

Christ - All, And In All

by T. Austin-Sparks



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"And He is the Head of the body, the church: Who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18).

"Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11).

There has been a great deal done in recent days to bring the greater magnitudes of the universe within the intelligence of the ordinary man and woman. This means that many people are interested in the explanation of the universe, and, no doubt in particular, of the course of this earth and of the creation and history of man; but we believe that we have the positive and final answer to the inquiry. For us there is but one definite and conclusive explanation of the universe, and that explanation is a Person - the Lord Jesus Christ, with all that is eternally related to Him. However much we read and study we shall never get the explanation of the universe, in whole or in part, until we come to see the place of the Lord Jesus in the eternal appointment of God. The simple but all-embracing words, "Christ is all, and in all," sum up the whole matter from eternity, through all stages of time, unto eternity.

Firstly, then, that "Christ is all, and in all" is

1. The Explanation Of The Creation Itself

This letter to the Colossians makes that very statement in other words. It tells us that *"In Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things*

invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through Him, and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (hold together)" (1:17). That is a comprehensive statement, and it clearly shows that Christ being all, and in all, is the explanation of the whole creation. Why were all things created? Why did God through Him bring the universe into being? Why does this great universal system exist and continue? What is the explanation of the world? The answer is that Christ may be all, and in all.

The intention in the heart of God in bringing this universe into existence was that, ultimately, the whole creation should display the glory and supremacy of His Son, Jesus Christ; and this one little fragment, "and in Him all things hold together", says quite clearly that but for the Lord Jesus Christ the whole universe would disintegrate, fall apart; it would be without its uniting factor; it would cease to have a reason for being maintained as a complete and concrete whole. Its holding together, its failure to disintegrate and break up, is because of this: God has determined that the Lord Jesus shall be the centre, the governing centre, of this whole universe, and He - God's Son - is the explanation of creation. But for Him, there never would have been a creation. Take Him out, and creation loses its purpose and its object, and need not go on any longer. "Christ is all, and in all", was the thought, the ruling thought, in the mind of God in the creation of the universe.

That may leave you cold in some measure and not get you very far, but I venture to think that what I am now going to say will get you a little further and warm your hearts; for the prospect is this, that when God has things as in eternity past He determined to have them - and He is going to have them so - every atom of this whole universe will display the glory of Jesus Christ. You will not be able to look at anything or anyone without seeing Christ glorified. A blessed prospect!

It is a happy thing when, as a company of the Lord's children, we can be together for hours on end or even days on end; when we are occupied with the Lord as our one common interest and are all taken up with Him. When we have a time like that and go back into the world, what a different atmosphere we find! How chilled we feel! It is a fine thing to meet the Lord in His children and to be shut up to Him like that; but even then it is only in part. But the eternal day is coming when there will be no going back into the world on a Monday morning after a day in the courts of the Lord; when we shall be touching nothing else but the Lord Jesus, and the whole universe will be full of Him - "Christ all, and in all"! That is God's end. That is what He has determined; all displaying the Lord Jesus; all for Him.

We see much that is not the Lord Jesus in one another now; the day is coming when you will see nothing but the Lord Jesus in me, and I shall see nothing but the Lord Jesus in you; we shall be "conformed to the image of His Son": His moral glory will shine out and be displayed; Christ will be "all, and in all." God has determined it, and what God has determined, He will have. This, then, is the explanation of the creation, that Christ may be all, and in all, and among all have the pre-eminence.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul has a very remarkable statement in this connection:

"For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him Who subjected it, in hope, that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (8:19-22).

Note what this really says and implies. The creation is possessed by an earnest expectation. This expectation is with groaning as in travail, an expectation of hope - not of the dissolution of the universe, of which certain scientists say so much. Nevertheless the hope

and the groaning "hereunto are deliberately put under a reign of vanity - made to be all in vain - until a fixed time and goal. That climax is in two parts: one, the revealing of the sons of God; the other - linked therewith - the deliverance of the creation from the enslavement to corruption.

