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## The Supreme Message of the New Testament

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

"He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17).

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, which is in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

If our life with the Lord is really a living one, that is, if we are in living fellowship with Him in and by the Holy Spirit, if we are really alive unto the Lord, there will be one thing about us. That is: we shall always be in a state of seeking to know the things that matter, that are the living and supreme matters as to the Lord's mind concerning us, as to the Lord's thoughts for His own. And that feature of our lives will be because it is a work of the Holy Spirit, something which makes it possible and makes actual a continual new revelation, that nothing becomes fixed, static, final, set, stagnant, but everything is fluid. We are seeing (not to the repudiation of other things) with clearer eyes those things which lie right at the very heart of what God has purposed and how He has determined to reach His end. I say it is a state of quest all the time, not necessarily one of spiritual restlessness, but of reaching out going on in us. It is a mark of real spiritual life. If you have not got that, you had better look to the matter and ask the Lord about it.

And so it comes that we find ourselves from time to time standing back from all that we know, all that we have been taught, and asking questions, new questions, or questions are arising with new insistence: big questions, fundamental questions, ultimate questions. Now I am not just going to say that that is so, but I want to show you what that means, or what that is.

I stand back from my New Testament or from my Bible very often from time to time, and ask big, comprehensive, ultimate questions. I have got into the minutia of the Scriptures, to the detail, and I want to extricate myself and stand back and survey the whole thing and find great big questions about this: now, what does it all resolve itself into? What does it all mean, what is the ultimate implication, what does it work out at? What is it meant to bring about? Where is this intended to get us, the whole thing? Questions like this arise, not just mental inquisitiveness, but out of your own spiritual life and experience, because one great urge of the Spirit is to *attain*.

You see, that was the mark of Paul, this Holy Spirit urge in him to *attain*. "Brethren, I count not myself to have *attained*", "that I may attain" this thing, and out of that Spirit urge inside, pressure inside, largely born of the experiences through which he passed: difficulty, trial, tests of faith, big problems, questions arising. You cannot be content with theories, you cannot be content with just doctrines, the whole practical issue arises. You are forced to face these practical consequences of it all, and say, "Is it all myth, or what does it mean?" That is a mark of a Spirit-governed life, and so from time to time we stand back and make these enquiries. I have been doing that with my New Testament and I have had opportunity of doing it lately, standing back from my New Testament and asking some big questions. I give you the result of that enquiry in one matter this evening.

What is it that arises from the New Testament as the *primary* thing? It comes out, yes, through the Gospels in measure, particularly through John, and lying there in Luke, and then in the Epistles, and finding its fullest, most comprehensive and most profound expression through the apostle Paul. What is it that becomes the one thing, the great consequence of it all? I can put that in another way, focusing upon Paul particularly. What is the distinctive message and revelation that has come through that servant of God, not through him in an isolated way, in an unrelated way, but through the New Testament as a whole, and yet through him in a fuller way than perhaps anyone else?

Let me say some of the things which it is not. It may surprise you, especially when you think of Paul. The upshot, the special message, the great note, is not salvation. It is a note, it is a related note, it is a part of the whole score of the glorious harmony. It is not *the* note. When I speak of salvation, let me break that up. Even bearing in mind the great message of the letter to the Romans, the great issue coming out in its fullest volume and force through Paul is not justification by faith. That is a great note. Oh, thank God for the letter to the Romans. Thank God that Paul gave, by the Holy Spirit, such a marvellous and wonderful unveiling of the truth of justification by faith. But that is not Paul's peculiar and supreme message.

It is not reconciliation; though Paul says much about reconciliation, that is not the revelation. It is not redemption, though there is much about redemption in the New Testament and in Paul. It is not sanctification, though that is there and there is much about sanctification, and a great emphasis upon the necessity for it, that is not it. It is not glorification, though that is the one thing in view so often, the thing which casts its ray on the path, that is held up to us as the prize at the end of the road - "glorified together with Him" (Rom. 8:17). But that is not the revelation particularly, it is a part of it.

It is not evangelisation. There is much about evangelisation in the New Testament, and of course Paul did a very great deal in that matter, but that is not the message, that is not the word; and with Paul particularly in mind, it is not that the Gentiles are to be evangelised and that Israel's limitation among the nations is to be overstepped to open a door for the Gentiles. Some people think that is Paul's particular revelation and message. No; it is there, it is a part of it, but it is not it.

Now listen - neither is it the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, much as that has its place and is in view and is stressed, yet even the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is not the great revelation. Now, it sounds like going back on many things that we have said, when we say that neither is it the Church. Yes, we have said that the Church is peculiarly Paul's revelation and ministry. It is peculiarly his, but not uniquely his, not his alone, and neither in Paul, nor in all the apostles put together, is the Church the supreme revelation.

