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## The Church - the Body - as the Anointed Vessel

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*"Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah" (1 Samuel 16:13).*

*"Thus all the work that Solomon wrought for the house of Jehovah was finished. And Solomon brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, even the silver, and the gold, and all the vessels, and put them in the treasuries of the house of God."*

*"And the staves were so long that the ends of the staves were seen from the ark before the oracle; but they were not seen without: and there it is unto this day."*

*"It came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking Jehovah; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised Jehovah, saying, For he is good; for his lovingkindness endureth for ever; that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of Jehovah, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of Jehovah filled the house of God" (2 Chron. 5:1,9,13,14).*

*"Moreover, Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying... and thou shalt make it a holy anointing oil, a perfume compounded after the art of the perfumer: it shall be a holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint therewith the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony" (Exodus 30:22,25,26).*

*"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written,*

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor:  
He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,  
And recovering of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty them that are bruised..." (Luke 4:16-18).*

*"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many" (1 Cor. 12:12-14).*

By linking together passages as we have done above, we are only bringing counterparts into view. We first of all see David anointed personally. Then we see the great inclusive, all-embracing purpose of David's life, and his anointing in relation to the whole testimony. In the passage in 2 Chronicles we see that purpose realised, and that anointing which was upon him personally now upon the temple; shall we say a collective thing: out of the personal anointing has come the collective anointing. The one leads to the other, the second is the justification of the first. The glory of the Lord filling the temple, the cloud taking up residence in the whole comprehensive order of things in the temple is the explanation of its full intent as to that individual or personal anointing which was upon David at the beginning.

Then we have brought another two things together. The Lord Jesus anointed personally, separately; declaring that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him; that is Christ personal; and alongside of that 1 Cor. 12:12,13, the one Body and the one anointing definitely mentioned, with its tremendously striking and impressive statement that: "...as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is *the* Christ" - the definite article; "...*the* Christ". It is not the first time that we have said it, but it has to be brought again before us in this particular connection; for what is clearly said is this, that this anointing upon the Lord Jesus is a collective and corporate anointing, and that for present and future universal purposes Christ is so vitally one with all His members that the members, joined to the Head, *have the effect* of being one Christ; *not meaning that Christ ceases to have a personal and separate existence*, but now, for the manifestation and expression of Himself, and for the full realisation of Himself, He is no longer just a separate individual entity, but is the Head of a Body, and He is Head and Body by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has made the Head and the members one. "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit", the Spirit of the anointing, the Spirit of the Anointed, the Christ. A tremendous statement! Let us repeat and emphasise that Christ remains the personal and distinct Son of God. The "Body" is but a means and method of His self-expression and activity.

Thus the Church becomes the anointed vessel, the Body of Christ, anointed in union with Him: "But he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit". Now to give a single emphasis to that, we read the passage from Exod. 30 in connection with the making of the holy anointing oil and underline the clause: "...thou shalt anoint the tent of meeting". Everything else in it and about it was to be anointed likewise, but we select the inclusive and comprehensive thing: "...thou shalt anoint the tent of meeting" - that is, the whole assembly. It is the tent of meeting, the tent of the congregation, and it is to be anointed.

### **Corporate Anointing**

Now let us consider the matter of corporate anointing.