All this is taken back to eternity past and linked with the Lord Jesus as the Son: *"For whom He did foreknow, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren"* (Rom. 8:29).

In the former passage there is a definite statement and a clear implication. The statement is that the creation was subjected to vanity, and its state is the bondage of corruption. The implication clearly is that there was a definite time when, because of its corruption, the whole creation was brought into a condition in which it was caused to groan and travail unto an end that could not be reached. It is in that connection that there is given room for the whole range and nature of the Satanic interference with the creation with a view to challenging the ultimate Divine purpose in the creation and to frustrating it by bringing in corruption. So universal was that corruption that a sentence of vanity was pronounced upon "the whole creation". The effect of this was, and is, that the creation can never realize the object of its being, save on the ground of holiness and Divine likeness.

Here there comes in also the whole range of "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"; the universal work which He accomplished by His Cross in the destruction of the work of the Devil, and, potentially, of the Devil himself; with all the sin-destroying and corruption-destroying power of His sinless nature and life, the efficacy of His incorruptible Blood, and the providing of justification and sanctification for all who believe, these by regeneration becoming "a new creation in Christ Jesus" (I Cor. 5:17).

By this means alone can the creation be delivered. When these sons of God are manifested - their number complete - and all who have refused this salvation are dismissed from God's realm, then shall the creation be delivered and its original intention be realized, Christ being all, and in all.

2. The Explanation Of Man

Then, in the next place, as a central part of the creation, we have man. What is the explanation of man? What is the explanation of Adam as the first man? There is one little passage of Scripture which answers that. "Adam... who is a figure of Him that was to come", that is, Christ (Rom. 5: 14). A figure of Him that was to come; that is the explanation of man. God intended that every man entering this world should be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Multitudes will miss it, but there will be multitudes such as no man can number, out of every tribe and kindred and nation and tongue, who will realize it. What a high calling! What a different conception of man that is from that which is popularly held, and what a thing to be missed! And yet there are many who say complainingly that if they had had their way they would never have come into this world. There have been those who, in an hour of eclipse, cursed the day that they saw the light. Ah, but something has gone wrong there; that is not how the Lord meant it to be, and however much we may have blue days, when we wonder whether really it is worthwhile after all, let us come back to God's thought in our very being. It is our tremendous privilege, the highest honour that could ever have been conferred upon us from the Divine standpoint, that we should have been born.

We do not always feel or speak like that, but we are constantly compelled to bring ourselves back to God's point of view about this and to remember that His purpose is to have a universe peopled with such as are conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ, a people

who are a universal manifestation of Christ glorified with the glory of the Father. That is a privilege, an honour, something to be born for! That is the explanation of man.

We can only touch many of these matters lightly, and pass on.

3. The Explanation Of Redemption

Further, this word, "Christ is all, and in all", is the explanation of redemption. Things of course went wrong: God's purpose was interfered with. It could never be finally thwarted, but there was another who did determine that, so far as it was in his power, that universal display of Jesus Christ - that '*all-in-all-ness*' of the Lord Jesus - should never be; one who desired to have that for himself - that he should be universal lord of heaven and earth. That interference for a time has made a great deal of difference. It has interfered with man and made him other than God intended him to be. It has spoiled the image.

But there is redemption through the Cross of the Lord Jesus. What is the explanation of the Cross? What is the explanation, on the one hand, of all that atonement, that redemptive work of the Lord Jesus in dealing with sin, and having universal sin laid upon Him, and being made a curse for us, in our place?

And then, on the other hand, as the complement of that, what is the explanation of that Cross being wrought in the believer so that the believer becomes united with Him in the likeness of His death and burial as a spiritual experience? - all that application of Calvary which is so painful, so terrible to pass through: yes, the disintegrating of the "old man", the cutting off of the "body of the flesh", that inward knowledge of the power of the Cross, so terrible to the flesh. What is the explanation? Beloved, it is that Christ may be all, and in all.