There are other things that have a very large place, such things as resurrection. Well, Paul has touched on resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 and given us something that we can find nowhere else as to the fact and nature, the glory of the resurrection. It is not the great revelation. It is there, it is a part, but it is not it.

Then what is it? Well, this is what has come to my own heart with new and great force, gathering all else into itself, all these other things as a part of it, but becoming like the hub of the wheel of which all these are but the spokes, in which they find their centre and from which they radiate. What is it - the great revelation, the great message?

The passages we read contain it:

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are *in Christ Jesus*." "He that is *joined unto the Lord* is one spirit." "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but *Christ lives in me*."

What is the essence of those passages? *Union with Christ!* Once we receive that, the New Testament all takes new shape and all falls into a wonderful order.

### **Union with Christ**

You take a look back. "Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4); "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit"; past. Present - "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus"; "Christ lives in me"; and I would like to bring many more Scriptures, but to bring in the future there is that fragment from Hebrews 3:1: "Holy brethren, *partners* in a heavenly calling"; "we are made *partakers with Christ*". That is future. That word 'partakers' is a very strong word. It means to be in absolute union of life, partakers with Christ. Yes, union with Christ is the upshot of it all. It is the great mystery.

Oh yes, justification is a part of it, necessary to it, no end in itself. Justification by faith makes union with Christ possible, life because of righteousness. Redemption, reconciliation, sanctification, glorification, and all the rest, all come into line with that. The one great thing to which they point, to which they lead, is the central, basic, foundational thing, the heart of all - oneness with God's Son, union with Christ.

That is the most wonderful thing in its meaning and in its outworking that ever this universe has had revealed to it. You and I will need all eternity to understand it. Here and now it is exceedingly difficult for us to grasp the significance of union with Christ. The little that I see as to its meaning is impossible of passing on to you. I cannot pass it on to you. It has got to come by the Spirit in revelation to our hearts, every one, but oh, I do urge upon you: ask the Lord to reveal in your heart the meaning of union with His Son, because that, for one thing among many wonderful things, is the infinite genius of God. May I use that word of God? The infinite, unfathomable, wisdom of God.

We must not speak of God having problems, but if we dare to use such language about God, we should say that God had the greatest problem that ever could be faced by any being, when He created man and man fell. A tremendous problem confronted God, as we speak of things. God has solved the greatest problem that ever was in the universe along the line of union with His Son and once that union with His Son is brought about, everything is met and answered, every problem is resolved, everything is possible, God's end is already secured. It is a marvellous thing to be joined to the Lord, one spirit, and Satan will do anything and everything in the whole range of his diabolical ingenuity and fury to prevent real, vital union with God's Son being brought about and to bring the meaning of that union under arrest if he can, because it is in that that all the work of Satan is undone, actually and in prospect. Oh, if you and I realised what it means, or what it meant, to really live and abide in Christ, abiding in living union with Christ, all that is bound up with that in the purpose and thought of God, we should see that everything that ever God designed and determined has its realisation on that basis - union with His Son, vital union with Christ.

Now, you see, it is quite out of the question for me to go on as to what it means, or to show how it lies there implicit in the whole New Testament. All I have to say about this is to make the general statement that that is the heart of things, and to ask you to go to your New Testament again with that in view - union with Christ.

### **Crucified with Christ**

It begins here - "I have been crucified with Christ". Now, have you noticed that Paul did not leave the death of Christ there as something in the past, finished, rounded off and left behind as something that had taken place and that was the end? There are two things that are made clear about this matter of the death of Christ and our union with Christ in it. One has to do with the crisis of sin and the sinful body of the flesh, and so far as that is concerned from the Divine standpoint, that is something done, and God always looks upon that as having been done. It is in the past at once. We were crucified with Christ as to our relationship with Adam and the whole of that sinful nature.

Death union with Christ, from God's standpoint, is meant to be something that is done. But it is not left there. Paul is frequently found speaking about our union with Christ in His death now, day by day. "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:10); "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). This death of the Lord Jesus, according to Paul, is an abiding and ever present power, a mighty thing at work. Union with Christ not only means that the whole of that sinful body has been, according to God, cut off and set aside, and that whole relationship finished with, but union with Christ in His death is regarded as something which is at work in order that that great purpose of God in union with Christ should be made possible of realisation in a progressive and ever-growing way, that Christ and His own shall at length be manifested as one in glory without anything that is of death at all. Or, to put that in another way, death is finally to be vanquished,

therefore all death's ground has got to be removed and the ground of death is not only our sin, but *ourselves*.

