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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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## The Light of Understanding

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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"And God said, Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night" (Gen. 1:3-5).

"And God called the firmament Heaven... And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth; and it was so. And God made the two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night" (Gen. 1:8,14-16).

"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God; her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. 21:10-11).

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:9-10).

### **Light and Government**

You will notice that Genesis and Revelation link government with light, and light with government. In the natural creation the light was to govern. In the Revelation, the city, by that very name, suggests the centre and seat of government and its first and primary characteristic is light, light most

precious. The very first thing that God did and brought into being was light. The last thing, so far as the Bible is concerned, is government by Light, and seeing that all that lies between Genesis and Revelation is the conflict between darkness and Light, Light and darkness, the end of the Revelation sees the issue of the conflict through all the ages - the triumph of Light over darkness, and that triumph centred and embodied in that people represented by the term - the City, the holy City.

Colossians, from which we have read, sets forth what that Light is and that it is something beginning and growing now. It is not phosphorescent, it is not just what we call light. We find that it becomes summed up in one clause: 'spiritual understanding', and it is spiritual understanding which is the governmental factor. Spiritual understanding governs, and if you lack spiritual understanding you are by no means in a position to govern, to rule; you are entirely at a discount, weakened. The apostle in his letter to the Colossians speaks of our having been translated out of the authority of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. The apostle here says quite clearly that spiritual understanding is the meaning of Light. Light works out in that way. "Filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding"; the full knowledge of His will. But notice that full knowledge of His will is progressive, something into which the saints have to grow. You notice the word 'grow' in this connection. The knowledge of His will or the full knowledge of His will, what does he mean?

Again we must remind ourselves that he is not just speaking about our knowing the will of God for the various details of our lives here on this earth. We want to know the will of God about this and that, whether we should do this or that, go here or go there, and relate the will of God (and quite rightly so) to the numerous details of our lives here on this earth in temporal things. While we are quite right in seeking the will of God in everything, that is not the thing to which the apostle is referring here. "Filled with the knowledge of His will" as you will see by the setting, is related to that glorious, heavenly destiny of the Church. His will is that purpose of His concerning the Church and that gives such point to the fragment in Revelation 21. What is His will, that great will? Well, here it is realised: "He showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God; her Light was like unto a stone most precious." The will of God? A people of that nature, in that capacity, to be the governmental centre throughout the coming ages.

You notice a little before the portion we read in Colossians 1, the apostle is speaking about "the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens". That is it.

Now then, it is a tremendous destiny with which we are called, a marvellous eternal vocation, nothing less than this governmental position and function: to be in the spiritual universe what the literal sun is in the temporal universe. God made everything temporal on a spiritual principle: to be a symbol and a sign. "Let them be for signs" (Gen. 1:14). What is the significance of the sun? Well, it is a symbol, and it is a symbol of the Church in its eternal destiny - to occupy that place between the upper heavens and the earth for spiritual government, and to fulfil all the beneficent functions in a spiritual way that the natural sun fulfils in a temporal way.

### **Spiritual Understanding Governs the Lord's Dealings with Us**

But again, the apostle was here saying, "That is extremely practical, that is real spiritual understanding which brings to that position of government", and spiritual understanding is the whole object of the Lord's dealings with the Church in time. If we could just accept that, and accept it when we are not understanding anything at all, when everything is defeating and defying all our powers of understanding, that after all it is understanding that is governing the Lord in dealing with us like that, to bring us to an understanding which is not natural; it is spiritual understanding. You

and I know surely now that spiritual understanding is *spiritual* and there is nothing natural about it. If you have not got that far, you are only in the babyhood of the Christian life. But immediately the Lord gets us in hand, we begin to find that all our natural powers of understanding are completely defeated. We have to have some understanding which is not ours, or not possible to us naturally. That is the school into which we have come, and when it is like that, we are ready to know that the Lord is really after teaching us something. We have often said here that every new revelation of the Lord comes out of an impasse, and that is usually the impasse of our understanding.

So the apostle says that he did not cease to pray; he had the ground - their faith and their love - that gave the ground for spiritual understanding; faith and love, then Light. He did not cease to pray for them that they might be filled with the full knowledge, not the elementary knowledge, not the infant knowledge, but the *full knowledge* which is mature knowledge, the knowledge of the spiritually mature, the full knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. That is his prayer, and then he begins to break that up as to what it means in a practical way.

