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The Importance of the Holy Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come" (Matthew 12:31,32).

It is not my thought or intention to speak about the 'unpardonable sin'; but what is laid on my heart for this moment, is a word about the importance of the Holy Spirit.

I think that if, in anything that the Lord Jesus said at all, He gave importance to the Holy Spirit in these words more so. This is a tremendous statement about the Holy Spirit. You see what He says: Anyone shall speak a word against Himself, the Son of man, it shall be forgiven; but whoso shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven, neither in this age nor the age to come. That is a tremendous statement, and that lifts and elevates the Holy Spirit to a position and a place of very great importance in the estimation of the Lord Jesus Himself.

There is something needed in the direction of a recovery of this matter of the Holy Spirit's great importance. Firstly, simply, not as a matter of creed, or even dogma, of doctrine and teaching, common belief and acceptance, but the realisation that the Holy Spirit is on equality with the Father and the Son; that the order of the Trinity is not downward - at the top is God the Father; under Him, lower down, is God the Son; and on a third lower level, is God the Holy Spirit. No student or thoughtful reader of the Bible could ever have that idea. What is perfectly clear in the Word of God is that these are all on the same level, and it is just as right to speak of God the Holy Spirit, as to speak of God the Father. They Three are One God; they are God. And we must ever bear that in mind, that when we are thinking or speaking about the Holy Spirit, we are not contemplating an inferior, a

minor, or one in a third place in order - not at all! We begin there, in that recognition, for the equality in the Godhead is not only a 'truth' in Christian doctrine or Bible teaching, it is something that affects our lives very definitely. If we do not give due honour to the Holy Spirit, there will be something weak and lacking in our lives. Now there is the need of perhaps recovering or correcting this matter in our thought: the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son.

In this matter it would seem that, as on all very vital matters, the great Enemy has been busy. One of the works of the Enemy, as you know, is to underrate and undervalue the most important things; to take something therefrom, perhaps by discrediting in some way. And because of extremes with which the Enemy, with all his ingenuity, has forced this very matter of the Holy Spirit, people have got afraid. There have been many extremes in this matter of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been cleverly counterfeited; the Holy Spirit has been given to mean something that He does not mean; the Holy Spirit has been exaggerated in some directions; this great work of discrediting the Holy Spirit, and making people afraid. "Don't say too much about the Holy Spirit! Don't talk too much about the Holy Spirit - it is dangerous!" And many of you know quite well what I mean, because there are movements in this world which are a disgrace to the Lord, and which put off many people from the Lord Himself, because of the shameful way their behaviour surrounds the teaching of the Holy Spirit. I need not say more about that; it is just a part of this fear that has come into many honest hearts when the matter of the Holy Spirit is in view - the perils, the dangers, the contradictions, that which has come in to dishonour the Lord, and discredit the Gospel. That is a work of the Enemy.

But perhaps you will say, "Did not the Lord Jesus Himself say, 'When He is come He shall not speak of Himself'? Therefore, will any Holy Spirit-taught and led teacher make a lot of the Holy Spirit?" You see the tangle that you are in at once when you raise a question like that! The fact is: the Bible is full of the Holy Spirit; the New Testament overflows with the Holy Spirit; the apostles told much about the Holy Spirit; tremendous things are there stated about the Holy Spirit. They preached and taught concerning the Holy Spirit very, very fully; we have a mass on this matter. And it was all inspired by the Holy Spirit! Is He not speaking of Himself? Is this not drawing attention to the Holy Spirit? We have to get our mind, our mentality, clear; clear of what looks like a paradox and a contradiction. It is not so? You must remember that even in the teaching of the apostles, and the Word of God about the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is never the end in Himself: Christ is always the end. And if the Holy Spirit is made much of, it is His *work* to glorify Christ, and not to glorify Himself. It is true and it remains true that He will not speak of Himself; He will speak of Christ. But, we know quite well that we should know nothing of Christ but for the Holy Spirit. And so, be perfectly clear about this, that it is not a mistake, and it is not dangerous to bring the Holy Spirit very much into view, provided we always recognise that it is not to end with Himself; it is that He should lead us to Christ: there is no other way of being led to Christ. So, we do not make the Holy Spirit the object or the end. His work and His purpose is the magnifying of the Lord Jesus: "*He shall take of Mine and show it unto you.*"

Well now, getting clear on that matter, we shall not be unbalanced; we shall not do the wrong thing in this connection, but we shall recognise that the Lord Jesus has given immense importance to the work and place of the Holy Spirit.

