

## The House Not Made With Hands

### T. Austin-Sparks:

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe" (Hebrews 12:26-28).

There is a sense in which those three verses summarize this letter, and indicate precisely the object of the letter. The statement about the 'things which can be shaken' covers the whole ground of the typology and earthly representation of heavenly things in the Mosaic system. The 'things which cannot be shaken' are the spiritual meaning of those things, that to which they point and embody as abiding spiritual and heavenly realities. The Apostle is saying that a shaking is about to take place, and the result of that shaking will be that all those things will be displaced, upset and overturned, and that system will be disintegrated.

That, to some extent, fixes the time of the writing of this letter as being prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Temple and all its service was going on at the time, but the writer knew that ere long that whole system would be shaken to its foundation and collapse, and would be broken to pieces. That took place shortly after with the destruction of Jerusalem. The probability is that this letter was written about the year A.D. 64, and the destruction of Jerusalem took place in the year A.D. 70. These very Jewish believers to whom this letter was written probably lived to that day and saw the fulfilment of this prophecy. As they were inclined to go back from Christ, in all the spiritual fullness which He embodied, to the outward, historical, traditional system, the Apostle wrote this letter to save them from the awful disaster to their faith which would inevitably take place if they were solely bound up with that system and had no more. He wrote to woo them from the transient and the passing to the abiding and the permanent, and to bring them into the things which CANNOT be shaken.

You go through the letter and mark each step, right from the first chapter, as to what can be shaken and what cannot be shaken. The eternal sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be shaken. Our sonship in Him cannot be shaken. Is it the blood of the covenant? It is the Blood of the EVERLASTING covenant, and it cannot be shaken! Is it the Priesthood of the Lord Jesus? It is after the order of Melchizedek; not merely after the order of Aaron, which passes, but after the power of an endless life, which cannot be shaken! Whatever there is in this letter has two sides. There is the outward form used to express something, and that will pass. And then there is the inward thing being expressed, and that will not pass. So the call is to be bound up with the unshakable things, the eternal things and the heavenly things which are always the spiritual things, as differing from the temporal things.

The types represented the earthly, physical body of the Lord Jesus before the Cross and the resurrection. Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians that He was "found in fashion as a man", and we know that that word 'fashion' in the Greek means something which is passing. The Greek word 'schema' is something which is transient, which does not come to stay. It is the same word that Paul uses at the beginning of Romans 12: "Be not fashioned according to this world", this age. The fashion of this age passes so quickly. "He was found in fashion as a man", that is, He took a form which was not His permanent form. His permanent form is found after the resurrection, when He had a body of humanity, but different from the form, the fashion, of His pre-crucifixion body.

That body concealed an eternal, spiritual reality, and no one was able to discern or perceive that inward, eternal, spiritual reality of the Person of Christ apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God... Blessed art thou, Simon... flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee but my Father which is in heaven." We know how blind the religious people of His day were as to who He was. That body, that fashion, concealed, hid an eternal, spiritual reality. That is "the mystery", as Paul calls it. It is that which was associated with the ark of the covenant, the mystic secret of God, into which the Philistines wanted to peer, and which they were so anxious to possess, for when the ark came into a situation it represented some power. It was the secret of Israel's glory, and they were always seeking to get hold of the secret of Israel's glory. God was there. That ark was a type of Christ, but it is an ark of acacia wood - a humanity. It is overlaid with gold, it is true, which means that Deity is associated with it, but its purpose, its meaning, is not in the combination of those materials - wood and gold - but in the Spirit that is embodied in that. That was the mystery of Christ.

The disciples were wont to regard that earthly body as the essential and indispensable thing. Whenever the Lord Jesus referred to His Cross or to His going away, a cloud came over them, and they became overwhelmed

with a sense of foreboding, almost of despair. They were greatly troubled. To them the physical presence of the Lord Jesus was essential, indispensable. If He went away, that represented the losing of Him. It was in that way that the Jews, the Hebrews, regarded the typical system. That Mosaic order and system were their very being; they were bound up with them.

In relation to the body of Christ which was prepared for Him to fulfil an eternal purpose, and also in the whole Jewish, or Mosaic, system of types, which was provided as a means to an end, the fashion had to be broken, shattered, in order to bring the reality out. It is the difference between the flesh and the spirit - not merely the flesh in its evil sense now, but simply the natural life, and the spiritual. One has to be broken to make way for the other. The way into the 'naos', the very presence of God, was through the sundered flesh of Christ, just as the way into the Most Holy Place, the very Sanctuary, was through the veil of the Temple or the Tabernacle. But that way was not open to all until it was rent from top to bottom, and the veil of the Temple, or the Tabernacle, was that upon which everything else hung. All was gathered up into it. There was God's side, and there was man's side, represented in that veil, and the whole system had its focal point in the veil. The priests, as representing all the people, could go as far as that veil, but they could go no further, and that means that the people could go no further. God was on the other side of that, and He came, as it were, to that veil, but there was no way through. Once every year the High Priest went in, but there was no such thing for abiding fellowship or continuous union. When God split that veil from top to bottom He opened the way for all right into His own presence.

