

Vital and Organic Union

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the vital and organic union with Christ through begetting, birth, and growth in spiritual life.

Scripture: John 3:3, Acts 20:27, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 1:15-19, Ephesians 4:15, Hebrews 4:2, James 1:18, 1 Peter 2:2, 1 John 2:3, 1 John 2:29

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Union with Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the vital and organic union between believers and Christ, illustrating that true spiritual life begins with being begotten of God through His Word and the Spirit. He explains that this process involves begetting, birth, and growth, where the Word of God acts as the seed that contains the potential for spiritual life. Sparks stresses the importance of faith in responding to God's Word, leading to a manifestation of new life in Christ, which is essential for spiritual growth. He encourages believers to maintain a close relationship with Christ through the Word and prayer, as this is crucial for understanding and experiencing the fullness of spiritual life. Ultimately, the sermon highlights that all aspects of spiritual growth are rooted in a deep, abiding connection with Christ.

Transcript

"Every one... that doeth righteousness is begotten of him" (1 John 2:29).

"...Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (1 John 1:13).

"Of his own will he brought us forth [began he us, A.V.] by the word of truth" (James 1:18).

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

And of course the whole of John 15 should be placed there. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me..." and so on.

"As newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation" (1 Peter 2:2).

"...But speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

There will be no new profundities of truth delved into in what follows, and to many it will perhaps seem like coming back to the most elementary things, the very beginnings, of the Christian life, but I feel that it is very necessary for us to take nothing for granted. We who may know these things, and may have known them for a long time, will be the better for constant refresher courses in such matters, to help us to remember these basic truths and basic laws of our life and growth. There being such a large proportion of younger people among our readers, who are undoubtedly seeking the way of the quickest entrance into spiritual fullness, who are concerned to get on in the spiritual life just as quickly as possible, I think this word may prove helpful to them. At least it will be a re-emphasis upon things which it is so necessary always to keep in mind.

The Seed-Principle

Now the principle of being and growing is life. The means and method of being and growing is a seed, with life in it, in which the whole organism of its kind exists. That is, indeed, the principle upon which God has constructed the greater part of his animate creation. It is not a machine - it is an organism. It is not made to run and go by artificial means or external energies. Of course, it requires food from outside, but it must have life in order to feed. It is sustained by life in itself. The seed of every species has, within itself, all that characterizes the particular organism. The particular nature of that species, its shape, its size, its color, its form, its features, its capacities, are all there in the seed where the life is. Of course, that is the wonder of nature. It is an amazing thing: just a seed with its tiny germ of life in it, and then, when grown, developed and in full expression, coming true to type in all its features. It is a marvelous thing. That is God's method of being and growing. It is all there.

(a) Begetting

We have read passages in which the word "begotten" is used concerning certain people, a certain type of creation, "begotten of God." The seed, the fertilizing principle, is the Word of God, and the life is the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of life. Within the Word of God - of course specifically within the Word of truth in the Scriptures, but in anything that God says, that really comes from God to us - there are contained all the wonderful possibilities, potentialities, of what is of God, of what is like God, of God's nature, of God's mind, of God's features, of all the dimensions to which God would bring a life; the very shape of the life which God would produce. It is all there when God speaks. When God says something, and His Word falls into suitable ground and has that corresponding answer of fertilizing faith, it is all potentially there. (You will remember that it was said of some that the Word spoken profited them nothing, not being mingled with faith in them that heard it (Heb. 4:2), so that there was no begetting. There are always two sides to this matter, but we are not going to be too detailed and analytical. Some things will have to be taken for granted.) But when God says something and sees in us a response, an answer back to God, all that wonderful fullness of Divine meaning, intention, possibility, kind, order, shape, size and everything else, is there in what God has said. Something has happened and wonderful possibilities exist. It is possible, of course, for God to come with His Word, with all the mighty potentialities of begetting, and for nothing to happen because of our attitude, but, given the response, given the counterpart of faith, and anything within the compass of Divine intention and conception is possible.

Now I am stressing this very much because I feel that we have become too familiar with hearing the truth of God. So often nothing happens. We have not sufficiently recognized the tremendous things that are bound up with the Lord speaking to us. If the Lord has said anything to you, be very careful that you give heed, that you do not let that go, that you do not despise that. God does not come for nothing with such an

object in view, and with such tremendous possibilities; He is not playing with us. It is the most solemn as well as the most glorious thing, in possibility and prospect, if, and when, the Lord speaks to us. Do believe that. You see, within His speaking, within His Word, there is all the possibility of God coming into expression.

I have illustrated this before in days gone by by the seed merchant who has a double window to his shop. On one side of the door, he has the seeds and the bulbs to look at - very uninteresting-looking, unpromising things. There is nothing attractive in their appearance; you do not want to take out your artist's palette and make paintings of seeds and bulbs. But, on the other side of his window, he has the full flower - the flower fully developed in its exquisite colors and wonderful form and he says, "This is that; all this is in that." That is the marvel of living things.

