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The Holy Spirit in the Life of a Child of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature... And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he is keeping the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him; for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:7,11-13).

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall over-shadow thee; wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

"And Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:41).

"And... Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:67).

"Simeon... was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple" (Luke 2:25-27).

"He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 3:16).

"The Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

"And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led in the Spirit in the wilderness... And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (Luke 4:1,14).

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because, he anointed me to preach... to proclaim... to set at liberty... to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18).

I feel it very much on my heart that the Lord would have me to say a little to you about the Holy Spirit. To some of you what I shall say will probably be very elementary, but it may be helpful to others, and we never get beyond the place where we need to be reminded of things which are, after all, the greatest things in the life of a child of God. It is not my intention to take up the above passages and speak about them in particular. They have been read in order to bring this matter before us with one object - at least to indicate how large a place the Holy Spirit has in the bringing in and the carrying through of God's purposes and God's instruments.

Some False Ideas Associated with the Spirit

Let me say at the outset one or two things about the negative side of the Holy Spirit and His presence, that is, what the Holy Spirit does *NOT* imply - for it is necessary for us to adjust our thoughts in this matter so that we have not wrong ideas which will lead to disappointed expectation. Many people seem to have the idea, more or less vaguely or certainly, that should anyone really be filled with the Holy Spirit and live in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, certain things are sure to result.

One is that of course such an one will never come up against any difficulties which to him are completely insurmountable. He will, by the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit dwelling within in fullness, surmount his difficulties and solve his problems very easily. Or again, such a life ought to be very largely free from suffering and adversity; being sealed, owned of God, it could hardly be set aside and rejected and driven out, and, amongst men, made a thing of nought; God would see to it that it was not so. Such ideas do exist, and when experiences to the contrary come, a good deal of perplexity and questioning arises. After all, is the Lord with us? Is the mighty power of the Holy Ghost amongst us and in us? If the Lord were mightily with us, surely we should be carried right on and all our mountains would go down and our difficulties would be swept aside, our sufferings would be as nothing? And so on. Well, from the moment of the Spirit's descent upon the Lord Jesus at the Jordan, there followed the wilderness and the devil. By the direct action of the Holy Spirit it was so. He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tried by the devil. So with David; from the day the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon him his troubles began. Almost immediately he found himself a target of the devil. From that day he was a marked man and an outcast, and we know the long periods in which he was hunted, "as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains" (1 Sam. 26:20). This man, upon whom the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily, was hunted for his very life. Yes, he was completely rejected and set at nought, and even, at one time at least, despaired in his own heart of survival. So much for a man upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rests mightily. Let us adjust ourselves to this matter and not entertain false ideas of what life is going to be if only we are filled with the Spirit and the power of the Spirit of God rests upon us.

The Basic Fact in the Life of a Child of God

That is the negative side very briefly. Come now to the other side and get right back to the beginning of Christian life - for the sake of anyone who may have an insufficient understanding of what happens when you become the Lord's. Here again we need to correct ourselves, for many think that when you become a Christian, you just adopt a certain line of procedure: you are expected not to do

many things that you have been in the habit of doing before, and you begin to do other things that you have not been in the habit of doing. You go to meetings, you associate with Christian people, you begin to pray, and to read the Bible, and do all sorts of things which are regarded as proper to a Christian. That all may take place and then life become one continuous struggle to keep it up. You have taken on something and you have to live up to it, and it is a struggle, and there does not seem to be very much in it more than that. Perhaps you enjoy the fellowship of God's people. You sometimes enjoy the meetings and sometimes you do not! It is a very unsatisfactory experience from your own personal standpoint in an inward way. After a while you get very weary and you wonder whether there is anything in the Christian life at all.

