

# The Spiritual & Natural Man - Part 5

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the natural and spiritual man and the significance of the Lord's table as a declaration of faith in Christ and a test of whether we are on Christ's ground or natural human ground.*

**Duration:** 42:02

**Topics:** "Natural Man"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the theme of transitioning from being a natural man to a spiritual man. He emphasizes that we can either be governed by our own soul or by the Holy Spirit. The speaker also highlights the importance of the Lord's table as a testimony that we belong to the Christ type, where we partake in his body, blood, and life. Additionally, the speaker emphasizes that preaching is not limited to being on a platform or in a meeting, but it is also about living a life that proclaims the testimony of God in Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

As we are getting nearer to the end of this time together, we naturally move to a culmination and a gathering up of what the Lord has been seeking to say to us, and so there has to be a certain amount of retrospect and repetition, but as little as we can make it, in order to link on for what yet the Lord has to say, and you know that the basic portion of the word out of which we have been led to many other things, is the second chapter, the first letter to the Corinthians, in which the Apostle is seeking very early in his writing to the church at Corinth, to re-emphasize, re-stress and underline the real nature of the Christianity into which these Corinthians had come, and of which they seem to have lost very much, from which they had deviated and declined, and so he is calling them back from their declension to real foundation and restatement of the Christian life. You know when he gets well on in this letter to chapter 15, he does definitely state that he is telling them what was the gospel that he preached to them. I make known unto you brethren the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved.

I make known, I say, in what words I preached it unto you. If ye hold fast, hold it fast, except ye believe in vain. These two letters are for one purpose, to remind them, and he does so very forcefully, of what it was that they had come into.

The necessity was this state of confusion which had come into their Christianity. And his way of approach, as we have been seeing, his way of approach to this whole matter, is along the line of distinguishing between two kinds and types of manhood which can be characteristic of Christians. That is, that in Christians there can be two things, and the whole question and issue is, which of these two things is going to predominate? And the two things are set forth here in chapter 2, and if you remember that when he wrote he did not mark out his letter with chapters.

You can just wipe out those numbers. He is going straight on. He has made a start, he is going straight on.

He is not stopping at the end of chapter 1 and saying, well that is that, we will leave it for the time being, and then next Sunday we will read chapter 2. He is writing straight through, without any breaks or interruption. It is one thing. You must remember, and this should be helpful to you, you must remember that the whole letter, and the whole of these two letters, have to be read in the light of one main theme.

There are not so many themes here, although so many aspects are touched upon. You may say so many subjects are included. Every one, the whole, relate to one thing.

You must read every part in the light of that one thing. If you do so, it will be a very helpful way of reading the letter. And you have to say, as it moves on, it looks as though it changes from one thing to another, then another, and another, but you have to say, but how does this relate to the basic thing? And you find that that is the way of interpreting the whole of these two letters.

Every part a part of one whole. And the one whole is the transition from one kind or type of Christian to another. The two types being called now the natural man.

The natural man. In the original, the man of soul, and then he that is spiritual, that is, the man of spirit. The natural man being the man as he is in himself, the spiritual man being the man as he is in the spirit.

And we know quite well that we can be in one of those two things. We can be in ourselves over anything. That is, self can be the dominating and governing thing, or we can be governed by the spirit.

We can be in the spirit, controlled by the spirit in our life. These two are here set over against one another by the apostle. And the whole letter is to be read in the light of this one thing.

The transition from one to the other. As we have seen in the second letter, chapter three, we are being changed, transformed into the same image. We are being made to pass from the one image to the other.

We are in transition. That is the nature of the Christian life. And that is what Christianity is.

Complete change from one type of manhood to another, and the another being Christ. Now we have traced that in the case of Christ. We began by seeing that that is the meaning and significance of the incarnation, the birth of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, that another than the natural order of man has been brought in.

Christ did not come into this world along the ordinary natural lines. It was a work of the spirit of God which produced his very being, his very body. As the angel said to Mary, the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, that which shall be born of thee.

A work of the Holy Spirit to produce something that is not the old kind, the known type, something born of God, a different type of manhood, meaning of the incarnation. From there we moved on to his baptism.

We saw that as he placed his cross in figure right at the commencement of his mission, his public mission, he was saying that this mission that I have come to fulfill requires the death and burial of one kind, the resurrection and bringing into being on the other side of the cross of another kind.

