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The School of Christ

I want to take a short break from our study of the book of Ephesians this week in order to talk about something else that has been on my mind. As some of you know, we've started a new group that meets in Cleveland, and that group has decided to work our way through a book called "the School of Christ" by T. Austin-Sparks. If anyone here has not read "The School of Christ", I would highly recommend it.

At any rate, his book, along with some other things that have been pressing on my heart, have had me thinking about what it does and does not mean to know the Lord. What is knowing the Lord? The basic premise of Sparks' book is that the rare individual that truly has a heart to know the Lord is escorted by the Spirit of God into what Sparks calls "the School of Christ". As Jesus Himself says in John 14 through 16 several times, the Spirit of truth was coming with this express purpose – to take the things of Me and reveal them unto you, to guide you into all truth, to teach you all things. And so this school is not at all a learning about Christ, but rather the experience of the soul learning Christ. And between those two statements there is all the difference in the world.

So I've been thinking about knowing Him. Specifically I've been thinking about the way He is known, or how it is that we grow up into knowing Him. This is the primary issue in the life of every human being, whether or not they even consider the question. I know that many people live their lives, 60, 80, 100 years, without hardly a thought of growing in the true knowing of God. But, when it comes down to it, this is true only because the darkened heart of the adamic man often enjoying a life of self-preoccupation far too much to ever look beyond its own soul. Relatively few ever elevate the gaze of their heart beyond the seemingly-pressing desires of the soul.

We live as though we are bodies that have a soul, rather than souls that have a body. Body-life is our main preoccupation. Spiritual reality is an important or interesting thing to think about, if we have time. But life is generally about the body – and the experiences and struggles and emotions and goals of that body. Its an incredibly sad thing.

Do you know what I find almost too sad to look at sometimes? People who have come near to the end of natural life, people who's body's are a just about spent, and they have absolutely NOTHING to talk about except for perhaps the weather, their various illnesses, and some scattered memories of life in a body. I'm sorry if that sounds critical or offensive, but I just can't stand to see it. God offered His Life, God offered EVERYTHING HE IS – life, truth, righteousness, purpose, love, a kingdom, wisdom,...and we were perfectly content to stare at, and seek purpose in, our flesh for 75 years. From God's vantage point that must be virtually unimaginable.

Oh I know it's a little more deceptive than that. When you're young all of your ideas seem larger than life. You don't start out life planning to grow old and have life

revolve around a 401k, the weather channel, and a pile of scrapbooks. Of course not. You have your goals, your passions, your purposes, your great ideas for life. But life wasn't ever given to you by God to create purpose. And that is why all who go this route end up in disappointment...regardless of what their biography says. Life was given to you by God to find His purpose, to come Home to Him in His Son, to find in Him a world of Life and reality that transcends this weak realm of shadows.

Act 17:26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, **27** so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

You who are born again are a soul that has been raised up and seated in the heavens in Christ. You are only attached to the earth by a flimsy thread called the human body. Do you realize that? You are attached to the earth by one thread, and that thread is breaking. Some break sooner than others, but they all break. But my Lord, the thread is not your life. It is not your purpose. Its not why you are here. Its not even really where you are. Not really. You have no purpose in that thread. That thread exists on earth merely as a conduit of expression for the heavens. That thread remains connected to the earth for 75 years so that you can express where and what you really are in a realm that needs to know the truth. It exists as an ongoing invitation to the universe of Christ.

But the life and salvation that God has offered humanity in the Person, AS the Person of Jesus Christ stands secure and real whether or not a single human being turns their heart to know it. It is, as I said, the chief issue, the ultimate issue of created purpose, even if the entire world pretends like it doesn't exist. Brothers and sisters, you exist on planet earth for one reason – to know Jesus Christ.

Joh 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

And I can say this without the slightest question - everyone is invited by God to enroll in the School of Christ. Everyone is offered a front row seat, and granted the most competent teacher that a soul could know – the One who knows the deep things of God and reveals them to men. And there is no such thing as an honors student or one who is born developmentally challenged. ADD isn't an issue, and high test scores will not help you. The cross has leveled the playing field and the only relevant question as far as learning is concerned is not intellect, gifting, or connections, but only a question of the heart. Do you want to know Him. And that question alone, despite people's arguments to the contrary, dismisses most of the class before it even starts.

And so the school of Christ begins, but not the way you would think. You'd think it would start by the Spirit teaching you something you don't know about Jesus, but really it starts by teaching you something you **don't know about knowing**. In other words, before God can ever address what you don't know, He has to address that **you don't know how to know**. **Failure to know Jesus is not first a lack of information. It is first a lack of understanding what knowing God even means**. You might call this the very first lesson in the School of Christ.

