

# The Manifestation of the Glory of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the unfolding of God's eternal purpose through Christ and the implications of redemption for creation.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 22:7, Matthew 4:9, John 5:40, 2 Corinthians 5:15, Ephesians 1:3

**Topics:** "Gods Glory", "Redemptive Plan"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the eternal purpose of God revealed through the Apostle Paul's ever-growing knowledge of Christ. He explains how Christ, as the central figure in God's eternal counsels, bridges the gap caused by man's failure and sin, leading to the redemptive plan introduced after the fall. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and conforming to Christ's moral and spiritual essence, highlighting the ultimate goal of a created corporate race expressing God's thoughts, desires, and will. It concludes with the significance of dwelling in Christ to find hope, assurance, and the way out of despair in a world filled with chaos and uncertainty.

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## Transcript

Reading: Hebrews 1.

As the first thing in this meditation upon Christ, we have been occupied with the ever-growing conception of Him that marked the life of the Apostle Paul. We saw first how that Paul as a Jew had himself shared the very earthly and narrow conception of Messiah so common to his race, with all its thought of a temporal kingdom, privilege, and position, and how for him this conception came to be shattered by the revelation which he had of the Lord Jesus while journeying on the road to Damascus.

This crisis marked the beginning of an ever-growing knowledge of Christ. There Paul had learnt, not only that Jesus of Nazareth was Himself the long-expected Messiah, but that He was also the Son of God, Who from before times eternal had been in the bosom of the Father. Christ was thenceforth to him no longer just a figure of time; and we marked how that by further revelation this fact came to be related to what Paul frequently calls purpose; the purpose of God, the Divine counsels--"...Who worketh all things after the counsel of His will..." That is related to the "before times eternal," and in that purpose, in those Divine counsels from eternity, very many things are found to which Paul refers. We saw that these Divine counsels (this eternal purpose) concern the universe, and man in particular, and that both the universe and man are gathered up into His Son: "according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the

things upon the earth." That led us to consider a point which requires perhaps stating afresh, or at least a reiteration, to which therefore we now proceed.

### The Purpose of the Ages

These eternal counsels (this eternal purpose of God) represent the straight line of God through the ages, and as we are considering them have nothing to do with redemption. That is another line, an emergency line. We were saying that this fulness of the times, of the ages or seasons, represents God's eternal method of unfolding His fulness, and of bringing men into that fulness. They are stages of growth, of progress, of development concerning His Son, and, as we have said, all this was intended to be a straight line through the ages. These other ages of which we read, the ages of this world according to present conditions, are quite another line and introduce another expression of purpose. They were brought in, if we may put it figuratively or imaginatively, in this way: the Godhead in counsel laid the plan for all the future ages of the ages from eternity to eternity, and in that plan everything was clear and straightforward. There would be a progressive unveiling of God in the Son, and a progressive bringing of the universe into that fulness. But then God reached a point where He had to say, because of His foreknowledge (we speak imaginatively): But we know what will happen. We know that at a certain point the man whom We create will fail, will break down. That will mean a long period of disorder, disruption, chaos, and We must provide for that. There the whole plan of redemption was introduced, and the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world. That is another line of purpose. Thus the ages of this present world had to be introduced; the age before Law, from Adam after the fall to Moses, an age governed by certain things; then the age of Law up to Christ; then the age or the dispensation of the Church. These were not in the original plan. It is necessary to say that, because, were it otherwise, it would make God responsible for sin, and you might say: Well, if God had planned all that, the fall was bound to be; God had to bring about the fall! But that is not true. None of us would lay it to God's charge that He had planned the fall in order to make redemption necessary. That is another line of purpose, of planning according to the foreknowledge of God. The first line of purpose was not that, and, as we said, you start on a level and then reach a point where, because of failure and sin, there is a dip in the line, and in that dip, in that gap the whole story of redemption is seen. Christ bridges it and links up the first purpose, and its realization, from eternity past to eternity to be. Coming in the likeness of sinful flesh, but without sin, the Redeemer stands in the gap and carries the purpose of the ages straight on in Himself. The present dispensations are, shall we say, subsidiary in their nature, and were brought in because of an emergency. God never intended it to be like that. Let us be quite clear on that point.