What is the work of the Holy Spirit? The Lord Jesus Himself, by clear and precise statement, indicated that He, for all that He came into this world, depended entirely upon the Holy Spirit for its fulfilment and realisation. What did He come for? Well, to put it in one way: The Lord Jesus came to be the first-born among many brethren. That is only one way of saying: to bring into being a new type of manhood, a new order of humanity; a different kind of being from all those who were in the world when He came. As truly as the Lord Jesus, in His essential nature and character, was and is different from all men, so He came to make that difference in a new creation, a new race, a new family, to be

the first-born among many brethren. The *first*, - you cannot get behind that, and *many brethren* - that is, another family, taking its character from Him. So, the Holy Spirit's work is to produce a new order of being.

We know, of course, those of us who have really come into the experience of new birth, that we are different. We do not always understand the difference: we may not be able to wholly define it, but we know it; the world knows it; the devil knows it. Make no mistake about it, if you are of this Christ-order, this heavenly order, you are in this world, not only as a foreigner, an alien, but, so far as Satan is concerned, you are here as an intruder, and you are a 'marked' person. We use a phrase, which our brethren from other countries may not understand: a 'speckled bird'! Every truly born-from-heaven child of God is a 'speckled bird' and a 'marked' person by Satan and his hosts. They know, as truly as ever demons cried out in the presence of Christ, 'I know Thee whom Thou art', so these forces know everyone who has received the Christ-life and the Christ-nature. If you have not got clear on that, the sooner you do the better, for it will clear up a lot of your problems. Make no mistake about it - you are marked! You are marked as something different, as something in this world strange, foreign; and, as far as Satan, the prince of this world is concerned, as something that has no right here, and to be got rid of as quickly as possible. Yes, Satan knows something about liquidating! Yes, he has all through these centuries sought to liquidate the people of God, the saints; he has sought to see that their existence is made as impossible as it can be. Be clear about that; it is a mark of the fact that you are of another order, which Satan and his kingdom cannot tolerate; which explains all the martyrdoms, all the butcheries, all the persecutions, all the sufferings; and not only the outward persecutions alone, but the persecution of your soul, day by day. Pursuit and pressure to crush you, to break you, to make life impossible for you, is because you are other; and it is a mark of your heavenly birth. The Holy Spirit came to do that; to bring into being another order of being. You and I know that from the beginning of our new life in Christ, but the impossibility of accommodating ourselves to this world, and of the world accepting us unless we do, becomes more and more real as we walk the heavenly way.

The Holy Spirit has not only come to produce that new order of being, He is here to develop that order of being. It is not only the beginning, the initiation, the origin, it is the development; it is the continuous history of the people of God under the hand, the power, the energy, of the Holy Spirit to be conformed to the prototype; Jesus Christ is committed to that. And that again explains another side of life. What is it that accounts for this discipline, this schooling, this seemingly hard-handling of the Lord? It is so true that the more we go with the Lord, and seek to live with the Lord, to walk in the Spirit, the less do we get away with what is contrary to the Lord. You know, we overlook quite a lot with children, don't we, because they are children. There is a statement in the Scripture: "*The time of their ignorance God winked at!*" He just closed an eye for the time being. But now the time has gone on; the day has come when they should have moved from that infant state. And in our spiritual infancy, well, the Lord is very gentle and we seem to get away with quite a lot of things, but as we go on, the leash shortens, the noose tightens, and we don't get away with so much! No. He keeps closer accounts with us. Is that not true? Well, what does it mean? The Holy Spirit is doing His work: He is committed not only to introduce, but to develop this new order after Christ. And I believe, and it may sound painful to you, that those who walk closest with the Lord, find that they are the least able to make mistakes without knowing it. A life in the Spirit is a life that is checked up continually, and you can test your life in the Spirit like that.

