual life, is one of light and darkness, of truth and falsehood, of purity and adulteration or mixture, of clearness and cloudiness, of openness and secretiveness. And many other words can be used to express this long history, so long and so chequered all because of this persistent, continuous effort to bring what is of God into a place of doubtfulness, of uncertainty, to rob it of the tremendous power of absolute truth, absolute purity, absolute clearness.

Long before Christ came Satan had spread abroad in this earth those Babylonish elements which only waited for an hour when the Church should fall into a state of spiritual declension or weakness to seize the

opportunity to pounce upon this spiritual Body and become the parasites which sapped and destroyed its life. So that we find, even before we move out of the New Testament, that where there was a state of spiritual declension there was a condition of Babylonish features, priestcraft, ecclesiasticism, formalism, ritualism, and a host of other things which came from Babylon and are seen in the occult, the mystic, the aesthetic, those ideas which are now the very sum and substance of the whole Romish system. These all came from Babylon, and were in the world waiting for the Church to decline, and immediately that decline took place they took hold, impinged upon the Church. You find them all there in the first chapters of the book of the Revelation, and in other places also, elements of this religiousness of Mystery Babylon. Their object was not to blot out Christianity in a direct and immediate way, not to wipe the Church out of existence, but so to mix things as to bring her into an uncertain place before God, that He could no longer recognise her as His pure Bride.

You notice the call in some of Paul's letters, as well as in those letters to the seven Churches, is to purge out these pagan elements. There is a tremendous amount of paganism represented in the conditions of those to whom he wrote. Take the letter to the Colossians. What was the object of the writing of that letter? Well, the whole spiritual hierarchy, the realm of spiritual beings, angels and archangels, had been, by paganism, so marvellously organised that even Jesus Christ had been placed as but a super-archangel. All the other angels, it is true, had been set under Him in different ranks, but He was given no more than the position of a super-archangel; one of them, though of much higher rank. And the Colossian letter was written, as you will see from the content, on the one hand, as denunciatory of this whole false system of teaching; to destroy it by pointing out how evil the whole thing was, and, on the other hand, to give Christ His rightful place. The first chapter of that letter is the classic as to the Person of the Lord Jesus and His eternal relationship with the Father. He was before all things; all things were made by Him; He is the Head. But all that mischief had been done by mixture, that is, the destroying of the utter purity of truth, the truth which is only in Jesus.

This is but a very small and inadequate illustration of how the enemy has all the way through sought to destroy real spiritual power by introducing elements which would take from the utterness of the truth, destroy the Church's clearness, and work against this ultimate revelation in which she is seen with "her light like unto a stone most precious... a jasper stone..." Pure gold, transparent glass, clear as crystal - that is the characteristic of Zion, the characteristic of the Lord's people; and against that the enemy has worked continuously, in order to compromise the Church's position, the position of the Lord's people, by getting them into an uncertain state in themselves and before God.

Dimming the Fine Gold.

This has been done in the first place, as we have seen, by doctrine. If the enemy can introduce any suggestion of false doctrine, if he can but insinuate the slightest degree of error, he will cause it to work like an evil leaven till a development of that kind has become the occasion for the Holy Spirit's drawing back, the Lord being unable to go on where that is, and a state of compromise, and paralysis, and weakness obtains. The pure gold, the fine gold, has become dimmed.

Not only along the line of doctrine has this been done, but along the line of life. The same method, and the same object, governs the enemy's activities. It is possible to stand very strongly upon what is absolutely orthodox as to doctrine, and to be in a very doubtful state in your own life, your own spiritual life, your own moral life; to be very faithful to the letter of the Word of God, and yet to be compromised in your own spiritual life and testimony. This may be in business dealings, in other relationships, or in your own life

before God; something not clear, something not pure, something not clean, something not straight, something doubtful, maybe a secret habit. Oh, it may be one of a multitude of things which takes out of the life that certainty, that definiteness, that positiveness, that clearness, and creates, sometimes almost unconsciously in the one concerned, a fear of being confronted with something, of having to own up to being found out. There is something in the background of the life which is causing an arrest. It is taking the real drive out of testimony, the real impact out of life, and the real fruitfulness and value out of fellowship. There is something there, though very often intangible. You cannot put your hand upon it, but you know there is something there in that life which is not right, which is not clear; and then there develops a secretiveness, an evasiveness, a detachment, or many other kinds of evil symptoms may develop. It is all because there is something there which is not absolutely clear before God. The enemy has got in an element which has destroyed the pure light, and there is a shadow, a film about that life. The enemy's purpose is to destroy that perfect crystal clearness of a life in God, and so paralyse the whole life. The outward form may still be the same, the profession may be just as ever it was, but there is a check.