That is what the New Testament teaches about baptism. The meaning of his baptism then was, in the light of the cross, which is its true fulfillment, the putting out of the sight of God of a type, a type. He is on the cross, figuratively on the cross in the Jordan.

He is taking the place of a whole race of beings which are being dismissed by God as never suitable for his presence, and coming out on the other side he is attested as beloved, that which is suitable to God. From there we moved to the anointing. After his baptism, the Holy Spirit coming upon him, which we saw that this new manhood into which we are called, is a manhood wholly governed and led by the Holy Spirit.

Led by the Holy Spirit. I don't know whether it comforts you, or whether we can draw very much comfort from this, that the first leading of the risen Christ on the other side of the Jordan was into battle. By the Holy Spirit.

Then was Jesus led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Probably you will pause in the future when you are asking to be led by the Holy Spirit, if you remember that. But here it is quite clear, the very first action of the anointing was to bring him into battle.

And as we have seen, it was the battle between the prince of this world and the one who was not of this world, who repudiated this world, the spiritual man over against the worldly man. Well, we got on the details of that to show how the temptations were just an effort of the enemy to get this spiritual man back onto natural ground. And so spoil him, the last Adam, as he had spoiled the first Adam.

And retain the kingdom for himself, that is, Satan. So much for the battle over the spiritual man and over what really is under heaven attested, as approved of God. What really is in God's approval, my beloved, anything that can be of that order is a thing which is contested by the enemy, to spoil it and to get it away again onto the old natural ground.

These things, all who have been here now know that this is the way we have come. The anointing, the earthly life from that time onward, was the life and the walk of the spiritual man. And that spiritual man amongst men is different.

There's something different about him which the world cannot understand. We're keeping to the text of 1 Corinthians 2. The natural man understandeth not. He cannot know, he cannot judge things.

But he that is spiritual understandeth all things, judgeth all things, does know. But he is not judged of any man, or understood by any man. How true that was of the Lord Jesus.

If ever there was a man who was misunderstood by everyone, even his disciples, misunderstood, it was the Lord Jesus. He was of a different order, and they could not judge him. They could not understand him.

He was, as we said, inscrutable. And that is true of everything that is spiritual, and everyone that is spiritual. They're here as strangers in a world, and the deepest reality of their being is something that the world cannot understand.

They're a mystery to the world. There's something about them that is different, and that altogether defies the world's understanding and comprehension. You know, that's how it ought to be.

It makes, of course, the Christian life an exceedingly difficult one to live in this world. But then, you see, we are aliens here, aren't we? We are pilgrims and strangers on the earth. We don't belong here.

We speak another language. We don't belong, and therefore we're not understood, or it should be so. One of the great mistakes that many Christians and young Christians mistake, make, is to try, try, to make the world understand them.

Can't be done. Can't be done. If you lower your standard in order that they might comprehend you and accept you as one of themselves, you see, you're throwing away the very truth, reality of your Christian life.

While you don't try to be different. That is, you're not all the time trying to be awkward amongst people. The fact of your very being is that.

You're strange to them. You're of another order of creation. They can no more understand you than an animal can understand a human in many, many of the human ways.

Well, that was the earthly life of the Lord Jesus, and this is the meaning of the spiritual man. And for the little while this afternoon, at any rate, to begin with, we're going on to the next thing that came in the case of the Lord Jesus. And that is the supper in the upper room.

You see, there you have the actual history of the Lord Jesus. Isn't it interesting to note how Paul, in these letters, takes us through that history. In a spiritual way now, not a historic way, but in a spiritual way.

And how in this very letter, he comes on the Lord's table. You know that you very rarely, very rarely come to the Lord's table without reading from 1 Corinthians 11. It is regarded as the formula for the Lord's table.

I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you. The night in which the Lord was betrayed, he took bread and bread and gave to his disciples. He said, this is my body which is for you.

In the same manner, after supper, he took the cup and said, this cup is the cup of the new covenant, my blood, which is shed for you, and so on. Well, it's read. There are a few passages probably Christians are more acquainted with than this.

There are a number of things gathered into it. A number of things gathered into it because it's so comprehensive. But what is the inclusive thing that is here? What is the inclusive? This loaf.

What is this loaf? What is this loaf? He says, this is my body. My body. He is contrasting by the my, contrasting this table with the other tables you notice in the context.

Other tables, tables of demons, tables of this world. This is my body, and it's different from all others. It doesn't belong to any other category.

It is distinct and separate. Something unique. There is not another body like this.