Why are we broken? To make room for the Lord Jesus. Why are we brought down to the dust by the Holy Spirit as He works Calvary's death into us? In order that the Lord Jesus may take the place that we in the flesh have occupied. We get wrong sometimes about this application of the Cross. The enemy is always at our elbow to insinuate and suggest the unkindness of God to smash us, to humiliate us, to bring us to nothing, and to say that there is no end to this thing, seeking thus to get us down.

Beloved, the Cross was intended only to make the Lord Jesus all, and in all, for us; and is it not true that, because of the way that the Lord has dealt with us, the way in which He has applied the Cross, planting us into that death and burial, we know Him in a way in which we never knew Him before? Is it not by that way that He has become what He is to us, ever more and more dear to our hearts? The increase of the Lord Jesus in and to us is by the way of the Cross. We know quite well that our chief enemy is ourselves, our flesh. This flesh gives us no rest, no peace, no satisfaction; we have no joy in it. It obsesses, engrosses, constantly struts across our path to rob us of the very joy of living. What is to be done with it? Well, in and by the Cross we are delivered from ourselves; not only from our sins, but from ourselves; and being delivered from ourselves we are delivered into Christ, and Christ becomes far more than we.

It is a painful process, but it is a blessed issue; and those amongst us who may have had the greatest agony along this line would, I believe, testify that what it has brought to us of the knowledge and riches of the Lord Jesus has made all the suffering worth while. So the work of the Lord for us and the work of the Lord in us, by the Cross, is only intended in the Divine thought to make room for the Lord Jesus.

The brazen altar of the Tabernacle, as that of the Temple, was a very big altar. You could get all the other furniture of the whole Tabernacle inside it. Yes, the altar has to be a big one; there has to be a big place for Christ Crucified. He is to fill all things and He is to be the fulness of all things, and there is going to be no room for us in the end. Does that strike

you with dismay? Surely not. So the Cross, the work of redemption through that Cross, has for its explanation just this, that Christ may be all, and in all; that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.

This, then, is the explanation of our experiences - why the Lord deals with us as He does; why believers go through the experiences that they do go through; why they go through things that no one else seems called upon to go through; why sometimes they almost envy unbelievers the easy time that so many of them have. This explains the Lord's dealings with Israel in the wilderness. Even after their deliverance from Egypt's bondage and tyranny, there was heart-break and agony. Why this chastening? In the wilderness, they still hark back to Egypt. The work the Lord is doing in them is in order that He may be everything in and to them. If He cuts off their natural supplies, it is only to show what their heavenly supplies are. If He cuts off their natural power, it is that they may come to know the power of the heavens. Whatever He may take them out of or lead them into, is with a view to taking them out of themselves and that He Himself may be all, and in all.

This is the explanation of our difficulties. The Lord knows how best to deal with each one of us, and He does not use standardized methods. He deals with you in one way and with me in another. He knows how to lead us into experiences which are most calculated to bring us to where the Lord is all, and in all.

4. The Explanation Of Christian Growth

What is spiritual growth? What is spiritual maturity? What is it to go on in the Lord? I fear we have got mixed ideas about this. Many think that spiritual maturity is a more comprehensive knowledge of Christian doctrine, a larger grasp of scriptural truth, a wider expanse of the knowledge of the things of God; and many such features are recorded as marks of growth, development, spiritual maturity. Beloved, it is nothing of the kind. The hallmark of true spiritual development and maturity is this, that we have grown so much less and the Lord Jesus has grown so much more. The mature soul is one who is small in his or her own eyes, but in whose eyes the Lord Jesus is great. That is growth. We may know a very great deal, have a wonderful grasp of doctrine, of teaching, of truth, even of the Scriptures, and yet be spiritually very small, very immature, very childish. (There is all the difference between being childish and child-like.) Real spiritual growth is just this: I decrease, He increases. It is the Lord Jesus becoming more. You can test spiritual growth by that.