In the flesh of the Lord Jesus there was the meeting place of God and man. On the one side - God; on the other side - man. But there was the veil, and we know quite well how that veil did hang between them. When the Lord Jesus went to the Cross and THAT BODY was broken, then the innermost secret of His Person was revealed - GOD was manifest. That is why you must have Christ crucified in order to know the wisdom and the power of God. You never get through to know the power of God except by Christ crucified.

This letter to the Hebrews says that the shattering of this whole typical system is to make way for the spiritual reality to become predominant, just as the breaking of that body of Christ led to the yielding up of the eternal heavenly secret of His Person. It will always be so. Not only is it true in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 70, but it will be true again at the end, when all that is merely external in representation will be shaken, broken, and proved to be temporary, transient, imperfect, and never leading through to the reality. When that happens, those whose lives are bound up with it will go with it. So there is some point in our stressing the necessity for an apprehension of what is heavenly and what is spiritual, and our coming into it.

These words are introductory and lead to something quite concrete. We have said that this shaking relates to an earthly system of representation and types. That, then, leads on to the bringing into view of the heavenly system. (System is not a wrong word. God is systematic. He is a God of order and has arranged this universe as a marvellous system. The evil is in making what is earthly take the place of what it is only intended to represent.) There is a counterpart of all that is in this letter. The thing that is brought in with this letter - not discussed as such, but mentioned and taken very largely for granted - is what comes in with chapter 3, verses 3 to 6.

It is assumed in this letter that the House of God is represented by everything here. It seems to come, in so far as the phrase itself is concerned, in quite a casual way, which implies that it is taken for granted. It is not something detached or unrelated. It is the thing which gathers up everything else. All that is taking place here is taking place in the House of God. It begins with the "Son"; it goes on with the "sons", the "brethren", the "children"; then the priestly ministry in the House; and before it closes it will speak about the Father's discipline in the House, the child-training of the sons; and the very subject of the inheritance and heirship is something which has to do with the House, the family, the household. The bare mention of the House of God does not suggest another subject, but it suggests the inclusiveness of everything here in the House. That House of God is the heavenly system of which the house of Israel was but a type, a foreshadowing.

#### THE NECESSITY FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD

It is necessary to all the Lord's purposes which are gathered up into that which we have been considering - the bringing of children unto the full meaning of sonship - to have the House, for all that development takes place in, and because of, the House of the Lord. Wherever you fail to get that which truly represents the House of the Lord, and which is in accordance with the spiritual House of God, you will get immaturity.

This House of God, fully constituted, is essential to spiritual maturity, and if you have not got it you find that Christians are immature. In what way is it essential? To begin with, there is nothing like a properly, spiritually

ordered House for spiritual training. All the lessons that you need to learn can be learned in a properly ordered assembly, and the ordered assembly provides the background for the learning of those lessons. There are spiritual laws which govern the House of God, laws of relationships, laws of position, laws which the Lord enforces and demands shall be observed, which take away from us all our independence, and which definitely hold us into mutual responsibility. There is all the difference between a spiritual assembly as an organism, and the congregation. A congregation is a company of units. They come and go, and may do so for years, for decades, yet responsibility for one another spiritually never arises. But in a spiritually ordered and governed assembly the whole question and law of mutual responsibility for the spiritual lives of one another is demanded, is incumbent, is essential. Everything is relative. In that organism, if one member suffers all the members suffer, so very closely related spiritually are the members. In that organism there is no such thing as independence of action for life. The whole goes with the part, and the part demands the whole. In so far as that law breaks down, then the Testimony breaks down, the life breaks down, and God does not get what He is after, that is, spiritual maturity.

Read the letter to the Ephesians, the Colossian letter and the Corinthian letter, and you will see that that is running strongly through the whole, and wherever that law is not observed there is immaturity. In Corinth it was: "I am of Paul", "I am of Apollos", "I am of Peter". That is sectionalism, departmentalism, independence, detachment, fragmentary-ness, and the fruit is immaturity. The true spiritual fellowship is essential to spiritual growth, to maturity, and that is what is meant spiritually by the House of God.

