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The Development of Revelation in the New Testament

by T. Austin-Sparks

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The Book of Revelation

We at once get our original link with the gospels with the word of our Lord concerning the coming dispensation of the Spirit; He said of the Spirit: "He shall lead you into all the truth" - that was fulfilled in the epistle coupled with the first statement. We have His further words concerning the Spirit: "He shall show you things to come" - this is mainly fulfilled in the book of Revelation.

We have seen that all the great doctrinal features of the epistles are found in germ in the sayings of our Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh, and we find that the outlines of the book of Revelation are found in the parables and sayings of our Lord which relate to future history.

The epistles are related to the last discourse in John in the upper room and are linked with the mystery of spiritual life and the Spirit, while the last discourse in Matthew is on the Mount of Olives, and related to the question: "When shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age (world, ASV)?"

Then we found in the book of Acts, as in the epistles, it is the same Teacher and Worker as in the gospels, the Lord Jesus Himself was still working and teaching by revelation of Himself, specially to Paul. He is still seen to be at the heart of things concerning Himself; the same principle holds good in the Revelation - the same ONE doing, teaching, and enlarging the revelation: "The revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave to Him" and Himself still seen.

The Doctrinal Bearing of the Revelation

In the epistles Christ has been revealed as Saviour not only of the individual, but also of the Church - the Body of Christ. There the one thing made clear is that the result of the final appearing is not the peace, holiness, and inheritance of the individual, or of a number of individuals participating in these things, but rather the formation of a corporate Body. The Body of Christ is the final result.

This corporate Body has wonderful things said of it; it is the Body of Christ - a habitation of God in the Spirit: "The church of the living God", etc..

The emphasis of the epistles is clearly that it is not an aggregate of separate parts or separate units congregated together, but it is a corporate body and possesses an organic life as the Body of Christ: "The body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh increase of the body unto the building up of *itself* (not of themselves, but "itself") Eph. 4:16. The Church - His Body - is endued with a corporate personality in which the full results of redemption are to appear. It is called the Spouse of Christ - for which He died, which He loved, and which He will present to Himself without spot or wrinkle, faultless before His glory.

All that turns upon this, that the Church is not so much for the individual, but the individual for the Church; the Body does not exist for its members but the members for the Body.

The purpose of God in Christ before the foundation of the world is a corporate purpose, and the individuals are to relate themselves to that Purpose; our calling is to a corporate thing in Christ, not as only an individual thing, such as personal sanctification etcetera as a thing by itself and detached, we have to have the corporate consciousness developed, that is, every individual being for the Corporate Body.

Salvation of souls is not an end in itself, and we must not make it so; it is with the view to the getting of the ONE BODY.

Sectionalism in the Church of God does not exist in the thought of God, it is entirely contrary to the Divine mind, and so far as it exists in our mind or practice, we obstruct the course of the Holy Spirit - He is limited by our departmentalism in spirit, mind or practice. This of course works out in the other way also, that where there is a corporate mind and spirit (corporate consciousness), which refuses to recognise the artificial divisions (distinctions) made by man, the Holy Spirit has a free course, and will glorify the Lord there, unveiling HIM and giving revelation of HIM, and will *do those things* which will glorify Christ where all is "*according to Christ*".

The Holy Spirit will never glorify an organisation, or a company, or make that as such, a place of revelation. He will glorify Christ where Christ is recognised as undivided.

One of the most important things for believers is the Holy Spirit's development of a corporate consciousness in each, and consequently a corporate activity; this means that every one member of the Body implies or involves the whole; all the other members of the Body are involved in the interest of the one.

This constitutes the ministry of the Body, the ministry of prayer, the ministry of life, "that which every joint supplieth to the building up of the Body, and the edifying of *itself* in love". "Itself" - one entity.

That phrase - 'a corporate personality' - is most important. It has reference to our Lord Jesus first, and then to Him in and with His Church. If you take the Lord Jesus in the presentation of His person in the days of His flesh (which is our link with the gospels), even then we see Him to be universal. For example, it is wrong to isolate Him to the Jews. He was a Jew, but He is far larger than that; even in His humanity He was absolutely universal. It is wrong to locate Him to one country, He breaks the confines. You cannot tie Him down to any of the seven temperaments:

□ *Artistic* - He is that as seen from His parables and sayings, in appreciation of nature, the lily of the field etc..

□ *Sanguine* - always hopeful.

□ *Melancholic* - always gravitates below the surface, ploughing deep. For example, His distress over His disciples not taking in more than the surface meaning of things.

□ *Choleric* - see the knotted cords, righteous indignation, a boiling over righteously!

In HIM both masculine and feminine virtues, yet "in Christ there is neither male or female"! In every sense He is a universal personality, embracing everything on its good side. He is representative and the Holy Spirit comes as the Spirit of the universal Person of the Lord Jesus to constitute the Church according to Christ, so that the Church has a corporate Personality; the Lord's people are "*IN Christ*". This is an inclusiveness, an all enveloping fact.

