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## The Peril of a Question

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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*Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" (Gen. 3:1).*

### **A Devastating Question**

"Has God said?" is the most devastating question that has ever been put into language. All the history of sin, of misery, and disruption, all the evil story of suspicion, disintegration, hatred, war and the rest, came out of that question. The whole situation in the creation which we so deeply deplore had its roots in that question. Satan's whole evil, sinister purpose was summed up in that apparently harmless form - "Has God said?" - a question aimed at the very integrity of God, at the very goodwill of God, aimed at the purpose of God for man, aimed at God's method with man by which that great purpose should be realised, the method of faith, of confidence, of obedience. Yes, it was all in a very brief sentence in the form of a question - "Has God said?"

And that question, without betraying the subtlety and guile behind it, being admitted by the one to whom it was offered, resulted in a question becoming a very constituent of human nature, a very part of man's being. Right at the centre of every child of Adam there is a question; it is this question. Life itself, human life, is a question, a big question, a question which, all through the ages, men have sought to answer, to solve, by countless means, in countless ways - to answer the question that lies there deep in the heart of man. If you trace that question deeply enough, you will find that it is a question about God and God's intention in creating man. Yes, it is in us; it is a part of us.

The question mark is a bent thing, it is a crooked thing and anything that is bent and crooked is the symbol of weakness. It signifies that the thing is not to be relied upon, it cannot be trusted. It is weak, there is something uncertain about it, there is a doubt in it, and that doubt of the question mark has a long and terrible history. From its simplest form of uncertainty it grows to definite doubt, and on to positive suspicion, then to disintegration and ultimately to death. That is the history of a question. A question is a very terrible thing, especially when it involves man's relationship with God. "Has God said?" You and I know quite well that we are all in some way or other, some degree or other, caught in the meshes of that original question, and it forms the battleground of Life. But that, of course, is a very dark side.

### **The Lord Jesus the Answer to the Question**

There is another side, and if we did but realise it, if only we could grasp it, the whole purpose of the coming and the work of the Lord Jesus was to answer that question. His coming from God, His taking man-form, His being subjected to the testings and temptings of this same sinister being, His going to the Cross, and crying in His last agony another question - "My God, why...", was all to answer this question, and He has answered it. The deepest meaning of Christ in every way is the answer to this challenge of Satan - "Has God said?" Yes, the answer is in Him. What is His Name, His title? His final and all-inclusive title is the Amen, and, as you know, that simply means the great Yes, the great Verily, Verily, the Amen. What is His categorical language? - "Verily, verily, I say unto you", and those who know, know that the word Amen and the word Verily are the same word in the original. He was only saying, "Amen, amen, I say unto you". This is final, there is no question about this, no place for doubt in this, there is no room whatever for uncertainty here. "Verily, verily, truly, truly, I say unto you".

His Person - if you follow the Lord Jesus in His life here in His Person there is one thing that you have to conclude about Him. He is a man without any questions. He is not a man with a question. If ever there was a man assured, confident and certain, He was that one. There never has been another with such absolute certainty. "Moses said... yes, well you can rely upon Moses, but I say...". In His very Person He is a man Who is not divided at all. He is integrated, He is whole, He is one, and the integrating factor is His absolute certainty. He knows, or, in other words again, He is a man without a question. Therefore He is a man without any weakness, because it is questions that mean weakness. Where there is a question, there is weakness. Where a thing is still open and unsettled, there is weakness. There is nothing weak about Him. He spoke as one having authority (Matt. 7:29), and I am quite certain that if we knew why people said that about Him, we should arrive at this - 'This man knows what He is talking about, He is sure of His ground, He is not quoting others, though they may be the authorities. This man knows in Himself.' He spoke as a man having authority.

