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## A Positive and Purposeful God

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:1-3).

"I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved to and fro. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful field was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and before his fierce anger. For thus saith the Lord, The whole land shall be a desolation; yet will I not make a full end" (Jeremiah 4:23-27).

*'In the beginning, God...'* And everyone will say, That is right; that is the place that He ought to occupy. And so, with these words, so familiar to us, the whole Bible is introduced. From this keynote, the whole Bible runs, and becomes a harmony - God. Here, God, the subject of the whole Bible, is introduced. *'In the beginning, God...'* And when God is in His place, which is first and primary, there is always a new beginning. This is a point of departure, and a point which marks a new prospect. It is always like that when the Lord has His place.

### **Characteristics of God**

I want to dwell for a few minutes upon the kind of God that is introduced with these words. These early verses of the Bible contain in principle the great truths as to what God is like; the kind of God that He is. We open this Book, and are at once confronted with a state that is wholly negative. Everything about that condition is negative: there was *not* this, and there was *not* that; that is the mark of it. And God, introduced against the background of a negative condition, is immediately shown to be a God who is positive; a God who is not negative, and a God who cannot bear anything that is negative. He is the great 'Yea' God, the Almighty Yes, and whenever God comes to His place, there will be a change from a negative to a positive character, some meaningfulness. With God all that is negative will just begin to go out.

We shall, in fact, find that, whatever His activities may be - and His activities are many indeed, and sometimes they seem to be working in a negative way - the truth is, that, whatever He is doing, He is doing it with a positive object and a positive mind; His end is not going to be negative. "I will not make a full end", we have just read in Jeremiah. However it may appear that things are being brought to an end, He will not make a full end. It is all with a positive purpose in view. The very first thing about this God, who is the subject of this whole mighty Book, is that He is a positive God, who is set against any negative condition. Take that as a great truth in your relationship with the Lord, in your apprehension of the Lord. These are the foundations of everything.

### **Purpose**

The next thing is: "*And God created...*" Put that in another way: 'God got to work'. God is a God of purpose, and not passive, inactive. He is a God actuated by positive purpose. We know from the rest of the story how true that is. How much there is in the Bible that just comes back to this truth. God is not an inactive God, a stand-off God, just a spectator, somewhere amidst the shadows. He is right on the scene; He is right in things. As Paul says, He is '*working* in all things' (1 Cor. 12:6). He is not a purposeless God, and He cannot endure a state of things that has no purpose. He cannot look upon this 'without form, and empty'. God is not going to tolerate that; He is introduced to us as One who will not bear any kind of purposeless state, and who will do all in His power to turn things to positive purpose. He is the God of purpose; He is not a passive God.

### **Order**

"*Without form*". He comes in as set against anything that is formless, or without order. He is a God of order. It is a beautiful story of an order being introduced, evolved, where there was no order. Disorder is always weakness, disorder is always loss. A disorderly person wastes much time and energy, and throws away a great deal of vital value. Disorderliness in our person; disorderliness in our home, or in any sphere; disorderliness in the Church - it all means weakness and loss. God is a God of order. So, when the Scripture says that the earth was "without form", God is introduced as One who is not going to allow that to continue. His activity is to bring about an order - not merely for its own sake, not because He is fastidious or picky, but because, as we all know, economy is always bound up with being orderly, being systematic. And that is the kind of God He is, who does not want to see all the loss that is associated with a lack of heavenly order.

### **Fulness**

"Without form, *and void*". The Hebrew word would be better translated by the English word 'empty' - 'without form and empty' or 'desolate', 'barren'. God is not a God like that. If there is one thing that

the Bible says about the Lord, all the way through, it is that He is a God who believes in fulness; His thoughts are full thoughts; His ends are full ends. The great end that He has in view is when "the earth shall be *filled* with" - shall be full of - "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" (Hab. 2:14). He is working toward that. He cannot bear to have a condition that is not full; He just cannot. He does not like people to be empty; He does not even like us to be partially full: He wants us to know His fulness - to 'receive of His fulness, grace upon grace' (John 1:16). God cannot bear vacuums, for a vacuum is always a dangerous thing. He acts against that.