How is God known? Not by your mind hearing a new thing about God, but by God's mind being formed in your soul. I know that one having no experience with knowing the Lord in this way may think that sounds quite bizarre, but it is true. God does not shed new light on your thoughts, but shines His light in your soul. And so learning Him is not an occupation of the mind, but an awakening of the soul into the day of the Lord....a new place to live, a new universe of reality, a new life.

And when I use the term "day of the Lord", I'm not talking about a calendar day or any sort of time period. I'm talking about the day that He is. The day that all days spoke of. The day that every Sabbath proclaimed. A day that dawned in His resurrection, and knows no night. A day where man's works have ceased. He is the light of it. He is the provision of it. He is the rest in it. The eternal day of Christ. The day into which we are raised up with Him.

So it is not the mind chewing on ideas and accepting beliefs and learning verses, but rather the soul learning Him and sharing His life, nature, understanding, perspective, and reality. Knowing Christ is the soul's participation in His life. If you'll permit me this language, knowing Christ is the soul becoming conscious of its salvation. Everyone who is born of the Spirit has the fullness of salvation...but we can grow old in a church pew and still remain quite unconscious of it. But then there is this wonderful reality where we become conscious of the salvation that we have. This process Scripture calls the renewing of the mind or the revealing of Christ, whereby the soul becomes familiar with, intimately acquainted with, then confronted by, shaped by, conformed to, and constrained by the reality of salvation.

I've been thinking a lot about this recently. I've been thinking about how the soul grows with respect to salvation, and how what is real to God begins to become real to us. Somebody wrote me an email from somewhere recently asking about just how real this thing gets. That's not exactly how they phrased the question, but that's more or less what they were asking. How real does this get? How far does it go? What exactly does the revealing of Christ accomplish in the soul.

Well, it causes everything that is real and true in God's perspective to become progressively real and true in yours. It causes everything that God knows and enjoys and experiences and sees and has of Life, joy, rest, righteousness, truth, etc. to work in you by the very power of His indwelling life. Its more real than words can say, and it makes Christian religion, dead religion, look like a bag of empty promises. Knowing Christ, becoming acquainted with, conformed to, constrained by, the Person of Christ works an end in us of all things that are not Christ. Its certain. Its not a hope, it's an expectation. Its just a matter of the appearing of the Lord.

But getting back to our topic, I'm trying to communicate the way in which the soul learns Christ. I suppose there are many ways to learn about Christ, but there is only one way to learn Christ. And it begins with the re-defining of what knowing is. In the flesh, a man can know something by seeing it with eyes, hearing it with ears, perceiving it with senses. **In the Spirit, Christ is known as His life and realm and reality occupies our soul in spiritual awareness and floods it with His Light.**

That is how we grow. That is the only way to grow. God, when He is permitted, **when we are willing to bear the decrease**, begins to show us His Son. That is all He has to do. It sounds simple. God begins to show us His Son and with the seeing of Christ starts a sequence of spiritual realizations. This is the school of Christ.

God shows you Christ, the object of His divine pleasure, the Perfect Object of His desire, and that begins a progression of spiritual awareness. You see Him, and in His light something else becomes visible. You see Him again, and your view increases.

This is how you learn Him. Light shines by His Spirit. I'm not talking a neat chapter in a Christian-living book. I'm not talking about a helpful explanation of a difficult passage of Scripture. I'm talking about seeing Christ. And in His light, there you see both the truth, and you see something that doesn't belong. You see the Light, and then one more blotch of darkness that has no heavenly right to be there. Its something of yourself. Something that you have brought with you in the darkness and deception of your soul...not realizing all that the cross left behind.

Its very much like Abraham, who having come out of country, kindred, and father's house brought with him Lot, even though the land could not bear them both. Or when He sought to retain Ishmael when the house was only meant for one son. Something came in that didn't belong.

So you see Him, and in His light something that does not belong is exposed. Right there is another one of your imaginations uncovered. Another one of your concepts deflated. Another one of your doctrines shown to be meaningless. Maybe even a decade, or two or three of your life wasted. Maybe the invalidation of your ministry, your plan, your goal, your very life. So? What are you going to do? Look away? Will that change what is real? What are you going to do?...keep on pretending now that you've seen what it is? I've seen people do that.

But that can't be an option. The only real choice is to acknowledge and accept what is seen in His light. Its already real, you can't change it. It is not there for your vote. It is there to be abided in. This is how you grow. He shows you Himself..and right there along with Him you'll see something so contrary to Him, so utterly other than Him, and you are unspeakably aware that it does not belong. I'm telling you the truth here. You'll see Him, and every time you see Him there will be something that has no permission to stand in His presence. And that something will be YOU EVERY TIME.