The fact which stands out clearly for us, and which is one of tremendous value, is that God intended that there should be ages, times, periods in which there should be an increasing revelation, manifestation, and apprehension of Himself. Perhaps it sounds speculative, but let us ask: Now what would have happened if the fall had never taken place? If man had survived his testing in the garden and had not broken down, what would have happened? I believe man would have grown, grown, grown in his apprehension and knowledge of God, grown in his personal expression of God. God would have thus secured a progressive, ever-developing expression of Himself and, seeing that God is what He is, there would have been no limit to this; it could have gone on through successive ages, with movements in this universe into ever greater fulnesses of God.

We are not speaking of individual man but of collective man. That is what God intends, and that is what will be. Bridge the gap. Get right across the whole gap that has been filled by the redemptive programme, and take the matter up at the point where redemption is complete. Get back on to God's first level,

triumphant over the enemy, and take things up there. What are you going to have? You are going to have a progressive, ever-growing expression of the fulness of God displayed in ages, in ever-widening circles of the revelation of God. It is not possible to comprehend the fulness of God. It will take eternity to express that.

All that fulness is in Christ; and our point at the moment is, how great is that fulness! What a Christ we have! It will take eternity to discover Christ. There is no small meaning about that statement. We recall the words of the Lord Jesus Himself: "...no one knoweth the Son, save the Father..." That, of course, does not merely imply a question of identification, that no one knows Who Christ is except the Father. It signifies what Christ stands for in the history of this universe, all that He is in His position in it. I believe it is unto an understanding of that that the Lord is calling us. The Lord wants us to come to a new understanding and apprehension of His Son, Jesus Christ, and that apprehension is our way out, our way up, our way to fulness. This, as we have said, came to be related to purpose, to Divine counsels concerning the universe, and man in particular.

### The Personification of the Divine Thought in a Being

Its central meaning was in relation to a type of created being called man, and man is an expression of Divine thought, an image and likeness of something conceived in the mind of God. These are the eternal counsels issuing in eternal purpose, the counsel of His will. Now let us break that up.

God thought thoughts. You and I think thoughts, thoughts that correspond to our mental constitution, our nature, our make-up. One thinks after one manner because he is made that way, another after another manner because he is made that way. Our thoughts are the expression of our nature, our constitution, our disposition; in a word, our make-up. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he..." (Prov. 22:7). The thought is the man in essence. God thought thoughts. Those thoughts were God in essence. They were the projected mind of what God is like, what God thinks, what God is. Those thoughts were projected toward an object called man; that man should be an expression, a living personification of God's thoughts.

God desired desires. Now of man it is equally true that as a man desires in his heart so is he. We desire according to our inclinations, according to our preferences, according to what we feel to be best. Our desires express ourselves. God's desires are an expression of His own nature, His own being, His likeness. Those desires were centred in man, that man should be a living embodiment of God's heart, God's desire; desiring one desire with God, thinking one thought with God; one in mind, one in heart with God.

God willed a will. Our wills always betray us. What we will is the unveiling, the disclosing of what we are after, what we mean, what we intend. That is true of God. God willed a will, and that will was God, after the nature of God, the essence of God's nature, disposition, intention. That will of God was focused upon man, that man should embody the will of God and express it in personal living expression; living in the will of God, living by the will of God, his whole being gathered up in one inclusive and positive expression: Thy will, O God! There was to be a created being called "man" after that order, to be in that moral-spiritual sense the image of God, the likeness of God. This was not to share Deity, but to have the moral nature of God; the spiritual nature of God in mind, and heart, and will reproduced in man, expressed in a creation. That is where God's thought rested, and that is God's purpose. He would have it to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth; to grow and expand; morally and spiritually to reach out into all spiritual realms and fill the universe. Moral forces are forces which go far beyond the individual in which they rest or are

centred.

### The Lie and its Outworking

Now you can see why Satan sought to capture man, and why he went about it in the manner that he did. It is as though he said: Set aside God's mind, God's will, God's desire! In other words, Accept mine instead! Now what have you? The expansion of that thing from a man to a universe! Those moral forces which are other than God intended are cosmic forces now. They have gone far beyond the individual, far beyond the family to a race, and out beyond a race to all the encircling realms of the cosmos. There is a will other than God's impregnating the very atmosphere. There are other desires, other feelings, other thoughts, all against God.

