



# The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

---

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net  
Email: info@austin-sparks.net

*In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any changes, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.*

---

## The Cross and the Overcoming Life

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Oct 1927, Vol. 5-10.*

**(Notes of an address given at the September Conference 1927.)**

Now, beloved, as you are aware, we are being led these days to consider —

### THE CROSS AND THE OVERCOMING LIFE

and one wants right at the very beginning to tell you something in order to settle you, and this is — not any one of you will ever be an overcomer. You may take that as the key to the Conference, in the sense in which for many years many of us have thought of being overcomers. Of course I know that wants a lot of explaining, but I simply say that because it is necessary to settle it once and for all that we, in ourselves, will never be overcomers, and that opens the way for the whole of this theme and its reality of meaning to come from the Lord to us. There is only one Overcomer in the universe, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and if there are ever any other overcomers, they will not be others at all, they will simply be the extension of His overcoming — the expansion of His victory. It will be by reason of that vital corporate oneness with Him which is not two lives, two distinct experiences, but which is one and the same experience shared. That is the nature of overcoming. It will simply be the impartation on His part of His own triumph, the sharing of His own victory, so that it does not become several victories, or a thousand victories, but it becomes one victory in One Body, not in a host of bodies; and in order to apprehend that truth, and the meaning and nature of that, you have to go a long way back. Not to Calvary, but much, much farther back than Calvary; you have to get right back before the world was, and there discover the secret of God's heart. The thing which was wrapped up in His own mind as His secret purpose toward which He would work through the ages, and in the fullness of times disclose, so that it no longer would be a hidden mystery, but still a mystery, though a disclosed mystery.

Now that may sound complicated for you. Can a thing still be a mystery when it has been revealed in the sense in which we have spoken of the mystery of Christ of late? That no one whose spirit has not been illumined by the Spirit can ever understand or apprehend; that the believer and the company of believers known as the Body of Christ still do remain an enigma and a mystery in the realm of the flesh, and even in the realm of their own flesh, not only in the world; that we are a puzzle to ourselves and our deepest experience in relation to the Lord is a thing that we can never understand with our own minds, a thing which utterly defeats and defies all our own efforts to analyse and understand. The thing that is going on in the centre of our being by the operation of the Holy Spirit is beyond us all the time, and all that we know is that we have got to follow something that is going on, this something that is being revealed not to our outer understanding, but to our inner conviction, and we have to go on by faith; and only as we go on by faith do we get any revelation as to the nature of what is happening, it becomes clear sometimes; and it does require a good deal of persistence and continuance and endurance in this mysterious process of the divine operations in our life before we have understood just a little of what the Lord is doing with us, and what the Lord is after. It comes out one day, and we apprehend it clearly; but there it is, a mystery all the time; and although to our spirit it is an unveiled mystery, a disclosed mystery; to our flesh and to the world, and to all flesh around us it is still a thing too deep for natural apprehension, or human understanding, or the manipulation and analysis of our own thinking. We cannot unravel this thing.

Now that thing was in the heart of God before times eternal, disclosed in Christ, only in Christ, in the fullness of times. An eternal truth, not a thing which just comes out and is mentioned for the first time at some period in history, but a thing which has been mentioned all along, all through the ages, but it has its interpretation given in the fullness of times. There is a great deal of difference between the shaking on the part of God continuously of a thing, and the spiritual apprehension of the meaning of that thing. You notice how frequently that was so even in the case of the Lord's disciples. The Master was saying things to them all the time, but He had to cover His utterances and His activities by saying — "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know afterward, and the things that I am saying you do not understand now, but you will understand them later." And you find that afterward, in that near afterward when the Holy Spirit, the Interpreter came, then they remembered His words. Then they remembered that it was spoken; then they remembered that He had said these things, and they had come to pass. He knows; it had been settled all the time, and God is saying His eternal things right down through the ages, but not until the times of God arrive is the interpretation given. That is why I most strongly stand that the truth of the Body of Christ was not mentioned for the first time through the Apostle Paul. It was not a thing that came out in mention and reference at some New Testament time; it is a thing that is all the way through the scriptures from beginning to end; just as the Cross is, and others of those great revelations. They are there all the way through, but it is not until a certain time, and a certain condition is realised that the interpretation is given.

