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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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## Elevation- Resurrection

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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Reading: John 20:19-22; Col. 3:1-11; 1:27.

This fragment with which Colossians chapter 3 commences is clearly intended by the apostle to strike a practical contrast, though it is not definitely stated that it is so, I have thought it is very clearly implied; and it is important for us to bear in mind why this letter was written, so that we may appreciate its peculiar value and message. Colosse had recently been visited by some proselytizers, who had connected a philosophical religion with a combination of elements out of Judaism and Christianity, but was neither Judaism nor Christianity. However, it was a philosophical thing with elements out of both, and with this teaching which contained certain things about the nature of God and the orders of angels or angelic beings, there had been added the demand for certain outward observances along religious, and in a sense moral lines. And this thing had come into Colosse and had been threatening the lives of the true believers. There was that much of Christianity about it as to make it a deception, and there were those elements in it which created a strong appeal to the religious instincts and the moral desires of people. But the apostle implicitly condemned the whole thing as being human and earthly and quite unworthy of those who had been called with a heavenly calling. And this fragment: "*If then ye were raised together with Christ*" brings in exactly what the believer's true life is in contrast with this other imitation thing and strikes that contrast very clearly. And what the apostle is saying in effect is this: there is all the difference possible between two things, between this religion of religious and moral elevation, and being raised together with Christ. Now you will immediately see the value and importance of that.

There have been many things like this in the course of the years, things which have extracted from Christianity certain things and attached them to a religious philosophy of life and practice and given them the colouring of Christianity, so that many people have thought them to be Christian in

essence. And they have demanded a certain level of moral life and practice, and carried with them certain outward observances as to religion, and many have been carried off and have been affected by that thing morally. Yes, they have been morally changed, morally influenced for the better, and led into a life of religious observances which they never entertained before. So they have, to all outward appearances, been changed people and become religious people with religious interests which have often been called Christian because of the extracting of these Christian elements, the name of Christ and other phraseology having been adopted. The outward appearance of a changed life, and now these religious interests have all been taken to represent a true regeneration, a true heart change, and there has been something that looked very much like Christianity; very much what you have in the New Testament; celestial beings have been honoured, Christ has been given a place. That is exactly the background of the letter to the Colossians, and the apostle, as we have said, most strongly repudiated the whole thing, and the point of contrast that he makes is, in effect, the tremendous difference between elevation and resurrection. It is possible to have a wonderful moral elevation by the introduction strongly, enthusiastically, of religion, Christianity.

Christianity can affect things morally. It can creep in like an uplifting elevating atmosphere into society, into the mind, and people may get a wonderful moral stimulus by the bringing home strongly of Christian principles and ideals, and by being drawn into a company that have such interests at heart. And there may be a wonderful moral elevation; that is, the taking from one level of life and placing onto another different and higher level of life.

But what this letter to the Colossians clearly teaches is that the believer's true life is not just going up so many more rungs of a moral ladder and living upon a high moral platform. That is elevation from one level to another, but the believer's true life is in the nature of a resurrection, and that is an entirely different thing. And when you have seen that as the key to the letter, your door into this letter, then you are able to understand the true nature of the believer's life.

What is the true nature of the believer's life? It is living union with God. Now that is utterly and entirely impossible to the natural man, utterly impossible, for the position of the natural man is, so far as God is concerned, that he is dead. Fellowship and union with God are out of the question; he is dead to God. No amount of moral elevation can make any difference. You cannot bring about real, vital union and fellowship with God by just raising the standard of life morally, religiously, by the inculcating of Christian principles. What is necessary? It is that there shall be a Mean between God and man and that Mean must be God and man united in one. That Mean (spelt with a capital M) is on the one side God, and on the other side Man and in one being, one person, these two must be combined. They must be one person combining God and man, being God and man, and if we are to have vital union, fellowship, communion with God, that Mean between God and man must be resident within us. That can only be on the ground of a resurrection, because in that resurrection the living union is made with that One Whom we have called the Mean between God and man.

Now that is why the apostle opens this letter as he does with the first chapter and brings the Lord Jesus into such a position as is not revealed anywhere else in all the Scriptures. You want to read that chapter again in the light of what I have just been saying and see the presentation of Christ in Colossians one. And the two things are so marvellously combined there: Who He is on the Divine side, from God's standpoint, and Who He is on the human side, on the man-ward side. And there He is brought into the place of absolute pre-eminence, and then, "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*"; before you close the chapter you have got that marvellous statement.