The New Testament knows nothing of merely separate, individualistic anointings. We did not say individual anointings, we said individualistic anointings. Of course, the usage of words must be understood to appreciate that distinction. The anointing does come upon us individually as members. We are not all one member, but many, and every member is anointed, but there is a difference between an individual anointing and an individualistic anointing. That which is individualistic would mean that that member is a separate thing, something apart, detached. That is what we mean by individualism, which is one of the 'isms' that is not recognized by the Lord. That is, that which makes any man or woman something apart, a law unto himself or herself, a separate entity, doing their own work, thinking their own thoughts, even religiously and spiritually. There is no such thing in the view of the New Testament as individualistic anointing. Let me put that in another way. There are not so many anointings as there are individual members of the Body of Christ. While every member will receive the anointing, it will always be *the* anointing and not his anointing or her anointing; it will always be the one anointing. You do not receive one anointing and we another. We can put that more plainly. The Holy Spirit does not divide Himself up into as many parts as there are believers. There is but one Holy Spirit. "There is one body, and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all..." The anointing is made to reside on and within the Lord Jesus as Head of the Body. It is the Head which receives the anointing always. The rest of the Body gets this benefit by reason of its relation to the Head, it comes into the good of the anointing by being organically united with the Head. The anointing is upon the Lord Jesus as Head of the Body, the Church. Our receiving of the anointing is as we come into the Body of Christ and under the sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus as anointed. This one anointing is for all members, but only by reason of corporate and organic union with Christ as Head. So that the anointing is one anointing and not many anointings. All the members share in the anointing, but never receive an anointing separate from the rest, *in the thought of God*. Now that has a very wide range of meaning.

### **God is Against Separateness**

It means, in the first place, that God recognises no independence, spiritual independence, on the part of His people. God never goes with a spirit of independence, of separation, of detachment. Now we must come back and be very elementary in explaining that. We are saying 'a spirit of detachment', 'a spirit of separation'. There are times when by reason of denial of foundational verities of the faith there has to be a withdrawing, but that is not a spirit of separation in the sense in which we are using the term. We mean that disposition to be exclusive, to be separate, to be detached, to work apart, to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, to work and act independently of other believers with whom the Lord has joined us in Himself; the *spirit* of separation. The Lord is not with that, and never goes with that. The direction of the Holy Spirit is always toward fellowship and oneness. The whole direction of Satanic activity is to divide, to split up and cause friction, warfare, conflict. That has been the effect of sin and Satan. As we have said earlier, Calvary sees that work of the Devil dealt with, and that is why the Lord Jesus, right on the verge of His cross, prayed the prayer of John 17: "...that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us". That is the prayer with which He went to Calvary, and that prayer was answered in Calvary. That prayer has been wholly and fully answered in the cross.

Beloved, you and me *in Christ* will never be more one than we are. In ourselves the oneness may be weak and lacking but in Christ we are organically one, sharing one life. In the Christ who is at the right hand of God there is the unity of the born-anew ones which can never be improved upon. That is a testimony in Heaven. The Body is one, says the Word; it is one in Him, in the Head. The Holy

Spirit's presence in all the members of the Body constitutes a oneness deeper than consciousness, reason, feeling, recognition; a very life basis. A oneness is constituted deep down in every child of God like the oneness which exists between the Father and the Son, and when we get to Heaven and enjoy that oneness to the full without interference of this old-man element which divides and limits the fellowship now, we shall not be more one then in reality than we are now: it will then be manifested. We are never commanded to make the unity of the Spirit, we are exhorted to keep it, to guard it. That means that first of all we must take it as existing. The Body is one, so also is the Christ. He prayed that prayer as He went to the cross, and in the cross that prayer was answered. The testimony of Jesus includes that great truth that by His cross He has conquered the enemy, and destroyed that part of the enemy's work which brought disruption into God's creation. And in the new creation that spiritual, organic oneness is not only recovered but established beyond reach of again being destroyed. We shall come to the enjoyment of it only as we come to Heaven, as we leave earth. We are not now speaking literally, but spiritually. As we are linked with anything on this earth which is of a dividing character, then we miss the glory of the oneness of the Body and the oneness of Christ. The more earth-bound we are religiously, ecclesiastically, the more we fail of that heavenly reality of the oneness of the Body. Or to put it the other way, the more we come to our heavenly position the more we find it impossible to allow man-ruled systems, which divide believers into groups, to operate and govern our lives. We are out of all such, set free because the unity is in the Head in Heaven, and as we come to the heavenlies we come to Ephesians, where the Body is seen in oneness.