This is called the judgment. The judgment is what God has already accomplished in the cross, and what works in you by the coming of light, the seeing of Christ. Until that light shines you don't know spiritual up from down. You don't know Christ from the devil. I'm serious. We call the work of God the devil, and the work of the devil God. We don't have a clue what to call anything because our soul is so utterly dark. Its like a group of people standing in a pitch black room trying to decide which painting is the most beautiful. What exactly are you using as your criteria? Your point of reference? Your standard?

Until Christ appears you don't know Him, and therefore you certainly don't know yourself. And that is the ONLY reason why we can so foolishly ascribe our own works, our own ministries, our own ideas, our own understanding to Him. Its only in the darkness where He has not appeared that there is any confusion at all about what is Christ and what is not.

People sometimes ask me "how do I know what is me and what is Christ?". Its ok to ask that question in the beginning, but that question disappears when a soul begins to learn Christ. Because when He appears there is that horrible, out-of-place, thing that is trying to stand with Him in the light and the most obvious thing in the world

when you see it is the overpowering awareness that it is rejected. And again, that out-of-place thing is you - your thoughts, your nature, your otherness that you have sought to find place in the purpose of God.

In a book called "The City Which Has Foundations", T. Austin-Sparks says "If man, apart from the dominion of the Holy Spirit, in any measure however minute, intrudes into the things of God, be it in thought, intellect, reason or feeling, desire emotion or will, determination, or possession, the effect will be **a proportionate measure** of death, division, confusion and contradiction.

Friends, this is called judgment. And this is always the first thing that you see in the light. You see Christ is one thing, and you are the opposite. And the cross suddenly swells up in your awareness as the grand solution to this problem because what is needed more than anything else is an end to the one, and an increase of the other.

But judgment comes first. His light shines, and you see that you don't belong. Christ appears, and you know that in Him it must be Christ all and in all. All things acceptable to God must be thoroughly Christ in every way. And there is absolutely no condemnation in this. If you are hearing what I am saying and feeling condemnation, then you are not hearing what I am saying. I'm not talking about God despising you. I'm talking about God loving you, but the doorway of love is opened through judgment. Unless what you are by nature is seen and accepted as other than Christ, contrary to Him, enmity with Him, judged by Him, dead and buried in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, you cannot truly receive the love of God.

The love of God isn't an sentiment that He feels for you, it is the Person of Christ, the Person of eternal life that He gives to you. But life and love and reconciliation and purpose and growth...these all follow judgment. **The reality and awareness of what God rejects is the foundation upon which you can receive and know and experience what God has given.** In other words, you cannot know the life of God, the love of God, or the growth in God, until you have come to see at least something of what God has rejected.

What does this have to do with the School of Christ. This has everything to do with the School of Christ. If there really was a literal School of Christ that God established on earth with classes that Jesus and Paul and Timothy taught, I promise you that judgment would be the prerequisite for all classes. If you flunked this class, you would need to take it again and again or you would never be allowed to progress.

Knowing Christ begins with the awareness of the otherness of Christ. Knowing Christ begins with the realization of what is not Christ. **Learning Christ starts with a spirit-given comprehension of what you are NOT.** Upon that foundation alone can truth be added. **Judgment comes first, then understanding, then manifestation.** Let that order sink into your hearts. Judgment comes first, then understanding, then manifestation. Another way to say that, though perhaps slightly more confusing at first, is death, heaven, and then earth. That is the order - death, heaven, then earth. The church has it all mixed up. The church says its earth, death, then heaven. And that just isn't so. I realize that sounds like insanity, but just let me try to explain because this is really the order that we encounter truth and grow with respect to salvation.

This is the order which God is going to deal with your soul whether you've ever put words to it or not. The first thing that God shows in His appearing is that you are dead. You have been judged in the body of Jesus Christ. In the flesh dwells no good thing. The flesh profits nothing. Apart from me you can do nothing. You are dead in trespass and sin. Your righteousness is filthy rags. There is no one who does good, no not even one. No one that seeks for God, not even one. Etc. God shows you His Son and you are painfully, distressingly aware that the old man has no place in the new. I have been baptized into His death. I have been buried with Him. When one died, I died. In His light you see light, and you know that only in the blindness and presumption of the carnal mind have you sought to offer up to God the plastic fruit of your adamic man.

Death is seen. Judgment is understood. It is a good thing that I was crucified with Christ. It is a wonderful and kind thing for God to grant me a judgment in His Son.

