



# 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.*

---

## Man's Alternative to God's Best

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Transcribed from a message given by T. Austin-Sparks in Los Angeles, March 1962.*

*The spoken form has been retained verbatim.*

When I left New York to come here, I had a very strong sense that sometime while I was here, the Lord would have me speak on a certain matter. So far, and up till now, He has not underlined that, but in waiting upon Him it seems that He has brought it up again. And so, I just commit myself to Him for what it is that He wants us to understand at this time. May we have just a word of prayer.

Lord, Thou art the Master, we are the servants and it is for us to receive our orders from Thee and to obey them and not to do our own will or speak our own words. And so we would have it now, that we may only give at this time what Thou dost give to us, so that it may be receiving from the Lord and not from man. By the Holy Spirit make it like that we pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus, amen.

In the first book of Samuel, chapter eight, at verse four: "Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together and came to Samuel unto Ramah and they said unto him, Behold, thou art old and thy sons walk not in thy ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said give us a king to judge us. Samuel prayed unto the Lord and the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee, for they have not rejected thee but they have rejected Me that I should not be king over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them out of Egypt even unto this day, in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods and so do they also unto thee. Now

therefore, hearken unto their voice howbeit thou shalt protest solemnly unto them and shalt show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them."

Verse 19: "But the people refused to hearken unto the voice of Samuel and they said, Nay, but we will have a king over us that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles. Samuel heard all the words of the people and he rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord and the Lord said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice and make them a king. Samuel said unto all the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city."

In the prophecies of Hosea, chapter thirteen, verse ten: "Where now is thy king that he may save thee in all thy cities and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I have given thee a king in Mine anger and have taken him away in My wrath."

In the book of the Acts chapter thirteen, at verse twenty one: "Afterward they asked for a king and God gave unto them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin for the space of forty years and when He had removed him, He raised up David..."

This episode in the history of Israel, the episode of Saul the king, while it has some elements which may perplex and be difficult to understand, contains some very instructive things for the people of God at all times, for it is not just a bit of Old Testament history. What is here in principle has arisen again and again in the history of the people of God and become, as in this case, *the* point upon which there is a return, very often to tragedy.

What lies here at the heart of this incident or episode, is man's alternative to God's best. And in stating that you will immediately recognise that that is an issue which is constantly arising. It arises in our lives, as it has arisen in the history of the church all through these centuries: the issue of man's alternative to God's best.

The thing which is all-governing in this matter is that of the continued presence of the Lord in life and power right on to the end. You notice that that is the matter which Hosea brings out so forcefully: "You asked for a king and you got what you insisted upon having; where is he today? What's the good of him today? In so insisting, you lost the Lord! You chose an alternative to the immediate presence and government of the Lord and your alternative has let you down. Where are you today? Without both your alternative *and* the Lord."

So we repeat: the all-governing question is that of the continued presence of the Lord in power with His people, not for a time, but right on to the end. The Lord has been able to abide, to remain, to stay and go right on to the end; there has not come a time in which it could be said the Lord is no longer amongst us. That is a big issue isn't it? A very big one indeed. And I have said that this episode is not just a bit of Old Testament history, it is set in a very large context in Christian history and it must be therefore carefully examined and analyzed to discover the causes on the one side of the disaster, the tragedy of losing the Lord, and on the other side the ground on which the Lord is going to abide with His people to the end. We must therefore look into this to lift out the principles governing this whole question.

The Lord's verdict is written clear: "They have not rejected you," He said to Samuel, "they have rejected Me." That's what the Lord thought about it. They would not have accepted that if it had been put to them quite boldly in that way, "You are this day casting out the Lord, repudiating the

Lord!" they would have been very angry indeed. But nevertheless the Lord said that was what they were doing whether they would accept it or not. It can be done, you see, while we even protest that that is not what we mean or intend; we can just be doing it.

Now, right at the heart of this story, one fragment of two words only, is the clue to the whole great mistake. The whole phrase is: "Make us a king like unto the nations". And the fragment is: "like unto," like unto. Whenever the people of God fall out of the immediate and direct government of the Holy Spirit, invariably they proceed to imitate and reproduce something that they have seen objectively - not by revelation, not spiritually, but something that they have seen - and "We'll have it like that, we'll make it like that, we'll reproduce that, we will duplicate that". Very often it comes down to this: "We'll have a New Testament order..." something studied, something objectively apprehended, but it's an imitation. It's a seeking to reproduce something that already exists in some form; some settled established form and order. And let it be said at once dear friends, that as in this case in Samuel, which is a continuation for a time of the book of Judges, so in every other case when this happens, it's always the mark of spiritual decline when you do that, it is not a mark of spiritual maturity to do that, of spiritual progress, it's a time of spiritual declension when you've got to imitate something.

