

# The Spiritual & Natural Man - Part 6

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*T. Austin-Sparks explores the transformative journey of Christians from the natural to the spiritual man, emphasizing the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit in this process.*

**Duration:** 26:49

**Topics:** "Natural Man"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker expresses physical weakness and acknowledges the need for the Lord's intervention to continue. The letter being discussed focuses on the progressive perfection of believers and the process of transformation. The speaker highlights the importance of the spirit of man, which is the inner man and the real essence of a person. The sermon also addresses the issues and wrongdoings in the Corinthian church, emphasizing the need for personal embodiment of the truth of the cross and dependence on the Lord's strength rather than relying on one's own abilities.

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## Transcript

We are occupied in this time with the matter of the transition and the transformation of the Christian from one order of creation to another. From what Paul calls in his first Corinthian letter the natural man to the spiritual man. And he says in his second letter that we are being transformed into the same image that is Christ.

A little while this evening we shall think together about this progress and this process of the Christian life from one order of creation to the other. In these two letters of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians we have a wonderful setting forth of this process and progress and consummation of the Christian from what he is in himself to what he is to be ultimately in Christ. And if you look again at the letter, or if you call to mind what you know about it, you will see that the Apostle is dealing with the three parts of manhood.

He deals with his soul very much occupied in these letters with the soul life of the Christian. And then he is dealing with his spirit, what he calls the inner man. And then he deals with his body, what he calls our outward man, which is perishing.

It is the complete man who under the government of the Spirit of Christ is here being dealt with. He begins of necessity, because of the situation in Corinth, with the soul. And the soul man translated in our version the natural man.

Everybody knows that the word natural there in the original is the soul. The soul man. That is what man is in himself, his own natural life, how he is made and made up.

And all that goes to make him a self-conscious being. Over against that the Apostle is saying so much here about the spiritual man, he that is spiritual, making a very big contrast between these two. Later he will come to the body of the man.

And in every case, every realm, it is a matter of change, transformation, or being transformed. The natural man being transformed into the spiritual man. His natural life being dealt with on the basis of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, to be brought not into annihilation, but into subjection.

Not to get rid of a soul, but to capture that soul and bring it into full subjection to his spirit in Christ. I don't know how you have felt in reading this first letter to the Corinthians, especially as you take it up from the tenth verse of chapter one, where the Apostle begins his long section of dealing with the wrongs at Corinth. Cataloging all the wrong things that were there.

And they were all bad, but some of them were very bad. Really terrible things. And you might ask, be tempted to ask, were they Christians at all? Were they Christians? These people were really Christians? You are recalling, aren't you, some of the things there at Corinth? But it is impressive, very impressive, how the Apostle begins his letter.

What is he really doing? Really what does he mean? When he is going to uncover all this that is there, and knows it before he begins to write, and yet he will write like this, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, 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. Is he just seeking to get on rapport with these people? Saying some nice things to prepare them for the nasty ones? How can he, with his full knowledge of the situation at Corinth, speak about them in this way? And following things which he says about them, which are good. When reading on, as I say, you might wonder whether they were Christians at all.

And in reading on, finding these things in a Christian church, you might despair of Christianity. You might be very disappointed, indeed, with Christianity. Say, well, if that is Christianity, may I be saved from it? A very natural reaction to all that is here.

How does the Apostle justify himself and proceed with this situation? The answer is given in a threefold way. In the first place, he speaks of the Christian, the believer's standing, not his faith, his standing. These Corinthians had evidently come to the Lord Jesus, come in faith to the Lord Jesus.

Evidently, the Lord Jesus was their foundation, because he says so in chapter three. They were Christians, and born again Christians, the Apostle says, called saints, sanctified in Christ Jesus. Their standing is one thing.

And you cannot do anything until you've got the standing. He would not proceed to deal with the situation if there were not some ground on which to proceed. He is taking it for granted that there is a ground there.

It may be covered over with a lot of unworthy things, but there is a ground there on which to work. And given that ground, the Lord can proceed. The Lord can do his work.

And so the Apostle begins with the standing of these people in Christ, in Christ, by faith, as over against their state. And then he goes on to show that the course of Christian life, given that position, that standing,

that foundation, the course of Christian life is a process of making believers what they are. Their approximation by process and progress to what they really are in standing.

And here is something, dear friends, that you and I need for our health. When we come up against so much that is disappointing, so much that shocks us, so much that would almost bring us to despair, we need this. That in the New Testament, in the apostolic letters, perfection is future and not present.

If you are looking for the perfect person now, or the perfect church now, you are going to suffer such disillusionment and disappointment that you will despair. Some of us have poured ourselves out to have the perfect church, to have the perfect church. The last word.