### **Light**

*"And God said, Let there be light"*. God cannot bear a state of darkness. He is the God of light, the God of illumination; and His desire is that there shall be light everywhere, fulness of light. That is the kind of God that is introduced with this word, "In the beginning God..."

### **God's Second Movements: 'I Will Plant Again'**

There are those that believe that the state here described was the result of judgment upon a former creation. Whether that is so or not, the rest of the Bible does show, again and again, that God had to act in relation to a state of things that had missed the purpose of its existence, to break it down, destroy it, throw it into disruption and desolation. When a thing which He raised up for a purpose, had lost that purpose, He did that again and again. But whenever He did it, He moved again. The Bible is just full of the second movements of God, in lives, in a people, in places. Think of some of the double movements of God that the Bible contains. How thankful Jonah was that the Lord did not leave him in the depths of the sea in his misery! The word is: "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time..." Thank God for that second time! How glad Peter would be that the Lord came a second time into his life, after the chaos, after the blinding darkness of his failure. The Lord came again to Peter. The Bible is full of such examples. "I will not make a full end". In other words, 'I will come back again, whatever I have to do.'

Sometimes the Lord does seem to be on that line of pulling down. I read recently in that shortest chapter in Jeremiah, chapter 45, the tremendous statement of the Lord through Jeremiah to Baruch. He says: "That which I have planted I will pluck up... Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not" (Jer. 45:4,5). But we know that, while the Lord pulled up, rooted up that people from the land because they failed to fulfil their Divine purpose, He planted them again. Through the prophet, He says: 'I will plant again; I will plant again' (cf. Jer. 32:41, etc.). And He did. Sometimes there does seem to be the pulling up or pulling down business going on; the destroying, the bringing about of a state of chaos and desolation. If it seems like that, may it not be only another aspect of the Lord's positive line of action? If the Bible says anything at all, it says that even His judgments, in time, are intended to be to His glory, and not to final desolation.

We could take many illustrations or instances in the Bible of the working of this principle, as showing what kind of God He is. There was the chaos and desolation, the barrenness and unfruitfulness and darkness of Israel in Egypt; a condition in the nation, in the people, very similar to what we have here at the beginning of Genesis. It might well be said of Israel in Egypt during those four hundred years: 'Without form and void... and darkness'. The Lord moved into that formlessness, emptiness, purposelessness; and in the wilderness, what a beautiful order He established. From a rabble He created a nation; from a purposeless people, He brought out a people with a wonderful prospect, from the chaos in which they were living, He produced that marvellous system of worship in the

Tabernacle. How ordered it all is, to the last detail! He is the God of order. Israel in Babylon was in a similar condition - "without form and void... and darkness". The Lord moves against that. What about the disciples after the Cross? We could say: "without form and void... and darkness over the face of the deep" - awful chaos and desolation. But see the Creator at work after His resurrection, recovering! We know the end of that story.

### **The Spiritual Counterpart in the New Creation**

What I want to say alongside of this is the great thing, of course. All this is true as to what kind of God this is that is introduced with the Bible. The great thing is what Paul says about it, that 'all things were created for... unto... and by Jesus Christ.' What does that mean? It means that all this, of which we have spoken so imperfectly, becomes spiritually true in the Lord Jesus. As it is true in creation, in nature, at the beginning, in the new creation in Christ Jesus it becomes spiritually true for every member of that new creation, every one truly born anew.

