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Stripping Down to Christ Alone

by T. Austin-Sparks

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We realize, with intense sorrow of heart, that all is not well with that which ostensibly represents the Lord here... and that there is a state of things widely prevailing which does not truly accord with the revealed desire of God.

We live in a time of more than usual dearth spiritually - the state of things may well remind us of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. We have not merely to cope with evils which have characterized bygone ages, but also with the matured corruption of a time wherein the varied evils of the Gentile world have become connected with, and covered by, the cloak of Christian profession; and when we turn to the state of those whose knowledge of truth and high profession might naturally encourage the expectation of more healthy and vigorous Christian action, we find, alas! in many - yea, in the majority of cases - that the knowledge is but cold and uninfluential theory... and the profession but superficial.

Christianity has become so largely a matter of doctrine and creed; the test of Christian life is very much a matter of subscribing thereto. Christian experience has become largely limited to a matter of being saved, without the great eternal and universal relative factors and issues. Christian service is resolved far too much into a matter of enthusiasm in a great enterprise, apart from an adequate apprehension of what the Lord is really after... and the indispensable energy and equipment of the Holy Ghost. The Christian "Church" is very largely reduced to earthly institutions, societies, denominations, buildings, activities, and orders; and the spiritual revelation and apprehension of the

"one Body" and "one Spirit" is, for the most part by far, lacking. Christian teaching has very largely become - at best - a matter of giving addresses and preaching sermons with a presentation of "the letter of the Word" - a giving forth of truth as truth, but lacking in "revelation in the knowledge of Him"... that true inwardness of meaning which reaches the heart and meets the deepest spiritual need of the hungry.

The result of all this is that the impact, upon the world... and particularly upon "the world rulers of this darkness," of that which stands for God is almost nil, or a minus quantity.

Missionary leaders who are in a position to speak with authority are almost of one mind and voice in saying that the only hope of an adequate movement amongst the heathen lies in the direction of a new spiritual movement amongst God's people in the home countries.

As we get nearer the close of this age, the contact with... and impact of... the forces of Satan are going to be such that only those who know the full testimony of Jesus and stand experimentally in it will be able to go through without being paralyzed. The aspect of things is fast changing. The past twenty years has seen a movement into a realm where the old methods and means no longer prove effectual. We shall soon find a tremendous pressing down of the powers of darkness upon this earth, using the world-powers to such a degree and in such ways as to eclipse anything which has hitherto been. This is in full accord with the Word of God.

There will be one, and only one, hope for God's people: their knowledge of Him in Christ... and the power of His resurrection as a present spiritual reality. Not their activities, enthusiasms, organizations, enterprises, creeds, "churches," orthodoxy, etc., but HIMSELF. That time, which is now coming upon us - though imperceptible to so many who are preoccupied with plans and programs - will make manifest the principle of the "one Body," for each of the Lord's children will feel keenly the need of the fellowship of another, no matter of what connection, so long as that other knows Him.

The bringing in of the ministry of the prophets of old had its occasion in the breakdown of the Lord's true order. Theirs it was to keep before His people what that order was... and to call back to it... against a day of fire. We are in such a time, and what the Lord needs is that instrument by which He can keep His mind about things in view... and call back to it - an instrument which will pay the price of being refused a hearing, of ostracism, of false imputations, slander, and cruel calumny. This needs faith, boldness, and preparedness to leave all vindication with the Lord.

Beloved fellow members of Christ, will you have it urged upon you to seek the Lord for "a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" - a pure spiritual unveiling of the Lord Jesus as God's representation of His thought concerning all these things; and as He gives you light, will you seek grace to stand for Him in the day of His need... with all boldness, and whatever the price? All other questions will answer themselves as you do this.