

A Recapitulation

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks' sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual vision and the role of the Holy Spirit in the current dispensation of grace.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:9-10, Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 14:13-14, John 3:3, Acts 10:34-35, Acts 26:17-18, Romans 8:1-2, 2 Corinthians 12:7, Galatians 5:1, Ephesians 1:17-18

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Vision"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the transformative role of the Holy Spirit in the current dispensation, highlighting that it is characterized by Christ's enthronement and the Spirit's active presence within the Church. He explains that the Holy Spirit grants spiritual vision to all believers, enabling them to perceive God's eternal purpose through Christ. Sparks warns against the dangers of spiritual blindness and the necessity of personal revelation, urging believers to embrace the cross as a means of removing the self-life and experiencing resurrection power. He calls for a liberated, holy people who are responsive to the Spirit's leading, free from the constraints of religious systems, and committed to serving God without exclusivism. Ultimately, he stresses the importance of maintaining a vibrant relationship with the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's purposes.

Transcript

We have been seeing that in the dispensation of the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was operating as the Spirit of prophecy, making everything a prophecy. He was causing everything within the Divine economy to point onward, to imply something further, which was not clear to those who lived in those times and who were most closely connected with what was being done and said; and that comprehensive work of the Holy Spirit through those ages was all heading up to what would be the nature, character and purpose of the dispensation in which we live. This dispensation is marked by two outstanding features - two aspects of one thing. It is the dispensation, firstly, of Christ enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, and secondly, of the Holy Spirit here within the Church to make good all that that means. That prophetic activity was many-sided; that is, it pointed to various characteristics of the age which lay ahead; and we have been looking at some of those characteristics in the foregoing chapters.

So that now we start here. We have come to and are living in the dispensation of the spiritual fulfilment of what the prophets foretold; but that fulfilment is not merely and only objective, as in the history of the world or of the Church, in an outward way. That fulfilment is an inward thing, and moreover an inward thing so

far as every member of Christ is concerned. It is something which must come down to the youngest. Please do not think that this is for older or more advanced Christians! It involves every one of us equally.

SPIRITUAL VISION

The first thing that the prophets were occupied with, and which has its fulfilment in an inward way in the members of Christ in this dispensation, is spiritual vision. Everything in the purpose of God, for its fulfilment and for our attainment unto it, rests firstly upon this - that the Holy Spirit has become to us the Spirit of revelation, and has made us to see, in its grand outline, what God is after. The details are filled in as we go on.

(a) The Faculty of Seeing

That has two sides. First of all, there is the faculty of seeing. The prophets had much to say about this. You know that, because of a certain prejudice on the part of the people of Israel, by which they were not disposed to see what God wanted them to see (because they had their own visions and ideas and were not ready for what God wanted), a double judgment was passed upon them, and the Lord closed their eyes. The word was given to Isaiah for this people: "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes" (Isaiah 6:9,10). That was a judgment, and a terrible one: the very faculty of spiritual sight, of vision, was neutralised. It was a terrible judgment, with terrible consequences; for, as we have seen, the ultimate consequence was that they lost all that God intended, and that was no small thing. It passed away from them. It was given to another nation - a heavenly nation. It is a terrible judgment to have a faculty of spiritual sight nullified; and if that is so, it must be a very great thing in the desire and grace and lovingkindness of the Lord that people should have such vision, such sight.

The faculty for seeing is a birthright of every child of God. Do not think that you have to live the Christian life for a long time, receive much teaching, and reach a certain advanced position, before you begin to see. It is a part of your very new birth. The Lord said to Nicodemus: "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). By implication He said, 'When you are born from above, you will see.' The commission to the Apostle Paul was: "... unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes" (Acts 26:17,18). The very symbolical work of the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh, in opening the eyes of the blind, was pointing on to what was going to happen when He went above and the Holy Spirit came, and men saw. It is a part of your new birth to see. I am not saying that you will see all at once, that you will see all that those who have gone far on with the Lord are seeing; but the faculty of sight has been given to you. Are you using it? Do you know that it is just as true of your spiritual life as it is of your physical - that you have spiritual eyes, and that they have been opened? If not, get right down to the Lord about this, because something is wrong.