You see what you have brought about is this. Christ, God's Mean; Christ is God in Himself, and Christ is Man in Himself. He was not man only, He is man in Himself. And now on the ground of a

supernatural act in the life of every dead man and woman by nature, raised together with Christ, raised from the dead, Christ has come in to reside. It is the spiritual outworking of that of which John 20 was an illustration. There was a company, a company of those whose hearts were towards the Lord. There were many imperfections about them, doubts and fears, a measure of unbelief, but their hearts were towards the Lord; they were reaching out to Him, they were the Lord's as far as that could be carried at the moment. They were gathered together in one place, and the Lord suddenly, without announcement, appeared in their midst. The doors were barred; without unbarring and opening the doors He was in the midst, and then He showed them His hands and His side, brought them into an association with Him in His cross, in His death, His burial and His resurrection, and then breathed on them and said: "Receive ye the Holy Spirit". All that is an illustration, a representation of bringing man out of a place of death into resurrection union, fellowship with Himself in the virtue and power of His cross, and then by His Spirit becoming resident in them.

And if you notice, that word in Colossians: "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*" is more exactly: "*Christ in the midst of you, the hope of glory*". That is something far transcending an elevation onto some higher level of moral and religious life. That is something more even than changing our lives morally and religiously: that is God in Christ, combining in His own person God and man, coming into us and uniting us with God in the power of a risen life. "*If then ye were raised together with Christ*", upon that everything hangs, "*seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God*". Your life henceforth is not to be lived just upon a higher level religiously and morally than it has been, your life henceforth is a life united with Christ in heaven. You get so many contradictions when you have anything less than that, and it was those contradictions that were troubling the apostle.

Yes, interests here on this earth, an earth level outlook, but hear: "*Seek the things that are above*". What is necessary to gather it all up is this, that the Risen Lord should come right back into the midst, making the believer one with Himself and His risen life. That is what this letter stands for. That is what John 20 stands for. The Risen Lord coming into the midst and making those men one with Himself in His risen life, not as something objective and outward, but something inward by the Holy Spirit; and that is the true life of the believer.

Now that is for us, the position for us to consider for ourselves. "Is my life that?" "Have I adopted Christianity, taken on the Christian ideals, the Christian practices, the Christian conceptions, and for me Christianity is the most beautiful philosophy that ever was; and there are obligations resting upon me because I have accepted Christianity, and I have to conform to certain observations outwardly". Is that our life? If it is, whether you can understand my way of putting it or not, it will amount to this: that the Christian life becomes a thing of having to do, having to be something, having to live up to a standard, and all the time we are worried whether we are falling below the expected standard; having to go here and there, and not go here and there, all the time we are regulated by Christianity. That is the effect. We are regulated and governed by something we call the Christian life, which says you must not go here, go there, do this or that, or you must go here or there, you must do this or that and if you do not you will have a bad time, things will go wrong, and other believers will look at you. Then you are governed all the time by that system of things, and that is just the opposite of being risen with Christ; absolutely the contrary. That may keep you up to standard, it may check you in the moment of temptation, it may influence you to live the better life, it may make big changes perhaps, but that is not much, that is not the risen life.

The risen life is that you have been quickened as one who was dead, and made alive unto God, and Christ has become a living reality resident within you, and you have (because Christ is in you) living, daily, fellowship with God. You are in fellowship with God by Christ dwelling within Who is that divine

Man, God Himself and Man Himself, bringing both together in us, bringing man and God together in us. You repudiate that and you repudiate the true meaning of the believer's life. It is very blessed if we can say, yes, we know Him as having come into the midst as the Risen Lord, and He has breathed on us and said: "Receive ye the Holy Spirit". That is, He has not come to us as someone apart from us, as Christ raised from the dead a part of our creed, but is within us as the Risen Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit, and for us, life is above, all our interests are above, everything comes to us from above, and it is not Christianity, it is Christ.

The trouble with these people who were doing this proselytizing work in Colosse was that they had never seen the Lord Jesus, Who He was, never seen Him in the terms of that first chapter. They had made Him one of the celestial host, high up in rank, but not God manifest in the flesh. They had never seen Christ and that was the trouble.

So that for us it must be not a system, not an order, not a set of ideals, not a Christian philosophy, but Christ, in all that He is in the thought of God, in our hearts through faith, Christ in us, the hope of glory.