### **Light that We Might Walk Worthy of the Lord**

#### *(a) Unto All Pleasing*

What does light mean in a practical way? And let me underline this again, that light of this kind is essentially practical. Its outworking is that you may "walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing" or well-pleasing. Elsewhere the apostle uses the phrase "walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8), indicating the organic nature of the vessel in which the Light is. This is not just some thing. I know that the apostle to the Corinthians uses a phrase which I am sure he would not agree to mean what a superficial reading would seem to indicate. Paul would not agree that we are mirrors. He has used the symbol, "We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord..." but I am quite sure that the apostle would not agree that we are mirrors. He said, "*as in a mirror*", reflecting as a mirror. We are doing, or we should be doing, what a mirror does, but we are not mirrors. This is not just a thing. He has immediately in that connection said, "God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness... 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). A mirror has not got a heart, it is a mere surface. Out from the inside the Light has to come, not just a superficial reflection.

That would work in this way: you hear truth that you call light, and then you go and talk about it, throwing it back on other people, acting as a mirror. That is not what the Word of God indicates as to our function at all. Be careful about that. When you have heard true messages, and you say you have light, and immediately go and throw it off on other people, be very careful. The point here is, "Walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing". That is the first practical effect of Light, and any Light which we may claim to have which does not result in our "walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" is not real Light; it is mere mental truth. That is not what the apostle meant. It is that which has gone *inside*, and makes us walk differently from all others: "Walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing". It is the Light having got inside and made a difference. It is, in a sense, intrinsic Light; that City is not just like the mirror reflecting Light, it is the embodiment of the Light. The Light comes from within. The Lamb is the Light, the Lamb is at the centre, the Light comes from the inside, and so it makes a difference to our very character.

#### *(b) Unto Fruit Bearing*

Then the apostle says here, not only unto all well-pleasing, but "bearing fruit in every good work". Why? You see in Genesis that the natural light was followed by fruitfulness in the earth, and in a

spiritual way that has to be true. The test of our light is its fruitfulness in every good work - a very severe test. How much of all we know is working out in real fruitfulness? Somehow or other light produces fruitfulness spontaneously. You cannot follow the mystery of how the rays of light presently begin to show themselves in definite organisms of fruit, but that is just what happens. Cut off the light, and you cut off the fruit. There is something spontaneous about it. It is not legal, forced, strained; it is spontaneous fruitfulness. The test of our light is the spontaneity of the fruitfulness of our life.

### *(c) Unto Strength*

Then Light shows itself in spiritual strength. "Strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory" (Col. 1:11). "Having the glory of God". Light and power; Light working out in spiritual power. "The might of His glory". This City is a very strong thing; "having a wall great and high". It is the very picture of strength, and Light does mean spiritual strength, when it is true Light. I am just giving you these features before applying them.

## **The Impact of Light**

You see, dear friends, what it amounts to is this. We are here on this earth as the Lord's people to be brought into such a state of spiritual understanding, which is the real meaning of light, that there shall be a rebound of that upon the kingdom of darkness, upon everything around. Light makes an impact, and Divine Light has a tremendous impact. The culmination of that in 2 Thessalonians is concerning the great Antichrist, the man of sin, this colossus of iniquity whom the Lord will destroy with the brightness of His presence (or "His coming" 2 Thess. 2:8). That is the impact of Light. Tremendous, is it not? You notice that the book of the Revelation is leading up all the time to that. You get on and you find the tremendous conflict between Light and darkness, between the whole power of Satan and the power of the Lamb, and this strength of the City is the strength of a mighty victory, and now Satan's whole power has been broken, and in the place of the reign of darkness is the reign of Light; right in the same realm, in the heavenlies.

I am impressed with the real form of the word here in Colossians 1. It is a pity they have not translated it as they have elsewhere, as in Ephesians. "The hope which is laid up for you", they have said, "in the heavens". Why did they not translate it as in Ephesians, "in the heavenlies"? It is the same. "The hope which is laid up for you in the heavenlies". "Now in the heavenlies" (Eph. 3:10). Here is the Church, here is the City in the heavenlies to govern as the great Light for the coming ages. Governmental, in the heavenlies. What an impact this Light makes! The whole power of Satan and darkness has been met by the power of Light, and he has lost his place of government.

I do hope you are seeing through this, beyond what I am saying. We are right up against this whole power of darkness, and it is a terrific power and it is increasing in its intensity and its pressure upon this earth. We are conscious of the closing in of the powers of darkness upon this earth and upon the nations. The outlook is, humanly speaking, hopeless. Darkness, terrible darkness. We as the Lord's own, might well lose heart. We see whole stretches of the earth being closed to the preaching of the Gospel, the servants of the Lord being pushed out, and now no hope of their getting back. That is speaking of whole nations. We do not know half of what is going on and the outlook is a very dark one from a certain standpoint. What about the hope? Well, down here there seems to be no hope at all. We could well despair if we knew the truth. The little we do know makes our heart sink but for the hope which is reserved for us in the heavens. And what is it? Well, let the darkness go on, intensify; the City is coming, the Light is going to govern the whole power of darkness which is bringing this state of things about on the earth and is going to be overpowered by the Light. The

government is going to be taken from that realm into the hands of the saints of the Most High; that is the hope, but that is not just going to take place mechanically. Those who are going to reign have got to learn to reign, and to learn to reign means to come to spiritual understanding.

