

# The New Cruse (Continued)

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of a new cruse, an instrument conformed to God's mind, and the need for fellowship and love in the Body of Christ.*

**Topics:** "Unity in the Body of Christ", "Spiritual Ministry"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of a 'new cruse'--a spiritual instrument aligned with God's will and the Holy Spirit's guidance. He discusses the importance of relative and representative ministry, highlighting biblical figures like Esther and Daniel, who embodied this principle by interceding for their people. Sparks warns against the dangers of division and suspicion within the Body of Christ, urging believers to maintain fellowship and unity despite differences. He stresses that true ministry must be rooted in a deep relationship with God, prepared to meet the needs of others, and that the enemy seeks to disrupt this unity through discord. Ultimately, he calls for a diligent pursuit of spiritual growth and a commitment to love and support one another in faith.

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## Transcript

We expressed the feeling that, while many would agree with the statement that a general renewal of spiritual life is very much needed at this time, there might not be such agreement that what is needed specifically is "a new cruse", an instrument conformed to the mind of God, solely upon the basis of sympathy with the Holy Spirit's order and requirements. If there were pictured some new exclusive body; some select company; some iconoclastic movement; some spiritually superior class - such reservations would be justified, and might lead to suspicion, fear, apprehension. Such an attitude, though quite unjustified, and betokening the "flesh" and the activity of the Spoiler - the Adversary - might lead to much unnecessary loss, and make things more difficult for the Lord than they need have been.

Now, we need to recognise the fact that in the history of the Divine reactions the instrument has always been a definitely related or relative one, not exclusive and isolated. Although it may have been comparatively small in itself, it was representative and linked with the whole company of the elect.

### RELATIVE AND REPRESENTATIVE MINISTRY

Did Esther represent an instrument brought to the throne "for such a time as this" - the occasion of a Satanic plot for the death of God's people and the wiping out of His testimony from the earth? Then her life and the life of the whole company - although they were in captivity and 'out of the way' - were one,

however privileged and exalted may have been her calling. She was involved in the testimony, and this brought her into a travail concerning the whole chosen race. We shall have more to say about Esther.

This same relative and representative function characterized Daniel and his brethren. They took the condition of the whole captive nation upon their hearts, and entered into what we might call a vicarious repentance for the sins of all their brethren. They themselves were the 'overcomers' of that time, but all their experience, revelation, and victory was in a deep relationship to the people of God, though apostate.

When Hezekiah was instrumental in turning back the awful idolatry and wickedness made so complete by Ahaz, he first of all instituted a sin-offering "for ALL Israel" (2 Chron. 29:24), and then sent letters throughout all Israel to call them to the Passover at Jerusalem (30:1-10). This is striking when we remember that Hezekiah was king over Judah, not Israel; the kingdom being rent, and entirely schismatic, with Israel much more idolatrous even than Judah, Hezekiah's heart went out to all, and did not allow the grossest idolatry to create a spiritual abandonment of his so greatly erring and sinning brethren.

This principle of relationship and representation can be traced throughout the Word, and it is a most important one. There is no such thing as a 'section' of the Body of Christ. "The body is one", but there are "bands" and "joints of supply", fulfilling special related and representative functions or ministries. All the "members" may not be in equally good health, development, life, fellowship, but they are not thereby cut off. Christ will never have a mutilated Body.

We are not unaware of the greatness of the difficulty and problem with which we are here confronted. At the same time we make bold to tackle it for the Lord's glory. If only certain principles are recognised and established, there is hope of improvement, at least to some extent. We must, therefore, in the first place keep clearly before us that it is only the really born-anew children of God, in whom there is something of the Spirit, who are in view - not the vast accretions to 'Christendom', or 'organized' and traditional Christianity, of 'mixed multitudes'. However bad may be the spiritual condition of the former, they are not to be excluded from the SPIRIT of fellowship. That does not mean fellowship in work or that which is wrong, but it does mean earnest and loving solicitude for recovery therefrom. How patiently and diligently and ingeniously has many a surgeon or doctor worked to find some point of contact with life in a patient whose hold and interest was practically imperceptible! Should it be less so with us in this so much greater battle with spiritual death?