There is a very big principle involved in this. Imitation, duplication, reproduction, by *making*: "make us", by making. All this is the incorrigible habit of the natural man. The incorrigible habit of natural man: to *make* something *like* something. That was the terrible tendency and the tragic tendency of the church at Corinth, to make the church according to the wisdom of this world, on the principles of this world. And Paul said "You're carnal; are you not carnal?" Wisdom... the wisdom of this world, no not that. But to form the church on the principles of this world as they had seen the world - bringing it into the church - it was a disastrous thing for Corinth, it was the great peril which was threatening the churches in Galatia which drew the apostle Paul out in such vehement anger as you find nowhere else in all his writings, repeatedly he uses the word: *anathema*. *Anathema!* And what was the tendency? Oh, this whole Judaistic set up which the Judaizers had brought down to impose as a fixed, settled, historical, traditional *system* upon something spiritual, creating this terrible crisis: that the believers in Galatia were being influenced to the point of turning away from that which had come in by the Spirit. As Paul says, "having begun in the Spirit..." turning away from that direct government of the Spirit to some thing and imitate it; the whole system of Judaism.

And so we could follow this thing through history, but it's coming up again and again, and here it is in this story as a great example of the tragedy of that. Let us look at the real implications of this story. What was it that they were doing? What was it that was happening? And in noting these things we have our lesson, we have our warning and we have our instruction. Note, it was a break with their right position; the position which was their *right* position before God. What was their right position, the right position of the people of God? It was *absolute separation from the nations*. It began with Abraham did they not? Look at God's dealings with Abraham; lifted him clean out, separated him, kept him separated, let him know that if he interfered with that separation, as he did on one or two occasions, it came back, it reacted upon him in such a state of lost fellowship with God that he had to get his altar up again and recover. But on the whole, his is a life where he's completely separated from the nations, from the world and his seed Israel are an elect nation taken out of the nations. Their forty years in the wilderness had primarily this object: to show them how utterly, *utterly*, they were an *unworldly* people. Or on the other side, so utterly a heavenly people, to have everything from heaven: their government, their provision and sustenance, their guidance, their strength, their continuance, right out from heaven because a wilderness can't provide you with

very much for the life here of nature. Separated, unto God. We see why in a moment, but this was their right position. All through their history it was just a battle over this, the maintaining of this position.

They were called a *holy* people, sanctified. What is holiness; what is sanctification? It'd be as well if you get this thing settled, lots of ideas about holiness and sanctification. Do remember dear friends, that this whole world, this whole world lies in the wicked one. That's the word of God. It lies under a curse. And if it were the occasion and I had the time, and I'm being beaten right up now over this matter before I've started, I could show you and you would see very clearly how we are living in the part of the dispensation which is showing beyond any doubt or question that this creation lies under a curse, that every thing that man thinks to be progress and development, brings him into more trouble. And, *and* all his efforts after power, after strength, only bring him more fear and fear is becoming the universal thing in this whole realm. Fear, fear, fear! The greatest achievement of man is the splitting of the atom or the making of the atomic bomb. And what has it done? Brought more fear into the very creators of it than ever was in this world, and into the whole world. Is there a curse on all men's works? That is only a hint, it's only a hint, but it's like that!

Every fresh discovery and invention creates a new problem; some new problem, and we go from problem to problem and they get bigger and bigger until men today are just completely bewildered as to how to contend with the forces of this universe. Well, I didn't intend to say that, only to emphasise that there's no doubt about it, what the Bible taught at the beginning and all the way through is that this world lies under a curse. And its ruler is the accursed ruler! Touch it, touch it spiritually, become linked with it in any spiritual way, and you touch death because you've touched something evil, something unholy. Even unspiritual and unconverted men discern something like this. The great Churchill, you know, (not a saved man, a man who has a life with God, but, but very shrewd in his perception and judgment) spoke of Hitler "that *evil* man, that *evil*" - getting to the heart of it.

There's evil in this whole world system and God takes His people right out of it. For all spiritual associations and connections, you've got to live in it but not to be of it, not to be in any way spiritually related to it. Holiness, sanctification (the same thing) is just separation unto God *from* that evil regime that governs this world. Ah, wrestling, says Paul, is with the world rulers of this darkness, hosts of wicked spirits. For they had been brought out and their right position with God was that! And when they maintained that position, heaven was on their side, heaven was on their side, whatever they were in themselves. But here: "like unto the nations..." what a drop. What a collapse. What a break with their right position.