Of all the bodies in humanity, there is not another body like this. He said, a body did thou prepare for me. An act of God.

A unique act of God. This body, I repeat, there was no other body like this one. A special act of God.

His body from its birth was not an ordinary body. In its birth was not an ordinary body. Oh, looking at him from the outside, perhaps he doesn't look any different.

And yet there's something about this man, something about this man, that you cannot understand. Different. And when taking the loaf as the symbol of his body, breaking it, and distributing it, and saying, eat all ye of it, what is he saying? In the light of this discrimination in the types, kinds of humanity, what is he saying? In taking my body, you are declaring that you are a part of this other and different kind, type of humanity.

You are saying that you, you have become a very part of this other order that Christ is, and that he has become a part of your being. You are different from other people. Is that what we mean every time we come to the Lord's table and every time we read 1 Corinthians 11? Is that really what we mean when we declare by this act? That we are not of this world.

We are not in the innermost reality of our beings, a part of this old creation. In Christ we are of a new creation, a new order of manhood. And perhaps that is a reason why the Lord in instituting this indicated that there was something to be repeated, and repeated, and repeated, till he comes.

We come back to the Lord's table repeatedly, perhaps week by week. It is to both remind ourselves and declare that we are a different people. We are a different people.

That needs guarding, of course, not that we are a superior in a certain sense, and exclusive, but that we are different. We are a Christ people. We are a Christ people, standing in this world where every force of Satan and the world is set to draw us and drag us back onto that other old level of life, down to the lower level of the self-life.

We come back and say no. We have reaffirmed today that we are on another level of life, in another realm of life, in another relationship of life. Christ in us, and we in Christ, by this love.

And a cup, in like manner, a cup with the same significance, but this, a body needs a life. And you may repeat this so often, and it become a dead form, a habit, a custom, a bit of Christian procedure, which Christians do week by week, or so often. It's just that.

But he has combined the cup with the loaf. And the cup, the wine, is always a type of his life. His life released from himself to be shared by his people, so that it is a living body.

The characteristic of this body, this people, is life. They live. You can go to many communion services, and while you be very reverent in manner, and solemn in voice, and so on, go away just the same.

Whereas the Lord's table ought to be a mostly living thing, not form, custom, repeated procedure. A living thing, from which we come away and say, yes, we've had a ministration of life. A ministration of life.

Would that it were always like that? But here you see, it comes to these Corinthians, on the line of the difference between Christ and the natural man, the spiritual man and the natural man. The spiritual man is like this. He's the man who has imbibed Christ, and is changed, is changed into Christ-likeness by his, may I say, absorbing Christ into his being, making Christ a part of himself.

Oh, far from being formal. Far from being formal and custom. Something to be got through, because it's the thing that is done.

It should be a testament to the fact that we with Christ are joined in another kind of God-approved humanity, accepted by God, under an open heaven. God attesting, saying, this is what I love. It's what I love.

Don't you think that our times around the Lord's table ought to have that? Perhaps as their major effect. The Lord, the Father, looking down and saying, this is something I love, my beloved. It ought to be like that.

The Lord made it like that. So, we see here that in the course of a continuous narrative, or letter, without break, the Apostle comes at a certain point to this part, where he introduces into his main theme, the Lord's table, as a part of the whole, and says this Lord's table is a testimony to the fact that we belong to another race, another order, another type, a Christ-type. His body, his blood, his life is ours, what we belong to.

Now, note, this other thing, for the moment, you notice that right early in the beginning of this letter, beginning of the second chapter, the Apostle says, I brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the mystery of God. I came, and amongst you, I preached. Our revised text is the mystery of God.

You notice the margin says the testimony of God, which is really the exact word. The testimony of God. Came from preaching, proclaiming the testimony of God.

The testimony of God, of course, is Jesus Christ. He is the testimony of God. But do you notice that in this matter of the Lord's table, it says, as after he eats and drinks, ye do preach.

Proclaiming, that's the alternative word in the text, ye do proclaim the Lord's death till he come. You do preach. I came preaching, preaching, proclaiming the testimony of God.

In this table, you preach. You preach the testimony of God in Jesus Christ. You do proclaim the Lord's death till he come.

This is the preaching, and for the comfort of some who may not think they do very well on a platform, or in an open air meeting, preaching is not always by being on a platform, or in a meeting, standing up and talking. Preaching is what you are. Ye do proclaim.

You see, dear friends, you cannot just pass the ministry over to the preacher, or the preachers, whatever name you use for them. You just cannot do that. We are everyone who takes or partakes at the Lord's table is a preacher.