See, then, the awful alternative. See how far reaching this matter is. Had man been true to God's expressed thoughts, His expressed desires, His expressed will; had man, in other words, been true to himself as out from the hand of God, which was to be true to God, this whole world, this whole cosmos today would be an expression of God's thought, desire, and will. What a world! What a universe! But what is it now? Such a thing as a thousand leagues of nations will never set it right. Man has let loose something in this universe by his treachery, his complicity with God's enemy, which must work itself out until this creation is an expression through and through of that which has revolted against God: and it will compass its own doom. What a difference! It is working out in that way. Try to arrest war. How futile! It is the working out of that thing: "only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way." When that restraint is fully removed, you will see this whole creation as one leavened lump, seething with anarchy and self-destruction. God never intended that.

Do you see God's thought for man, God's intention, God's purpose? It was to express Himself through the universe. With this dispensation and creation just the opposite is expressing itself, and will do so until the end. This is not God's thought, God's desire, God's will; this is anarchy. It is against God, against His purpose, against His creation. Blessed be God, we are out of that creation, because we are in Christ, and Christ bridges the gap. He takes up the original intention. In Him you have God's thoughts, God's desires, God's will perfectly expressed, and we are in Him, a new creation in Christ Jesus. Now what is our business? To learn by the Holy Spirit to live after God's thoughts, according to God's desires, and in God's way. That lies ahead of us for our further consideration. It is only hinted at for the moment.

### Conformity to Christ Essentially Moral and Spiritual

You see the result was intended to be a created corporate race as an expression of that which was, in essence, God. I do not mean Deity, I mean that which was intended in moral essence; the kind of thoughts God thinks, the kind of desires God desires, the kind of will God wills. God intended a created corporate race as an expression of Himself in that sense. You see it in Christ. You have the meaning of Christ when you see all that. This is what Christ means. This is the interpretation of Christ. How great a Christ!

Paul sees Him lifted altogether out of time, sees Him related to God's purpose; His express image, the effulgence, the very essence of God. Yes, His Deity included the moral essence of God. The expression of God in an Image morally constituted after God, that is Christ.

It is a great thing to see Christ, and then to see that we were chosen in Him to be like that, "...conformed to the image of His Son." The first representation of that thought, that mind, that heart, that will of God, was the Son; and the Son was not created but begotten. Man was created to be conformed to the image of the

Son, but the Son was not created. He was the only begotten of the Father; unique, standing alone, inclusive, conclusive.

Those are not mere words. In the creation according to God there will be nothing but what is of Christ. It is important to realize that. That will govern a good deal that we may have yet to say. Thank God, you and I will not be as we are. It is not to be Christ and us; all is to be Christ. That is to say, Christ will be so corporately expressed that, the question of Deity apart, the moral and spiritual essence of Christ will utterly govern every other unit in the universe. It will be Christ in that sense; one great universal, collective, corporate Christ! Yes, there will be multitudes which no man can number, yet so conformed to the image of Christ that, looking at any one or all of these, spiritual conformity to Christ will be seen. We are not saying that Christ is to lose His individuality, to be absorbed in some inclusiveness where all His own personal distinctiveness ceases; we are saying that, when conformed to His image, we are to be as one great person, the Body of Christ perfected, a corporate and collective expression of what Christ is.

Paul refers to that when, with tremendous faith representing a tremendous victory and ascendancy, he said: "...we henceforth know no man after the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:15). It represents a victory of no mean order. In our dealings with the Lord's children, for instance, Paul means that, notwithstanding all that we may find of inconsistency and failure, because of what they are by nature, we are to focus all our attention upon Christ in them, and because they are Christ's, and He is in them, make His indwelling the ground of all our relations with them, keeping our eyes off the other altogether; we are to know them after Christ and not after the flesh. It will not be difficult in the ages to come, for then there will be nothing but what is of Christ in us. We shall see Christ in one another, we shall be fully conformed to His image. The Lord hasten that day!

What a Christ! See His position in God's purpose. See the universal, eternal Christ, embracing all, excluding all; excluding all that in character is unsuitable to God, and not out from Him, and including in Himself as the Son all that has become conformed to His image. Christ inclusive of creation, for all things were created for Him. They will be His, but as morally purged and made suitable to Him. That is why He refused them at the hands of the Devil. "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:9). He disdains the offer. Costly as the path would be--and He knew it--He would not be caught by that proposal. In effect He says: I will have them, but I will have them when all the trouble and the heart-break have gone. That is the effect of it; the whole creation included in Christ: but what a Christ!

