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"That I May Know Him"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." (Eph. 1:17-20).

From time to time, right through the ages, those who have stood in quite a definite relationship to the things of God have either been seduced, or have drifted, or have for some reason come to fixed and systematized positions as to the ways, works, and purposes of God, which fixed ideas have come to limit Him, bind them, and result in going round in a circle instead of on a direct course of ever-enlarging and clarifying spiritual fulness and newness.

This propensity for fixedness and finality in conceptions has threatened the people of God many times with a fatal impasse. Indeed, Israel's captivity and eventual disintegration among the nations, with all the agony of centuries, very largely rests upon their fixed idea of being so right as God's elect. This same peril threatened to frustrate the real spiritual way and purpose of God with Christ's own disciples. Because of Jewish ideas interpreted by their natural minds, they had prejudices and preconceptions which menaced their spiritual lives and constantly came into conflict with Christ's mind and way. Paul's life and ministry was continually opposed by this element, and he himself in his pre-conversion days, is a supreme example of its danger.

So it has been through the ages since, and is one of the greatest hindrances to the quicker realisation of the thought and purpose of the Lord in our own times. The fact is that God must not move or do anything which does not conform to the accepted and recognised order of traditional evangelical Christianity. Anything that is outside of a prescribed circle of what has been done and how it has been done for generations is suspect and boycotted. The official bodies of organised evangelical Christianity are the final court of appeal. One of the strong factors in the ministry that this paper has sought to fulfil through these many years has been that, while there are those foundational facts which are in their essence unalterable and unchanging, there is always, in everything that comes from God, a wealth and fulness of meaning and value which is commensurate with its infinite Source and Fountainhead, and that the Spirit of Truth can continually make us know that God's meaning infinitely transcends our apprehension. We must therefore never box the compass of truth or interpretation, and fix our methods and framework of doctrine or work in a way that makes it impossible for the Lord to show us that, although a certain way of outworking was all right for the time being, it was only relatively so, and fuller light means further adjustments. All this, not because the Lord is developing or changing, but because we can only move and change by life, organically, as we grow in understanding. That this is so is proved by much Scripture, and Ephesians 1:17-20 is the great stand-by in this matter; a word written to believers of no immature degree.

We venture to say that a time has begun when the old and fixed positions of traditional Christianity are losing their hold on—not only the Christian public in general—but many sincere seekers for reality, and that great numbers of young people are looking for something not to be found in many of the churches, and what they are looking for is the real and true life of God.

The question which confronts us all is this; can the Lord lead us on into His fulness in Christ without continually bumping up against something in our own carry-over of—not fixed truth, but—our fixed limit of its meaning; or something in our fixedness of position in any direction or connection? Steadfastness, unmovableness, faithfulness, etc. are to be to the Lord, and to the foundation realities of the faith, and also in the purpose for which and to which He has called us in life and service; but adjustableness is an essential to growth and increase in light and fulness. At the same time, we cannot change and move on only as there is a basic work of the Cross by which the strength of nature—even as it impinges upon Divine things—is set aside. The Lord find us such as have only one object, and that truly at any cost, "That I may know Him".