Now we shall see this in this very subject, so we get back to the times eternal that were in the heart and mind of God, and find that a two-fold election is made on His part for the realisation of His purpose. The election of a Head and the election of a Body, the two, of course comprising one entity. The election of the Head and of many members to comprise with the Head one Body — a two-fold election made by God. We are back there before there was any fall — "In the foreknowledge of God we were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world," and that elect Body was there and then placed beyond the reach of any destructive power, or of any possibility of failure. Oh, you get hold of that. That the elect Body of Christ was before times eternal placed in the same position as the Head, beyond the possibility of failure, so that although the strong delusions of the last days may lead multitudes away, and deceptions will be of such a nature as to be almost impossible of discerning and avoiding, it will come to this point that the very elect would be deceived, *if it were possible*. But it

is not possible! God has secured that beyond the possibility of defeat, or failure, or a deception which would wreck it as God's eternally chosen and elect instrument for Christ. Now just get that as basic truth, and you may take up your Word, and find that there it is. It is there all the way through, and it is a very blessed thing to remember.

Of course it does, I know, make possible to our finite understanding many problems, but these things are not revealed in all their meaning in the Word of God, and we are, I take it, not supposed to understand yet. There are those historic, or theological problems which we have not yet been able to fully explain. For instance, the election according to the foreknowledge of God over and against the absolute free will of man. How do you reconcile the two. But there they are, and the working out of the election is on the ground of faith on the part of the elect. Now how do you put these things together? There are many others; but we are not staying with that. The basic fact is this. That God has, before times eternal, chosen a Body in Christ with the same kind of choice as He did choose Christ as the Head of the Body; and this Body being one, many members holding the Head, it is one in its ultimate inevitable triumph which cannot be destroyed. Now how is that going to be brought about? Well, the method of God is next revealed, and that is by incarnation. We are familiar with certain passages. You might remember such a passage, for instance, as this — Colossians 1:27, "The mystery which hath been hid from all ages and generations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Ephesians 5:30, "We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones... This mystery is great." Now passages like that, which are eternal in their sweep, take you right back, and right on. We shall add others to them as we go along, but the method of God is by incarnation. Christ as God incarnate. "Whereas the children are partakers of flesh and blood, so He also partook of the same."

The whole theme of the incarnation of Christ is so frequently dealt with here that I think I need not stay with it. We accept it, but we must recognise this, that the ultimate purpose of God is not incarnation merely in an individual entity known as Jesus of Nazareth. The ultimate and full intention of God with regard to the incarnation is that He should incarnate Himself in that Body, that elect Body, so that it becomes the shrine of God in which He dwells — the temple of God in which He dwells, and all what was true in type of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple, and infinitely more, is true of the House of God, the Body of Christ, the sphere, centre and vehicle of His self-manifestation and of His glory.

There God is, as God said — "I will dwell in them and walk in them." Now when you recognise and realise that it is *God* who has come out of eternity, first incarnating Himself in a separate individual historic body, and accomplishing that immense work of the Cross, who has changed the form of His incarnation after that accomplishment and become, as the factor in Calvary, incarnate in the Body and in all its members. There you have the eternal secret of God's victory, which is Christ's victorious resident by the Holy Spirit within the believer — within the House of God. The great difference between the two dispensations of the Bible — the Old and the New — is that the one is always objective, and the other is subjective. The Old, up to Calvary, including the experience, was objective. Everything was objective. You get back in the wilderness, the Cross in the figure of the serpent lifted up — it is objective, and he that looked, lived. When we sing these hymns about "Look and live!" we must not get an objective materialistic mentality and have this conception of looking at something — looking out to something — we have got to look for that spiritual reality to be made real and experimental within our own spirit. The great difference is between the objective in the old dispensation, and all becoming subjective in the New. Calvary is not objective now; Calvary is subjective. God as in the blood is not objective, but subjective. Everything is subjective. It is within, because He is within the centre of all things; and He is the sum total of all things.

