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All Things in Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

An extract from "The School of Christ - Chapter 6 - An Open Heaven" first published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Mar-Apr 1943, Vol. 21-2.

We take the Epistles and we think of them as having to do within the building of the Church and the churches, the superstructure of Christianity, and so we take the technique of the Acts and the Epistles as a technique, as a system of doctrine and a system of practice, a system of Christian order, and the Epistles become - and have become for so many and for Christianity in general - a crystallized system of practice, order, form, teaching; and the weakness in the whole position is just this, that that is something as in itself and the Lord Jesus has just been missed and lost.

I wonder if you detect what I mean by that? You see, the Holy Spirit's way is to take Christ and open up Christ, to the heart, and show that Christ is a heavenly order; not that the Epistles set forth as a manual a heavenly order, but that Christ is that order, and everything in the matter of order has to be kept immediately in relation to the living Person. If it becomes some thing, then it becomes an earthly system; and you can make out of the Epistles a hundred different earthly systems all built upon the Epistles. They will support any number of different systems, different interpretations, represented by Christian orders here, and the reason is that they have been divorced from the Person.

You see, beloved, there are numerous things, numerous subjects, themes, teachings. There is "the kingdom of God", there is "sanctification", there is "eternal life", there is "the victorious life", "the overcomer" or "the overcoming life", there is "the second coming of Christ". These are but a few subjects, themes, truths, as they are called, which have been taken up and developed out of the Scriptures and become things with which people have become very much occupied, and in which

they are very interested as things. So certain people hive off around a sanctification teaching, and they are the sanctificationists, and it becomes an "ism". Others hive off; and they are bounded by the hedge of Second Adventism, the Lord's coming, prophecy, and all that. So you get groups like that. I want to say that would be utterly impossible if the Person of the Lord Jesus was dominant.

What is the kingdom of God? It is Christ. If you get right inside of the Gospels, you will find that the kingdom of God is Jesus Christ. If you are living in Christ, you are in the kingdom, and you know, as the Holy Spirit teaches you Christ, what the kingdom is in every detail. The kingdom is not some thing, in the first place. The kingdom, when it becomes something universal, will simply be the expression and manifestation of Christ. That is all. You come to the kingdom in and through Christ; and the same is true of everything else.

What is sanctification? It is not a doctrine. It is not an 'it' at all. It is Christ. He is made unto us sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). If you are in Christ and if the Holy Spirit is teaching you Christ, then you are knowing all about sanctification; and if He is not, you may have a theory and doctrine of sanctification but it will separate you from other Christians, and will be bringing any number of Christians into difficulties. Probably the teaching of sanctification as a thing has brought more Christians into difficulty than any other particular doctrine, through making it a thing, instead of keeping Christ as our sanctification.

I am only saying this to try to explain... that it is in the School of Christ that we are to be found, where the Holy Spirit is not teaching us things; not Church doctrine, not sanctification, not adventism, not any *thing* or any number of things, but teaching us Christ. What is adventism? What is the coming of the Lord? Well, it is the coming of the Lord. And what is the coming of the Lord? Well, such a word as this will give us the key: He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed (2 Thess. 1:10). You see, it is the consummation of something that has been going on in an inward way. How then do I best know that the coming of the Lord draws nigh? Not best of all by prophetic signs, but by what is going on within the hearts of the Lord's people. That is the best sign of the times, namely, what the Spirit of God is doing in the people of God. But you are not interested in that. You would far sooner know what is going to happen between Germany and Russia, whether these two, after all, are going to make it up and become a great confederacy! How far does it get us? Where has all the talking about the revived Roman Empire got us? That is adventism as a thing. If only we keep close to Him Who is the sum of all truth, and move with Him and learn Him, we shall know the course of things. We shall know what is imminent. We shall have in our heart whisperings of preparation.

The best Advent preparation is to know the Lord. I am not saying that there is nothing in prophecy; don't misunderstand me. But I do know that there are multitudes of people who are simply engrossed in prophecy as a thing whose spiritual life counts for nothing, who really have no deep inward walk with the Lord. We have seen it so often.

I shall never forget, on a visit to the United States, going into one of the big cities where I was to speak for a week. Everything was so arranged that my first message was timed to follow the last message of a man who had had a week before me, and he had been on prophecy for the whole week. I went into the last meeting where he gave his final message on the signs of the time. Notebooks were out, and they were taking it all down, fascinated. It was all external, all objective; such things as the Roman Empire revived and Palestine recovered. You know the sort of thing. Then he finished and they were waiting for some more, and the notebooks were ready. The Lord put it right into my heart that the first word was to be, "And every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3); to speak on the spiritual effect of that spiritual

hope. They were not interested in that. The notebooks were closed, pencils put away; there was no interest as I sought in the Lord to be very faithful as to what all this should mean in an inward way, in adjustment to the Lord, and so on. They were only longing for the meeting to close. When I finished - they hardly waited for me to finish - they were up and out.