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What the Gospel Is

by T. Austin-Sparks

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It is very important that we should know what the Gospel is. If we were asked to state what the Gospel is, probably we should set down some passages of Scripture which we consider are inclusive of the Gospel. Probably John 3:16 and say - that is the Gospel. We should be right to a point, but at best we should only be stating certain basic truths about the Gospel; glorious truths and yet not in themselves the Gospel in its fulness or in its central meaning.

Those are wonderful facts and they are constituent parts of the Gospel, but that is not the Gospel in the sense in which you and I must understand the Gospel and know the meaning of the Gospel.

I believe that the Gospel is just this, simply, but most profoundly, that the Son of God, Who is also Son of Man, has come, and in His Coming has expressed in the world the Divine type of what God intended before times eternal that His race, His creation, should be. That is God contracted to the span of human life; God manifest in the flesh; God combining with His own essential nature another kind of creation called "man" and in that combination producing as out from Himself a type, a kind, a species which never occupied the world before (so far as we know), which was His thought and conception before the foundation of the world. A creature in which God is resident Himself by His Divine Nature; and in the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Christ, we have that species represented, that type manifested, and that is the Gospel. That into the image of that Son those who become identified with Him in oneness of that Divine life are destined to be conformed, to be the instrument for the manifestation of God by His indwelling.

And that is the mystery of which the Apostle Paul speaks so much, you are familiar with the word: "the mystery which hath been hid from all ages and generations which is Christ in you, the Hope of glory." "This mystery is great; we are members of His Body, of His flesh, and of His bones." The realisation of this will be both personal and corporate.

Now the Master threw some advanced rays of light upon that revelation which was to come by the Holy Spirit later through a spirit-indwelt Church and its members when He said words with which we are very familiar - "In that day (what day? well we know) ye shall know that ye are in Me and I in you," "and if a man love Me he will keep My words and My Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." Further, in His prayer: "I in them and Thou in Me," and again: "If any man will hear I will come in unto him."

Then later these words from the realisation of that marvellous foreshadowing and promise: "If Christ is in you the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness." "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" - "Jesus Christ is *in* you," - and "for me to live is Christ" to which might be added many declarations and utterances relative to this great central truth.

The Gospel is the manifestation and revelation of that which was in the heart of God before the world as to what His own people should be; that His people in whom He Himself is resident, through whom He reveals and manifests Himself, who are definitely partakers of His Divine nature, and that that representative, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, has achieved that work by His Cross whereby God may get His end and realise His original purpose. That is the Gospel. And seeing Him, not as an historical figure, not as just Jesus of Nazareth, but seeing Him as the representative of all the sons of God as an inclusive Son and understanding the true nature of the Lord Jesus, we see that which God has from eternity chosen us to be in Himself. That is the Good News; that is the promise, that is the prophecy, that is the power. Of course, I am quite conscious that many questions might rise out of a statement like that, but I am not careful to stay and discuss such at this moment. We want to recognise one or two other things in relation to this theme which arises out of that declaration.

We have often said that although God created Adam and intended him to fulfil ultimately, and to realise, the work which Christ the Lord came to do and to realise, it was but a probationary creation; He did not create him at the outset on the same plane as the Lord Jesus, and therefore he never lost what the Lord Jesus regained, but the Lord Jesus brought infinitely more than ever Adam lost.

It was the Divine intention that ultimately the Lord should inhabit and indwell, and reside within and manifest Himself, as out from the man of His creation. But that first creation which was in the mind of God intended to realise that end ignominiously failed and fell from God. The Cross does not come in to retrieve merely that loss. There is much misconception that Calvary just regains Paradise and reconstructs the mass of wreckage of Adam's fall and mistake and blunder and sin. The Cross may do such, but it does infinitely more. It does not start where Adam went wrong; now it starts with God Incarnate and on the ground of all that Calvary has done in wiping out one order which has proved ineffective you start where God originally intended man should end, where man should have arrived at the end of his probation. If Adam had not fallen there would have been a development and a growth unto partaking of a life which is uncreated. That is why God hedged around that Tree of Life so that a man should not perpetuate a species endlessly. He might later have taken that, and possessing *the* life of *the* Ages, sharing one life with God, uncreated life, endless life, he might have come at length to the standard of the Sonship. But the probation failed and so man on that plane

was wiped out in the Cross and that creation brought to an end; and when the Lord Jesus rises from the dead He rises not of a fallen Adam race but He rises as the first begotten from the dead, of a new species altogether; and it is a new creation, not a renewed creation - a new creation, something that has never been before. And that is brought about by the same Spirit as energised out from God in the original creation but which energises so much the more now to bring forth this other thing. There never was such an energising of the Holy Spirit in the history of the Universe as is manifested in the raising of Jesus from the dead.