This is the revelation as developed in the epistles, but it demands a continuance and consummation as contained in the book of Revelation. Just as the gospels created the need for a fuller revelation, even as He said it would be, and Acts met the need created in the gospels with the next stage of the revelation and in so doing created a yet further need for both revelation and interpretation, and the epistles answered to that need, so yet again the epistles create another need and to this need the book of the Revelation is the answer and the consummation of all.

We have had a history begun, but not ended and you want to know how and where this matter is going to end. The book of Revelation answers this, and not only satisfies this but gives those assurances which have become so necessary because of what has come out in the epistles. You cannot read these epistles without a shadow coming over the heart, a sense of disappointment stealing in; it has been a fair morning, but you have not got far before the sky is overcast, conscious of a growing darkness in the foreground - you get the retarded spiritual progress of Galatians and get the necessity of some who had received the living oracles of having to lay again the foundations (compare Heb. 6). Then you get the grievous divisions in Corinthians; know something of the fiery trial of Peter; and the growing consciousness of conflict with principalities and powers in Ephesians.

Then we trace errors and false teaching creeping in and are also told that at the end things will not get better but worse: 'grievous times'. This is a lowering sky and as you close the epistles you might be tempted to think all had broken down or was breaking down; the radiant morn has passed and even before we are out of the New Testament we are in the presence of ruin. So there is a great need created by the epistles to know what is going to be the end of it all, and how it will work out eventually.

We have noted that the progression marked in the epistles is a spiritual one and not chronological, you begin with doctrine and revelation and end with exhortation, admonition, and encouragement. There is great revelation, as in Romans 6, Ephesians, Colossians and elsewhere, but even at the end

of some of these there is warning and exhortation to stand. And then almost exclusively this becomes the note of the closing letters: *stand, endure, contend for the faith*. There is an order of arrangement which is almost ominous. So the book of Revelation is addressed largely to a state of mind, because a great want has been created. The book of Revelation therefore is a book of consummations; it is the answer to the need created by the letters that have gone before it. The answer is given in a twofold manner.

1. A Revelation of the Basis and Cause of the Consummation

Firstly, a revelation of the basis and cause of the Consummation; here it is revealed that the personal salvation of the individual and the corporate salvation of the Church have the same ground. And that ground is the occasion and cause of the consummation - it is the LAMB SLAIN! The Apocalyptic name for the Lord Jesus is the LAMB, and everything here is centred in and circles round the LAMB. The fundamental passage is Rev. 5:5-10. Note what proceeds it: "Behold the LION... I saw a LAMB", a deliberate change of image. Why? The Lion represents the power; the Lamb represents the means. The power is by the death, the shedding of Blood, this is but taking up of the doctrine (as in the epistles) "That by death He should destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14,15).

The destruction is the Lion's side, the death is the Lamb's side, so you have the sovereign power related to the death - the key and pivot on which everything turns. One title for Him who conquers, judges, and reigns, and the one title of the Lord related to the consummation is the LAMB. The Lamb makes war. It is the Lamb from whose wrath kings and people flee away. The Lamb, by His blood, His servants overcome; the Lamb in whose blood many have washed their robes and made them white. As the Lamb's wife, the Church is presented to Him. The Lamb is the light and the temple, the throne is the throne of the Lamb.

In all this there is a wonderful revelation of the Person, the blood, and the death of the Lord Jesus, a deeper unfolding of the *so great salvation* upon redemption by blood; *death defeated by the blood*. Here you have a development of Revelation, not merely as related to salvation, but in relation to the consummation of the eternal purpose in and through the Church, His Body.

So far (up to the close of the epistles) there has not been a very full development of this matter beyond the fact that redemption has been secured through the blood, and death defeated by the blood. There is enough to rest salvation upon, but here you have development of the revelation; not only of personal salvation, but also of the consummation of the eternal purpose. Here not only the individual, but also the corporate thing gets right through to consummation through the power of the Blood.

At the close of the epistles a shadow was present; one might conclude there was a breakdown. Now nothing better remains than for each to stand to be as true as they can, to stand each one for himself, looking to it that they avoid the errors by which others are gone aside. So the peril could be to relapse into a dangerous individualism, but here in the book of Revelation it is not only the individual, but the corporate in relation to the Lamb's blood. So you have the Revelation of the Person, the power of the blood, and the triumph of His death. This is the profitable side of the Revelation to dwell on, rather than dates, signs etc..

2. The Revelation of the Connection Between Things Seen and Unseen

Secondly, the revelation of the connection between things seen and unseen. The Lamb of God: introduced in the gospels, doctrinally opened out in the epistles, and the consummation in the book of the Revelation. And the development is seen here, that the things on earth are all working out, and being worked out in relation to things in heaven. This is suggested in the epistles and can be traced to a point, but here it is brought into full view: things are taking place in connection with the things in heaven. The glory and the terror of spiritual forces, both celestial and diabolical agents, all working in relation to eternal interests which are involved.

