

GOD'S INSTRUMENT

There are three things about which it is very necessary for us to be quite clear and certain. I will state them briefly and concisely without comment or enlargement.

The first is that God never gives up his original decision to bring his people to spiritual fullness.

The second is that, if his people, in general, move away from his intention, he raises up vessels and ministries both to bring that intention into view and, as far as possible, to recover his people to it.

The third is that those vessels and ministries have a peculiar and particular history under his hand. They are, in a peculiar way, governed by the purpose for which they are raised up.

There are two subsidiary factors in this connection. One is that such vessels and ministries must not compare or judge themselves by other standards, by other ministries, by other things the Lord may be doing. Neither should they be judged by others. God is dealing with them in a particular way, for a particular purpose, not necessarily saying that they are more important than others, but the fact is that they are called to a particular work.

The second thing is that, if the purpose of God is corporate, the corporate factor will govern the instrument that he raises up. This means that each individual within the compass of that ministry and its purpose will himself or herself be governed by the corporate law. Each individual will be a part of something much more than himself or herself, a part of a corporate whole, and will therefore have his or her experience under God's hand in a related way. It will not be just something personal and private.

Such a vessel has to begin at the beginning. The vessel that is going to bring into view God's full thought, and recover to it as far as can be, will have to be taken right back behind tradition, right back behind a lot of history, right back behind much that has been built up and become common and accepted. It will have to be taken back to start at the beginning. It may have had a Christian life, a Christian upbringing. It may have had behind it much of Christianity. But a crisis will come when it will seem as though there had been nothing before at all. "This is the beginning; we are starting all over again now!"

There must be that clear-cut beginning that is not just the carryover of history, the carryover of form and formalism, but something tremendous, as though there had never been any Christianity before now. "This is the break in history."

It must be like that! There has come a point when these instruments have realized that all their past Christianity has been almost as nothing compared with that which the Lord has now broken in upon them. It is like beginning all over again with a new conception, a new beginning at the beginning.

The second thing about all such instruments is that they must not be a part of the existing spiritual condition. If we are going to be useful to the Lord in any greater purpose of his heart, we shall have

to be no part of that which is content and satisfied with something less, and certainly no part of that which is contrary to his mind. There is to be a difference about us.

The third thing here is that such have to learn the voice of the Lord for themselves. To learn the voice of the Lord for oneself is essential to future ministry. That may explain a great deal of the Lord's work with us. Why is the Lord dealing with you as he is? And why is it that you can get so little help in your deepest problem at second hand? The Lord is seeking to make you know him personally at first hand, not to make you independent but to make you useful. That is very important.

Further, such an instrument has to be faithful, even though it seems presumptuous. Sometimes we are called upon to be faithful when it just seems like presumption, like putting other people right. It must be done in a spirit of meekness but, as the Apostle says, in all faithfulness. Such a vessel must be faithful, that is the point, faithful to what the Lord has said and shown. Faithfulness to the Lord sometimes requires that we do many things in those sovereign orderings of God with which we ourselves naturally do not agree.

Samuel's whole life-ministry was fulfilled through prayer. His ministry was mainly a ministry of prayer, which meant that he had to have a place with God so complete and utter that his own reasoning did not come in, his own feelings did not come, nothing about himself came in. He was right there with God, and although God told him to do things that seemed altogether contrary to God, and certainly contrary to his own best judgment, he obeyed. He knew it would work out. He could not understand why the Lord was doing it but he obeyed. We cannot have power with God unless God has gotten us into a place like that.

A vessel, based upon and governed by the corporate principle mentioned above, will have a peculiar corporate history. There is something about such a work and such a ministry and such a purpose that is different.

In the whole range of his sovereign purposes to bring people to a knowledge or fuller knowledge of Christ, God raises up and uses many particular instruments and ministries. It may be distinctive preachers and preaching places. Or it may be a ministry for the deepening of the spiritual life, and special gifts may be given for this.

When the Lord is concerned with this corporate factor, he deals with the vessel and ministry in a particular way; the history is different. The matter of relatedness is a very great deal more fullness in Christ, in a related way, than we should do as individuals under the best way. Therefore, the Lord deals with those who constitute such a vessel not just as individuals. They are required, every one of them, to take this attitude: "God is dealing with me in relation to a number of people, all of whom constitute for him a vessel for a particular purpose, and the only explanation of his ways with me is that related principle. If I were an individual by myself, I should not have to have many of the experiences that I have. And if I had my way, I would get away from all these people as soon as I could and get on my own and know the Lord for myself without all this business of relatedness!"

To take such a course would be to lose the main thing that God is after; you would just get right out of the way of that thing that is nearest to his heart because, for a corporate purpose, he must have a corporate instrument. So he must deal with us on that basis of relationship, and everything is related. Therefore, in this realm, the enemy will make the breakdown of fellowship his chief object.

Do not take your trying and difficult experiences, your sufferings, as merely personal. The sufferings that come upon you are not your personal sufferings in relation to your own separate spiritual life and growth. It is not just an individual and separate thing that you are going through, that God wants to bring you personally and alone into some greater fullness of spiritual life. It is related to his whole Body. Believe that, and it will be a help because we are part of some larger thing. It is to serve a larger purpose than we as individuals, however we might know of the Lord, could serve. There is a far greater value to the Lord in having an organic vessel in the greater fullness of Christ than in having a number of separate individuals going on with him.

So we cannot judge others, nor can we judge our own position in the light of others. And others should not judge us. The Lord himself knows what he is doing.

--excerpted and edited by Patrick J. Hession from a message by T. Austin-Sparks