Then again this word is

5. The Explanation Of All Service

What is Christian service according to the mind of God? It is not necessarily our having a very full programme of Christian activities. It is not that we are always busy in what we call 'things of the Lord'. It is not the measure and amount of our activity and business, not the degree of our energy and enthusiasm in the things of the kingdom of God. It is not our schemes, our enterprises for the Lord. Beloved, the test of all service is its *motive*. Is the motive, from start to finish, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence, that Christ may be all, and in all?

You know the temptations and the fascination of Christian service; the fascination of being busy, of being occupied with many things; having your programme, schemes, enterprises; being in it, and always at it. There is a peril there which has caught multitudes of the Lord's servants. The peril is that it brings them into prominence, it makes the work theirs; it is *their* work, *their* interests, and the more they govern the thing and run it the more pleased they are.

No, there is a difference between going the round of the clock in Christian service as the mere enjoyment of activity, with the fascination of it and all the advantages and facilities it provides for ourselves, and its gratification to our flesh - there is a great difference between that and this, "Christ all, and in all". Sometimes this latter is achieved by our being put out of action; and then is the test, as to whether we are, or are not, quite satisfied to be altogether put out of work if only the Lord can be the more glorified thereby. If only He can come into His own, it does not matter a scrap whether we are seen or heard. We are getting somewhere, in the grace of God, when we are quite content to be put up in a corner, unseen and unnoticed, if thereby the Lord Jesus can come into His own more speedily and fully.

Somehow we have got caught up into this thing and think the Lord can only come into His own if we are the instrument. The rivalry on platform and in pulpit; sensitiveness because one is put before another, because the address of one is given more attention than that of another; the favourable remarks all made in one direction, etc! I know all about it. After all, what are we after? Are we seeking to impress our audience by our cleverness or to make known our Lord? A great difference! Sometimes the Lord gets more out of our bad times than we think, and it may be that when we have had good times He has not got the most. Therein is the necessity for our being set aside, kept weak and humble, *that He might have the pre-eminence*.

The challenge of service according to God's thought is just this - What are we doing it for? Do we want to be in the work, because we like to be busy? Or is it utterly and only that, by any means, He may come into His own, that God's end may be realized? If He can be all, and in all, by our death as well as by our life, have we come to the place where we truly desire "that... Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death"? (Phil. 1:20). That is the explanation of service from God's standpoint.

Of course, this is the explanation of many other things. It is

6. The Explanation Of The Whole Of The Old Testament

We will not tarry to examine in detail how this is so, but just indicate and pass on. What is the old Testament? It is all gathered up in great representations of Jesus Christ. Take the two main ones, the Tabernacle and the Temple. These are comprehensive representations of the Lord Jesus both in His person and in His work, and these occupy, as such, the central place in the life of a chosen people, whose life is bound up with them. The two are one, and while that elect people are in right relationship to that central object, the Tabernacle or Temple: while they give it its place of honour and reverence, and maintain it in its place of highest holiness: while they are true to its spirit, and its laws, and its testimony: though they are amongst all the peoples of the earth the least capable, naturally, of looking after their interests, yet they are the supreme people of the earth; there is not a nation or a people in the earth able to stand before them. They have never been trained in the art of war, they have no long history behind them of arms and military strategy, and are in themselves a defenseless people: yet they take the ascendancy not only over individual nations greater and mightier than themselves, but over a combination of nations; and though all unite against them, while true to that central object they are supreme. That central object is a representation of the Lord Jesus in His person and work. The spiritual interpretation of it is that when the Lord Jesus has His place there is supremacy; there is absolute supremacy when He in all things has the pre-eminence in and through and by His people. "Christ is all, and in all." When that is true in His people there are no forces capable of withstanding them. The secret of absolute supremacy and sovereignty is the Lord Jesus having His place in the lives and in the hearts, in all the affairs and relationships, of His own people; and the gates of Hades cannot prevail then.

