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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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Man's Way Versus God's Way

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8,9).

When we have lived our lives and have gone hence, what will go on as the substance of the incorruptible resultant from our having been here at all? - a universal question, though a difficult one. What will there be that defeats time, defeats decay, defeats death, defeats the whole realm of corruption, and appears again in glory for ever, as the outcome of our having been on this brief journey on the earth? We have to apply this question of the incorruptible to ourselves.

Applied To Our Knowledge

What about all our Christian knowledge all the teaching we have had, all the truth we possess? We have to apply the question here. How much of that great store of teaching and truth, doctrine and knowledge, is producing the incorruptible in us, is going to appear again in eternity? We must test our conferences by this. We have been, perhaps, to many conferences, we have had a great deal of teaching by one means and another. Well what is the upshot of it all for eternity, when the fire tests our teaching, when the fire tests all our knowledge, perhaps in this life? That is what is going on in the East. A great deal of teaching has been given and now the fire is testing the incorruptible value

of that teaching. What can survive and triumph over the fire? In all that we know, in our Christian profession, as we bear the name of Christ embodied in the title 'Christian', Christ's one, how much of that very profession is more than a profession? Is it a possession, an intrinsic value, incorruptible reality? All our Christian tradition handed down from our fathers, all that we inherit through the centuries of Christianity: how much of it now is of this particular quality, this essential value, this essence of Christ, and how much is just form, habit, an established and recognised and accepted thing? How much of it in our case is incorruptible? All our emotion, our excitability, our noisiness - is there behind it all that substantial element that will stand up against the fury of Satan, the hatred of hell?

As to ourselves, this matter of the incorruptible is a very pertinent thing, and, if I mistake not, this is going to be the kind of thing that will be pressed home by God to the nth degree at the end-time. If, therefore, we are in the end-time, and it is not easy to doubt that, such a word is of importance. If we were to turn aside to consider that matter, we should find that never before was there so much in the Scriptures that was never understood, even by its writers, which today is intelligible with a mere modicum of intelligence. The very language of Scripture which could not possibly have been understood at the time when it was written is as patent as anything can be patent today. - But that is an aside. We are unmistakably and undoubtedly at an end-time. Therefore God would gather His people, those who really mean business with Him, and He would begin to say, 'That is good, but there is something very much more than that: this is the thing that matters - the intrinsic value, the essential value'. He would put His finger upon the absolute essentials. How much of the very essence of Christ is wrought into us? That is the point.

Applied To Christian Work

This question of the incorruptible has to be applied, of course, to Christian work and works, and everything must be tested by it. It is all very well - size, appearance, seeming, immediate effects, the trappings and the means - but what about the essential, intrinsic value? God does not judge by the size of a thing as it appears, by the seeming of things, nor by the immediate effects produced by man's means and methods. God is looking through, His eyes are the eyes as of flame, and He looks right in to find the measure of the incorruptible that will not be gone in a week, a month, a year or a few years, but will go right on and appear again. He is looking for that.

There are two kinds of starting-points you know - man's and God's. Man usually starts with big frameworks, with a big plant, machinery, publicity, structures and so on. That is how man usually starts when he is going to do something for God. It is a propensity; it is our way. We may argue that God is worthy of something big. That is man's way. God's way is never like that - it never was. You search in vain to find any instance of God beginning like that. Pentecost came out of very deep and drastic dealings with twelve men. God's starting-point is always the intrinsic. God has always begun with life, with the inherent, with the potential. Man's beginnings usually end in only a small percentage of lasting value. God's beginnings always end in a very great percentage of lasting value. But God's beginnings seem so small, they appear so little. But so does a seed: it is a small thing, a little thing; yet look at the potentialities in one seed, one grain of wheat. It is the intrinsic with God. That is where God begins. That is why anything really of God has a long and hidden history of deep dealings on His part.

God's Secret Work

The thirty years of our Lord's hidden life had a great bearing on the three and a half. The forty years of Moses away back there in the desert, looking after those sheep of his father-in-law, had a great bearing upon the rest of his life. They were not lost, wasted, futile years. And so we could take up one after another - Abraham, David, and others, who had a long, deep, secret hidden history: it was out of that that the effectiveness came. Very often more is done, when God has been at work, in the last few years of a life than in all the years previously. That does not mean that all the previous years have been of no account, having no place. It means that God has been working to get intrinsic values, and now at last these values are coming out. Be careful, young people, that you do not write off older saints as back numbers. You may be violating the very principle of your own life - that of intrinsic value. But God have mercy upon an old man or an old woman who has no intrinsic values. As we get older, we ought to be the substance for the generation to follow. And God help the generation that follows that has not an inheritance of intrinsic value. No, let us be careful how we judge things. It must not be by time, but by the incorruptible.

Let me repeat that God begins with the intrinsic. His greatest things are the coming out of intrinsic values to make themselves known. Therefore He takes a lot of time and a lot of pains in secret history with that one object, and it may be that, though you may be thinking the years are going, and what does it all amount to? - soon life will be past, all over, and you have missed the way, and it has all been a problem, an enigma - it may be that in a few years an infinitude of spiritual value will come out of the time through which you are going, out of this which you think is lost time. Only adjust yourself to this, that God is not careful at all about our standards of values, either in time or in method or in any other way. What God is careful about is to have the inherent, the potential, the essential, the intrinsic. Lay that up in your hearts and cherish it and let it be a real governing factor with you. God works for depths, God works for solidity, God works for intensity: therefore He works through testing, through hiddenness, and with very, very little appeal to our natural pleasure. Incorruption is therefore a very testing thing, and may demand a complete adjustment of our whole mentality.

Having reached this point, we are committed to an enquiry into the nature of the incorruptible. If all the foregoing was true of the Lord Jesus, and if it is true that the Word of God teaches that, Deity and Godhead apart, what was true of Him in this way is to be reproduced in His own, then we want to know what were the incorruptible things that constituted such a life, and we shall go on to look at these, for it is in this way that we shall have the best explanation of what we have already been considering.