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The Meaning of Christian Service

by T. Austin-Sparks

Excerpt from "Christ All in All" first published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Nov-Dec 1931, Vol. 9-6.

What is Christian service according to the mind of God?

It is not our having a very full program of Christian activities - not necessarily.

It is not that we are always busy in what we call "the things of the Lord."

It is not the measure and amount of our activity and busyness - the degree of our perspiration and enthusiasm in the Kingdom of God.

It is not our schemes - our enterprises - for the Lord.

Beloved, the test of all service is this: its motive. Is the motive, from start to finish, that in all things HE may have the preeminence - that Christ may be all in all?

You know the temptations and the fascination of Christian service - the fascination of being busy... being occupied with many things... having your programs, schemes, enterprises... being in it and always at it. There is a peril there, and that peril has caught multitudes of the Lord's servants: it is its bringing them into prominence. It has made the work theirs - it is their work - it is their interests; and they are the more pleased the more they govern the thing and run the thing.

No, there is a difference between going the round of the clock in Christian service as the mere enjoyment of activity and of the fascination of it, and of all the advantages and facilities it provides for ourselves - our flesh and its gratification - there is a great difference between that and this: "Christ is all and in all."

Sometimes that end is achieved by our being put out of action, and that is the test as to whether we are quite satisfied to be altogether put out of the work if only the Lord can be more glorified by our being out. If only He can come into His own, it does not matter a scrap whether we are seen or heard. In the grace of God it is somewhere to get when you are quite content to be put in a corner, to be taken no notice of, not to be seen... if thereby the Lord Jesus can come into His own more speedily and fully.

Somehow we have got caught up into this thing, and we think the Lord Jesus can come into His own only if we are the instrument. The rivalries - platform rivalries, pulpit rivalries - sensitiveness because one is put before another, because one address is given more attention than another - the favorable remarks all given in one direction, etc., etc. - I know all about it.

After all, what were you after? Winning your audience or winning your sermon... or winning your Lord? A great difference!

Sometimes the Lord gets more out of our bad times than we think; and sometimes we have our good times, and He has not got the most. Therein is the necessity for our being set aside, our being kept weak and humble: that He might have the preeminence.

The explanation of service according to God's thought is just this: what are you doing it for? Do you want to be in the work - to take up the work - to be busy? Or is it utterly and only if by any means He may come into His own? That God's end may be realized? And if it means that He can be "all and in all" by our death as well as by our life, have we come to the place where we can say, "That Christ may be magnified in this mortal body, whether by life or by death"?

That is the explanation of service from God's standpoint.