Further, it is

7. The Explanation Of The New Testament

And the New Testament brings in little companies, small among the peoples of the earth, despised, cast out, hardly allowed to speak without being bitterly molested, and upon whom eventually comes the organized wrath and hatred of the nations of this world until all the resources of a great iron empire are exploited and put into operation to blot out the remembrance of these humble, despised people. The story is just this, that the empires have broken, the world powers have ceased to be. We go round the world now looking at the relics and ruins of those great empires; but where is that people of the Way of the despised Nazarene? A great multitude that no man can number! Heaven is full of them, and here on earth there are tens of thousands who know and love the Lord Jesus, who are of this Way. The explanation is that God determined that His Son should be all, and in all things should have the pre-eminence. Come into living relationship with God's Son, and men and hell may do what they will - God will reach His end and such a people will be triumphant.

One word more. This is

8. The Explanation Of The Church

What is the Church? God's thought is not Christianity; it is not churches as organized centres of Christianity; it is not the propagation of Christian teaching and enterprise. God's thought is to have a people in the earth in whom, and in the midst of whom, Christ is all, and in all. That is the Church. We have got to revise our ideas. In the thought of God the Church begins and ends with this - the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ: and what God is always after is to get together those of His people who will most fully realize that thought of His, and be unto Him the satisfaction of His own eternal desire, the Lord Jesus in all things having the pre-eminence, and being all, and in all. He passes by the great institution, the so-called 'Church' and He is with those who in themselves are of a humble and contrite spirit and who tremble at His word, and with whom the Lord Jesus is the one and only object of worship and adoration. Such satisfy the heart of God. Such, for Him, are the answer to His eternal quest.

You notice the word of God says that. Look at it again in Col.3:11: "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond-man, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all." There they have "put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created Him." Look closely into that and you will find this is the corporate man, the Church, the Body of Christ, "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23), and there, in that corporate man, there cannot be Greek and Jew. Note the words. It does not say, where Greek and Jew come together in blessed fellowship. No, you have not got nationalities in the Church; you have got rid of all nationalities, and you have now one spiritual new man, a new creation, where there cannot be Greek, Jew, bondman, freeman. All earthly distinctions have gone for ever - it is one new man. The right arm is not a Jew and the left arm a Greek!

No, they have gone out. In *that* Church there is one new man - not a combination where Anglicans, Wesleyans, Baptists, Congregationalists and all the rest come together and sink their differences for the time being; that is not the Church. In the Church these differences are not merely covered up for the time being; they do not exist; there is *one* Body, *one* Spirit. The Church is this, "Christ is all, and in all". Get that, and you have the Church. Call anything else the Church and let it be without that, and it is a contradiction. Test it by that.

If it is true that the Christian life according to the thought and mind of God is just this, "Christ all, and in all" are you and I true Christians? For we have seen that by the Cross we went out to make room for the Lord Jesus. Now, if we profess to have come by way of Calvary to the Lord, the implication is that we have gone out by that Cross, that Christ may be all, and in all.

What about this? Do we want a little bit of the world? Do we still voluntarily cling to this thing and that thing outside the Lord, because the Lord Jesus has not wholly satisfied us and we must have a make-weight? A worldly Christian is a contradiction in title. To have a little bit of something outside Christ is to deny Calvary and to stand right in opposition to the eternal intention of God concerning Christ. Will you take that responsibility? God determined this from all eternity concerning His Son; and can we profess to belong to the Lord Jesus and yet at the same time it is not true that He is all, and in all to us? If so, there is something wrong, there is a denial, a contradiction. We are opposed to God's thought and purpose. Is it true that He is all, and in all? He will be that if we will go all the way.