One of the great governing factors and features of the new creation in Christ is deathless life. In the present creation at its best death reigns, decay reigns. Deathless life! There is no death at all in that new creation.

All the ages are included in Christ. Yes, there are ages yet to be--"...that in the ages to come...." Those ages are being included in Christ. That means that Christ will give them their character. They are to take their nature, their character from Christ, and inasmuch as they are ages, it means that progress, development, increase, expansiveness, extensiveness is all a matter of going on and enlarging unto Christ. The ages are made for Him, and the ages to come are for the showing forth in us of God in Christ. All the Divine fulness is in Christ. These are statements in the Word.

#### The Gift of Eternal Life

In the creation of man at the first one great factor was suspended. Perhaps it was the most important factor, and it was suspended pending man's probation and testing. What was it that so entirely depended

upon how man issued from the probation and testing? It was eternity of life; life from the Divine standpoint; what God means by life. This was suspended pending the trial of man, and it introduces a further great factor of the Word of God--namely, the revelation of God. This represents the great governing question in history from Adam onward. The great governing question is this: In whom can that which is called eternal life dwell? We know that eternal life is not mere duration of being. It is a kind of life; it is God's life, Divine life, the life of the ages. In whom can that life dwell? That is the great governing question of history. The answer to the question is Christ: "...in Him was life...." He is the life. But then, we behold Him not only as personal, individual, separate, but corporate; the creation in Christ.

That concludes the first stage and begins the next. Up to that point everything, so far as this present time is concerned, is one great question. In this redemptive period, brought in as a second line of Divine arrangement, the whole matter of our response to God's call, of our acceptance of Christ, and of union with Him is in the balance. One big question hangs over this dispensation: Who will respond? To many He has had to say, "...ye will not come unto Me..." (John 5:40). The question is settled once the life is within; you have started at that point where Adam broke down, and have immediately been lifted out of the gap, out of the bend; you have been brought up there in Christ and have come right into the straight line of the eternal purpose which, in its realization, will be a universe full of Christ: "Unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ...."

Are you asking what this is all about? If you are not yet clear it can be put into very few words. It is to bring the greatness of Christ into view, that is all. Now we need that there should happen to us, in the grace of God, what happened to this man who came into this ever-growing, inexhaustible conception of Christ. We recall his own words: "...it was the good pleasure of God... to reveal His Son in me..." You may have heard all this: it may have sounded more or less wonderful; you may know the truth, in an intellectual way; but there is all the difference between that and the way in which Paul knew it. Paul's way of knowing brings emancipation.

Have you ever seen a fly in a bottle? Round and round it goes, beating itself from side to side, rising, falling, until you really ache as you watch that fly. You saw it rise a little and your hopes rose with it, and then you saw it go down, trying to find a way out, beating itself to death. Then up, up, climbing and reaching the top, out and away! That is the difference.

You and I with all our head knowledge, our mental knowledge of a great spiritual realm, find it a hopeless thing if in reality we are living down in this creation. Today it would be easy to despair, to drop down into things as they are. Look out into the world for prospects for the Church, prospects for the Gospel, prospects for the Lord. Look at the state of the Church itself. Bring the Letter to the Ephesians down into this world! You will give it up and say: It is a wonderful conception, but impossible. Try to realize it down on this level and you beat yourself to despair. Note Paul as he looks out over the churches which he had seen brought into being and sees them breaking up, and the men for whom he had suffered turning against him. Paul would have despaired in his heart, had he been living down here. What were the prospects in such conditions? But he got up into the heavenlies in Christ Jesus and saw that this was a heavenly thing, an eternal thing. Read the Ephesian letter again and mark how it starts: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved: in Whom we have our redemption through His blood, the

forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace..." (Eph. 1:3-7).

These are the words of a man with his life-work tumbling to pieces and all his old friends for whom he had sacrificed himself turning against him. What has he seen? The eternity, the universality of Christ, ALL THINGS IN CHRIST. Paul is not living in this world now, but living in Christ. It is the only way out. It is the way of life, the way of hope, the way of assurance in a day like this when things close down. Christ is the way out: "...in the heavenlies in Christ..."; "...chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...." Again we say: What a Christ!

Let us dwell much upon the Lord Jesus, for everything for us is in Him.

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