

# The Tragic Interlude

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The Great Schism refers to the cosmic disruption that has affected the course of events and led to the separation of humanity from God, and the Church is called to stand against the wiles of the devil and to fulfill God's purpose.*

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "The Cosmic Conflict"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks discusses 'The Great Schism' that occurred between the eternal times and the beginning of creation, emphasizing its tragic impact on humanity and the cosmos. He highlights the Apostle Paul's teachings in his later letters, particularly in Ephesians, which reveal the cosmic conflict between Christ and the forces of evil, led by Satan. Sparks explains that this disruption necessitates the re-gathering of all things in Christ, as humanity was originally created in Him but has since fallen into sin and separation from God. He stresses the importance of the Church's role in this spiritual warfare, equipping believers with the armor of God to stand against the wiles of the devil. Ultimately, the sermon calls for awareness of the ongoing battle for unity and the need for believers to actively engage in their spiritual defense.

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## Transcript

We have mentioned that between the "before times eternal" and the first era of time there took place something which has affected in a tragic way the whole course of events. The Bible has much to say in relation to that, but Paul in his final three Letters (excluding those to Timothy, Titus and Philemon) gives a very strong place and meaning to that event. We refer to the invasion into the universe of

The Great Schism

As to the particular Letter with which we are occupied, there are three allusions to this cosmic disruption.

The first, and this is a supreme factor in the significance of Christ, is in a very brief phrase. The fuller context is this (chapter 1:9,10): "having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him (Christ) 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; in Him, I say...." The clause we want is "to sum up all things in Christ."

The word (one long Greek compound) "to sum up" means "to bring back and to gather around the main point", that is, "in Christ." It is to re-gather the "all things." In the companion letter, Colossians, Paul says:

"For in Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth" (1:16). This means that originally all things were in God's Son. That it should be necessary to say that in the fulness of the times all things would be re-gathered or brought back into Him clearly means that something happened to take things out of Him, or away from Him. Oh, what a lot there is that points to that! Jesus said that He came "to seek and to save that which was lost." He gave a parable of wicked husbandmen who slew the heir in order to appropriate the inheritance. He said that "All that came before me are thieves and robbers" (John 10:8). It is an aspect of truth which has an immense amount of teaching in the Scriptures. Something was done to rob God's Son of His place and rights in the eternal purposing of God, making it necessary to re-gather, re-cover, re-unite. Back to that later.

The second thing pointing to that great event and breaking in of disruption is the state, the condition against which the purpose revealed in this Letter stands. It is a horrible picture.

"Dead through your trespasses and sins," "Ye walked according to... the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience... in the lusts of our flesh... by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:1-3). "At that time separate from Christ (note that) ...having no hope and without God in the world" (2:12) ...as the Gentiles also walk, in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God... being past feeling... lasciviousness... uncleanness..." (4:17,19). How did all this come about when all things were in God's Son originally? All this is outside of, and apart from, Christ! Surely we can say of this: "An enemy hath done this."

Very well: let us pass to the third thing in this Letter indicative of the great schism. How well known the words are, but how little known their vast, sinister context. "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." "Stand... withstand... having done all, stand" (Eph. 6:12-14).

Relations between the Son of God and some evil Power and his hosts have been so ruptured and disrupted that there can be no appeasement, no compromise, no fellowship, until that evil system has been destroyed beyond remedy. That great schism began somewhere outside of this earth; it then invaded the earth, and it has been the source and cause of all the schisms and disruptions in history. The Bible labels that responsible one Satan, the Devil.

For some time rationalism, liberal theology, psychology and certain philosophers ridiculed the existence of a personal Devil, and what the Bible attributes to him was explained as just neuroses and complexes; that is, evil is not anything to do with evil spirits or a "Satan," it is nervous disorder, or at most good in the making. Demonology is only a form of mythology. So, Satan played a master trick by persuading men to believe that he does not exist. But the world has had some shocks in recent history and there has been a positively terrible unmasking of the most awful malignity in this world and in human behaviour. Not only in those realms which are called "savage," "uncivilized," and "backward," but for sheer devilry, wickedness and calculated cruelty, nothing has ever been worse than that among what have been thought to be "cultured" and "advanced" peoples. Their very scientific "advancement" (?) has been employed for the most unspeakable horrors. We could write many pages on this line, but we refrain. The Bible is terribly vindicated as the course of this world proceeds, and not least in its unveiling of an evil personal power which is ill-disposed towards mankind and particularly to those who have allied themselves with God's Son. The battle for unity is a painful and heart-rending conflict. The disruption of nations proceeds apace, and among God's people there is nothing too sacred to escape this cosmic determination to disrupt the

smallest approximation to Divine fellowship. Of course, there are many "societies" and "fraternities" which are left alone, but it is no compliment if Satan is not disturbed. Let us make no mistake about this matter. The Bible leaves us in no doubt that, at the end of the age, every element in the universe will assume unmistakable features of intensification. This, of course, is only logical if the end is fulness in every connection. Whatever your interpretation of Revelation twelve may be, we have to note that Satan's shortening tenure of power is marked by his coming down to the earth with great wrath (Rev. 12:12).