Our sin was dealt with, thank God, in the death of the Lord Jesus once and for all, and there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus; that is the conclusive and final aspect of union with Christ in His death. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus". But there is still this self, and we know it. Anybody who does not know it, is indeed blind. Oh, it is possible to have even a doctrine that dismisses the idea of any sinful self remaining, and I fear that the people who hold that doctrine are very often the people who are blindest to the self-life in themselves. However, there it is; for all who are honest, there is still the self-life which is a ground of death. To realise God's full end of absolute oneness with His Son, there is to be death working in us, "Bearing about in the body the putting to death, the dying of the Lord Jesus", the dying daily in union with Him. That is the meaning of His death, not only to sin, but to self, it being a progressive and continuous thing.

The Lord Jesus daily lived on this earth a life of denying Himself. It was not a sinful self, as it is with us. Nevertheless, it was something which had to be denied and refused, which would have acted independently of God and had to be put back. What Satan was trying to get Him to do all the time was to take things into His own hands without consulting the Father, and act as out from Himself in order to get Him on to the ground of the first Adam, to bring a great crash. He refused. He took up the Cross daily and set it ever against all that. He was not then daily dying to sin; He was daily by the Cross denying Himself. That dying of the Lord Jesus has to be borne about day by day. It is a union with Christ that has in it all the purpose of God, that final great oneness: partakers with Christ.

### **Raised with Christ**

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is regarded in the same way by Paul. We were raised together with Him (Eph. 2:6). Yes, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was an act in history, was something that took place in the past on a certain day in the history of this world, and we were raised together with Him through faith in the operation of God; it is past at once. But this resurrection union with the Lord is not left there alone as a thing in history in the past. "That the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor. 4:10). "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10). This is something not past, but present and future. "The power of His resurrection". Union with Christ in resurrection, so that Christ's resurrection is working in us and becoming our resurrection continually, with the great resurrection values being taken on all the time.

Oh, what are the great resurrection values? Well, what would happen if there was not a resurrection? Go back to Genesis 1, and see the earth in chaos, darkness, and ruin. Supposing the Spirit of God had not worked the miracle of resurrection. Well, it would have just gone on like that: darkness, chaos, barrenness, ruin. Nothing for God in that. Supposing the dead man is not raised, is left there. Supposing there is no resurrection. Well then, there is nothing. You just go on like that. But now then, call in everything that you know of wisdom and power and ingenuity and genius from all this world, call it in to deal with the situation and see what can be made of it. Let the preachers preach, and let the philosophers philosophize, and let them do all that human wisdom and ingenuity can do with this curse, with this ruin, with this situation of death. If they can do it, if they can raise that from the dead, if they can work resurrection, then it is their work, it is their merit, and it will be their glory and their praise. What results, what comes out of it, will all go down to their account. But they cannot do it.

There is nothing and no combination of powers of mind and skill in this universe, outside of God, that can raise the dead, and can bring about resurrection. It is God's own prerogative and His ability alone to work the resurrection. Resurrection is the miracle above all miracles and it is God's alone, and if He does it, then it is all God's, it is all from God and all to God. It is for Him and the praise and the glory and the honour and the worship is all to Him and all the fruit that comes from that resurrection is God's fruit. God has reserved that in His own hands.

Now then, what is the Lord doing in union with His Son on this basis of resurrection as a progressive thing from day to day, from hour to hour in our experience? And is it not true that the Lord makes necessary resurrections in our case continually? I am not thinking just of physical resurrection, but resurrection when the bottom falls out of everything and there is no hope and unless God comes in it is all gone, whatever it may be; the Lord has got to do something or else that is an end. Maybe in our spiritual experience, our relationship to the Lord that is how it may feel, it has all gone, even the Lord has gone; maybe in any kind of situation. And the Lord allows that not once or twice or thrice in the course of spiritual experience amongst His children and in His own work. We get there where another miracle of resurrection is necessary, or else this is the end this time, and it is more the end than all the ends that have ever been before. That is how it seems, and then the Lord does do it. It just is done. He does not cleave the heavens and come to the mighty whirlwind sound of trumpets and archangels appearing to do it. It is just done quietly; it happens - we might say, it is done. But it *is* done and the quietness and the simplicity of the accomplishment takes nothing from the greatness of it. It does not mean that it is not as big a thing as we thought it had to be. Oh no, it was God's. Unless He had come in, that was the end. That is union with Christ.

But what is the result? Every time there is something more of the Lord that is wholly and utterly and only of the Lord and for the Lord. We see things that have got to be as we never saw them before of the Lord, things that the Lord requires: adjustments that have got to be made - they arise in this deep crisis. The Lord gets more.