(b) The Object Seen

And not only the faculty, but the object, of sight; it is a part of the vision. There must be a faculty for seeing before there can be an object seen, but, having the faculty, you must have an object to see; and the object is - what? What was the thing that came to the perception, the recognition, of people, when the Holy Ghost came? What did they begin to see? They began to see the significance of Jesus Christ, and there is one very familiar phrase which indicates what that is - "the eternal purpose". They are one and the same thing - the significance of Christ, and God's eternal purpose. The purpose of God from eternity is concerning His Son - the place that His Son holds in the very universe according to God's mind; the tremendous

comprehensiveness of Christ; the tremendous implications of the very being and existence of Christ; the tremendous consequences that are bound up with Jesus Christ. They did not see it all at once, but they began to see the Lord Jesus. They began to see that this was not just a man among men, not just the man of Galilee. No, He is infinitely greater than that, overwhelming. This mighty impact of a meaning about Jesus Christ is too big to hold, so great that you cannot grasp it. It is overwhelming and devastating. They began to see that; that was their vision. Out of that vision everything else came. Look at them and hear them, recognise what a new and great Christ they have found, what a significant Christ He is, how everything is bound up with Him. All destiny is centred in Him; He is the only consequence.

The prophets had dimly seen something. You will hear a prophet saying: "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Well, that prophet had begun to see something; and there are other things like that. It is but a beginning, but what they are saying is that this One is going to come into full view. 'We are pointing on to Him', they say, 'looking on to the day when this One shall come right out into recognition.' And this is that day; we are in the day of the prophets' fulfilled vision.

These are not merely words, great ideas. It has to be true of you, even though it may be only at its beginnings, that the apprehension of Jesus Christ in your heart is tremendous, is overwhelming. He is your vision, and He has mastered you in the sense of His greatness. We shall never get through without vision. We shall break if we have no vision, or if our vision is arrested. If something interferes with the clearness, the fullness, of our vision, we shall begin to go round in circles, not knowing where we are. The vision will carry us on if it is kept clear and full. Have you got it? When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, this tremendous thing happened - they saw the Lord, and in seeing Him they began to be emancipated from everything that was other or less than He. Those who did not see, well, they began to pass out and either became nonentities in the spiritual realm or, because of their prejudices, enemies to those who saw. The instance in John 9 was fulfilled in a spiritual sense. The Lord opened the eyes of the man born blind. What happened? The others cast him out. Those who saw in the day of the Spirit's coming were excommunicated by many who were prejudiced. They were cut off. There is always a price attached to seeing.

But that is not our subject now. Simply, what the Lord has been saying to us, in the first place, is that He desires to have, and must have - and therefore He can have - in this dispensation a people with their eyes open, a seeing people who have the faculty in themselves.

(c) Vision to be Personal and Increasing in Every Believer

Now, the difference between the dispensations is just that. In the old dispensation everything had to be told to the people. They had to get it secondhand from someone else; it was never their own, it was not original. In the new dispensation of the Holy Spirit, the thing was in themselves; the root of the matter was in them. But Christianity has become very largely a system which has reverted to the level of the old dispensation. That is, so many Christians have their lives based upon addresses and sermons and going to meetings and being told by other people. How many Christians do you find today who are really living in the good of a throbbing, personal revelation of Jesus Christ? I do not think that is an improper question. The great need of our day is for the people of God to be re-established on the basis upon which the Church was founded in the beginning, a Holy Ghost basis; and the very beginning of that basis is this - not to have a lot of information given to Christians, but that the Christians should have the faculty of spiritual sight within them, should have the capacity for seeing, and should themselves be seeing. Can you say:

'My eyes are open; I am seeing God's eternal purpose, I am seeing the significance of Christ; I am seeing more and more as to the Lord Jesus'? Unless it is like that, we shall leave the Holy Ghost behind, and we shall have to turn round and go back to find Him where we left Him, because a life in the Holy Ghost right up to date is a life of continually increasing vision. Vision is absolutely essential, both as to faculty and as to object.

THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF THE CROSS

(a) Death - the Removal of What is of Man

Still recapitulating, we went on next to see that, in order to keep the faculty alive and the vision growing, the Holy Spirit has an instrument. He always works by an instrument, and that instrument is the Cross; that is, the principle of the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

This means, on the one side, the removal of everything that cannot come into the new Kingdom; getting rid of that which in God's sight is dead and has to be put away - that is to say, the sum total of the self-life. Call it by other names if you like - the flesh, the natural life, the old Adam, and so on. I prefer this designation - the self-principle - because it is very comprehensive: whether it be the self-principle acting in the outward direction, in assertiveness, in imposition, where the self is the impact; or whether it act in the inward direction, drawing to self. Oh, how many aspects there are of the self-life in both these directions! We may know some of the more obvious ones, but are we not learning how deeply rooted, with countless fibres, is this self? We never get to the end of it. It spreads its tentacles throughout our whole constitution - 'I', somehow, strong or weak. It is just as bad for it to be weak as to be strong. Self-pity is only a way of drawing attention to ourselves and being occupied with ourselves, and it is just as pernicious as self-assertiveness. It is self, all the same; it belongs to the same root, it comes from the same source. It all comes from that false life of the one who said: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13,14). 'I' - 'I' - 'I' -. Truly, we cannot exhaust the forms of this self-life.

Now, because it is so many-sided and so far-reaching and so deeply rooted, the Lord cannot deal with it all at once in the active way. He has dealt with it all at once potentially in the Cross of His Son. But now the application of that must go on. You and I must know continually the application of the principle of the Cross to the various forms of the self-life. We must learn both the need for and the manner of its being smitten, stricken, laid low and brought under the hand of God; and that is the meaning of 'disciple', that is the meaning of training. It is on that side of things that the Holy Ghost is constantly taking precautions against the self-life. Even in the case of a far-advanced and well-crucified Apostle, it becomes necessary, in the presence of great Divine deposits, for God to take precautions and put a stake in his flesh and give him a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should become exalted (II Corinthians 12:7). That is very practical. The Holy Ghost uses the principle and the law of the Cross repeatedly and ever more deeply in order to get rid of the rubbish - that which occupies the ground which must be occupied by the Lord Himself. There has to be a lot of clearing of the ground in order to build the new spiritual kingdom within.

(b) Resurrection - The Expression of the Lord Himself

So, on the other side, the corresponding thing is the power of His resurrection, which can never be known except as we know the power of His Cross; and it is in knowing Him and the power of His resurrection that our education on the positive side is found. Oh, to know Him and the power of His resurrection! It is a

wonderful thing when you and I are brought to the place where on the side of nature - and not feignedly, but very utterly - we are compelled to recognise the awful and terrible reality: 'This is an end of everything. I who have said so much, I who have preached so much, I who have taught so much, I who have done so much - I am at an end.' It is the sentence of death; no more is possible; and it is terribly and grimly real. And then God raises the dead! You go on, and there is something more of the Lord than there was before. It is a great thing to see how God does raise the dead again and again. The same person is alive again, and there is more than there ever was, because there has been a greater emptiness than there ever was. It is a very safe position from the Lord's standpoint.

What are we learning, what is the meaning of that way, what is it we are inheriting along the line of such experiences? Just this - we are knowing the Lord, that is all. We are knowing this, that everything is of the Lord, and whatever is not of Him is nothing at all. It must be of the Lord or there is no more possibility, no hope. We are the most ready to say, 'If it depends upon me, there is nothing more possible'; and then the Lord does it. You see what He is doing by the death side of the Cross. He is clearing ground for Himself, and then He is occupying the ground; He is building Himself up as the risen Lord on the ground which has been purged of our old self. The Holy Spirit uses the Cross to keep the way open, to keep the vision clear and growing.

A NEW LIBERTY

Further, we pointed out that when the dispensation changed on the day of Pentecost, from that moment there was a marvelous emancipation into a new liberty. In the old dispensation the whole order was one of bondage, of thralldom; people were in a strait-jacket of a religious system. In the new dispensation, the strait-jacket has gone. There is nothing that suggests a strait-jacket in the Book of the Acts. People are out, they are free. There will still be some things to be taken away, like Peter's remnant of tradition in the presence of the call to the house of Cornelius, and so on. But in the main they are out, released, and it is the Holy Spirit who brings that about and demands that it shall be maintained.