It is there that we get our training. If you come under the government of the Holy Spirit you immediately are related by that one Spirit - by whom we are all baptized into one Body - and are made responsible for other believers. If something comes up between you and other believers with whom the Holy Spirit has linked you spiritually, you cannot snap your fingers and say: 'Let them get on with it! I go my way and they can go their way.' The Holy Ghost sees to it that you cannot get on! It is like the dislocation of a joint in your physical body. You will be suffering in your soul and in your spirit. There will be an ache, and you will know that you have not got freedom of action and restfulness of heart. There will be something all the time which is working against the free, spontaneous expression of your spiritual life. This thing will be there all the time. What has happened? The Holy Ghost is witnessing against that and life is arrested. Why? Because of the fact that the law of the House of God has been violated. When you come into that realm and know that you are getting some training, you are learning that it is not only necessary to have fellowship and maintain fellowship, but that increase of spiritual life is that way, and increase of spiritual power is that way, that the Body builds itself up in love that way, that prayer becomes mighty that way, testimony becomes effectual that way, and everything for the Lord's ultimate purpose depends upon that. Unless you recognize that, all these things are weakened and destroyed. And so the Lord brings saints together and relates them in groups, smaller or larger, for the spiritual purpose of representing His House, and in order that the spiritual laws of the House should operate there. It is so different from organizing a 'church', and having a 'church' roll and 'church' services. It is something which is a spiritual order, and a representation of a whole heavenly system, or, rather, the heavenly system itself in operation. Can you see the difference between the Body of Christ and what is called 'the church' today? One is an organized system; the other is a spiritual, living organism. The one will pass; the other is eternal, indestructible, heavenly, spiritual. The House of God is essential.

The House of God represents an order. Just as truly and fully as Israel's life was ordered, so is the House of God. If you read the book of Numbers you get but the type and representation of the House of God as ordered. Then you look into the New Testament and you will find the spiritual principles which are embodied in the book of Numbers. You do not organize the Church according to the book of Numbers, but you find that the Holy Ghost orders the Church according to the book of Numbers.

You will have representative members. In the book of Numbers they are princes and heads of fathers' houses. Carry that into the New Testament and what does that mean? It means men who have been brought to a place of spiritual wealth and spiritual dignity in the House of God, and can take responsibility. Moses (as God, mark you: "Thou shalt be to him - Aaron - as God" - Exodus 4:16) there at the door, and then all the fathers' houses gathered representatively at that door in these princes and these heads of fathers' houses, and God spoke from that door to all the households through these representative members.

Princeliness and headship are spiritual principles. Princeliness speaks of wealth and dignity. Headship speaks of authority and government. In the New Testament the ministry is the ministry of those who already have spiritual wealth and spiritual dignity, and have therefore, by spiritual maturity, come to a place of SPIRITUAL (not ecclesiastical) authority. They are not appointed officially, for you can never appoint people to be full of dignity, nor appoint anyone to spiritual wealth by a formal act.

## The House Not Made With Hands

That is a part of the heavenly order, and God takes great pains, when He gets things into His own hands, to see that that is how things are. The Lord is very jealous for princeliness. His people must be able to look up to those who represent the Lord's higher interests amongst them as their overseers, their leaders. That is a household thing, a Temple thing, a thing which is to have its expression amongst the Lord's people corporately, and a thing which means strength, growth and development. It is a great thing for young Christians to have had the advantage of having seen princeliness in their leaders, when those leaders were under provocation, were in suffering, affliction and trial, and to have seen the wonderful grace, graciousness, steadiness and dignity of the Holy Spirit, of THE PRINCE HIMSELF, reproduced in them. There is no small significance associated with that title of the Lord Jesus: "A PRINCE and a Saviour." Watch Him and see the princeliness! That, by the Holy Spirit, is reproduced in the House of God for the good of the House. It is not enough that there should be only one prince in a household. The Lord wants to develop that as a spiritual thing in all the members of the household - to develop spiritual responsibility. Responsibility only comes to those of spiritual means and spiritual dignity; otherwise it is merely official and will lack something.

The order of God's House is many sided. There are the princes of fathers' houses; there are priests, and Levites, and much more; all signifying the Divine, the heavenly system.

If only the Lord's people would recognize more that they are responsible for one another, there would be development and maturity. That is too long delayed so often. You remember the word which seems to touch this aspect of things most directly, from Ephesians 4: "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto (or amongst) men... and he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ." That passage has been grievously mutilated by words being put in which are not there: "He gave some TO BE apostles." The word is: "He gave some apostles", that is, amongst men He gave them apostles, pastors and teachers. What did He give them for? For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry. If you put a break between those two sentences you upset the sense. It does not say or mean that He gave them for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the Body of Christ. It says that He gave them for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry. Leave the responsibility with those gifts, and the building up will not take place. It is only when the saints come into the work of the ministry that the building up takes place. When the saints are growing, being perfected, and taking up the work of ministry, the Body grows. If you use a definite article there and say: 'For the perfecting of the saints for the work of THE ministry', you are in danger of making THE MINISTRY something apart from everything else. It is "...the work of ministering". The ministry is a general thing amongst the saints. All the saints have to be in the ministry, and it is only as they are in it that the Body is built up. Are you in the ministry? Are you leaving the ministry with the people whom you call 'the ministers'? If so, the Body is being deprived of something. If you are growing, in the sense of that word "being perfected", that is simply 'for the making complete of the saints'. If you are being made complete progressively, then that ought to be expressing itself in ministry, and that will result in the building up of the Body of Christ.

You see how the order of God's House is necessary to God's end; how the House is necessary because it embodies an order which is fruitful in the purpose of God.