We see all this from an advantage ground, a point of view; in spirit we are 'up there' with the apostle and looking down from the vantage point, seeing from above the great fact that the earth is the battlefield of the eternal purpose. The two kingdoms meet here, the Old Serpent on the one side and the Lamb on the other; the whole issue is being settled here. This earth is the battlefield of two realms in relation to the eternal purpose of God.

Now there is a marked advance in revelation, and a full unveiling of Ephesians 6, and Daniel 10-11 of the presence and action of the powers of darkness, where the facts are simply stated, but not developed. Here it is developed.

Note also the last words of the earthly discourse of the Lord Jesus (John 16:33), "in the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." In Revelation this has been proved. "They overcame because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony." "Because I have overcome you shall overcome." In Revelation the Lord is seen securing the overcomers. This would be much more apparent if the one Greek word in the original were uniformly rendered by one word in the English, but we have in the latter several: victory, prevail, conquered, overcome.

In the book of Revelation development is seen in relation to seven things:

1. The Person of Christ.

He is presented in the gospels. Doctrinally revealed in the epistles. Manifested in glory and power in the Revelation.

2. The Blood of Christ.

Only mentioned in a mystical way in the gospels. The doctrine is given in the epistles. Revealed as to its full power in the Revelation.

3. The Overcoming of the World.

Stated in the gospels. The doctrine in the epistles. Actually realised in the Revelation. We might say that the spiritual principles of overcoming are set forth in the epistles, and it is spiritually known and experienced of many in the Revelation. Then it is historically consummated.

4. The Judgment of the Prince of this World.

Declared in the gospels: "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31; 16:11). The spiritual principles of His nullification are laid down in the epistles. The great fact that he has been so judged and cast out is demonstrated in the Revelation.

5. The Basis, Nature, and Indestructibility of the Church.

Suggested and hinted at in the gospels: the corn of wheat, dying and becoming an ear - this hints at the corporate nature of the Church. "On this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" - indestructibility is the basis of the Church. The blood of the LAMB - intimated

for all who have discernment in the first 'sign' that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee at the marriage feast; the blood, one life, the first thing to the last thing in that marriage; a type of the consummation in the marriage of the Lamb, the Church being the Lamb's wife. All is more fully developed in the epistles, and brought to consummation in the Revelation.

6. The Coming Again of Christ.

Mentioned many times in the gospels; the object in view in all the epistles; fulfilled in the Revelation.

7. The Ruin of the World.

In like manner: Mentioned many times in the gospels; the object in view in all the epistles; fulfilled in the Revelation.

Clearly then, to reject this book is to reject all the books, and the ONE revelation of the Scriptures. To reject any part of the great revelation or any one of the doctrines is to reject all the Scriptures, for they are one. We have seen that one theme runs through all: one growing revelation of the ONE PERSON, our LORD JESUS.

The final thing in the Revelation is revelation! We are not left even with the Church delivered, fully formed and conformed to Christ, with victory and the devil cast down. All that is there, but that is not all. There is a new heavens and a new earth; the end is the presentation of the City. The City is the aggregate of the world; that is, there is now nothing in the world contrary in character to the City.

What then do the words there mean? "Without are dogs, whoremongers... and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." These are not in the world; they have been cast into the lake of fire. The City is the type of all the life of the new heaven and the new earth. The City is the representation of the complete and ordered life of the world, and everything is according to the City. It is not that the City is of one kind, and all around it in the earth of another kind and character, but as we have said, the City as now seen is the aggregate of the World.

We have seen in recent days the meaning of the City. It gathers up all the features of the Church, the elect, when brought to perfection: transparency, elevation, stability, everything of God, life eternally fresh, Divine administration of the world (represented by number 12) - all these spiritual features of the Church according to which God constructs His new universe. Thus the City when spoken of as shining as the sun is not to be thought of as a point of light shining out into the darkness like the literal sun, but spiritual condition is meant. All the above are descriptive of spiritual values, this is Jerusalem above, the Mother of us all. This is the special emphasis also in relation to the City. It represents the administrative seat of the world or nation. If the City is the Church, it is the administrative centre, and instrument of the new earth.

This is the full development of all that is found in the gospels and epistles: "Foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son". It represents, therefore, the perfection of the Spirit's work in relation to all the revelation of truth in Jesus Christ. Its features are doctrines made into life in perfection. The mind of God for His universe is eternally revealed in His Church. "And the nations walk in the light of it." The beginning of this revelation is the Spirit's revealing and imparting Christ within the individual heart.

The New Covenant is inward and spiritual: "God *hath shined in our hearts*." This is the inwardness of revelation; it begins as revelation within the heart, it ends with conformity to that revelation. Given this in all the children of God and you have the City.