Well, there is a great deal to be said to correct this point of view. We must understand exactly what does happen when we really become children of God. Let us consider the case of the Lord Jesus, because in everything, from first to last, He is the exemplar, the representation of the whole Christian life. If you had looked upon Him as an ordinary person in this world in the days of His flesh, you would have seen nothing that marked Him out as essentially different from any other man - that is as a person in the world. You might have noted that He was a fine type of man and have been impressed by certain things about Him, as in the case of any other man; but apart from that you would not have noticed anything different. In outward appearance He may well have been like David, a splendid specimen of a man. I do not know what He was like physically, but David was that. The Lord had said to Samuel, "Look not on his countenance"; and almost immediately afterward the Word says of David "he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon." The implication is this, that, while you are not making the outward the criterion, there may be something quite good there; that is, ugliness is not at a premium. But that is not the point - "God looketh on the heart." Don't you look at the outward appearance; and even although the Lord Jesus may have been amongst men exceptionally fine in physique and appearance, His essential difference from other men was not in that fact. The difference lay deeper, hidden, quite out of sight. Even those in the closest association with Him physically, living with Him all day and every day, week after week, month after month, were not able to discern that difference until long afterward. They had suspicions, perhaps - fleeting impressions; they were often bewildered; but the vital factor lay hidden from them. "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip?" (John 14:9). The difference lay deeper.

What was the reality, the great difference, in the case of the Lord Jesus? It was a link between His inner being and His Father God. Those two were in perfect oneness, and out of that perfect, hidden, secret, spiritual oneness of His spirit with the Father, everything in His life took its rise. All His guidance came by that, and He did not act on any of the other lines of guidance common to men - advice, counsel, coercion, custom, expectation, even sympathetic appeal. He put back appeals that were made to Him out of the best of motives and desires for His good and well-being - even a mother's appeal. He had an inner union with God, and out of that He took His guidance, the yea and the nay for all His movements and for everything else. He lived on that, and that was the great inner difference between Christ and every other person. And that is the thing which distinguishes a child of God. No one who has not been born of God has that, but everyone who has been born of God has it - doubtless in a very elementary and infant form to begin with, because it comes by birth.

Here is the Lord Jesus again as example. He could have come and occupied the body of a man fully grown, and done the work which He really took up only when He was thirty years of age; but He started with birth because we all start there in our relationship with God - new birth; and the new birth is just the bringing about, by a miracle of the Spirit of God, of a union with God which was never there before, and it is out of that that everything of the Christian life takes its rise. It is by reason of that that you begin to do things that you never did before and you stop doing things that

you did before. There is no question of strain about it, of compulsion, of law. From the beginning it is just the work of that Spirit's law of life, and you act spontaneously, you, do not stop to think about it. In the physical realm you never stop to ask yourself if you are going to take another breath, you just do it. That is living, and it is because you are alive that you do other things. You do your thinking because you are living, but you do not have to think in order to live. It is like that in the life of a child of God. You are alive, and then because you are alive, you become conscious that you are no longer drawn to certain things, but you are drawn to certain others.

The Basis of Spiritual Education

Now what is the outworking of this great fact of being thus alive unto God? As we go on, that factor of life-union is the basis of all our education. It is the nature of our life and it is the basis of our education. David, as an Old Testament saint, was not on the ground of a "born again" believer, but his life was lived under the government of the Spirit and therefore can serve our present purpose by way of illustration. Why, after the Spirit of the Lord had come mightily upon him, did David have the history which was immediately subsequent - adversity, expulsion, suffering, perplexity, bewilderment, even despair? It is a common experience of those who have the Spirit. Even the Apostle Paul - who unquestionably had the Spirit - said at one time that he "despaired even of life" (2 Cor. 1:8). Why that? For this reason, that this nature of our spiritual life has to be perfected. The way of spiritual joy is through natural sorrow. The way of wisdom is through utter confounding. And that is not done once and for all; that is repeated again and again, and the process becomes more severe as you go on! You are brought more and more to an end of any possibility of understanding the ways of God naturally, and more and more to the place where a Divine revelation is absolutely necessary to survival and emergence.

We have said, through sorrow to spiritual joy. We are talking about *spiritual* joy. It is different altogether from mere optimism and suchlike things. Oh, it is so different! You ask the question, how can certain people rejoice over against such and such circumstances? Well, there is the mystery. It is not something that you can explain naturally at all; it is supernatural, it is Divine, it is a miracle. And so it is with everything - joy, wisdom, strength. Spiritual strength is an altogether different thing from natural strength. Natural strength ebbs and comes to an end. Spiritual strength comes in and even vitalises the physical and the mental. But the position is this, when that work is advanced - should the Spirit of God leave you for a moment, you are utterly weak; that is, for all practical purposes you are useless. But now, for the demands laid upon you physically and mentally, you are living upon another energy, though in the natural world you are weak and a fool. You might be otherwise; if you had not been brought on to this level, you might be amongst men other than a fool, but you have come under the hand of the Spirit of God, and He is making all things to be out from God and nothing out from yourself, physically or mentally or in any way. It is "by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6), and the education is going on in order to develop our spiritual strength to be the energy of mind and body, the wisdom and the understanding of our lives. It is developing another entity in us, or, to put it more correctly, it is the growth of Christ in us over against ourselves.