### **Organic Oneness**

We have illustrated these spiritual things by the human body and its double system of control. This body of ours physically is a unity. While it has many members, organs and functions, yet it is a unity, and it is made an organic unity, one thing, by a double system of control. One is the blood system, the other is the nerve system. The blood system makes the body a whole as an organic living thing. Strangle any one member, stop circulation, and before long that member ceases to be an active part of that organism. The whole blood system makes the body a single active living unity. The other is the nerve system. We know that every needle point of this entire physical body is governed and controlled by the nerve system. Now this whole nerve system has its base in the head, so that we cannot touch the most minute point with the finest needle without touching the head and registering that touch in the intelligence which resides in the head. If you understand the brain and take a needle and go from point to point in the brain you can put out of action any member of the body. Now the Body of Christ is a counterpart of that spiritually.

### **Oneness in Life**

The blood system which makes our physical bodies one organically while in action, has its counterpart in the Divine life that is given to us in new birth. We receive life in Christ and that life in the whole body is one life. The great circulation of Divine life through the body is the basis of not only the oneness, but active oneness, in relation to Christ. If the life is strangled, if that circulation is interrupted, then the wholeness of the Body is spoiled. If two members only, brought into working relationship in the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, indwelt by the Divine life, should come to a place where one of them has violated the spiritual laws of Divine life and thus arrested the circulation, these two will begin to find it difficult to work together, they will no longer be able to co-operate and help one another. There has come about an arrest upon the active principle of corporate life in the Body. So that an Achan can arrest the progress of all Israel on the principle that Israel (in type) is a corporate whole governed by one life; and when one member violates the laws of that life all the Body is affected.

To put it the other way round; when all the members have a full tide of Divine life flowing uninterrupted and unhindered, then you get a mighty corporate movement. That is how it was at the beginning. Ananias and Sapphira represent the enemy's effort to interfere with that corporate life and to check the movement of the whole Body, and it was said to be a sin against the Holy Ghost. (This life is not abstract, but in the Holy Spirit.) The seriousness of that is, that Satan had interfered, and they, in complicity with Satan, had threatened the entire movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church in those days. Now you have in Ananias and Sapphira a literal outworking of that passage in 1 Cor. 3:16: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" That is collective, corporate; that is the assembly. The "ye" there is the House of God, not the physical body of 1 Cor. 6:19, where the language is singular, not plural. Now note what God says: "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy". See how jealous God is for the Body of Christ, the House of God, the assembly. Ananias and Sapphira came to judgment in death because in truth the Devil had captured them to arrest and destroy the corporate testimony in the House of God as it was launched on its way in the beginning. It was a blow against the oneness of the Body under the one anointing, and that met this word: "...him shall God destroy".

Beloved, it is a terrible thing to put our hand upon the assembly, it is a terrible thing to touch the Body of Christ. Psalm 105 puts that very plainly: "...yea, he reproveth kings for their sakes; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm". The assembly is the anointed vessel and we see that the enemy is out to thwart the mighty effect of that one anointing, to interrupt the progress of it. The one life is seen there corresponding to the blood system. This is the one life by which we move, which is our energy; Divine life given to us in the Holy Spirit.

