



# The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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## The Family of God

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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The Divine thought is surely not to have companies of Christians constituted by a New Testament technique, or system of doctrine and practice, any more than it is to have congregations, preaching-places, or just meetings. Primarily it is to have spiritual families; and a Divinely governed and ordered family will express its life according to what is true doctrine and right practice. Thus, when it is time for His people to take spiritual responsibility, if the Holy Spirit had things on His right basis, He would distribute them so that new spiritual families are brought into being. This is organic growth as differing from organised expansion which is so unsatisfactory in its resultant spiritual measure. How much safer and purer is this Divine method. For one thing, it starts from the inside and not from without. Its bond is mutual love, not doctrine. It grows by spiritual birth or organic oneness, not by adherence or "joining". Its success is not determined by its size or numbers, but by its *spiritual* life and inward measure of Christ.

There is nothing professional about a true family; neither is there anything artificial or formal. What a true natural family would be in every respect, as to its own inner corporate and family life, and as to its growth, testimony, work, and multiplication of itself in new families in due course, so the local companies of the Lord's people ought to be; for God intended His visible institutions to embody His invisible, spiritual, and heavenly thoughts and principles. But it is all spontaneous and vital, not organised and technical. We cannot go further here with this Divine thought, but we ask; May this not be the Lord's object in allowing or causing that ever present sense of inadequacy, limitation, and dissatisfaction in "organized Christianity"; and may this not lie behind His permitting of so much destruction in the realm of the traditional framework which has really come to take the place of the true spiritual family? There is nothing like an emergency and suffering to bring down to the bedrock things; and the bedrock of true Christian experience is that, beneath all else, the Lord's true people are a family - "The Church of the firstborn ones".

The first thing that the Lord Jesus said on His resurrection was "Go to my *brethren*, and say unto them, I ascend unto my *Father* and your *Father*". When the meaning of His resurrection was made good in the coming of the Holy Spirit, we find that the believers in Jerusalem were spontaneously constituted a spiritual family, "breaking bread from house to house". Later, reference was made to one local company as "the Church in thy house". Let us remember that only *two* spiritually responsible ones are essential to be the starting-point of a family. May this not be the principle behind the sending forth at the beginning "two by two"?

But let us ever remember that the Lord has a governing object in mind in the family, and that the family is not an end in itself. Spiritual fulness is His end, not only spiritual fellowship. Much loss has been suffered by the Lord and His people by other forms taking the place of the spiritual fulness. Beware of substitutes. Beware of letting go something of the measure for which you have been apprehended. This is one of the perils of isolation and scattering from the family where your home has been. The one powerful bond of a true family is that the desire and will of its head governs all its members. If the Lord's desire for spiritual fulness governs us all, it will be a safeguard or guiding principle, and motive-power which delivers from many personal and lesser interests or considerations which would eventuate in limitation and disappointment. We are quite certain that spiritual fulness is only possible by emancipation from the artificial and man-made system of procedure which obtains today, and a return to the simple but powerful basis of organic life kept pure by the *direct* government of the Holy Spirit, as it was at the first.

Well, beloved, the Lord open your hearts to all that is of Himself, and our prayer is, in the words of an Apostle, that "none of you should be deemed to have come short".