And when God speaks, all that is of God is there in that speaking, and when you and I get to glory and are glorified together with Him, He will only say, "This is that. You gave heed to something I said, and this is the result. I spoke to you: you received, you obeyed, you gave diligence: well, this is that - this is not something extra; it is just that." Do believe, do remember, that the Lord is constantly wanting to speak and to speak in the nature of a begetting - the bringing into being of an organism which is produced in heaven and has all heavenly features in it.

But of course this is in the power and custodianship of the Spirit of life. We have to receive the Spirit; the Spirit has to be in us to work out all these wonderful things in God's speaking. If we have the Spirit of God within, as we should do, or if the Spirit of God is accompanying the Word to us before we have actually received Him within: if the Spirit of God works upon that Word, then the purpose of God is realized. For us as Christians, it is most important that when we hear what God has to say we should be in the Spirit. It is most important that, when you go to meetings, if God should speak, you should be in the Spirit. You should take every measure to see that you are in the Spirit, that there is nothing there hindering the Spirit, nothing of which you know grieving the Spirit, working against the Spirit of God; because nothing is going to happen if that is so. With all the hearing, nothing will happen. But, being in the Spirit, all the mighty possibilities of God are taken up by the Spirit of God to be made real.

In this begetting, there may be a period of hidden activity, when we do not know what is happening, and perhaps we cannot sense anything happening; but God has spoken, and something has happened: we have answered. For the moment, for the time being, we do not know that anything is taking place, but it will come to light. Presently there will be a sensing that God has done something. That period may be longer or shorter, but it will surely be known that God has said something and God in saying something did something, started something, and His work will be manifested, something will be going on secretly. That is the meaning of being "begotten of God."

(b) Birth

That leads us, of course, to the next step. Many people have confused these two things - begetting and birth. They are not the same, either in nature or in grace. Birth - what is birth? Birth is the point at which manifestation begins, when what God has been doing begins to show itself, comes out into manifestation; life manifested now in some Divine organism, a new life, a new order of things.

I wonder if you have followed what I have been saying. You see, it is like this so often in the early part of the Christian life. God says something, and His Spirit is with us in the saying, and we make a response. Then, for the moment, we do not know that anything very much has happened. But something has

happened. Sooner or later - it may be very soon, almost simultaneously with the act of God in us, or it may be after a period of secret operation within, and faith is being tested as to whether anything has happened at all - something comes out, and we find that we just cannot do what we did before, and we have now got to do things we never did before, and our way of thinking and speaking is becoming challenged and changed and transformed. We find that some new order has come into being, and it is making all the differences, and we are able more and more clearly and definitely to draw the line between what was and what is now, what we were and what we are now. That is the course of the normal Christian life: that this new thing has now begun to manifest itself, and we are aware that something new has been born, and we just cannot be what we were, we just cannot do what we did; we are behaving in new ways; something has come from another world; a new beginning has been made. It is a new organism altogether. "If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The main point about a constitution of a particular kind is that it begins to manifest its kind. That is birth - something of a particular kind. "Except one be born anew [or 'from above'] he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The kingdom of God is a kind of order, a nature of things; not just a sphere, a place, but how things are done with God, in God's realm of things; what is fitting to God's realm, suitable to God's realm; how things happen and work in God's realm. And this new organism shows the nature of what is born in God's realm. Well, sometimes a little baby does act like a monkey, but normally it acts like a human being! I mean, it conforms to type. Some baby Christians act very strangely, but it is not long before you begin to realize that they are of another mold, everybody else begins to realize they are of another order, a new kind of being has been brought into manifestation, and now quite spontaneously they act according to their species, a heavenly order. That is being born from God - a manifestation of something, the bringing to light of something. That is very elementary, but it is testing.

(c) Growth

And if that is true as to the beginnings, then it must be true, increasingly true, in the matter of growth, following begetting and birth. Here a few quite simple but very vital things have to be noted.

(1) Christ Imparted

What is the principle and the basis of the growth of this heavenly organism, begotten of God, born from above? Well, the principle of growth is, from beginning to end, Christ imparted. All the Scriptures as the Word of God center in Christ. So is the begetting, the birth and the growth, all related to Christ. It is Christ imparted. Any ministry claiming to be the Word of God, which does not center in Christ, will not have God's effect. It is very important always to keep Christ to the fore if you are going to have God's ends reached: because from start to finish, initially, progressively and finally, God's object is the imparting of Christ - the imparting of Christ through the Word, by teaching, and the Holy Spirit working upon the Word, upon the teaching, concerning Christ.

It is something more than information about Christ. It is a ministration of Christ by the Spirit in the Word. I am quite sure you have learned, one way or the other - that is, negatively or positively, by failure or by success - you have learned that if you neglect the Word of God, if you neglect the ministry of the Word, your spiritual life is going to fall away, your spiritual growth is going to be stultified, arrested. If your Bible is kept to the fore all the time - I do not mean that you are reading it all day and night, but that it has the foremost place, so that if you can by any means get some few minutes with the Word of God you are after it - that is the way of growth, the way of the Spirit, the way of spiritual formation. Neglect the Word and

neglect the ministry of Christ, and you lose out spiritually.