An ordained preacher. That you are preaching is a declaration before heaven and earth and hell, that in this table you have become a part of another order of creation. By the body and blood of Christ, you're proclaiming that you are of the Christ order.

Proclaiming it. Wouldn't it be a good thing if that were true of all people who took communion service? But when you bring it into the letters of the Corinthians, it's quite startling and testing, isn't it? These people were coming to the Lord's table, but you see how they came. See how they came.

What is said about them here. How they came to the Lord's table. And the apostle Paul summed it all up in one word.

He that eateth and drinketh unworthily in an unworthy manner. My word, the context of that is shocking. How they came to the Lord's table.

They brought to the Lord's table, the old man, there's no doubt about it. They brought to the Lord's table themselves. It's all there.

And it's a very terrible, terrible picture of the Lord's table at Corinth. I must leave you to read it again. Their behavior, which is being rebuked.

But the point is that coming like that, with anything of that kind, let a man examine himself. Let a man examine himself. Look at himself.

Let a man examine himself. Look at himself. See, see now, how he comes to the Lord's table, whether as the old man, on the old man's ground, on the ground of the natural man.

Does he come to the Lord's table with that? Or is he coming really to the Lord's table on the ground of a spiritual man? If so, if so, all those things that are in this letter are ruled out by the Lord's table. There are divisions among you. You can't have that in one body, can you? That must go.

That belongs to the natural man. And there are a number of other things to which I may refer later, which were characteristics of the Corinthians, which were a contradiction to the fundamental meaning of the Lord's table. The Lord's table therefore becomes a great test of one thing, whether we are on Christ's ground or on natural human ground.

Now you, many of you, perhaps wonder why this should be said to you. You are not Corinthians. Hope you're not.

Maybe very little of these Corinthian conditions amongst you. I hope that is true. But I'm not so sure when it comes really to the test, whether we shouldn't be found out in some of these things.

You look at that again. But it's a great test of whose ground we are on. Ground of the natural man or a ground of the spiritual man? Ground of the first Adam or the last Adam? The table is put there as a cleavage, clean between the two.

And therefore, this table is a very sacred thing. We're not always at the Lord's table, to be a note of warning, as here. While it, and it's a beautiful thing that the apostle says at the beginning of this letter, it is a beautiful thing, I think it's one of those things that need to be taken note of very much.

Right at the beginning, he says, Them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours. There's not exclusiveness there when it comes to a matter of those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, who is their Lord as he is ours. That's all right.

That's inclusive. But then when you move on to this matter of this table, the table cuts in. And says, Not for the natural man.

Who is of this order, division, and all these things? Oh, be careful, examine yourself when you come to the table and see that you're not bringing the natural man, these characteristics of the Lord's table. If you stand on other ground than that, the ground of Christ. Might I remind you that Paul is so strong about this matter of Christ's ground that he opens this letter and what is in our arrangement, the first chapter with its 31 further divisions into verses.

It's a small section. In this introduction, introduction to the whole, no fewer than nine times he mentions the name of the Lord Jesus. It's impressive, isn't it? I don't know whether you mark your Bible, but you take reading or something that shouts and underline the name of the Lord Jesus in these first 31 verses, or this first section of the whole letter.

And that will always be a guide to the letter. And then in the second part, the second chapter which is going on, he said, I came to you proclaiming, proclaiming, I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ. How utter, ultimate, complete is this concentration upon Jesus Christ right through.

Jesus Christ, at every point, he says to every situation, that's not Jesus Christ, that is not Jesus Christ. But I think all this is just a build-up of this one thing, that there's a great divide in our humanity, in our humanity, the divide between what he calls the natural man, the man of soul, and the spiritual man. And that is never to be more marked and clear than when we come to the Lord's table, because there we do, by taking Christ, declare we are Christ people, Christ people, and not of this other type.

Well, I think if I were to go on and say a lot more, I couldn't say anything more vital, and we might spoil things by adding words, but dear friends, look at this matter of the natural man in the Corinthian letter, leading right on to this advanced point in the letter, the Lord's table, and see all this that has led up to it, and what an appalling, appalling lot it is. What an exhibition of the natural man. All that comes right up to the Lord's table, and the Lord's table says, no to that, no to that, that's not Christ, that's not Christ.

Here is Christ, and he is different, and you are different from that, if you really have rightly apprehended to be praiseworthy.

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