But the main point is this. The Lord must have an instrument which He has formed in the fire and to which He has given peculiar knowledge of Himself. This instrument will have to stand upon a peculiarly pure basis of life in God. Whatever the rest may do, it dare not take its lead from them. Its methods, means, and standards must be those which have shed the less mature elements. Of some it would stand as God's plummet to reveal that which is out of the straight; that which is short of God's best - or God's better; for who would claim to have reached God's best? A much greater cost will have to be met by such an instrument; and there will be little place left, if it is spiritually constituted as against mentally apprehended, for spiritual pride.

Now the chief difficulty, as history has shown, is how to realise such a ministry, constituted by knowledge of the Lord through suffering, and how to hold it in relation to ALL the Lord's people, avoiding separation in spirit, schism in the Body, exclusiveness and 'watertightness'. It is the easiest thing to withdraw to some given point and look down on all others, as though to say: 'We are THE people - you must come to us.' The Lord will lose much this way. No; while in PRACTICAL matters, for consistency's sake, there may

HAVE to be withdrawal, as also where error predominates, yet the preservation of what there is of God must be diligently sought in spirit. While there can be no official link with what is wrong, there can and must be a reaching out in spirit to keep the door open for the "more excellent way".

The next thing is to apprehend the Divine meaning behind the creating of this instrument. Surely it is twofold.

Firstly, to have for Himself in the earth that which is as close an approximation to His own mind as possible; that it should not be true that there is nothing which is in any real way an expression of the Lord's mind. Thus, further, He would have that which cleaves a way through for others. So it ever was in battles of old. The specially trained and disciplined troops broke through for others.

Secondly, that there may be that which gives the Lord His point toward which to work. As He creates a sense of need in His people, and leads them on thereby, He would have that which can be His means of meeting that need in spiritual knowledge. That the Lord directs hungry ones to those who know Him through special dealings is a principle not far to seek in the Divine record. We remember how Cornelius was brought into touch with Peter (Acts 10), Apollos with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18), and so on. There is such a thing as election to special service, and there ought to be mutual recognition of this. When the Lord Jesus took Peter, James and John into the more inward activities and revelations of His life, especially up to the Mount of Transfiguration, He was not guilty, in principle, of an act of schism in the Body. What the others thought or felt we do not know, but in the long run we know that ministry was in view, not personal preference, He was not making of them a specially privileged and separate company. A great need was coming, and this was His method of providing for the need which would one day be created.

The appreciation of what He did and what they knew had to tarry until that need arose. There will never be an appreciation of special resource without conscious need, but such need will justify God's methods, and prove His wisdom sound. God has from the beginning of the world always had His escape ready before the fire broke out - His lifeboat before the wreck - His store before the famine - His Cross before the curse. His peculiar ways with some are in view of a coming need which will give them a peculiar ministry. There are those who are out on a general basis of activity with the Lord, going all the time in a continuous stream of good works. There are also those who are cut off from anything great as to measure, and are reserved for what the others cannot do; less in bulk, but perhaps of indispensable worth and service in emergency, and beyond a certain general point of attainment. The latter have to bide their time in patience, but when their time does come it is THEIR time in the Lord, and no one else can do the work.

Let us return to our main principle, namely that REMNANTS ARE RELATIVE. The remnants of which we spoke in our first chapter were not something conclusive in themselves. Sometimes a remnant of only a couple of tribes is referred to as "all Israel", showing their representative character. While in the first instance the movement was on the part of a few, comparatively, there was from time to time a trickling after them, as there was that to which such tricklings could come. The remnant was not conclusive.