In our resurrection union with Christ we are to "walk in newness of spirit." Not merely the old spirit resuscitated, but a newness of spirit. What is this newness? It is in the fact of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as its true life; Christ resident within by the Holy Spirit. This is new. It was never true of man before, the operations of the spirit of God were always *upon* before - as from without.

It brings us right back to the A.B.C. of our Christian life and experience to recognise this, that sonship in this superlative sense, relationship to God of this kind, which is to be sons of God in the Eternal Son, is on the basis of God Himself being resident in our spirit and that on the basis of a new thing which has been done in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, a new creation, in which God takes up His abode. "Upon man's flesh shall not the holy anointing oil come."

From that time onward the course of spiritual experience is the history of the progressive ascendancy of God in man's spirit over that other old outer man.

There are times when it is difficult for the Lord's people to put a piece of tissue paper between the two. It is very difficult for you, for instance, sometimes to be able to see the narrowest line between your prayer and the prayer of God the Holy Spirit in you. You are praying and for all you are worth, but your prayer as such gets nowhere, if it were left there you could go on praying and get nowhere until in your prayer there is an extra ingredient.

Many people have the idea that incense in the Bible represents the prayers of God's people, that is not so. They quote Scripture from Rev. 8 - the golden bowl containing incense, and then immediately the declaration "which are the prayers of the saints" - be careful of your grammar - "the incense which are the prayers of the saints." What are the prayers of the saints? The golden bowls. What is the incense? It is the prayer of the Holy Ghost within the saints (Rev. 5:8). The Greek in that passage makes it perfectly clear that it is the bowls which are the prayers of the saints and the incense is something which is added to; the incense is added into the prayers of the saints. Elijah, a man of like passions - he prayed and "in his praying he *prayed*," the something extra there. What is that? The man prays, but as he prays something comes through his prayer, it comes right out of the Throne of God. Only that declaration which comes right out from God Himself can open or close the Heavens. And that is what is meant by praying in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost praying in you. For is it not said most definitely that He shall make intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered. The Holy Spirit is in the Church, the Body of Christ and it is there that He is fulfilling His advocacy and making intercession. There are times when an unutterable something is in our spirit, an awful cry which we are unable to articulate, a groaning which cannot be uttered and although you cannot articulate that that is the effective thing; that is the extra ingredient.

That is why God was so particular when He gave the ingredients of the incense - "there shall be none of this used by men *for* themselves." Not merely to make, but not *for themselves*. This thing was not for the flesh, it was unto the pure purpose of God; and if it came into the realm of the flesh there

would be a blazing forth of judgment - so it was when strange fire was offered. It is the thing which is God Himself, effecting His purposes which are the purposes related to this new creation.

One thanks God for that extra something, because while one has a very blessed union with God and life in Him, one is always making mistakes; one is constantly coming short; overwhelmed with lack of wisdom and understanding and how they do move short of that revelation of life utterly in the spirit. While one's relationship to the Lord is absolutely clear, and while one's spirit is pure (I prefer to interpret "heart" as "spirit") towards God and while one is always and constantly praying - "Lord, plant that Cross into the depths of my being," while one does that, in spite of the limitations, there is a movement of the Lord, He is doing it though we be of little faith, which is nothing else than God Himself going on with His work. That will never be thought a reason why we can continue to blunder, but as one is seeking to go on with the Lord, the Lord is doing His own work. We are in union with the Lord and He has brought us on. Sometimes He lets us make these false moves to show us that this thing is of Himself and not of us.

The main conception is before us and the line is simply this - that God had a design, a species in mind that is the reproduction of Himself, an incarnation of Himself not in one man only but in a Body, the inclusive incarnation of God, the Body of Christ, composed of born-again ones; that was His original conception. Adam did not lose that, he failed to attain unto it. The Cross comes in and wipes out that kind of thing, not merely the result of Adam's failure in himself and in the earth, He wipes it out - the first Adam.

In the resurrection this is realised, but God Himself brings about the resurrection by the energising of the Holy Spirit and sonship in this superlative and transcendent sense is on the ground of a union with Christ in resurrection by an indwelling revelation of God through the Holy Spirit. "Because we are sons God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our heart whereby we cry "Abba, Father" - "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His." Sonship is only possible by the way of the Cross by the indwelling Spirit.

These are far-reaching principles, but they bring with them comfort and assurance that the end will be attained because God has promised it. He does not leave it with us to do it, it is God Who works in us. It is very difficult to understand why some who claim to be the Lord's people, some who carry His Name and are engaged in what is His service, can go on with gross and fundamental contradictions in their life, and that the Holy Spirit should be resident in them to declare in them the Will of God. This thing is so difficult to understand, but I believe it is impossible to go on like that if really the Holy Spirit is getting the upper hand.