Dependence on the Lord and Spiritual Responsibility

Now this further word. The point you and I have to watch carefully is this, that we do not get into the habit of expecting the Lord to do everything objectively to us and for us. If we do that, the inevitable result will be the stultifying of our spiritual life. You do everything for little children: you hold them up on their feet to start with; if they begin to fall, you at once save them; and you explain everything, you tell everything, and do everything objectively to them and for them. What would you think if you had to do that to a grown person? It would be altogether abnormal and wrong. And it is no less

wrong in the spiritual realm. But this is where many become confused; for they realize that they are utterly dependent upon the Lord - and of course that dependence is necessary essential and right - and then they mistakenly collapse on the Lord because they are so utterly dependent and wait for Him to do everything. They expect Him to carry them, to support them, and to provide them with a life of continuous miracles. That is all wrong, and it is just there that we have to harmonize these two things - dependence upon the Lord, and spiritual responsibility; by no means an easy task.

That brings us to a more advanced point. We have got away from the beginning now. We are told we have to be utterly dependent on the Lord; on the other hand, we have to be responsible people. How do we reconcile these two things? How is it going to work out? In actual experience we often find that the Lord simply does not do the thing for which we had been waiting. He wants us to come into intelligence, where we recognise whether He says yes or no about the matter. When He says, Yes, we move forward and act, trusting Him of course for the necessary resource. We do not wait for Him to do it. If we have any witness of life and peace in our heart that that is the Lord's mind after sufficient testing of it by the Word and by prayer, then the responsibility for acting is ours. If, on the other hand, we have any reason whatever to doubt that that is the Lord's way, we must take the opposite course; however much we may want to do it, we must say, No; we must refuse to be moved in that direction by any kind of coercion or personal preference or desire. Let everybody say that is the direction in which we ought to move - that of itself is not a sufficient ground for moving. But here we must add a word of caution. What we are saying is based upon this - that the one concerned really has a life with the Lord, really does know the Lord, and that a sufficient breaking has taken place in the realm of natural will and natural likes and dislikes. The Lord Who lived on this basis and moved according to this law had been to Jordan and in type had there renounced the entire ground of self. There are many people who take an independent attitude on the ground that they have received their guidance from the Lord and therefore they are not going to take any notice of what others may say. But they are unbroken people; that is stubbornness, self-will, natural strength. We have to go through discipline, through testing, and through a measure of breaking, to be in the place where our interests are not governing, where what we would like is not dictating and where our natural thoughts and judgments are not the criterion. But given a true walk with the Lord inwardly, then there is a place of responsibility which we must recognise and accept and where we move or do not move according to what we judge to be the Lord's way after testing the situation.

It is then that the Lord comes alongside. We have been waiting for the Lord to come and act apart from us, and the Lord has been waiting for us to come to a place of spiritual intelligence where we move in that intelligence. As we move He begins to move alongside of us, and we find that things do happen, they do open up. It is wonderful how the Lord comes in and we find that is just what we have been praying for all along - for the Lord to do it; but the Lord has been waiting for something also. The Word speaks about the "set time." David said, "Thou wilt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for it is time to have pity upon her, yea, the set time is come" (Psa. 102:13). Yes, the Lord may have His set times, but in His infinite wisdom and perfect foreknowledge He makes His set time synchronize with a set condition. We cannot explain that, but there it is. The truth is that when the Lord's time comes and the thing happens, it is not just by an act of God unrelated to other conditions; you will find that that synchronizes with the end of a preparation, the arrival at a state on the part of those concerned, and the set time is in effect the time when they have reached a certain spiritual position. It may be a position of complete disinterestedness, where they are out of the picture - the last vestige of self-interest has gone and the set time has come. Or it may be any one of a number of other things. Whatever it may be, remember that the Divine activities are intimately linked up with a work in us, and that although it will be God's working alone that accomplishes anything, yet that working is delayed until we are ready to take our place of responsibility and to act in faith.