So the Lord thinks it worth His while to bring His people into bewildering situations, into such situations that far outreach their powers of comprehension and understanding, in order that they might learn His secrets, the knowledge of Him, to come to be the ruling class for the coming dispensations. That sounds like a wonderful story, almost like fiction, but there is no other explanation of the Lord's dealings with us. *Why?* The eternal *Why*, and the everlasting *Why*, and the endless *Why's* - the Lord's ways with us. And yet we know that it is along this line of baffling, perplexity and being drawn out in spirit that we are learning, that we really get our spiritual understanding and we are coming to know what no other people know (that is, in the world), and every bit of spiritual understanding or real practical light puts us in a position of power. The world thinks and believes that knowledge is power. Oh, how much more true that is in this Kingdom of the Son of His love, this other Kingdom! What an advantage we have if we have spiritual knowledge, when we know in a spiritual way, when we have spiritual understanding. What power there is about it - not for the sake of power, but for the sake of the Lord's glory.

Now then, we are here on this earth (and it is a very dark earth and encompassed by these powers of darkness) that by a progressive knowledge of the Lord there should be, not the throwing out of teaching, but the impact of Light by reason of what we are, our very presence. You do not have to define the sun, you do not have to give the theory of the sun to prove that the sun is. You have only got to get into it, and you know what it is the nearer you get to it, the more directly under its rays. You know the sun is there without any theories at all. It may be very useful to know about the sun and be able to explain it and define it, and analyse its rays and all that, but the thing which matters, after all, is the sun and what it does. We may have all our doctrines, teachings, interpretations and theories which may be useful, but the thing is that the Light is there, the impact is there, and by our very presence things happen. As it was with the Lord Jesus when He was here - His very presence made things happen without saying anything, movement started. It was the impact of Light.

Some of you may serve the Lord in a spiritually dark country. It is not because you have some interpretations of Scripture that are extraordinary that you count there, but the very impact of the Light which is in you counts and it makes disturbances. And so it should be with us everywhere. This Light business begins now, and we only learn its real meaning and nature by its values: that is, by what it does, how it delivers us, how it challenges us, how it brings us into the place of power, of government. I ask you, with all the messages, the addresses, the conferences, do you know that what the Lord has revealed in your heart has put you in a place of spiritual power? You may not have attained to the fulness, but you know that this has made you strong, that you are not just carried about by every suggestion, every doctrine, by all interpretations. You know you are strong by reason of what the Lord has revealed in your heart, and every bit of truth has become strength to govern the situation.

Oh, for people of God who know now more of government! There may be such a baffling situation, such a difficult situation: no one knows what to do about it. Then someone who has a bit of spiritual understanding says, "This is where the devil has his hold, this is where the power of darkness has a footing". If you have light about that, you have the power, and the enemy has lost. Oh, for people who have light in that way which is power, which breaks the power of darkness and the Evil One! Do we not need it? Are there not situations arising all the time which defeat and defy all human understanding and ability to cope with them? If only we could get light on them, if only we could see

the point, the secret, understand the nature of that thing, then it is delivered into our hands at once. When you see, it is in your hands.

Well, that is the value of what the Lord is trying to do with us - to put us into a position. My fear is that we may have mountains of truth and teaching, and it not just work out in impact upon the forces of darkness. Let us ask the Lord about this, because here, you see, we are translated not out of the kingdom of darkness and the power of darkness; we are translated out of the *authority* of darkness. Authority is something very much more than power. You may be able to use a good deal of force and power, but if you have not the right to use it, you are in a weak position. The very usage of it can be taken from you. If you have the right to use it, the authority to use it, you stand doubly strong. And we are out of the authority of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. Now to know our inheritance in that kingdom; it is a kingdom of Light. The kingdom of the Son of His love is the opposite of the authority of darkness, therefore it is a kingdom of Light. "The inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). That is not hereafter, that is *now*; the saints in Light now. Then there ought to be a coming to spiritual understanding as to our own inheritance so as to be able really to bring this impact of spiritual light, spiritual understanding, upon the whole forces of Satan's jurisdiction.

It is a large matter, but I trust that you see this: that there is the great destiny, the great purpose to be the City governing from heaven. We have to learn that now, and the way of learning is that in dark situations we discover by revelation that which saves the situation, changes it, brings heaven's own impact to bear upon it. The Lord make us all like that, not just superficial reflectors, but the embodiment of Light.