

# The Meaning and Reality of Things

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the meaning and reality of Christianity, and the need to take it seriously, rather than just going through external rituals and practices.*

**Scripture:** Revelation 2:4

**Topics:** "Cost Of Discipleship", "Reality of Faith"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the importance of understanding the true meaning and reality behind Christian practices, warning against the superficiality that has crept into Western Christianity. He reflects on the early church's commitment to the costliness of faith, contrasting it with the modern tendency to treat conversion, baptism, and communion as mere rituals devoid of their profound significance. Sparks calls for a return to the seriousness of faith, urging believers to grasp the implications of their relationship with Christ and the true essence of their spiritual practices. He highlights that true Christianity involves a willingness to face challenges and to seek a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. Ultimately, he warns that neglecting the weight of these truths can lead to spiritual complacency and a lack of genuine faith.

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## Transcript

The Book of the Revelation -- a book which discloses the changed spiritual conditions in the early post-apostolic days, and perhaps, prophetically, the state at the end-time in the church -- speaks of certain losses. It reproachfully uses the words: "first", "first love", "first works".

This is only another way of saying: "As it was in the beginning".

We are, in these reflections, seeking to note some of these changes and losses, with a view to creating exercise for recovery.

A further very evident change from the beginning, especially in Western Christianity, is indicated by the two words at the head of this page -- meaning and reality.

Perhaps because of long tradition and familiarity, our accepted system and established order, or perhaps because of an oversimplification and superficial presentation of the involvement, we are in a time and condition when Christianity is very largely a matter of things without their meaning. "Conversion" is something less -- if not other -- than regeneration, a new creation. Baptism is something DONE, either as

a bit of ritual, the requirement of association, a compliance with a demanded ordinance, an adherence to certain parts of Scripture, or -- at most -- the expression of a desire to follow the Lord. The "Communion service", "Lord's table", is very much in the same realm and of the same nature as baptism. Membership of the church or of A church, and Christian work are the expected things, and things to be maintained.

How great is the loss of the tremendous and demanding meaning of these matters.

It is not possible to read any part of the New Testament without being made aware of the costliness connected with ANY step in relation to Jesus as the Christ. The very contemplation of association with Him raised the most serious issues. Confession of Him and baptism involved in deep and far-reaching difficulties. Testimony to Him and just representing Him in the world produced spontaneous trouble. The further the believers and servants of Christ went, the more costly the way became. The believers, the churches, just had to stand and fight for their very lives spiritually. It is so manifestly true, even in our time, that where it is costly to stand true to the Lord -- as in East Germany, Russia, etc. -- there you find the most real and true kind of believers. It is known that some have deliberately chosen to return to such places and accept the suffering after having tasted or seen the spiritual poverty and unreality of Christians in what are called "free countries". It is not necessary to go behind the "Iron Curtain", or the "Bamboo Curtain", or to "heathen lands" in order to know persecution and thereby find reality. In such case millions of Christians in the West would never find it.

Utterness for the Lord ANYWHERE will produce spiritual conditions which will test, challenge and make for reality and bring out the real and deep meaning of everything. Utterness means willingness to let the Lord dictate every aspect of life and, when He faces with a question or test, to go through with it, whatever the cost. It means being committed to knowing the deepest and fullest meaning of every bit of our Christianity.

What does the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures mean by new birth, baptism, the Lord's table, fellowship, the church, ministry and service, etc.? Indeed, what does it mean to HAVE the Holy Spirit? There is such a great amount of assuming and taking for granted, which MAY work out in presumption -- PREsumption.

Most Christians accept the doctrines, the traditions and the ordinances, but, in the beginning, it was the implications, the significance, and the meaning which gave reality to everything. This reality provided a place for a wholesome fear. Violations or ignoring of vital principles can go on with impunity in our times and because the judgments of God are not prompt sudden and apparent but work slowly and almost imperceptibly on a long-term course, it is assumed -- if thought about at all -- that it does not matter. There ARE many conditions and situations, confusions and frustrations, limitations and complications, which -- if we but knew it -- ARE judgments. May we not have taken far too much for granted?

One thing is very clear: the apostles and their fellow-workers sought to make the believers take their Christianity very seriously and left them in no doubt as to serious consequences following -- sooner or later -- if they did not do so.

We may take up some of the matters mentioned in a more specific and fuller way, but for the moment we want to put the emphasis upon this: that the Lord has never made provision for anything less than downright reality.

Stresses are certain to be brought to bear upon our profession which will find us out, and we shall be tested on the threshing-floor. The disciples understood the implications of the Lord's teaching when they

asked "Lord, are there few that be saved?"

Dr. Billy Graham has reason for asking why it is that, of all the thousands that make "decision", so few go through, and so many go back. The answer might very well be that the full implications and the deep significance of what it MEANS to be a Christian are not generally presented.

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