### **Oneness in Intelligence**

But then the nervous system in our physical body also has its parallel in the corporate Body of Christ in the Holy Spirit. He is both life and intelligence. These two things cannot be separated, but there is a difference. The Holy Spirit is the intelligence of this oneness; it is the nerve system by which we are made aware of things. We have the intelligence of the whole Body by the nerve system because that is registered in the Head; and the Holy Spirit, the one Spirit, makes the Body one in action by a registration of the Divine mind. How important it is to have spiritual intelligence in order to have the Body perfectly functioning. These two things go together. The eyes of the heart had to be enlightened by a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in order to see the full meaning of the Body of Christ. That is the 'Ephesian' position. The Apostle is praying "that... that... that..." Notice the successive 'thats' governing his petitions, and all those petitions are in relation to the Body's union with Christ. The basic thing is: "...having the eyes of your heart enlightened" there being given "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him". We shall blunder on and make all kinds of mistakes and confusions if the Lord does not give us spiritual intelligence; if we do not recognize that the anointing is meant to bring to us intelligence as to the Lord's mind. 1 John 2:20,27 comes in again to our help. "And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things", and of that it is said, "...and it is true and is no lie". That chapter, 1 John 2, is a chapter of antichrist and Christ, Christ and antichrist. Many antichrists shall come and declare themselves to be Christ, assume the garb of Christ, the language of Christ, the phraseology of Christ, many of the ways of Christ; but still antichrist; so subtle, so impossible of recognition by the ordinary intelligence even at its best. Over against the antichrists - with their well-nigh perfect counterfeiting of Christ - is Christ the Anointed; but the antichrist is a "Christ" without the anointing, and therefore a denial, for "Christ" means - "anointed".

How are you to know where the anointing is, that is, where Christ is? The anointing in you tells you

where the anointing is and where it is not. The anointing is one anointing and recognizes His own expression. Mark that well. The anointing is one. Someone or some system comes and poses as Christ the Anointed, but is not the Anointed. How are you going to know that the anointing is not there? By the anointing which is in you which is one anointing, which does not have fellowship with *that*. But when that which is of the anointing is present the anointing in you flows out to it. That is something which only the anointed ones have, something we cannot define, and is not something mental. You are not able to sit down and put on paper precisely where the antichrists are wrong; it is the anointing in you that tells you before you can reason or analyse. That is not misjudging, but you know because the anointing in you teaches you. 'How do you know?' 'I cannot tell you, but I know'. That is, the Lord in you does not let go to that, does not flow out to that, does not give liberty and sanction to that; and you must wait until the Lord does; sooner or later you will have the explanation. There is all the difference between that and our natural suspicions and prejudices. Oh, that the Lord's people would know the Holy Ghost and be delivered from all that bondage which comes along the line of eternally suspecting everything with which they come into contact! Beloved, if in your heart the Holy Spirit witnesses to the fact that another is a child of God, that is all you want as a *basis* of fellowship.

Now this intelligence which corresponds to the nerve system is all linked up in the Head and that is what Paul means when he says: "We have the mind of Christ". How do we have the mind of Christ? The anointing! It does not mean that any one of us has reached the place where we immediately know the Lord's will about every detail in our lives. The anointing does not work out in that way immediately. There are many things about which we are not sure as to the will of God, but we do know this, that if we are walking in the Spirit and the anointing is free within us, if we take or essay to take a step out of line or out of time with the Lord, the Spirit does not go with us and we know that we go on our own. This is simple but it is true. The Spirit of Jesus suffers us not. It may only be a matter of time, or it may be a matter of finality, that that is not the Lord's will for our lives. The intelligence of the anointing is the Holy Spirit who would give to all the members the one mind of Christ. We cannot conceive of an organic unity having half-a-dozen contradictory and conflicting minds.

It may be asked, how is it to be explained that so many godly, consecrated people are entirely different in their attitude towards certain vital things? We do not know that we are called upon to account for that, and certainly we are not called upon to judge any man, but we do venture to say this, that it can easily be accounted for by the measure in which the cross of the Lord Jesus has been wrought into those lives. Which means this, that still there may be a clinging to something of good which is not the Lord's best, and that means that the Holy Spirit is not free to lead out of the one into the other; and there you get the difference. We are certain of this, that the deeper we are baptized into the death of Christ the more we shall know of the oneness of the Spirit, because that is the ground upon which the Spirit operates - the death of Christ. We must remember that no man has as yet reached 'fulness' or perfection.

The foregoing covers some ground as to the corporate nature of the anointing. It is only perhaps by way of illustration, but we think it is useful in bringing to us the fact with which we are dealing, that the anointing is one, the Spirit is one, the Body is one.