This is said, not by way of accusation, but by way of indicating one of the favourite lines along which the enemy works to destroy what God has in view for His people, for Jerusalem; namely, that she should eventually come out of heaven having the glory of God, her light like unto a stone most precious, as a jasper stone, and that everything about her should be pure gold, as transparent glass, clear as crystal. Oh, the spiritual value and weight of words and phrases like those!

All this is indisputable and patent. We have to recognise this, that the enemy is continuously seeking to get us into some place where, in spite of ourselves, we feel that we are under a cloud. Sometimes he sets up a false position, and makes us feel that we are false. We may not be false, but he seeks to make us feel that we are false, to get us into that realm where we have lost our confidence, our assurance, our certainty, our standing, our position, where we are weakened by some element which has crept in. The enemy is out to bring God's People under clouds, under suspicion, and to bring them in their own hearts under doubts and questions, so that the clearness, the certainty, the strength is destroyed and they are a big question to everyone, even to themselves.

Poison Gas from the Enemy.

Not only as to individuals, but as to collective instrumentalities of God, this is true. Whenever God raises up an instrument by which He intends to bring His Testimony into greater clearness and greater fullness, the object of which in His desire and thought is to reveal the nature of His Son more clearly, more perfectly, then the concentrated attention of all the powers of evil is to bring that thing under suspicion, and to put over it a great question mark in the eyes and minds of everybody.

Why are not the Lord's people alive to that fact? For a fact which runs parallel with that, and which is just as mighty a fact itself, is that when you really investigate that thing you find you have no reason for question at all. It was all an unfounded suspicion. This is clearly the Devil's work, to cast over something which the Lord would use for a fuller revelation of His Son, and of what He desires for His people, this film of questioning, suspicions, doubts, so that it is forced into a realm where it is regarded as dangerous, suspicious. Would to God that the Lord's people would obey the injunction to "prove all things"!

You see what the enemy is after, and how he goes to work. It is helpful to know sometimes what the enemy is after, and how he does operate. We may be saved from much if only we are aware of it.

This is a message to our hearts, not only of helpfulness in an objective direction through our being informed as to the danger, the peril, the devices of the enemy, but it sheds light upon the inward experience, and shows that all the Lord's dealings with us are intended to bring us to this state of crystal clearness. "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Psa. 51:6): and what the Lord desires He will get. The dealings of the Lord with His own are purifying dealings, in order to have this crystal clearness, this pure gold, this stone most precious. They are for the getting rid of the dross, getting rid of the film, getting rid of all those secret and secretive elements which work in the direction of deception. Those are like unto a lie, a falsehood. The Lord wants to root all that out of us. He is against everything that is shadowy. He is for everything that is perfectly clear, and so to get rid of the dark substances He puts His fires to work in our lives to purify them. In our individual lives and in the case of such collective instrumentalities as we have mentioned, He does this. He does not allow such to be out of the fire for long. He is after this state of utter purity.

You see what is involved. In the coming generations all the nations have to walk in that light; that is, they are going to have their knowledge of the Lord through the Church's instrumentality. They are going to be governed by the Church. The nations shall walk in the light thereof. What light is this? This is no mere external aurora. This is the out-shining of a spiritual and moral condition of glory. This is something out from the very nature of the thing "having the glory of God." It is from the centre, and works as an expression of a spiritual and moral condition. God is not cleansing, purging, chastening you and me, and causing His fires to work to our purifying, just for the sake of doing it, and He is not doing it just for our own sakes inasmuch as He wants us individually to be good and not bad. I suppose He wants that, but that is not all. God has a mighty, universal purpose in view, an eternal vocation, and that is what He is after, and it requires a condition. That is one of the governing conditions of Zion, namely, the full expression of the Lord's mind. The Lord is always motivated by things so much greater and vaster than we understand in the day when we are passing through the trial. We bring it down to a personal matter, and ask questions: Why should the Lord deal with me like this? We narrow down the range of His thought, His purpose, His intention. Because we make it so local we lose the strength and helpfulness which would come to us if we could see the great eternal vocation for which we were being prepared.