The thing that really does fully, wholly represent and express what we have in Ephesians. We have been terribly disillusioned and disappointed, haven't we? We have had to come back again and look at the matter. And when we have looked again, we find that Ephesians is pointing on to the end.

It stands in the ages to come as the perfect thing. Not now. Not now.

And what is now is the process, the progress. Pray dear friends, I've got to stop. I'm having a bad time physically and I don't know that I can go on much further unless the Lord really undertakes.

If you lift your hearts to the Lord. But here in this letter, it's all dealt with this in between the beginning and the end. And the perfection of believers is progressive and not final here.

And so the apostle comes in with all the teaching about the process. He tells us what that process is. It's transformation from one kind to another.

And he is teaching the principles of spiritual progress in this letter. What he calls transformation into the same image. Will you allow me to stop for a few minutes? Perhaps you'll have a little time to pray.

Father, we said that the apostle is here teaching the principles of this progress and transition from one type of man to the other. The natural to the spiritual or to Jesus Christ. And that is why he so repeatedly brings Christ into view.

And why he declares that in this realm of the natural, where the personal self-life of Christians is brought to the cross of the Lord Jesus. And the apostle here shows what that cross means over against these natural conditions. He is himself the embodiment of this truth of Christ and the cross.

You notice how he comes to Corinth or came to Corinth. He says, I was amongst you determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified. I was among you in much fear and trembling and weakness.

And in so stating, he has laid down the very ground of his appeal and his teaching. It is this, that there must be a personal embodiment of the truth of the cross before we'll get anywhere. Think of this man, his calling, tremendous revelation, his ability to stand before princes and rulers and kings with all boldness.

Tremendously strong and able man he was in so many respects. But when he comes to a situation like this, all that goes, it all goes. And here this, this in other respects, tremendous man, such ability, qualification, courage.

I was with you in much weakness, in fear, in trembling. Ever we are going to deal with the strong soul life which is making so much trouble in the church, we'll not deal with it with our own soul strength. We'll never be dealt with by our own natural strength.

It can only be in our own weakness, our own sense of dependence upon the Lord. Much weakness, fear, trembling. That's a crucified man when you think of the man who said it.

A crucified man. And it is one of the great principles of spiritual helpfulness that the one who is going to help must embody the truth, be the embodiment of the truth being given. Like that.

He himself, by emptying of himself of himself, was able to help these people and only so could really help them. It was not himself, but as he says here, it was Christ. So, so much Christ.

I preach Christ. I proclaim Christ and him crucified. A crucified man preaching a crucified Lord.

When Paul determined to know nothing amongst them, he covered a great deal of ground. There were three classes of people at Corinth. There were the Romans who had captured that province and ruled.

The Romans were the embodiment of natural strength. There were the Greeks, the embodiment of natural weakness, a natural wisdom, intellectualism. And there were the Jews, the embodiment of a life of the senses.

Jews seek after signs. Signs, those things which can answer to the soul's requirement for demonstration. Proofs, evidences in that realm are wonderful words.

Jews seek after signs. Greeks seek after wisdom. These three things made up the church at Corinth.

Paul says, so far as your spiritual progress is concerned, all that's got to go in the cross of the Lord Jesus, and he let it go. All power, natural power, all natural wisdom, foolishness he calls it, and all this craving for sense demonstrations and proofs must go to the cross if you're going to make the progress of the spiritual man. Christ is the power of God.

Christ is the wisdom of God. And Christ is the sign, the great sign of God. Not things and demonstrations, but himself.

The sign because he is the risen Christ. With God everything is centered and contained in his son, the Lord Jesus. And he is not a philosophy, a wisdom, an intellectualism.

He is a person, a divine person. The apostle is trying to draw them away from these things to the divine person. And he himself represents that.

Now I must, I fear, by sheer necessity draw this to a close. But I pass on to this great culmination in the 15th chapter. He's dealt with the spirit, spiritual man.

He's dealt with the soul, the natural man. Now in chapter 15 he deals with the body. And what arises from that chapter is this.

The spirit of the man is the seed. The seed. The spirit of the man is the inner man, the real man.

Not his soul, nor his body, nor his body. But the real man is the spirit. What you are in spirit is the real man.

And now says the apostle in chapter 15, that spiritual man, that spirit man, that man of the spirit, that inner man, that inner man being renewed day by day is the seed of a new body. God giveth it a body as it pleaseth him. And chapter 15 sees the culmination of the spiritual process and sees the transformation completed in the body, the physical body, made like unto his glorious body.

That's the transition, transformation, and the end of a spiritual process, a spiritual body, like unto his glorious body. Transition from this to that. A body that is not subject to what we know in the body.

The outer man perishes. The inward man is renewed day by day. But ultimately, chapter 15, the body itself is made like unto his glorious body.

The Lord fulfill all his design in everyone.

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