



The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net
Email: info@austin-sparks.net

In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any changes, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.

A Right Thing Done in a Wrong Way

by T. Austin-Sparks

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1963, Vol. 41-1.

(1 Chronicles 13-15)

The inclusion of this episode in the Chronicles of Israel has evidently a very definite purpose; it conveys a message which the "Israel of God" - the Church - has been, and still is, all too slow to take account of.

Precisely, it is this. A right thing done in a wrong way can be as disastrous as either not doing it at all or even doing a wrong thing. It says beyond question that God is as jealous and particular about *how* a thing is done as He is about having it done at all. Let us look carefully at this tragedy.

The Credit Side

On the credit and good side we have:

1. The right object. There was no question whatever that the matter in hand was something right and that God wanted to be done. Eventually, when it was done in the right way, He greatly blessed it. That the homeless Ark of the Testimony should be brought a real stage nearer to its final resting-place was all in accord with the mind of God. It was really destined to have its full and final place as the focal-point of the life of the redeemed nation in Jerusalem, and so reach the end of that disorder resultant, so largely, from the man-made regime of Saul (verse 3).

2. It was contemplated, discussed, and decided upon with reference and deference to the will of God (verse 2). That will was desired and honoured.

3. Although the initiative and inspiration came from one man, it was a corporate decision, taken in conference and fellowship. There was no independent act of an individual (verses 2, 5).

4. There was no lack of zeal, enthusiasm, and energy. It says that they did it "with all their might" (verse 8).

5. The motive, good intention, sincerity, and devotion were unquestionable.

This makes a fairly good total on the credit side: right object; the will of God desired; unity and fellowship in decision; whole-hearted zeal in committal; rightness of motive and intention. What more could be required? Are these not the things which characterize most enterprises for God? There is certainly nothing wrong with *them* in themselves, and no condemnation attaches to any one of those points. What more could be called for?

And in the case under consideration, all seemed to be going well and prospering *for a time*. They were 'making merry before the Lord with all their might, with songs, and lyres, and harps, and tambourines, and cymbals, and trumpets' (verse 8). The *seeming* success up to a certain point led them to assume that the Lord was with them and that His acceptance was assured. But - Oh, woeful But! - something happened. In itself it was a simple thing and not an extraordinary happening. It was only that "the oxen stumbled". Upon that stumble in the threshing-floor of Chidon the entire scene changed. An apparently simple incident uncovered a whole lot of wrong in principle. It was well-intentioned on the part of Uzza, prompted by real concern for the Ark and its safety; a real interest in the success of the whole undertaking and enterprise. All that he did was to "put forth his hand to hold the Ark" (verse 9). It was all so natural, so spontaneous, so well-meant, so free from vice and evil desire. But "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him... and he died there... before God" (verse 10).

Well, we may not like it, and we may feel bad about it. That is how David felt. He was angry (verse 11). He was afraid of God (verse 12), and he said, "How can I bring up the Ark of God to me?" Looked at naturally there appears to be very good reason for being offended with the Lord; for saying, 'evidently the Lord does not want us, or our service; He does not care for all our well-meaning efforts to do what we were convinced was His will and would please Him. We had better give it up!' So David felt and acted accordingly, and the whole project came to a standstill.

So it remained long enough to permit the resentment to die down and exercise of heart to take place. There was deep enquiry before the Lord as to His meaning in all this. David was a big enough man in character to rise above mere pique, resentment, and offendedness. God has to be justified and His ways vindicated. So, in heart-enquiry, the debit side comes to light.

The Debit Side

What was a cart, even though it be a nice new and handsome one, doing in this business? What was it and where did the idea come from? Familiar and well-worn as it all is, let us frankly face it. This cart idea was born among the Philistines, persistent and incorrigible enemies of Israel (See 1 Samuel 6:7, etc.). David had spent a not very commendable period of his life among the Philistines. It was a time

governed by that abomination to God - compromise. Compromise - like appeasement - only puts off the evil day for a while, but it is an uneasy interim and the end is shame and reproach. It is at heart but a temporary relief.

So it was with David. During his time with the Philistines he had become familiar with the cart-device, and no doubt the idea had returned with him. When the Ark had been captured by the Philistines in the days of Saul, they had placed it on a new cart. They had suffered the severe judgments of God for having touched it and, although superstitiously, had sent it back in awe.

In the interval of tragedy David - *through enquiring into the Word of God* - came to see that worldly methods, organizations, inventions, and the productions of the "uncircumcized" (uncrucified) in heart and mind, are not the ways and means of the Spirit of holiness. Nothing imported by the natural man, or that emanates from him, will pass with the Lord when it is the essential and full testimony of Jesus which is in view. The cart may represent many things and may be linked up with many well-intentioned objects, but it is an invention of man.

In the oxen we may see symbolized the strength and energy of nature. Strength of mind, will, emotion, were all there in that enterprise. The Lord's word is "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit" (Zech. 4:6).