I can't take more time with that, but the Bible speaks of that kind of thing as spiritual fornication. Spiritual fornication: intercourse with an *evil* state of things which is in this world. Touch it and you lose God, He stands back. Well, leave that for a moment; do notice that the battle has always been on that for the people of God, always on that issue, if only the forces of evil can in some way bring about some kind of link between the people of God and themselves and their system, that's the doom of the people of God. This talk about worldliness, worldly Christians, and worldly church, and worldliness in the church goes far deeper than just how you dress and how you get yourself up and what you do and where you go; it's far deeper than that. It's touching spiritual iniquity and it spells spiritual death. It was a break, then, with their right position, it was a breach of vocation, a breach of vocation.

Why were they chosen out from the nations? Why is the church chosen out from the nations? Let's bring it right here: why have you and I been called out from the nations? For God looked to take out of the nations a people for His name. And we belong to that people, if we're in Christ, but why? Why? Just to be saved and go to heaven? Thank God for all that, but this people, and we, were chosen, separated in Christ for a purpose, for a vocation. And the vocation of the church, as was the vocation of Israel, and your vocation and mine, dear friends, is a very great one, it is an ultimate one, there's nothing beyond it. It is threefold: we should be here amongst the nations though separated from them, for a testimony to the absolute supremacy of the Lord. *The absolute supremacy of the Lord!* Now you've only got to recall your Old Testament to say that's the issue: "I am the Lord, beside Me there is no other." Their whole existence rested upon that, that they should fulfil this vocation of being here, to let it be known to powers seen and unseen, men and demons, earth and hell, that the Lord is the Lord supreme. And that's a very practical thing, it comes down to a lot of matters you know.

"I prefer to live forty years in the wilderness..." well, here we are, where are you going to have bread in a wilderness? Where are you going to have water in a wilderness? How are you going to live in a desert for forty years? Only as heaven comes to your rescue. Only if God Almighty intervenes on your behalf. It's a great illustration of this, but go through your whole Old Testament and you'll find that this is the thing: these people are either doing this, or they're failing to do this - maintaining a testimony in their very life and being, history and experience, to the absolute supremacy of the Lord without any pluses, without the Lord needing any help from the world, without your having to turn in any other direction to see you through for your support, for your maintenance, for your progress. The Lord alone and the Lord sufficient. That's why they were chosen. It was a breach with their vocation when they said: "Like unto the nations..."; not only the supremacy of the Lord, but to keep before the world the nature of the Lord, the *nature* of the Lord. What kind of a Lord is this? What kind of God is God? The Lord, the Lord merciful and gracious, plenteous in loving kindness, slow to anger. That was their song in testament. A holy God, a *holy* God. Without enlarging upon that, their vocation was to keep alive on this earth amongst the nations a testimony to what *kind* of a Lord the Lord is. Stating that, we leave it.

And then their vocation was to demonstrate to all around the complete sufficiency of the Lord. The Lord did not choose you because you were greater than any other people, because you were more able and efficient and you were better. Better? Not a bit. We know today that that people is no better than the other people of the world, indeed Moses did say, "If you depart from the Lord you'll stink in the nostrils of all peoples." How true that has become. Not because they were better, no they needed the grace of God perhaps more than any of the other nations. They needed, because of their weakness, the power of God more than the nations round about. Oh, they just needed the Lord! That's all there was to it, and the Lord chose them, chose them. Paul said to the Corinthians, "You see your calling brethren, not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, God has chosen the foolish and the weak and the things which are not..." That is very comforting to us, but mark you, that can be just negative comfort. What for? "To bring to nought the wise, the mighty, the things that are, that no flesh should glory before God, but he that glorieth should glory in the Lord..." the absolute sufficiency of the Lord! And that was their vocation, that's your vocation, that's my vocation and that has got to be preserved intact in weakness, oh yes, weakness....

If the Holy Spirit does one thing with those who He gets really hold of, He brings them to weakness. He just undercuts all their self-sufficiency, their self-importance, their self-resourcefulness. You meet a truly Holy Spirit possessed man or woman and you meet one who has no strength in themselves,

no confidence in themselves - foolish. Foolish! Why, you're destined, you're destined under the hand of the Holy Spirit to come to the place of utter bewilderment over everything if God doesn't resolve your problems and see you through, you're beaten absolutely for want of explanation and understanding. It's alright, it's just the way of the Lord! Emptiness, emptiness, yes, that's the way of the Spirit, the way of the Spirit.

You know the way of a river, the way of a river is always the lowest channel; always seeks out the lowest place, a river does. The Spirit, which is the River of God, always seeks out the lowest place: emptiness. And this is the way of the Divine glory, but this was a break, a break with vocation: "make us a king like unto the nations...".