Oh! those subtle suggestions that are ever being whispered in our ears, that if we give up this and that we are going to lose, and life is going to be poorer, and we are going to be narrowed down until we have nothing left. It is a lie! That is the thing that is countering God's great thought for us. God's thought for us is that one, no less than His Son, Jesus Christ, in Whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form, should be our fulness. All the fulness of God in Christ for us! You never attain to that by rejecting Him. Life must be much less than it need be if you are not going all the way with the Lord; and what obtains in the matter of our consecration to the Lord, our entire and complete abandonment to Him in our life and our complete cut with all that is not of the Lord, obtains in the realm of service. This flesh loves to sport itself in Christian work, and tells us that if we are going to be dependent upon the Lord we are going to have an anxious time. But a life of dependence upon God can be a life of continual romance. It is there that we make discoveries which are a constant wonder.

You may be nearly dead one minute and in the next the Lord gives you something to do and you are very much alive, dependent upon Him for every breath you breathe. But thus you come to know the Lord. Then after that experience you are just as helpless and dead again for a while, but you remember that the Lord did something. Then He does it again; and so life becomes a romance; yet no one would ever guess you were depending on the Lord for your very breath. It is a very blessed thing to know the Lord is doing it, when you could not do it at all; it is, humanly, naturally, impossible, but the Lord is doing it!

Follow on, beloved, in the matter of the Church. Apply the test. I am not speaking judgmentally, censoriously, nor do I intend to be discriminating in a wrong sense, but let me be faithful - for us, our fellowship must be where the Lord Jesus is most honoured. Our fellowship must be where God gets His own most fully, where Christ is all, and in all. We must not be tied by traditions, by things which make the claim and take the name. Where the Lord is most honoured, that is where our hearts must be; where everything else is made subservient to this one thing, Jesus Christ all, and in all. That is God's thought of the Church, and that must be the place where for us is the gravitating of our hearts. The place where God is going to register His testimony and bring the impact of that testimony upon others will be found where the Lord Jesus is most honoured; and you may take it that where there are hungry ones you will not be at a loss for an opportunity of ministry if you are fully in accord with God's purpose concerning His Son.

9. Everything Living

Remember that everything in relation to the Christian is experimental. Everything in relation to the Lord Jesus is essentially experimental. It is not only doctrinal. This is not a matter of

creed. It is not that we accept certain statements of doctrine or creed, and by that fact alone are brought into relationship to the Lord Jesus. We are not made Christians by the acceptance of doctrinal statements or orthodox creeds, or things about the Lord Jesus. The Church is not constituted on that ground at all, though the Church stands for certain things. Experience has to be wrought in the life and you have to become a part of it and it has to become a part of you. It is not sufficient to believe that Christ died on the Cross. That has got to come down here into our lives and become an experience, a mighty, operating force and factor in our beings. The Church is not set up on a basis of doctrinal statements. You cannot gather people together and say this is perfectly sound, we will constitute our Church upon this basis. You cannot do it.

The Church is that in which the truth has been wrought, in which it has been made experimental. Creeds cannot hold you together when hell rises to split you. No, the most ultra-fundamental creed has not succeeded in holding people together. The unity of the Spirit is a thing inwrought. Unless that is so there is nothing that can stand against the divisive, schismatic spirits that are abroad. Everything must be experimental, not merely doctrinal, not credal. Now that is where you get to God's reality. It is one thing to sing hymns about Christ being all, and in all, to look at it as an objective thing and agree with it; but it is another thing to be brought experimentally to the place where the truth actually works. There are many who will say today 'yes, that is right, Christ is all, and in all', and tomorrow morning, when you touch them upon some trifling thing where their preferences are involved, you find that Christ is not all, and in all. We have to come to it through experience. *May the Lord give us grace for that.*

The final appeal I make is that we all should seek anew the enthronement of the Lord Jesus as supreme Lord in our hearts, in every part of our life, in all our relationships; that if there is anything we have been holding back, we should let go; if we have had any reserves, we should break now; if we have been less than wholly committed to Him, from now this should be no more, but He should be all, and in all, from this time. That should be our understanding, our undertaking with the Lord. Will you do it? Ask the Lord to break even every tender tie that is in the way of His being all, and in all. Are we prepared for that? *The Lord give us grace.*

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