You see the old idea of sentiment, "Oh, if the Lord spares my life, I will be more for Him!" - that does not always work out with men, but there is something in that, that the Lord by resurrection does seek to have a place and a measure that He has not had, and He is increasing the measure of Himself by resurrection. But this is the point: this resurrection matter is based upon our union with Christ, is based upon our inner spiritual union with Christ. It is not something in us apart. This is the hope of it.

You see, we cannot die if Jesus lives in us. It cannot be an end if Christ is in us, and we are in Christ. We can go down into Sheol, but if we are in Christ and Christ is in us, death cannot finally swallow us up. It may seem that it is all gone, everything has gone, the Lord has gone. It may seem like that, but right there at the centre of the being of a true born-again child of God who is joined to the Lord one spirit, right there at the heart and centre, there is that which is impossible of being overcome of death: God's Son Himself in us, and by our union with Him, we are going to survive, and not only survive, we are going to triumph over death. Again, I am not speaking just of physical death. The time will come when, unless the Lord appears, we shall all go into the grave, so far as this body is concerned, but that is not to be death, that is not to be the triumph of death if we are joined to the Lord. No, union with Christ is the basis of a sure resurrection in any case, whether it be physical now in the matter of sicknesses and infirmities, or physical later in the matter of the resurrection from the grave, or whether it be spiritual. Wherever and whatever resurrection means, it is assured on the ground of our union with Christ, and the issue every time in God's purpose is an increase of what is

of Himself, wholly and uniquely and only of Himself. That is what He is after, and it is that which is bound up with our union with His Son.

When the final great word of resurrection, the final great shout and voice of resurrection is heard, how much of the Lord will there be then? It will be *all* the Lord. Oh, thank God, there will come that moment when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, when all that remains of death will be shed and put aside and it will be just all and only the Lord Himself. But He is working towards that in our experience now, and union with Christ has that in view, but it is being accomplished progressively by union with Christ.

Union with Christ means that you are going to have death experiences, and do not think when you have death experiences that the union with Christ has broken down. Not necessarily. Oh, you may deliberately, consciously, sin and bring yourself into a state of death, and it may not mean what I am talking about. That may lay an arresting hand upon the values of your union with Christ, although it may not break that union. But in the walk with the Lord in the Spirit, our very union with Christ will result in those experiences which make new acts of resurrection power necessary for our very survival, and those acts will mean that there is an enlargement of Christ, an enlargement of the Lord.

You see how that union with Christ is the heart and basis of everything that God has in view. What is the end of it? God - all and in all. That is the end. God - all and in all. But, blessed be God, that is going to have a realisation in you and in me. God all and in all, that this universe will be filled with Him. You and I will be filled with Him, filled with the glory of the Lord, having the glory of God. That is the end, God filling all and in all by death and resurrection, but the only death and resurrection that leads to that is that of His Son and our union. We could die and never come to the glory of God, but union with Christ makes Christ's mighty and triumphant death operate in us, His glorious resurrection put to work in us. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit". "Christ lives in me". "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus". Now, I may just leave it there.

Paul speaks, as you know, on so many points in this very connection so much, about the sufferings of Christ and our sharing of them. Well, the sufferings of Christ - are they just those historical sufferings accomplished in the days of His flesh and finished with? Oh yes, He suffered, He was made perfect through sufferings. But oh, His sufferings were so potent, so vital, so fruitful: "He shall see of the travail of His soul". "Now", says Paul, "I fill up that which remains of the sufferings of Christ for His body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). Again, "To you it has been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer in His behalf" (Phil. 1:29). "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). Then the sufferings are not just way back there in the past. They are now, and our union with Christ is union with those sufferings in all their mighty profitableness and fruitfulness. Oh, we do not suffer vicariously in one sense, but there is a sense in which we suffer with Him even vicariously. We do not suffer with Him atoning sufferings for the sin of the world, but we suffer with Him that others may get the benefit. Oh, thank God that Paul knew the fellowship of His sufferings, because I have got the benefit of it. But we are slow to say, "Thank God that I know the fellowship of His sufferings that you might get the benefit!" - but that is what it means, union with Christ resulting in all the values that have come from His death, resurrection and suffering, and everything else.

I think we are right, the heart of everything is this great revelation. If it is the Church, what is the Church? The Church after all is just the expression, the crystallisation, of union with Christ, one Body.

It is a great revelation. The Cross - all these things, yes, but there is something behind all this. What is the Church? It is a Body. What is that? Identification with Him, fellow-members of His Body; union with Christ - the basis of it.

The Lord just help us to see the meaning.