And this certainty, this assurance, this confidence, this integration of His being was His power, His power with men, His power over the devil. The devil had no foothold here in this way of a question. He could not get in at all. He tried to get in - "If you are the Son" (Matt. 4:3 etc.). That is only another form of saying, "Has God said?" because only just prior to that God had said, "This is My beloved Son." It is only just assailing in another way. "Has God said?" He did not get in there, and therefore the one who sought to get that foothold on a question at the beginning was himself cast out in the end by this power of an integrated life. Here is the answer to the question, and the answer is in Himself.

But then you say that may be very true theoretically, actually, but what is the value of that to us? Oh, everything, everything! Dear friends, you know, those who know the Lord know quite well, that one of the very first features of the Christian life when we really do receive the Lord Jesus into our life is the consciousness that the great big question has been answered. We put that in many ways. Now we have come to rest, now we know, we have assurance. You ask us how we know; we cannot tell you, but we know. There is a sense of our questions having been answered, our doubts having been dealt with. Something has happened that has brought to us the rest of a conscious assurance, certainty, confidence. It is just a mighty sense, but there it is, and that is the secret of Christian joy.

### **The Lord Jesus the Answer in Us**

Now listen, there are numerous aspects of this whole matter of doubt. Between the blatant atheism of Communism which is the consummate work of the devil, and those finer degrees of temptation to believers to doubt their salvation which the enemy presses right up to the end, there are a vast number of aspects of this same pressing of the question about God and God's integrity, His faithfulness, and love. But whatever the aspect or degree of this thing, it originates from the same source. It comes from the devil, and the only answer to the devil is Jesus Christ, and seeing that that work of the devil is in us through Adam Number One, the only answer to that work of the devil in us is Adam Number Two: Jesus Christ in us, and He is the answer, and we believers know it. We know it from the very beginning of our Christian life that the Lord Jesus answers the devil in this matter of the basic, fundamental question of relationship with God.

Now, you can never argue anybody who has atheistic inclinations, tendencies or bondage to the devil, you can never argue them into any position of knowledge, of that assurance. It cannot be along the line of argument or reasoning, philosophy, or anything else, but it can all come about by the receiving of the Lord Jesus into the life, and the answer is there. Now the blessed thing about the Christian life is that all those who look on to a true Christian life and to a number of true Christians have to say, 'They have got something that we would like to have.' I do not suppose for a moment that I am talking to many atheists, but supposing, and for our own sakes let us remember this, that the very desire to have that answer, the very desire to have that which the Christian has, the very coveting of it, is a proof of God. It is a proof of God in itself. If you have any inclination, any desire, any longing to have what you see true Christians have, that is a proof of God, and if you follow that very desire, it will lead you to Jesus Christ, you will find in Him the answer to that which is in you by your birth - a question.

But I was touching it on the other side. Let us remember, dear friends, that while we can never reason or argue anyone into faith, we can live them into faith. That is, we can make them covet what we have. And it is our longing to inspire a holy covetousness in this world by revealing that we have got the answer to the question. Because we have the Lord Jesus, we have the answer, the Amen, the Verily, Verily, and you and I need to be more characterised by that.

### **Our Relationship with the Lord**

And that leads me to a final word as to the application of this, because the application is in many directions. Of course, it begins with God Himself, this tremendous testing of faith, even of Christians, as to the Lord. The devil never gives up. Even though he has lost us from his kingdom, he pursues us and tries to somehow insinuate the doubt right up to the end. Especially when we are not in first-class condition, that is when he thrusts; when physically, nervously, mentally, we are off-colour and a

bit down, then he presses in his doubts, getting in between us and our God, or seeking to. In this very connection we have those very precious letters of Peter.

We always ought to remember Peter and his letters together. If ever there was a man who had given the devil occasion for bringing about an overwhelming and devastating question and doubt, it was Peter. Peter might well have sunk under the dark waters of his own denial of his Lord. Satan had plenty of ground there. But read his letters, and the whole tenor and tone of Peter's letters is that of seeking to inspire tried, tempted believers to trust the Lord. He talks about the fiery trials. "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial". Peter is saying, 'I have been through fiery trials, I know all about it, but do not think it is strange', and his whole letters are on that line, that the Lord can be trusted in trial. Do not cast away your trust in the Lord because He is allowing trial to come, and the enemy comes in through your trial to tempt you to believe that the Lord does not love you. It is so easy in such times. The application must be to our relationship with the Lord.