I was going to say something about the Holy Spirit's work of administering this new order, but I will leave that for the moment. But do let me just bring before you the means that the Holy Spirit employs for His purpose.

Firstly, in accordance with what I have just said: the instrument, or the vessel, of the Holy Spirit's work from the beginning right to the end, is the renewed spirit of the child of God. "The Spirit bears witness with *our spirit* that we are children of God." No unborn-again man or woman knows the meaning of that phrase; but immediately you are born again, you know the meaning of that phrase - *our spirit*. An organ has been brought into life in us which has a new sensitiveness, a new sensibility, a new intelligence; there is a faculty for 'knowing' now in a way that we never knew before. This renewed spirit that has been born from above is the instrument, in the first place, of the Holy Spirit's work. I say that because so many people are looking for the external and objective operation of the Holy Spirit; to do things as from without. Now the normal life of the child of God is the residence of the Holy Spirit within our spirit, and through our spirit, to educate us, to teach us, to instruct us, to make us know.

Then, the second instrument of the Holy Spirit is the Word of God. I cannot emphasise that too strongly; and it is needed among us. Remember the Holy Spirit binds Himself to the Word of God, is committed to the Word of God - that is His instrument. We cannot be superior to the Word of God; we cannot go the way of this new order by neglecting the Word of God; for everything in it, for the life, for the development, for the administration, the Holy Spirit must have the Word of God. And I so often groan in myself, and say, "Oh, I do wish they would read the Scriptures!" there would be far fewer disorders if the Lord's people were familiar with the Scriptures; far fewer complications, if only they would read the Bible, read it carefully, read it watchfully, read it particularly, read it thoughtfully. What is it saying? Don't pick out the choice bits that you like, such as the lovely promises, the parts that you think say something. Read it! The Holy Spirit has a way of making what we would never select and choose, the very thing that we need. Sometimes right out of a most uninteresting bit of the Bible, something springs into life which is of vital account. And I am only saying that the Holy Spirit demands the Word. Remember this was true in the case of the Lord Jesus, and if it was true in His case, that He could not be superior to the Scriptures, or move apart from the Scriptures, that is ten thousand times more true in our case. "Then was Jesus led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And Satan came to Him... And Jesus said: it is *written*... it is *written*... it is *written*..." Led of the Spirit saying, "It is written", finding His defence and His victory in the Word of God!

It is very important that the Word of God should dwell in us richly, just as a base for the Holy Spirit. You may not understand; I am not saying that you should study it to understand in the first place, but read it and get it into you! And then the Holy Spirit has got His essential ground, and from time to time it will come back, even if when you read it, He does not say something to you. Oh, for your life personally, and for your life in the assembly to be in order with God's word. There is an administration of the Holy Spirit, and a divine heavenly order to be expressed in the church, in the House of God. If you and I are in the Spirit, and have the Word, there will be that order.

And remember that the House of God is the third instrument of the Holy Spirit. The renewed spirit of the child of God, the believer; the Word of God dwelling within, and kept continually before our eyes; and thirdly, the House of God itself. The Holy Spirit needs the House of God. I am quite convinced of this, although it does not very much matter whether I am convinced or not, but I speak from some experience, that the Lord's people do not really grow and develop in this new heavenly order, except in a related way, on the basis of the House of God. While they remain just separate, unrelated, detached, disconnected units, going their own way, fulfilling their own desires, or their own thoughts, or their own will, they will not grow spiritually. We do grow in this united way.

The Holy Spirit, committed to the new birth, committed to the Word of God, is also committed to the House of God. He is the Spirit of the House of God, he dwells within that House. He must have us on

the ground of fellowship, and unity, and the order of the House of God, in order to build up, to increase, and to bring about this attainment unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Now, my burden was: Don't leave the Holy Spirit out! The Holy Spirit is the point of the union and the Holy Spirit still remains the Holy Spirit. We are not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not us; He still remains a separate divine entity. The union is on the basis of faith and obedience and walking. We are not absorbed into the Godhead at all. The Holy Spirit must be honoured, as we honour the Son, and as we honour the Father. He must have His place.

The Lord instruct us.