So much then for the Philistine cart. But what of Uzza? What was he, and what was he doing there? There is something here which calls for a very close and careful attention. Uzza was the son of Abinadab. It was in the house of Abinadab that the Ark was lodged when the Philistines sent it back on their new cart. Uzza had become very familiar with the Ark, perhaps too familiar, and most likely a kind of proprietorship had come into him. The sacred testimony had been in his house for a very long time. His father was a Levite; he was the son of a Levite. He should have known, indeed, he must have known the history, the nature, and the vocation of the Levites. All the provisions and the instructions for carrying the Ark were a part of his very inheritance. The Levites were especially near to God because of that radical repudiation of all that related to foreign gods in the day of the golden calf. The very principle of foreign worship was expunged from their constitution as the tribe of Levi. The Ark embodied what was utterly separate and holy. On long poles alone could they carry it, not touching it with their own hands,

Uzza was supposed to know all this. He was, however, held responsible for knowing it. The eyes of glory and of flame saw in Uzza a fatal familiarity with holy things. Moreover, those eyes saw beyond the Ark to what it represented. The Ark was no less a type than of the Son of God Himself: Divine in the gold; incarnate in the wood; containing the mind of God in perfection; the rod of living priesthood in resurrection; the heavenly manna of life for the people of God. To God the Father, the Son is infinitely holy and sacred; "separate from sinners", and to touch Him with familiar hands is to meet the jealousy of God.

Uzza had insinuated himself into a false position. Was there some secret pride which led to presumption? God had not put Uzza where he was at that time. Being in a false position, he could - as it seemed - of necessity put out his own hand when things became difficult.

There *was* a movement of God stirring. God had repudiated and brought to an end that false regime under Saul. That also had been man's choice. It was human glory that governed; it was natural strength. God had exposed it. There is one thing that God will not tolerate in what is truly of Himself;

it is that any "flesh" shall glory in His presence. God was moving toward that which, in the history of Israel, would - as fully as type could do so - represent His mind about government, foreshadowing the Kingdom of His Son. If that was to be through 'a man after His own heart', then everything of a contrary nature thereto had to be judged.

It is to be noted that this dramatic incident had a very wide audience: "all Israel, from Shihor of Egypt to the entrance of Hamath". So that all the people of God were to know the solemn lesson being taught. The kingdom is coming in, and it is to be established according to Heaven. It cannot stand if its foundation is other than heavenly. It is - in principle - the Kingdom of *God*, not of *man*, even with the best intentions. The great lesson, then, and the lesson which David learned, is that for spiritual things only spiritual people have a place. Let us put that into large print, it is so important.

For Spiritual Things - Only Spiritual People

The basis upon which the tribe of Levi was set apart for the holy ministry to the Tabernacle defines the nature of spiritual men, and it should be carefully studied again. They were men who in their very constituting knew the difference between the natural and the spiritual. They had been tested very drastically and had shown themselves true at great cost. Their office or public service was not their testing. They were not put into spiritual responsibility in order to give them an opportunity to show their fitness for it. They were not selected by men, much less were they there of their own volition or ambition. They were there because God approved of them as *men*. They were *men of God*, not firstly officials or parts of a machine. They were men with a history with God which came to light at a time of spiritual emergency. All the Lord's people knew this. They were an Israel within Israel and showed what every Israelite ought to be.

God had been watching the development which had been initiated by David and the new cart, and He saw the contradiction and falsehood at its very heart. It is not just a matter of correct technique or right form; nor is it just correspondence with an orthodox system of teaching or practice. It is essentially and indispensably the spirituality of those in active association with the Testimony. We can be passionately evangelical or 'fundamentalist'; we can be fastidiously jealous for correct doctrine and order, and yet - with all this - still not be spiritual men. There can be as wide a gap between a rabid fundamentalist and a spiritual man as there is between a conservative and a liberal theologian. Failure to understand this difference results in a very great deal of confusion.

Uzza would have passed for a very zealous evangelical, but his lack of spirituality led to the tragedy recorded. It amounted to interfering with or overlooking God's spiritual order.

So we end where we began. This whole episode, so full of powerful instruction shows that God is just as particular as to how a thing is done in relation to Himself as He is that it should be done at all. Spiritual principles are very serious things with Him; even to the point of life or death. Whether it be in Old Testament foreshadowing or in New Testament reality, it is all a matter of God's jealousy for His Son. No *man* may put his hand on God's Son to control or take charge. The custodianship of the "Testimony of Jesus" is not in man's hands.

Good motive and intention may be quite right, but with that there must be spiritual understanding. Zeal, yes, indeed; but not zeal that is not according to knowledge. Let there be a desire to do God's will, but let the doing and the way of doing be governed by the Spirit of God, and not just by human judgment. God's *way* is as important as God's end.

If, through a mistake, tragedy, confusion, and even heartbreak ensues, natural questions would be - 'What is to be done?' 'How can the fault - if not the damage - be corrected?' 'Now that the damage is done and cannot be undone, should we not just leave it and trust to the sovereignty of God to over-rule it for good?'

If we are to take the particular incident before us as a guide and answer, there is quite clear guidance. If a situation exists concerning which we have in all honesty to say that the *way* was wrong, we must do what David did. We must go back to the point where we were wrong, that is, to the Word of God and its provision, and in humble, contrite confession, start again from *that* point. God will have no glossing over of the violation of basic principles with talk about 'sovereignty'. That would be to use God against His own word. If it is possible to do so we must correct the wrong. Let it be understood that we are not here referring to errors, mistakes, or even sins in human life; we are referring to the work of God and the Lord's Testimony in building according to Christ.

It is the law that God's end must be reached in God's way.