### **Our Relation to Salvation**

It must be in our relation to salvation. The Lord Jesus has dealt with the enemy who was determined to rob man of God's purpose concerning him, and in the Lord Jesus is our assurance of salvation. We must not allow the enemy to find a niche into which he can thrust the thin end of the wedge of doubt as to our salvation. Dear friends, if ever that comes your way, do remember where it comes from. It is Genesis 3:1 all over again, and you see the devastation wrought by that question, that apparently very harmless question. Oh, what a history follows! - and the same history will follow in our lives spiritually if we let that question in. The first thing to remember when the enemy comes to cast a doubt upon our salvation is this - Gen. 3:1: "I know where that comes from, I know who originated that, I know who is the power behind that. Am I going to have any dealings with him? No, I shut the door." Do not repeat Eve's folly. Shut the door, seek the strength of the Lord Jesus to shut that door, and to keep it shut, and not entertain the question as to salvation.

### **Our Relation to God's Purpose**

How necessary it is for us to be in assurance as to God's intention, God's great purpose. You here are familiar with the eternal purpose, but that purpose has got to come to every one of our lives. We are all called according to His purpose, and we are to have that assurance that we are related, individually and personally related, to the great purpose. We are a part of it, we are in it, and if we are tempted to believe that our lives are without purpose, without meaning, you know where that comes from, and you know where that will lead you to. Lose your sense of life purpose, and you will see the same devastation. I know that again the Lord tests us. Sometimes there seems to be no purpose. The last thing that seems to be true is that we are called according to purpose, but here it is. "Has God said?" Yes, He has said about this: "Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4), "called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). God has said. If the enemy raises a question about Divine purpose in our life, then our lives will disintegrate. There will be disaster sooner or later.

### **As to Fellowship**

And finally as to fellowship. You see again, it is for the same thing: for destruction, for devastation, for disintegration, for the cancelling of purpose, the robbing of power. It is just the same thing. Introduce a question amongst the Lord's people, and see what happens. Introduce a question, get

any kind of suspicion amongst believers of one another, a question about one another, doubts about one another, anything like that coming up. What is the end?

Well, to begin with, it is weakness, and it is a weakness that means that things are not safe, things cannot carry a weight, cannot take responsibility. Something is going to break somewhere. It is a question mark, it is weakness. It is something bent, and from that point onward everything grows, if it is allowed - weakness, doubts, fears, suspicions, separations, disintegration, the end. Everything is nullified, and it all began with a question. If we are going to have any questioning at all, let us question our questions and prove them. If Christians today would be doing that where insinuations, suggestions, rumours, reports and what not are going about, if only Christians would question the questions, and say, 'Look here, we have got to make sure about this, it sounds as plausible as the devil's first question, it seems perfectly harmless, but let us make sure as to one another, and as to all concerned...' nail that question. If you have any reason to believe that that question being given place is going to lead to disintegration, the break-up of fellowship, nail it as from the devil, and have nothing to do with it. Oh, what a different history if only Eve had turned at once and said, 'Yes, God has said, and that is the end of the whole matter.' God said. Let us be like that.

It is not necessary to remind you of the tremendous emphasis in the New Testament upon certainty, assurance, standing fully assured, having confidence, "casting not away your confidence" (Heb. 10:35), assurance, certainty. Oh, what a lot there is, and if you look again you will find that it all relates to this matter of power, authority over the enemy and his works, and in the doing of the work of God. What a lot a question can lead to if it is not, as we say, nipped in the bud, challenged at once, if it is allowed a place. The Lord make us such as are not prepared just to accept anything that the enemy likes to offer in the most beautiful garb without first of all wanting to know where it is going to lead to, what the result of it will be if we do accept it.

I do not think we can do better than sing one verse about assurance - "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine."