

T. Austin-Sparks:

Reading: Rom. 5:12,15–19; Eph. 4:13,20–24; Col. 3:9–11.

Here the Word says we have put off the old man, or more literally, that we have laid down or laid aside the old man. The same word is found in Hebrews twelve, verse one—“therefore... lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us....” We have laid down, or put off, the old man. So often those words are used by us in a merely personal connection. We speak of “our old man”; by which we mean this sinful nature of ours which rises up under provocation. That aspect, of course, is included in the initial act of faith’s repudiation, but that is not all that is meant by the statements before us. It is included; but what we have here is something very much more.

The Significance of the Term “Old Man”

Romans five explains what is meant. The old man is a racial order, represented by its racial head, Adam. It is an order. That corporate, collective Adam, as apart from God, having departed from God, is a kind of order which can no longer be accepted by God, which has passed out of God’s thought and God’s acceptance, and stands contrary to His mind. That is the order into which we are born, and to which all that we are by nature belongs, and it is spoken of as a corporate, collective entity. It is important to remember that, not only is the Body of Christ one, but the Body of Adam is one; that is, that all in Adam are also a corporate being. It is a man, a kind of man, a type of man expressed world-wide; and we are said to have put off that man, the old man; we have laid him aside, laid him down. We have laid him in the grave in the same way that we lay a corpse there. The body of one who has departed this life is laid aside. It is no longer the place in which he dwells. He has laid aside that body, and we follow up and likewise lay it aside. Now as believers we have put off, have laid aside the Adam type, the Adam order, the Adam system, this one great collective man of a certain kind, of a certain order.

The New Man

Then it is further said that in Christ we have put on the new man. That also is often thought to be a merely personal affair, an individual matter. That is to say, the new man in our conception is a kind of new personal life and nature. That is true, but it is far more than that. In the Letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle is speaking of the new man which is the Church, “the Christ” as it is literally expressed in First Corinthians, chapter twelve and verse twelve. Christ is one with all His members, as the Head joined to the body, all the members making one body, one new man. It is a collective, corporate man, a man of a new order which is not Adam, but Christ: “where... Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11). Before it was Adam who was all, and in all, but now in this new creation it is Christ Who is seen to be all, and in all. The Apostle well expresses what is meant when he writes: “But ye did not so learn Christ; if so be that ye heard Him, and were taught in Him, even as truth is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:20, 21). It is a great embodiment of Divine truth in a Person, and we are represented as having divested ourselves of the one body, of old Adam, and as having invested ourselves with this body of Christ, with the new man.

(a) The Primary Feature

That includes a good many things. If you look at the context of this passage you will observe some of them. It includes the nature of Christ. That is why, after mention has been made of putting on the new man, the Apostle proceeds almost immediately with words like these, “Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, even as Christ...” (Eph. 5:1,2). The new corporate man is the embodiment of the love of Christ. That is the first thing. This love must have an individual expression, for what is said to be true of the whole body is only so in the degree in which it is found to be true of the individual member. Let us recognize that, when we speak of the Church, or the Body of Christ, or make use of this alternative title, the “new man,” we are speaking of that which is the embodiment of Christ’s love; and when we say we are putting on, or have put on, the new man, we mean that we have put on the love of Christ.

To walk in love, then, is one thing that is involved. The Body is built up in love; the Body is constituted by love; the Body is the means of the expression of Christ’s love. If you take the figure and follow it, you will see how impossible it is to escape the fact. Were you to find a body without a head, it might be said that you had found a body; but it would be a very mutilated body! It really could not in the full sense be called a body. The Lord Jesus has not such a Body. For a full expression of the meaning of “body” you must have head and members all together, properly adjusted and related. Now Christ cannot be said to be love as the Head, and His members be viewed apart from Him. The Body is one; Christ in expression is inclusive of His members, and

that involves a nature. That nature is love: therefore “...as beloved children... walk in love, even as Christ also loved you....”

Love is not the only feature in this new nature. We use it simply by way of indicating that this nature does imply a new Body-disposition. You and I need to be more before the Lord for a Body-disposition. The disposition of this new man is the disposition of love. Let us ask the Lord for the increase of this disposition in the Body of Christ. All that is other than that is still the old man, and he has to be put off. When anything that is not of the love of Christ springs up amongst us as the Lord’s people, in any form whatever—and there are many forms of thoughts, and feelings, and words; words of criticism, words of judgment—love has to put it off. If you and I are found with such a thing as a spirit of criticism one toward another, that is of the old man, the old Adam, and he has to be put away. We have to recognize that the Lord has put old Adam in the grave. Then we have to follow up and say: To the grave you go; you belong there! The new man, then, speaks of a new nature, and of a new disposition. We all need more of this “new man” disposition, that we may walk in love.

(b) A Corporate Consciousness

Then this new man, being corporate and collective, being related and inter-related in this way, represents a life of fellowship. It demands a corporate consciousness which is one of the most important things. In the Lord’s purpose everything depends upon this corporate life. The Lord Himself can never reach His end by individuals, and you and I can never reach that ultimate end as individuals. While it is true that Adam, the old man, is a corporate unity, the consciousness of the old man is not a corporate consciousness; it is an independent consciousness, a divisive consciousness. We must have a corporate consciousness in order to reach God’s end. There are quite a number of the Lord’s own dear children who remain far too long in a state of spiritual immaturity. They never grow much beyond childhood spiritually. You may know such for years, and find them to be just the same simple children today as when you first knew them. Now, it will be said: It is very right and proper to be a simple child of the Lord! Well, let us always have a childlike spirit, let us always seek to be of a pure, simple spirit before the Lord, but let us remember that there is a difference between childlikeness and childhood. There is all the difference between keeping that simplicity, purity, openness, teachableness of the child, and a delayed understanding, an overdue ability to grasp spiritual things and to assimilate food for those more advanced in years. The trouble with so many people, or the cause of their delayed maturity, is that they are merely going their own sweet way; that is, they are butterflies, simply flitting from one thing to another with no corporate life, no related life. A butterfly is quite a pretty thing as it flits about, but there is all the difference between a butterfly and a bee. A bee too may go from one thing to another, but it does so to very good purpose. The bee’s life is a corporate life, the butterfly’s is not a corporate life; it is an individual life.

Delayed maturity, stunted spiritual growth, is very often due to this lack of a corporate sense of life which is bound up with the life of the Lord’s people in a definite and positive way. That is the way of enlargement. That is the law of the new man. We arrest our spiritual growth when we set aside the necessity for a life that is linked with the people of God in quite a definite way. That is a background in Ephesians. The whole of the fourth chapter is devoted to this vital matter. The new man is there set forth as the Church, the Body of Christ, and this new man is to grow unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. It is the corporate man that grows to that stature; individuals cannot do so. Only in relatedness do we move into the fulnesses of Christ.

Beware, then, of missing that very important law of spiritual enlargement. This is what is meant by putting on the new man. We are right, then, in asking the question, Have we really put on the new man? Have we really put on a Body-consciousness, a related-consciousness, a fellowship-consciousness that belongs to the new man? It may not always be possible for us to enjoy the immediate, local, geographical fellowship of a large company of the Lord’s people, but that is not the point; we are talking about a consciousness.

(c) A Disposition

Again, it is a disposition. It is the setting aside of everything individual, personal, separate, as such, and putting on that consciousness of relationship in which everything is for the Body, and in the Body, and by the Body. It is by this fellowship of spirit that the Lord gains His end and we come to the Lord’s end.

It is very sad to see the results of failure to recognize that. There are some, of whose devotion to the Lord we have no question, but the thing that pains us is that they have not grown one fraction of an inch since we first knew them years ago. At least, there is no sign of larger capacity. They are just exactly the same as they were. Such as these are never to be found making a supreme effort for a relatedness of a definite kind with the Lord’s people. They flit about from one thing to another, and they say: I am not going to settle down in any one particular fellowship of the Lord’s people! I am going to keep free! I am going to move about and keep in

touch with everything that there is! That may be very good from one point of view; and you must not misunderstand and suppose it to be said that we are not to be in sympathetic touch with all that is of the Lord. But there is something else which is necessary to building up, and that is a concrete relationship with the people of God. It is necessary to the Lord for fuller revelation. What do we not owe in the matter of revelation to this very thing! For revelation the Lord must have the Body spiritually expressed. It is tremendously important to know that. It is there that the Lord's ministry functions. Ephesians four is a great ministry chapter. You lose all isolation and departmentalism in ministry when you have the Body in realized expression, when everyone is found occupying some place of spiritual value in the work of the Lord; not according to the technical terms that man is wont to use with reference to such work, but where everyone represents something of spiritual value, where everyone is a minister before the Lord in some way. Whether you recognize it or not, it is a fact, and unfortunately a great deal of loss is suffered because it is not realized how greatly obedience on the part of every one of us affects the issue.

I will tell you how to test it. Is there going to be something personal for the Lord by a corporate means, say a conference? I venture to say that there are not many people who are spiritually associated with that who do not know some aspect of the Devil's rage and pressure in connection with it. You do not have to provoke the Devil in any way. It is one conflict and not only are the more evidently responsible individuals in ministry affected, but the conflict reaches to those whom we do not connect with ministry in that specific sense. In our thought we so often limit the ministry to this one expression of it. Those who have ordinary home and domestic duties may haply think of them as something quite other, and not as part of the ministry, but the conflict finds its way in there. It gets into your personal consciousness, into your business, apart from your being in any more immediate way involved in what is going on. It is because you are spiritually related to a testimony, because you have come in a spiritual way into the Body of Christ, recognizing what the Body of Christ is. Whether you have understood the truth or not in any large measure, you have put on the new man and you are suffering as a part of one man.

Now that is not only a fact which perhaps we recognize in a painful way, but it is a privilege. Paul said, "I... fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church" (Col. 1:24). There in your homes, in your business, in what you would call the back places, you meet with the conflict. It is for the Body's sake. Out there, far away from others, you are meeting the impact. That is the proof that every part of this Body is a partaker in this ministry. The whole is being served by every part in a spiritual way putting on the new man.

While it involves us in the cost, in the suffering, it equally means that we come into the good and the value; for no few members can come into blessing without all who are in spiritual relationship receiving benefit. If one member suffers, all the members suffer; if one member rejoices, all the members in some way rejoice, in some way come into the good of it.

God's Quest is a Man

You will see that this is very closely related to what the Lord is seeking to bring to us in these days. We are still speaking of it in very general terms, but the presentation of the Lord's mind ought to be very clear to us. It is a man that God is after. That man is represented by His Son, and the Church is His expression as His Body. This new man is the universal manifestation of what Christ is—one Lord, one Life, one Love. It is important, lest you should make a mistake in interpretation, to recognize that there is a difference between the word used in Ephesians and that in Colossians. In Ephesians we read of putting on the new man, in Colossians we read of having put on the new man. In Ephesians the word *kainos* means something that never was before, something altogether new. This Church never was before; this corporate man according to Christ never existed before, it is something new. In Colossians another word is used which simply means "fresh," not necessarily altogether new. You will see the significance of the different word if you look at the context. There is a freshness of mind, a freshness of spirit that is to be a mark of those who are in Christ. But our word at this time has to do with the former word, which is *kainos*, the new man, the man that never was before. There is an old man who was before, and he has to go. Here is another man that never was before, and he has to be put on.

This new man is after God. That takes us back to our previous meditation, God thinking His thoughts, desiring His desires, and willing His wills, all of which express His own nature, and all of which are focused upon a created being called "man": "...which after God hath been created..." (Eph. 4:24). That is a marvellous expression. Now here is a new man which after God is created in righteousness. The Lord teach us the meaning more clearly of so learning Christ.