Now, beloved, do you get that far? Have you really had a spiritual quickening to that basic fact. It would make the biggest difference possible in your experience. One spoke of how the Master was always referring to this very thing. You remember how frequently He was speaking of it. Take His parable of the vine and the branches. I think Hudson Taylor's discovery of the reality of corporate life with Christ through that parable is one of the most beautiful expositions of the truth that we could have. I would like just to give it to you: "As I thought of the vine and the branches, of the Lord, the blessed Spirit poured direct into me, how great seemed my mistake in having wished to get the sap, the fullness out of Him. I saw not only that Jesus would never leave me, but that I was a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. The vine now I see is not the root merely, but all — root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit — and Jesus is not only that, He is soil, and sunshine and showers and ten thousand times more than we have ever dreamed, wished, or needed."

Oh, the joy of seeing that truth, the oneness, that the one Life is in all, in every part to the uttermost leaf or twig or bit! And that Life, beloved, is the Life whereby Jesus conquered death! That is the Life of His resurrection.

Now our mistake has just been to try and achieve victory on the outside, to fight, to struggle, to be overcomers and to wage a terrific warfare, without recognising that the only triumph and the only warfare is that which Christ, Himself, wages and achieves. One has found such tremendous help in the recognition of this wonderful reality, and since one has come to appeal to the Lord as within, this is to meet the situation! Oh, the difference from appealing to Him as somewhere objectively, outside, to come in and deal with the situation! Nothing ever happens along that line, but to recognise that He dwells within — the realisation and fulfilment of that eternal intention in the mystery of God "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith". What do you mean by that last clause "by faith"? Do you mean to say that He dwells by faith? No, that would be as good as saying that faith makes out to be what it is not. "This is the victory that overcometh, even our faith." But what is the direction, or the nature of that faith that overcometh? The faith that believes, and believing counts upon, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." You see this is the victory that overcometh the world. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." Now put that fact in that "Christ may dwell in your heart by faith." That is, faith reckons upon the fact that if you have received the Holy Spirit into your spirit, you have received God into your spirit. You have received the triumphant Christ right into the centre of your being, and in faith, appealing to that, He manifests Himself, and you discover that this is the secret of overcoming.

This is the victory that overcometh, the faith which turns to the Lord not as objectively, but as within and says — "Now, Lord, as within me, I appeal to You to rise up and meet this situation." There is a vast deal of difference between that, and our calling upon the Lord and going out ourselves to meet the situation. That is Old Testament, that is not New Testament. The New Testament is the Lord rising up within our spirit to meet the situation, He who already has the victory, who possesses it, and dwells within us; and that is why one said at the beginning we shall never be overcomers in that detached, or separate sense. He is the only Overcomer, and He will have to do all the overcoming in us, and for us. He will have to work out His overcoming, work out His victory, simply sharing with us that which He has within, and this is how "He prepares a table in the presence of our enemies." He shares with us the fruit of His victory right in the middle, and what is more central to the situation than your own spirit. Your spirit, beloved, and my spirit, they are the very centre of the conflict. This conflict only arises because Christ is in the spirit, because He is there. This kind of warfare, this conflict is the challenge of the enemy, not to us as such, he may well snap his fingers at us! Let us never think that we can meet him. The Lord deliver from any vain confidence of being able to meet the enemy, he would snuff us out very quickly, but it is because the Lord is there, and he is the

sworn enemy of Christ and he wants to destroy the manifestation of Christ in us; and so it is in the nature of a battle that cannot be helped. You have seen some people who can never cross each other's path but what they fight, and like some animals in the streets, they are sworn enemies, they can never see each other without getting their backs up and showing their teeth. Forgive the very low level of the illustration, but it is like that, the enemy cannot come anywhere within the range of the Lord Jesus Christ, but what he shows his teeth, he snarls, and it is because Christ is in you that the battle rages.