Now, as I close, it was a repudiation of the principle of their very existence. What was it? You see, dear friends, there are depths of Divine wisdom which we have not fathomed or grasped. By His people and in His people, God is undercutting the whole of the work that the devil did in mankind at the beginning. And the principle of the man of God, the woman of God, the people of God, is *utter and absolute dependence upon the Lord*. Dependence upon the Lord! Look at Moses, look at Abraham, look at all of them: Moses, a man learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, evidently a very wise, intellectual, well-trained and tremendously efficient man when he was in Egypt, comes out and after forty years under the hand of God when God calls him to go he says, "I cannot speak; I cannot speak; I cannot. Oh, if You will send, send by anyone whom You will, but not by me... I'm not Your man." He's only one example, isn't he, Jeremiah: "I can't speak, I am but a child, I am but a child." Here is utter dependence upon God.

Saul of Tarsus, a big man in his own realm, yes, everything, everything, but if there is one man in history who knew his dependence upon the Lord, it was Paul the apostle. Utter dependence upon the Lord, "We have this sentence of death that we might not trust in ourselves but in God who raiseth the dead. That's where I am, a dead man needing to be raised". A dead man can't do very much can he? Not much good, a dead man, needing to be raised. The principle of absolute dependence upon the Lord which was the principle of Christ's own life: "The Son can do nothing out from Himself but whatsoever He seeth the Father doing...", "the words that I speak I speak not of Myself...", "the works that I do I do not of Myself..." dependence, dependence. And here: "Make us a king like unto the nations..." repudiation of this very principle; a change from the spiritual to the natural. Saul, Saul... their choice, Saul, the man who God gave them, was everything that pleased the natural. Look at him, he's taller than any other man in Israel. He's finer looking, a finer specimen of humanity than any other there. A magnificent fellow, judged naturally. Yes, alright, you asked for it, you've got it; what you asked for. The natural? God will give you the natural.

But we close. What did the Lord do about it? What did the Lord do? Well, He did two things. He helped them to their own conclusions. This is a very terrible thought. He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls. You know, dear friends, apparent prosperity and blessing is not always a good sign, you think that we are having great blessing and things are going just as we want them to go, but there may be a snare in it. It depends on the motive lying behind it all: your natural gratification and pleasure... something to glory in... your wonderful 'Saul' whatever he may be: *your system, your organization, your thing...* wonderful Saul, bigger than any other, something to take note of and to point out and "Look! Look!" There's a terrible snare in that. The Lord may not be in it.

The Lord helped them to their own conclusions, He gave them a king, told Samuel to anoint him, "Go on, go right along their line, they are determined, give them what they are determined to have, we'll help them to their own conclusion". And so He did and you know what the conclusion was. By Divine aid, they came to tragedy.

But the Lord was doing other things and this is better; while all this was going on, He was secretly preparing something that *was* after His own heart. Unrecognised for the time being, taken no note of, no account of for the time being, while these people are getting on with their Saul, the Lord was working outside. That little David, secretly chosen and anointed, separated unto God, going through a deep history with God, deep history, for a long time, during the whole of these forty years of Saul's reign. What a terrible time David was having out there in his cave of Adullam, but God is doing something in him. Secretly doing a deep work in David, preparing him for the day of crisis. And there is seeping out to him those who are being disillusioned, saying, "This is not it! This is not it, we've made a mistake. We've got on a wrong line, this is not meeting our real need, this is all disappointing" and a few like that growing company and their disillusionment and their heart emptiness - disappointment with this whole thing - were moving out to David and God was forming something secretly and hiddenly that was really after His own heart.

Oh, there's a lot of history in that. I don't like being critical at all, but I do point this out, dear friends, that there's a great deal of the Saul idea about in Christianity: the *big* thing, the *wonderful* thing, the natural fleshly thing that appeals to men and the world, something like unto the nations... like that, there's a lot of it. But is it not true that even in such a day, there are many hungry, empty hearts that are not finding that to be the answer? They're on stretch for something more and God is doing a secret work in our day, make no mistake about it, you can go over this world and here and there, one, two, a few whose hearts are disappointed and whose hearts are reaching out for the true thing of God. And God is doing it *secretly*; going to do no Saul kind of thing over this, no great public bigness, but no, quietly and secretly He's doing His deep work and *these* will be the instrument when that day arrives when this whole other thing will be blown to bits. It will be the people who know the Lord, with whom the Lord will go through to the end.

I've had to skimp a lot and leave out quite a lot this morning, I've gone far beyond my allotted time, but I got a comforting note to take all the time I needed. I haven't done that, but dear friends, I trust you see the point. This is the issue: whether you're with a thing "like unto the nations" or whether you are being after the thing after the heart of God, "I have chosen for Me a man after My own heart who shall do all My pleasure." "My pleasure..." The Lord give us understanding...

Do give us this insight, perception, understanding, discernment in the things that differ, even in Christian things, the things that differ, and lead us in the way where Thou Thyself canst commit Thyself without reserve... where Thou canst abide forever for Thy name's sake, amen.