But to return to "Ephesians," the great summary of spiritual history. We must note particularly that the Apostle brings out in full and definite statement that the Church--the Body of Christ--is involved in this war of the ages and all that he has written he heads up in this. It is as though he would say: "All that I have been saying regarding the eternal counsels of God; the place and purpose of the Elect--the Body of Christ; the redemption of that Body and its uniting with its Head; its life, character, walk, and work in this dispensation; and the great goal and established purpose of God to ultimately reunite all things in Christ is the object and occasion of an immense, untiring, and ever-intensifying cosmic conflict, in which unseen and countless evil forces are bitterly antagonizing the purpose and all related thereto." Paul says that it is because of the ministry committed to him to make all this known that he is in bonds and imprisonment. He shows that this antagonism of spiritual intelligences will be levelled at all that relates to that stewardship, and implies that if ministries are not just "departments" or aspects of Christianity, but all of a corporate whole, solidly bent upon a single object (Eph. 4:13), this corporate character will constitute the most serious menace to that evil kingdom as to draw out its venomous and every-sided effort to break it up and neutralize it. The Apostle defines this opposition as "wiles of the devil." He then sets over against each other the armour of God and the wiles of the devil. It is God's provision for meeting Satanic "wiles." By symbolic means he shows the nature of the "wiles". On the positive, Divine side the points of attack are shown to be "Truth," "Righteousness," "Peace," "Faith," "Salvation," "The Word of God." Against every form of subtle lying God provides the girding of the Spirit of TRUTH. Against accusations and condemnations of the heart, He provides "The RIGHTEOUSNESS of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ." Against fear which makes the going, the feet, unsteady and unsure He provides "the PEACE of God, which passeth all understanding." Against the suggestions, ideas, thoughts, imaginations and reasonings which assail the mind--the head, He provides SALVATION by Grace. Against the attacks upon the trustworthiness of the promises of God He supplies the Holy Spirit to answer back and retaliate with the sure WORD. "Over all," and related to all, He says 'in all your taking, take the big shield of FAITH.' But note, God does not put all this provision on His people; He provides it and then says to them, "Take unto you." There must be an act on their part, for the element of passivity is not consistent with such warfare. Would to God that, when these fiery darts began to fly, we instinctively reached for the appropriate weapon of defence! Perhaps we ought consciously to have them always on.

As we have said that in his last Letters Paul gave a strong place to this conflict of the ages, we cannot close this chapter without a reference to "Philippians." In "Colossians" it is obvious (see 1:13,20; 2:15), but in "Philippians" it is more by inference and allusion. We believe that when Paul, writing of the self-emptying of the Son of God, said that "although He was equal with God, He thought it not something to be grasped (held on to) to be equal with God, but emptied Himself" (2:6), the Apostle was alluding to the ambitious pride of "Lucifer" to be like the Most High (Isa. 14:14; Luke 10:18). If this is a right interpretation (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4 and Jude 6), then the scene in Philippians two, in keeping with so much other teaching in the New Testament, is that of the Son of God becoming the Son of Man, taking man-form to fight out this battle with the usurper.

"A final Adam to the fight

And to the rescue came."

And Paul, a "good soldier of Jesus Christ," in the same letter (Phil. 3) goes on to show that the way of victory is the way of "counting all things as loss."

Let us sum up.

"Before the foundation of the world" Divine counsels took place which are called "The good pleasure of His will," "The mystery of His will," "The purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His will," "The eternal purpose" (Eph. 1:4,5,9,11; 3:11). In those deliberations certain very definite decisions were made. These decisions were two-fold.

1. The Son of God was "appointed heir of all things." The sphere and realm of all things (Heb. 1:2; Eph. 1:10,11).

2. An Elect people was "chosen" in the Son to be the complement of Him; to be the corporate vessel of His expression and administration, termed His Body, His Bride, His Church, etc.; vocation being the idea of that election and predestination (Eph. 1:4,23; 5:25-32; 4:1).

3. Subsequent to that two-fold appointment and election, a revolt took place among heavenly beings in great number, led by one in very high position, probably very near the top. Pride and jealousy over the Son's appointment were the causes of this revolt, the place of "equality with God" being aspired to by that high one. The one, and the hosts in complicity with him, were cast out of heaven and "kept not their first estate" (Jude 6, A.V.). The schism, rupture, and division in heaven with the wrath of God upon them inspired an eternal and deathless enmity in that leader against God's Son, and mankind as the intended and potential vessel of His glory. So mankind was struck at early after creation, and the special enmity was focused upon the line of those who maintained faith in God and bore any characteristic features of God's Son. As primarily, so through all the ages, the one object and activity of that evil adversary has been to disrupt, divide, disintegrate humanity, and most particularly the "elect," the people of God. By such an object the purpose is to neutralize God's purpose and its appointed and chosen vessel. In this intensifying battle the true Church is shown to be deeply involved. God has made a full provision for the Church to meet and stand against that great enemy. That is a general summary of the actual teaching and implications of one aspect of this "Letter to the Ephesians."

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