Now the Lord has got to meet the enemy, has got to share right in the presence of the enemy the fruits of His victory. But, of course, we are not going to lie down and say — Now, Lord, I simply sit down and You meet the enemy. That is not it. He is in our spirit, and He has given us in the first place, a spirit and made us distinct from all other results of His creative activity by giving us a spirit, because He is a Spirit, and only spirit can have fellowship with spirit, or understand spirit, or know spirit. He has given us a spirit in the first place in order that there might be on the level of His own nature and likeness co-operation as well as communion, and by His resurrection, and our apprehension in faith of the meaning of His resurrection for us through Calvary, He has quickened and raised from the dead our spirit which was slain in the fall, and brought it up out of its sepulchre, out of its place of death, quickening it with His own Life by His own Spirit and entering into our spirit in order that our spirit, being energised by Him might co-operate with Him intelligently in that. And this is a very vital thing to remember, that the Lord is victorious, and the Lord is in you.

Don't conflict this, because one finds that there are so many of the Lord's people who are simply submerged and defeated and broken, and there is so much that is a contradiction of the fact that Christ is in them for the simple reason that their spirit has not stood up in the Name of the Lord and claimed His energising. Oh, how wonderful are the results of a divinely energised spirit. That is the secret and the key to everything. This is very familiar ground to most of you, but perhaps for the sake of some it is necessary for the Lord to take us back to the beginnings, and in all matters, even in the physical realm where there is no resource, where there is infirmity and weakness, and the very sentence of death — the secret of accomplishing the Word of God is not in having our bodies reinvigorated and made whole and robust, it is in having our spirit energised by the Life of God, so that our spirit can lift up our body in the hour of God's will, and carry it to do the Lord's will. That is the 'marvel' and the perpetual miracle of Christ dwelling within — the hope of glory. You take some of the Lord's poor cripples, there is no hope of glory in them physically, or mentally, or in any other way; but they do become a praise and a glory to God, and the glory of God is seen in them. Why? By reason of the expression of this basic and central truth. "Christ in you, the hope of glory," and they are counting upon Him in a positive way to manifest the fact that He is within. Surely that was the secret of the life of the Apostle Paul in all his infirmity, in all his affliction, in all his weakness, in all that came upon him and arose up within his own natural life, which might well have curtailed, to say the least of it, or swamped him and put him finally out of action. "Nevertheless in labours more abundant I labour, more than all." The marvel of it was this continuous energizing of his spirit, and his spirit co-operating with God in rising up and claiming the energising; and so he did what was physically impossible to him otherwise.

Beloved, not only in the physical realm, but in every other way, the need of the Lord's people is to recognise that if they are the Lord's children they have been born again, and if they have received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit — Oh, may I pause there! That is the point.

The whole point of the emphasis, of the interrogation upon that question "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" Did ye? If not, the eternal intention of God that you should be an incarnation of God in that sense has been thwarted. This far-reaching question in a moment takes

you right back to what God intended before the world was, that you should be indwelt by Him, the shrine of God therefore. (And the need of many of the Lord's people again is to recognise the relative element in truth. They are all the time making it personal, incidental, fragmentary, a thing which is a bit of truth, an isolated spiritual reality, something for personal experience, instead of seeing that every fragment of this thing is related to the vast intentions and purpose of God. If only you get a revelation of the vastness, of the infinite range of every fragment of Divine truth, how far it takes you back, and how far it takes you on, and all that is wrapped up with it — the smallest fragment — you would feel the power of it, and realise that there is a dynamic in it; but when you limit it and make it personal and local it loses all its power, and you go on all the days of your life circling around that thing and it never becomes anything experimental to you; and at last you give it up. You need, therefore, to know and to recognise the relative element in truth — how vast it is, and how it is a part of a thing which God pre-determined before the ages and the generations.)

Well, that is all in brackets, but we come back now out of the brackets to this, that what the Lord's children want, above all things, to recognise is that if they are utterly His children, born of, and out from Him, having received the Holy Spirit to dwell within, they must in their renewed spirit co-operate with Him, count upon Him, exercise faith in the inward reality of Christ, and that is the only secret of victory. You will find that the Lord has got to do everything for you, that you will have, in spirit, to count upon Him and exercise your spirit in faith. You will have to say — Lord, now I cannot face this, and He energises. I very often have to do that myself, to let you into a secret — the Lord doing everything, but it is the co-operation of faith. Oh, faith is a tremendously active thing! Faith is not a passive thing; faith is not just flabby, as if to say — I leave it to You, Lord, I believe You are able; and so leave it there. Now that is not the mighty energising faith of God by which He created worlds.