In unenlightened days when one knew very little about the fact of revelation, one was working upon the objective and external, even then one recognised most clearly that they were held when they said a thing from a pulpit or platform which was not according to the truth, and yet it seemed to be born out by the truth, but one remembers they did not have a good time when they were saying it. And we are being checked like that all along if the Lord really is within. You are safe if the Lord has really taken up residence inside. You will have a check when you are making a mistake.

The whole secret of walking in the Lord is that the Lord is walking in you.

May He bring us into the effectual working of it that we may know what that extra is - Christ in you, by the Holy Spirit, the hope of glory.

Thus far we have seen something of the nature of the new man whom God had in mind as the ultimate realisation of His desire. We have seen that Christ Who is God manifest in the flesh is the only answer but the absolute answer to that quest of God from before the world and its creation, and that Christ is the first and representative and inclusive of that type. He answers specifically to the Divine desire and requirement in that He is a manifestation of God by the indwelling of God.

We have been able to see just a little of the meaning of Pentecost and of the Holy Spirit's coming as an inseparable part of the Godhead and taking up residence in the spirit of the new creation man on the ground of the resurrection of Jesus, the Cross having for ever wiped out of existence, so far as God's purpose is concerned, God's creation in Adam.

So we have the presentation as a new man in Christ Jesus; that he is in a very real way by Divine intention a God-man - a God-indwelt man, a God-possessed man, a God-revealing and manifesting man and in all therefore not a natural man but a supernatural man that has the Risen Christ as his type, he is essentially a spiritual man. All his being and his life is spiritual, his sustenance is spiritual, his warfare is spiritual, his service is spiritual, his equipment is spiritual, his walk is spiritual; everything of this man is spiritual because he is a spiritual being.

You say - "that does not describe us!" - "That surely must describe some future state." But it does describe us if we are in Christ Jesus. That is our description but we have to be able to clearly make that discrimination between the outer man and the inner man and to recognise that this man is not the outer man with which we are so familiar, but it is the inner man to whom we, the outer man, are such strangers. We are learning to know him and to know ourselves by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

One feels a desire to indicate afresh by familiar words how we are learning to know this new man as ourselves, to recognise him and to see who he is and what he is, what he is made of, what he can do and what are his qualifications.

We see him mostly in his enduements and service as portrayed partly and very clearly in that 12th chapter of the first Corinthian letter. We shall see here just again as has been said already that this new man is as distinct from our old, outer, natural man as any two entities can possibly be distinct from one another. These two entities are utterly distinct from one another. They are poles asunder and all their make-up is clearly divided and between the two stands the Cross which writes death on the one side and life on the other.

If this new man is a spirit-man, is born from above, born of the Holy Spirit for that which is born of the Spirit is spirit and if we are born of the Spirit therefore we are spirit in our new life, new nature, and new being; if this man is such then his whole outfit must be spiritual.

This is not something up to which you have to climb, it is interwoven with your new life and is the expression of it, but you are called upon to recognise three definite lines of separation, to acknowledge them and assent to them and to allow the Holy Spirit to make them very clear and practical in your experience; that is our spiritual education.

The clear line of distinction and discrimination in the matter of use and service and work is simply this: that the abilities and enduements and qualifications and gifts of the natural life are not the primary ground of our activity and service in the spiritual life; that our activity and service as a new

man is upon the ground of an entirely spiritual equipment and that is not natural but supernatural. And that if this new man is a supernatural man, something which cannot be produced by any of the resources of natural life, he requires the transcendent act of God in that power which itself transcends all the ordinary operations of the natural and which relates to all his activities and works and these are the product of special, definite, spiritual impactions and gifts.

Those who have no gifts naturally can have them spiritually, whilst those who have plenty of them naturally have nothing to boast of.

The very birth is not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man.

What does 1 Corinthians 12 really represent? We have thought of it and in thinking have got into an awful lot of confusion and made room for many preponderances. We have recognised the true nature of this, that it is indispensably necessary that this new man by the Holy Ghost should have special spiritual qualifications to do the work for which the Holy Ghost - in the knowledge of God's purpose concerning each one - has equipped and called him. God knows what we are called to in the Body of Christ and He has made provision for our equipment to do that thing. This chapter presents to us many of those things by which the new man fulfils his new vocation according to the Will of God. Dispensations and dispositions were said to be *as He willed*. One does not regard these things as extraordinary demonstrations, but as the normal and natural expression of a spiritual life that the Lord shall give equipment for special service.

Now beloved, it should never be right for you to say "I am not fit for that, I am not qualified for that; I have no abilities of any kind or gifts or qualifications for the Lord's work." If you are really born again of the Holy Spirit and you are this new creation, what has happened is that being in the world you can do nothing. You can neither talk nor use your hand nor feet nor your eyes, that you are simply useless in the new creation. I am of the persuasion that there are no useless things in the new creation. The Holy Spirit wraps up with the new creation those things which are going to make it capable of realising its end and effecting its purpose.