"The Wiles of the Devil."

If we had time to note all the secretive things of which the Word of God tells us concerning the earthly Jerusalem, we should find that it was the purposes of God that were so often threatened by those secretive elements. Think, by way of illustration, of Nehemiah's day, when the wall was being built, and how the enemy got one of his own representatives hidden right in the temple itself, and so sought to compromise everything, to weaken the whole work and position, by having a representative occupying a chamber in the temple itself. Then in Ezra's time the adversary said: We serve the same God as you do, let us come and work alongside of you! Subtle! But thank God the man of God was a man of such transparency himself that he could see through things, and he was not deceived. He saw quite clearly that in these people there was darkness. Their condition was not one of clearness, nor of light. There was duplicity, and he shut them out; and immediately he did that they showed quite well where they were. In these and numerous other ways you can mark the enemy trying all the time to get that which was not suitable to God right into the heart of things, in order to destroy the effectiveness, the positiveness of testimony, and Jerusalem's history is a long history of these subtle elements working in the midst.

We come to the day of our Lord Himself. What a mass of this sort of thing he encountered in Jerusalem! They tried to catch Him in His words. They were all the time laying traps for Him. They were working

furtively, secretly, by deceptions, by snares, trying to take Him. The whole situation, the whole condition of Jerusalem was like that in His day, and clearness, transparency, was destroyed. Yet the temple worship was going on. Outwardly the whole of the religious system was proceeding as it had been wont to do, yet here was this dark interior. God forsakes it, because of the lie. The Lord put His finger upon that so often in very straight and terse language. "You make clean the outside of the platter..."! "Whited sepulchres"! What a picture! See them going round with their whitewash, making white their sepulchres; and within, He says, they are "full of dead men's bones." They were making the thing to appear something other than it was. Such is the lie, which is the Devil's work, leading to rejection. The Lord's desire toward us is that we should know that state of light, of clearness, of which we have spoken.

The next thing is love. What is the character of New Testament love? Love unfeigned! What a word! Fancy using that word to Christians - love unfeigned! Does that mean that some would love feignedly, feign to love, pretend to love, while really they do not love at all? That which the Lord seeks in every virtue, in every element, is something that is true.

That is what we mean by light in the sense of clearness. It is the purity and inwardness of things. Truth may be in word, in doctrine, but there has to be a corresponding truth in heart, truth in life. Light may be a matter of doctrine, but there has to be a corresponding state of light in the heart. The enemy will not object to us having plenty of the former kind of light and truth, but, if he can, he will seek to destroy its real value by introducing a lie over against it, a contradiction.

This may sound rather strong. Well, it is strong! It must be strong! It has not been put in this way to lay charges against anyone, but by way of warning. It will perhaps explain some things, but we must take it to our hearts as a word of exhortation or admonition. Remember that God never builds in the dark; that is, there can be no constructiveness where there is not light. Before ever God would bring this world back into order and fruitfulness He said: "Let there be light." God is out for the manifestation of the truth. God's works are never darkness, and we can never know constructiveness and progress unless there is absolute light. You know quite well that you cannot go on with people who are not straight, people who are crooked, people who are all the time furtive, not open, not frank, who have somewhere in the background a secretiveness. You have to say, I cannot go on with that one. God is like that. He would say to any one of us who might be there, I cannot go on with you until you are absolutely out in the open, until you have come to a place where you are going to be perfectly honest. Reality is God's demand for any kind of work that He will do. There may be many weaknesses, many imperfections, but if there is genuineness, reality, openness before God, where the spirit is clear and pure, God can go on with His work. But immediately we begin to lock something up inside, hold something back, cease to be perfectly open before God, the work stops. Light in the sense of clearness is an essential for the building of the city of God, because the ultimate purpose for that city is to shine forth with that glory of God in character. With Him there is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning. That means that God can be relied upon.

The Lord make us like that.

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