We must keep clearly and strongly before us the fact that, while the Lord must have His testimony maintained in the earth, and while He desires all His people to enter into the fullness of light and truth, and while there are clearly seen to be different companies of His people in Heaven, both as to time and as to position, the main characteristic of any company which may be termed 'a remnant' or 'overcomers' is that of vocation: that is, they stand in a vocational relationship to all other really born-anew children of God. It is something which they are called to be and to do which is preparatory for the rest. They have, amongst

other things, to 'pass over armed before their brethren' (Deut. 3:18), to cleave a way and take the first shock of spiritual antagonism.

Now, before defining the nature of this instrument, we will say just a little more on this matter of fellowship. We have recognised two things, namely, that fellowship is limited to the measure of life and of the Spirit, and that for fuller fellowship there must be progress in the life of the Spirit; and then that, inasmuch as every true child of God has SOMETHING of Himself in them, there should be care and diligence in discovering, unearthing, and fostering that. We have now to see that, no matter how we may seek to go on with the Lord, there can only be TRUE BUILDING UP of the Body on the ground of fellowship and love.

#### A SATANIC MASTER-STROKE

Perhaps one of the most SIGNIFICANT things to any who are "not ignorant of his (Satan's) devices" is that there never has been a specially spiritual movement of God in the earth, calculated to serve Him in a particularly useful way, but what Satan's animosity thereto has been manifested along the line of division, schism, discord, separation, and a breaking down of fellowship. And how often has the real sting and stigma been modified by a feigning love unbroken and preserved, when the divided parties should have no association with each other in the things of God. Love, let us again say emphatically, is incumbent upon the Lord's people toward "all men", whether of the "household" or otherwise (Gal. 6:10), but fellowship is something more. It is the most spiritual things which suffer the greatest shocks in this matter, and again we say this carries its own Satanic significance.

The methods of the enemy are numberless, the "wiles" unfathomable by human wit. A suggestion of suspicion, if it finds lodgment, is enough to completely paralyse the work of God and spiritual progress. Have a doubt and you are done. There never was a time when positive spiritual work was more jeopardised by suspicion than now. It would seem that hell is largely employed in issuing forth smoke, clouds, vapours, mists of suspicion, question, reservation, in order to infect with uncertainty, mystification, prejudice, fear, discrediting, distrust, aloofness. It is in the "heavenlies" that this is most registered; that is, the higher ranges of spiritual things. It is an ATMOSPHERE, and it is everywhere. You sense it wherever you go. In some places it is stifling - there is no clear breath of the Spirit, and a word of life is almost choked back.

Of course, this is no new thing, although now so intensified. The New Testament is full of it. The Lord Jesus met it - not in spiritual people, only in religious people. John met it. Paul met it in every direction. It was made to circle round his person, his methods, his character, and his message. Even some members of the mother assembly at Jerusalem showed suspicion and lack of cordiality toward him. Paul's setting aside of the Law, for instance, seemed to them to go beyond even the Lord Himself, who had not openly abrogated it. Then Paul appealed to "visions and revelations" (2 Cor. 12:1), but they asserted that these were dubious, or at best they could only serve to ratify his own personal convictions. Again, both Paul and his opponents appealed to the Old Testament, but the letter of the Old Testament seemed undoubtedly to favour the literalists, and his 'attempt to read new meanings' into the old revelation seemed to them mere cleverness. They looked on it as barefaced denial of the Divine Word. To them it looked as though he did not believe the Bible. They regarded his innovations as morally dangerous.

Of course, this in SUBSTANCE ought to have no parallel today, but it has in spirit. There is nothing added by revelation to the Scriptures since the New Testament was closed, but there is much to be RECOGNISED in them by the enlightenment of the Spirit. There is no new meaning, but there is much

new RECOGNITION of the meaning.

## CAUSES AND PRECAUTIONS

The point is, not that there never was or never will be an absence of this Satanic enterprise of smoke to prevent or destroy fellowship, but - what is to be our attitude in such circumstances?