Having made the provision, we have as our birthright, our inheritance in the new creation, the right of equipment of a supernatural character unto the work of God and have it as something which is natural to us in the spiritual realm.

Two things must be said here. The whole of our trouble is to recognise this, that our uselessness or our usefulness in our natural life is no criterion whatever, and that is where the Cross comes in. It comes on the positive side for the very clever people, to smite them right out of the realm of real spiritual effectiveness, to smite them as clever people, as natural, in their equipment and endowment; that is a fact, however, you may wriggle and argue. The course of spiritual experience is to make them realise how utterly useless they are in spiritual service, they don't count! Their works are at an end, their abilities are at an end, their reputation is at an end, no longer can they hold their heads up before men and claim to be something in religious work. We cannot do the things that we once could do even in the Name of the Lord.

But then in the recognition of that fact, the meaning of the Cross, they come not to the end but the beginning. Behold I make all things new and all things are now out from God, whereas before they were out from somewhere else.

The new door with a new equipment. How different! And only those who have gone some way through that new door know how different. Your wisdom here is absolutely confounded, your natural genius for getting things done is absolutely brought to confusion; you are made a fool of if you dare to move in that realm again, and God sees that you don't succeed in that way.

But now it is a new kind of thing - the Wisdom of God set over against the wisdom of this world. This wisdom of this world is sensual, psychical, is devilish. (James 2:15.) A different kind of wisdom, "By the same Spirit the word of wisdom; to another - knowledge," this is as far removed from natural knowledge as heaven is from the earth. By it the things which are of God are accomplished, are done, and that which is of God far outstrips anything we can do.

We have got to face the fact that the Cross means on the one side to bring us where we cry, though we have been the most able and successful, "I cannot!" "I cannot!" - that is the end. You have got to accept that fact, the sooner, the better, before we shall come into that new creation, "I can, in Christ, all things."

We have to recognise this that these equipments and enduements are racial and as such they are corporate. The Church is also called a "nation," "an elect nation." The metaphors are all brought together - "an elect nation, a royal priesthood, a spiritual house."

Nation - the root is a birth, it relates to a birth; it is racial, it is on the ground of sharing one life. If this is true and the Holy Spirit is "The Spirit of Life" *that* life, He is also the Spirit of service, and therefore of equipment, by whom and through whom the gifts are given - "distributed" - to those who share the common life of the Body. These gifts are corporate gifts and related, and they are not for independent service or action, but all meant to contribute to one object and purpose, and they are inseparable.

If this is true and the gifts, the qualifications, are the natural right of birth on the basis of a common life for a common end in a corporate Body, they will only be manifest and effective in their own place and relationship. That is that the member has to be properly related and put into position, and function within the definite and clearly defined limits of their divine appointment. *To get outside your appointment in the Body of Christ is at once to arrest the functioning of the Holy Spirit through that divine importation.* "Stir up the gift" - to keep it in the ascendancy because it may be lost in its power - stir it up.

If all this is true the Holy Spirit requires for the expression and manifestation of the gifts a discerning of the Body, a recognition of the fact of the Body. For spiritual equipment is dependent upon relationship, ministry in and to the Body of Christ. If it requires the Body for this then the Holy Spirit will require a discerning of the Body if there is to be a manifestation of enduement for body service.

That brings us to that much misunderstood testimony to the Body which was discerned undoubtedly by the Church in its first clear days when those who were representative members in the Body brought each new convert, each new elect member, who had confessed and declared their union with the Body of Christ, and in a definite act by putting their hands upon them and held a testimony to the Body, and the Holy Spirit recognised their testimony and gave His own attestation to it, and by such means and at such times equipped that member for the work - it was "the work whereunto I have chosen them." Timothy, "Stir up the gift which is in thee in the laying-on of hands." What was that? It was there by prophecy. Do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy

ministry. When the Holy Spirit prayed through such as prayed over Timothy, evidently He prayed prophetically as to Timothy's work as an evangelist. "By prophecy," says Paul (1 Timothy 4:14,2,6,4,5).

Beloved, is this quite clear that this new man is a corporate new man, his equipment is a corporate equipment, his enduements are for the whole work of the Body. The recognition and discernment of that fact is required by the Lord in a definite testimony, and then not necessarily by any demonstration at the time. There is a quiet, a silent moving out into ministries which take their own course and find a special emphasis in the Body of Christ, and while we keep within the realm of that ministry, it grows and so it becomes the natural expression of our life in the Body of Christ.

One does feel that it is necessary to add as a note the emphatic pronouncement that while fulfilling the Divine mind and will as representative and "First-begotten" - the federal head of a new race - Christ was infinitely more than that. He is very God of very God. Deity will never be the *essence* of the new creation man. His will be Divine nature by *derivation*, not original being. We must always recognise the two sides to Christ's being and work.