That is very elementary, but it is true. If Satan can raise up any excuse for your Bible remaining closed and out of hand, if he can fill your hands and your mind and your time with anything to keep you from the Word of God or from the ministry of the Word, he will do it. He is out to cut clean across your growth spiritually, because it is the increase of Christ. It is against the increase of Christ that he is set.

Take that quite solemnly. I say you prove it one way or the other. We have all proved it. We know that if we lose the ministration of the Word we lose our spiritual life. Christ is ministered to us for growth. And what is true of the Word is equally true of prayer: because, although we make prayer nine-tenths a matter of trying to get the Lord to serve our convenience, to be at hand just to give us the things we want, the real meaning of prayer is that we truly receive the Lord, we receive Christ. If we are seeking Christ in prayer, prayer will have a wonderfully refreshing, renewing, strengthening ministry. How often, in the weariness, the terrible weariness, of the way, when it seems impossible to drag on any farther, if we just get away quietly for a few minutes with the Lord and draw in prayer upon Him - "Lord, I need You, I need strength, I need renewal" - how refreshed we are. It is so. If only we would make prayer more a matter of a ministry of Christ to us - not of asking for a lot of things that will make our lives a bit easier and more pleasant, but the increase of Christ -! The Holy Spirit works on that, He responds to that. So then, growth is a ministry of Christ through the Word - the teaching, the instruction, the ministry - and through prayer.

(2) Christ Assimilated

But then there is something further. After you have taken your meal, it may do you no good - it may do you a lot of harm. Food is not everything. There is such a thing as assimilation, and this is where the enemy usually scores. If he cannot stop us from the one thing and the other, the Word and the prayer, he will make frantic efforts to break in here. We must therefore make sure that, whatever has to be suspended for it, we do have at least a brief time for dwelling on the impartation, dwelling on Christ, dwelling on the Word.

That means an inward attitude. If you take food, and you have not, as it were, the right inward attitude toward that food, it does not do you any good. There is a complaint which has to do with what is called the pancreas, and if the pancreas is not functioning properly the food does not nourish the body. You can take as much as you like but it does not do any good. You can eat and eat, but the food does not profit the body. You need something to stimulate or restore the function of the pancreas. You know what I mean - this assimilation business, this inward attitude that draws upon the Word, draws upon the Lord, that dwells upon Him, just a few minutes perhaps in a day, but a quiet time of assimilation. That is the way of growth. You may come through eleven meetings of a conference, and what a heap of stuff you get, and it may profit you not a little bit. There is enough in one meeting to carry us a very long time, to accomplish a very great deal of spiritual growth and yet it may effect nothing at all. What do you do about it? Do you lay hold inwardly? Is your attitude, "I must have this! If this can help my spiritual life and growth, I lay hold of this, I break this up!" - do you take this attitude? It is essential to growth. Growth is organic, it is vital.

(3) Christ Known

And then, in the third place, growth is by Christ known - what the New Testament calls spiritual understanding. The Holy Spirit, working through the Word, working through prayer, working through our meditation, would bring us into an intelligence concerning the Lord, so that we are able to say, "Yes, I heard that, I received that; I have laid hold of that, I have been exercised over that; but I understand now, I see the meaning, the importance, the value: I see." And there is a great deal connected with spiritual

understanding in our spiritual growth. You know how true that is shown to be in the Word. Even one who had seen so much, and been given so much; who could say, "Well, coming to visions and revelations of the Lord, I knew a man about fourteen years ago caught up into heaven, shown unspeakable things not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12:1-4); even such a man, who had had all that and much more, could say, as his life, his course here, was coming to an end, "'that I may know him' - that is still my ambition." It is growth by knowledge.

And that man wrote, as we know so well, to those who had some fairly rich impartation of Divine ministry - for consider how long Paul was at Ephesus. He said concerning his ministry: "I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). What a lot he had given those Ephesian believers! And yet he says, in writing to them at last, toward the end: "I... cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" ("the full knowledge of Him" is the word used); "having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling. what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe" (Eph. 1:15-19). There is something in knowing, in seeing, in understanding. It is the way of enlargement, the way of growth.

Of course, that is normal in a normal human being. We grow, and as we grow our understanding increases, and as our understanding increases so we grow. Spiritual understanding works both ways. It is a grand thing to find Christians, and even young Christians, who are getting to know the Lord - not just living on addresses and externalities, but themselves growing in the knowledge of the Lord.

All this is certainly vital union with Christ, and it is certainly organic. It is a matter of life, and it is a way of life, and it is all a matter of our union with our Lord. That is what provides it, that is what provokes it, that is what stimulates it, that is what begins it, that is what maintains it, that is what completes it. So you may come to John 15, and you have it all there, "In Me"; "abide in Me"; "in Me bear fruit"; "abide in Me, bear much fruit"; and so it goes on. It is all "in Christ."

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