#### **Purpose**

We know how every true child of God, who comes into this relationship with the Lord Jesus, immediately assumes a new sense of positiveness in life. Before that, it is all so negative, is it not? Even the positives of this world - things in which the world glories or finds its pleasure - are all negative, and everybody knows they are. They must have, and have, and have, in order to try to overcome this negative element that is in everything. In Christ that negative gives way to a positive. Most of us can testify that union with the Lord Jesus has given to life a positiveness and a purposefulness. That comes in at once. When anyone is saved, born again, you see them assuming a sense of purpose in life; a new meaning to things has been introduced. "Called according to His purpose" - a sense of mighty Divine purpose comes in with Christ, it is found in Him.

#### **Order**

Then the life begins to take on a new order. All that uncoordinated state, where everything was as it were disintegrated and unrelated, begins to give place to a co-ordinating purpose; the life becomes united, and united by something quite positive. It is a new order that is brought into life in Christ, a heavenly order, a Divine order.

#### **Fulness**

The same is true of this matter of fulness: how empty after all life is until we find the Lord Jesus! I can never understand really the phrase: 'an aching void'! What is an aching void? A void is a void, and it is void of even an ache! But it is an expression; we know what it means - an emptiness, an ache for something to fill life. That is answered, is it not, in the Lord Jesus. We begin to know something of that when we begin the true Christian life; we know we are on the way to something rich and full. And it goes on and on; there is no end to this fulness. John said: 'Of His fulness have we all received' - *of* it! not *'it'*; we have not received His entire fulness; but *of* His fulness have all we received. And the end is 'unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13) - 'the fulness of Him that filleth all in all' (Eph. 1:23) - the fulness of God. That is what we are introduced into. God is that kind of God, but He is now made all that to us in Christ. There should be no vacuum in the Christian life, no emptiness.

## Light

And again, is it not true that in Christ there is the true illumination, the true light? He is the light. Paul, as we know well, linked this first chapter of Genesis, these very first phrases, with his own spiritual experience, and said: "It is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The new creation is a new illumination; the light begins to shine.

Now that we have it - imperfectly, it is true; a little, and more, and more - the measure of light, the measure of understanding of Divine things, will entirely depend upon two considerations.

On the one side, it will depend on how prepared we are to subject *our* wisdom to the wisdom of God. You know, our heads are usually the hindrance to spiritual illumination. We are wanting to get it all through our heads, through our reason to understand with our natural minds; we are struggling and struggling, and we don't get very far; and we have to say: I can't understand! Well, we never shall that way. Just as the will has to be subjected to the will of God, so the mind has to be subjected to the mind of God. We come up against something that is God's revealed mind, and it does not accord with our minds, and our minds do not accord with it; we therefore put our minds in the way, and say: But... but... but... There light is arrested; there understanding is arrested. 'Your thoughts are not My thoughts', saith the Lord. 'As high as the heaven is above the earth, so are My thoughts above your thoughts' (Is. 55:8,9). So you have got to surrender your own mental activities to the Lord, and perhaps be crucified in that tremendous reasoning faculty that you have, in humble acceptance of what God says. The light will break then.

That is one side. The other side is this. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of illumination, of revelation, and we must have the Spirit for spiritual understanding. 'The Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters'. He it was who was the agent in transforming this scene, and bringing in this light, which made all the difference. The Spirit of God does this. It is a simple word perhaps for beginners in the Christian life. It is a wonderful thing how, if we surrender, on the one side, mind, as well as heart and will, to the Lord, the Lord can get on with His new creation so much more quickly than if we are all the time arguing, or reserving, or holding back, or contradicting. When the Holy Spirit really gets His place in us, how quick the change is; how wonderful the transformation.

But my point is this. All this that comes in by way of illustration (I am not saying it is only illustration and parable, history or not history - that does not really matter for the moment) - all this is God's way of leading us on to His Son. He is saying: What is true in the natural order of creation, under the hand of God, has its superior counterpart in the spiritual, heavenly, new creation in Christ. And this is what we find, or should find, in Christ. This kind of thing: God working against what is negative, to bring about the positive; against what is empty, to bring about the full; against what is disorderly, to bring in the order; against what is dark, to bring in the light. That is the nature of the Christian life; that is what is made true in Christ, in the new creation.