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The Otherness of Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Extract from ["From the Wilderness to the Land" - Chapter 1.](#)

To be Christians after the Spirit is altogether a different thing from being Christians after the flesh. It is this Christianity after the flesh which has brought into being a vast system of things on this earth today which is not really serving the Lord, which is not really of vital consequence in this world, which is but an outward formal thing, which not only occupies the ground but is a menace to the genuine, the true; for so many say of it, If that is Christianity, I have no room for it! So the true is rejected and refused because of the false thing which is "Christian".

No, that which is after the Spirit is very different even from Christianity after the flesh. This latter can carry us a long way. We can have the very fullness of Christian teaching and truth in words, we can go right on to the fullest presentation of Christian doctrine and truth, getting right into what might be called the deeper things of the Word of God, and it may all amount to nothing more than our own natural interest in spiritual things. It is possible for us, for instance, to take up such a matter as the Scriptural difference between soul and spirit and to have a grasp of that as truth, as doctrine, and be able to analyse and present the analysis of that difference, and for it still to remain our natural mental interest, a fascinating subject, something of interest, and for the thing to be without the unction of the Spirit to precipitate a crisis, to effect something of God. That is only by way of illustration. We can preach the gospel in the flesh and make it of none effect, said Paul, because it is preached in the wisdom of words, in the wisdom of men. (1 Cor. 1:17). The very thing preached is nullified because of the source from which it comes, a natural interest, a natural drawing to that kind

of thing, mystical Christianity; it does not get anywhere, it goes round and round in the wilderness. That which is of the Spirit creates a crisis, that which is of the Spirit takes a direct course, a direct route. That which is of the Spirit is a straight way.

Dear friends, what is the Lord doing with us? That is what we want to know. What is He doing with you and me, and with those who are really in His hands? — Is He not doing with us that which He has done with all who have come completely under His hands, that is, leading in a way and realm where human understanding and ability are completely confounded and exhausted, where it is totally impossible to cope mentally with His ways, or to explain Him? We cannot see, we cannot understand; neither is it in us to do, to achieve. We are learning that all our resources are of no avail, and that everything depends upon the Lord Himself; *His* wisdom, *His* strength, *His* grace.

Well, if it is your experience so far and at this time, understand that it is quite right, it is not all a mistake. True, it is very painful, it is testing. It is testing up to that point where your feet have to touch the very brink before you prove God. You have to come to an utter end of one way and to a beginning which is a beginning even to the point of lifting your feet to take a step to prove God, for God to come in. You say that is very utter. Yes, but it is this utterness of the difference between the Lord and ourselves that we have to learn, and that is going to set us over against the colossus of false doctrine, of the iniquitous lie which is being built upon this earth up to heaven, the lie of humanism.

That is the greatest lie that has been brought into this universe, that it is in man to be his own saviour, that it is in man to rise to perfection, it is in man to be God. It is all in man, the roots are in himself. That is Satan's colossus of iniquitous untruth, and God is working out the contradiction of that in a company, in His church. It is being wrought, worked out, in the unseen, and, while it is so difficult to accept it in the day of suffering, weakness and darkness and inability to understand, if we knew the truth, the probability is that it is just this: God is doing with Satan in and through the church what He did with Satan in and through Job, answering his challenge and his lie. Here is a broken, shattered, helpless little vessel of saints, bewildered, stripped, thrown back upon their God, unable to do or to understand, clinging to Him and seeking to prove Him, and through that the greatest iniquity in this universe is being assailed by God and answered.

The lie! There never was a time when that lie has reached greater proportion than it has today. Of course, it represents the greatest enigma that confronts us, when what is going on shouts at the top of its voice what kind of creature man is after all, yet at the same time men are pinning their faith to humanism as never before. But in you and in me, poor broken ones, God has His answer, and it does mean something to the Lord that we have been emptied out to the last drop, thrown back upon Him, where He is our wisdom, He is our strength, He is our life, He is our very breath. That means something to Him.

The Otherness of Christ

To return to the central issue of this whole matter, namely, the great lesson of the vast expanse, the desert expanse, which lies between Christians in themselves and Christ. Karl Barth has coined for us a phrase which has gained a great deal of strength and place, and it is a very useful one — “the altogether other-ness of Christ”. Oh, that goes much further than we realize, certainly much further than most people are prepared to believe. Even yet in evangelical Christianity there is a clinging to the idea that we transfer every thing to Christ and to Christianity when we are born again. We

transfer all our faculties and our powers over to the interests of Christ and then, instead of using them for ourselves and for the world, we use them for Christ. That is the meaning of consecration, of surrender, as the terms are used so largely today in evangelical Christianity — the consecration of ourselves, our gifts, our faculties, our everything, to the Lord and to His service. But that falls short of something, and that is the meaning of the forty years in the wilderness. If that were all, then the eleven days would be enough. But no, it is not. It is not the transference and the consecration of everything that we are to the Lord to be used straight away as it is over on His side, for His interests instead of in the world. Christ is other yet, Christ is still different yet from consecrated natural life, oh, so other! Something has to happen, our entire mentality has to be changed, transformed. The mind has to be renewed, we have to have an altogether different kind of outlook, even about the things of God. It is a constitutional matter, not merely a directional one.

You have heard this many times and I want to emphasize it, I must emphasize it, because this is the meaning of the Lord's dealings with us, namely, to get a new mentality, a new conception, another, not our old one transferred, but another, and the distance, I said, is not the distance of time or geography necessarily, it is the distance of difference, and we make faster or slower progress spiritually according to how we learn this lesson. It need not be forty years, the Lord has not fixed it at forty years; He never did. It need not be.

May the Lord show us the great distance that lies between ourselves as Christians and Christ, and give us a heart that yields to the Spirit's work in teaching that lesson and making it good and bringing us more and more to the measure of His Son.