But the next thing in the order of comprehension I said was heaven. Heaven, as we have said, is not a place that you enter upon the death of your body, but a Person, a realm, a relationship, a kingdom that you enter upon the death of the cross. And certainly it is eternal, but the door isn't the death of the flesh, but rather the death of the cross. Death first, then heaven. First you die with Him then you are raised. First blood is spilt at the altar, then you are taken behind the veil in the Great High Priest. "You who were dead in your trespasses and sins have been made alive together, raised together, and seated together in the heavens in Christ Jesus".

Listen to this: **growth is first an awareness and revealing of that death, and then it is the comprehension of the heavens.** The spiritual learning of what it means to be in Him, in the Father. You have died, your life is hidden with Christ in God. First you see this death. Then you see that this resurrection has you somewhere else. And, though as we have said, the thread of your body has you connected to the earth, you are no longer a mere man. You are a citizen of Heaven and in His appearing you are learning what and where you are. First you learn death, then you grow in the comprehension of heaven...because you have come to the Father's House.

Then comes the earth. Only then, as judgment settles in as a matter of spiritual fact, as a deep spiritual realization...and as heaven becomes the realm and Person and kingdom that defines and conforms and constrains your soul in all things...then, what Jesus prayed begins to take place. "Let it be on earth as it is in heaven." Here's where expression begins. Here's where the reality of the heavens touches the earth through the thread of your earthen vessel. This is where the reality of your citizenship leaves its mark in the earth. Death, heaven, and then earth. First you face judgment. Then you grow in understanding. Then, and only then, can there be a manifestation of the work being done in your soul on the earth.

And this is precisely the order you will find in so many types and shadows in the Old Testament. For instance, look at the Exodus from Egypt...that great type and shadow of our salvation in Christ. No Christian I have ever read or known denies that in this exodus, this lamb, this door, this crossing of the sea, this entering into the promised land, there is not a divinely intended pattern and figure of our salvation in Christ. But what is the order of it? What is the order that God lays down? Look at it.

What comes first? The victories of Joshua in Canaan! Not hardly. What comes first? Death. Judgment. A great judgment in the land of Egypt. Death sweeping through

the land. Some die in the lamb, some die apart from the lamb. But all die. Can you hear that? Death comes first. For some that death is unto death. For some the death is unto life. But judgment comes first. And in that death a door is opened. Opened to what? Opened to the heavens.

Just look at what comes next. They pass through the sea, they pass out of death, out of Egypt and then God begins to deal with them according to understanding. God begins to deal with them according to the reality of where they are, where they have been brought, what this death has accomplished. God right then gives them the tabernacle and teaches them their salvation through the priesthood. After facing death at the door, seeing that death again on the brazen altar, God shows them that they have now been accepted in the bosom of the High Priest and brought behind the veil. They have been brought into the glory of God, the Shekinah glory, the heavens of God through the blood on the altar and the intercession of the High Priest. First they face death, judgment, then they come to understanding of relationship. Into the blood covered door, through the sea, and immediately behind the veil.

The Promised Land wasn't the picture of heaven, folks. Heaven was before the Promised Land. Heaven was where God's finished work in the lamb brought them in the High Priest, long before faith brought about the manifestation in the land of Canaan.

Well then, what followed. What followed was a manifestation of the heavens in the earth, and that is exactly what the victories of Joshua and the kingdom of David came to represent. What already was finished because of the door, was taught by the priesthood, and then expressed and exhibited by faith in the conquering of the Promised Land. Death, then heaven, then earth.

It is the same way with the Ark of Noah. First there is death. A judgment. A division, where God brings those who live into one Ark, and shuts the door Himself. Then, paralleling the wording in Ephesians chapter 2, the ark is raised up and seated high above the death and destruction and made to sit on the Mountain of the Lord. Raised up out of death and made to sit in Christ in the heavens. And then out from that ark you have the inhabitants of the ark being fruitful, multiplying, and filling the earth as they come out in covenant relationship with God.

We're out of time. Let me summarize what I'm trying to say. I'm saying that, if you are willing to bear the decrease, the Spirit of God will escort you into the School of Christ. And your spiritual education will be the progression of realizations that happen in the light of His appearing. You will see Him at every step, or you will not move forward. You will see Him, or you will never "know thyself".

And though God deals with everybody as individuals, and according to the room He has in your heart for His Word, you will progress according to an order of comprehension. In seeing Him you will progress according to the realization of judgment, understanding, manifestation...or death, heaven, earth. In this School, taught by the Spirit, every lesson will be learned in the light of His face. You will see Him, and be faced more and more with the reality of His death. And that, will make room in your soul for a greater realization of what God has done, and where God has brought you in Christ. And then, progressively and quite naturally, as more of a byproduct, really, the heavens that are working in your soul will touch the earth through the thread called your body. The kingdom of heaven will be exhibited,

through your vessel, in the earth. Death, Heaven, Earth. That is ongoing order of His instruction.