It would be vain to try to deal with all the secondary causes. Sometimes the ground of the adversary's success, either in ourselves or in "them that oppose themselves", is that we may be living in certain respects in some proximity to the "flesh" and the "natural man". Some secret pride may make possible jealousy, criticism, envy, 'hurt-ness', fear of loss, self-pity, comparison, or a wish to be out of the place of difficulty. Sometimes it may be immaturity; sometimes imperfect knowledge or understanding - 'seeing through a glass darkly'. There are worse things than these, too; but there are also such things as are either utterly imaginary, or real only because they seem real to those who register them. That is, the enemy can set up situations which are utterly false in themselves - they have no foundation in FACT. They are phantoms - but how terribly real phantoms can be!

How shall we meet all this? It seems so hopeless, and would almost drive us to ultra-individualism. Let us not abandon hope until we have been faithful to the exhortations, 'Give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit' (Eph. 4:3), and "Prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21). The final test will, of course, be - Is the Lord present in blessing? If so - and we ought to have spiritual discernment - then up to that point we ought neither to oppose nor to refuse all fellowship.

But before we are so general, perhaps we have a duty which costs a little more.

Seeing how great was the matter involved - no less than the Holy Spirit's presence and ministry - Aquila and Priscilla might easily have labelled Apollos as in error, altogether wrong and wanting, and left him and the assembly of which he was 'pastor'. But they saw the lack and lovingly took him and in a humble spirit helped him to see it (Acts 18:24-28). There is a fine record of the man after this. It could so easily have been a breach and a loss.

We must always be sure that those who seem to us to be wrong are not capable of being helped on those matters which are absolutely vital to fellowship. What have we done and what do we do in the matter? To come to a conclusion and forthwith to abandon those from whom we differ is a positive violation of scriptural method and instruction. This is often great loss to the Lord when there might have been gain. It would seem from the Word that the grounds of separation, WHEN ESTABLISHED, are brought within a small range as to number, though of course outweighing all others in importance. They are: the denial of the person of Christ, that He is truly God come in the flesh (2 John 7, 10); the denial of the necessity for and sufficiency of His death for reconciling men to God (Gal. 1:6-9); the practice of moral evil (1 Cor. 5:9); the defying of the united judgment of the whole assembly in a matter of wrong doing (Matt. 18:17); and, finally, the refusal to accept the authority in the house of God, of the Apostles and their writings (2 Thess. 3:14-15). All else is gathered up in these.

It would seem necessary to say again here what we have said earlier, that we are not dealing with the matter of co-operation in doubtful methods and on an unspiritual basis, or of a compromise on truth. There will ever have to be separation in these matters. Our point is the SPIRIT of fellowship - that we should not close ourselves up, as though we were apart from and superior to all others. Many of us have to confess to a time when our lives were by no means conspicuous for their spirituality, and we owe much to the spirit

of fellowship on the part of others. If so be we feel that, in the mercy of God, we have been given something more than some, we must be out to help, to win, to cherish. Above all, we must keep our hearts open and our spirit pure. It is terribly possible to get to a set place where no one can teach us, but we can teach others - they are the ones who are not going on with the Lord. This is entirely fatal to fellowship.

Now we must close this chapter, but with one important reminder. A great safeguard and security to that fellowship without which there is no building and progress in the House of God is to RECOGNISE, and bear continually in mind, that the master tactic of the enemy is somehow, by hook or by crook, to get in between the Lord's people and cause strain and break. Our 'diligence' must be along the lines of 'proving all things'; refusing the opinions and judgments of others - even the most spiritual; not listening to gossip or criticism; not going by appearances; and always keeping a very close walk with the Spirit and listening to Him on all matters.

When the Scripture says that we are to 'prove all things', we should apply that especially to the things which could serve the evil powers in their propaganda of suspicions, leading to divisions.

We should prove whether our judgment of persons and things is absolutely right. We should prove whether the things said by a person, by word or writing, are what we have taken them to mean, or whether they might not mean something that we have not recognised.

We should prove whether a person about whom we have a question is not open to being helped from the Word of God to see differently or better than he now sees.

We should prove whether love has no influence with such, and whether he is 'PROVED' to be bigoted, proud, and unapproachable.

Have we adopted such lines, or hurried to destroy by open attack or by the spread of suspicion?

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