The Lord wants and needs such a people today, just as then. Firstly, a people of vision; and then, secondly, a thoroughly crucified people, giving the Lord full scope for all His purpose - a people who, in themselves, have been removed out of the Lord's way. (That is the meaning of the Book of the Acts - that people are out of the Lord's way, and He can move freely.) Then, the Holy Ghost, having effected this liberation, demands that it shall be preserved. We were pointing out earlier that the constant and persistent tendency of man and effort of the enemy is to bring back again into a yoke of bondage, imprisoning the Holy Ghost in some set, crystallized system of things - a Church system, an ecclesiastical system, a man-made religious order, a formality, an organization, and all such things as so often commence with a Divine idea, and then take charge of the Divine idea and make it to serve them instead of everything serving it.

That is the peril, and the Holy Ghost will have none of it. He can only go as far as He has liberty to go. He demands that we be out in a free place with Him; He demands His own rights as the Spirit of liberty. He will be hampered by nothing. If we try to hamper Him, to put chains on Him, we shall lose His values. He demands that we shall never allow ourselves to be brought into any fixed form or economy or limit of any kind; that we shall be God's free people. That is not licence. That does not give the individual the right to be a free-lance, nor mean that we can go and do everything that our impulse would suggest, and independently snap our fingers at all spiritual authority. It never meant that. But it does mean that the Lord will not allow us to crystallize His things and put them into a box and say, 'That is the limit.' He demands

that we should be ready always to receive and respond to new light. If His new light demands that we make new adjustments - revolutionary adjustments sometimes - we are to be so free in the Lord that we can do it. It is most necessary that we should be like that, as God's free people. It is a very blessed thing to have the expanse of the universe in which to move.

HOLINESS THE CHARACTER OF THE NEW DISPENSATION

Now our next point was that the whole nature of things, characteristic of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit and of all the Spirit's movements, is holiness - that everything shall inwardly correspond to what is outward. Progress can be brought to an abrupt standstill; all this movement of the Spirit of God can be suddenly arrested; there may be an end beyond which there is no advance, if there is some debatable thing between the Holy Ghost and us. We have to keep very short accounts with the Holy Spirit on all matters of question, and He is resident in us for this purpose. Why are there so many things in Christians that are not as the Lord would have them? It is simply because those concerned have not recognised and taken to heart this - that the Holy Spirit is their personal, indwelling Teacher, and they have to listen to Him. How much is lost because of that failure! 'Oh, there is a meeting: I do not think I will go to it - I will go for a walk.' So off you go. In that meeting was the very word God meant you to have! If only you had said, 'I would like to go for a walk, but there is a meeting; I will ask the Lord whether He wants me there.' Something has been lost that you may not recover for yourself, because you failed to ask the Lord.

And so in a thousand different ways. If only we listened to the Holy Spirit, we should make more progress. He talks to us about all sorts of practical matters. For example, we need to be taught by the Spirit in the matter of our merriment - how to be merry without being frivolous, and how to be serious without being long-faced and miserable. We are not going to giggle our way through life, but at the same time the Lord does not want us to be poor, solemn creatures. He does want us to be serious people, but do not think that solemnity is necessarily spiritual life. I read in my morning paper of a poor girl in Australia, who was overtaken of a certain disease which deprived her of the ability to smile. She was brought by air to have an operation in London - and after the operation she could smile! I think a lot of Christians need that operation!

But in this whole matter we have to know the discipline of the Holy Spirit, because spiritual value, spiritual increase, is bound up with it. In matters of holiness, and controversies with the Lord - which may come down to very small points, such as details of dress, the wearing of adornments, and so on - it is remarkable how adjustments are made by many young Christians on these practical matters without anything being said to them by anyone. Who told them to do it? No one; but they came to feel that the Lord would have them do it, that is all. Such people are going on; they are beginning to count for God. I take those points, not to impose law upon you, but to show the principle of the Holy Spirit's being able to speak to us inside on matters where the Lord may not be fully in agreement, and, as He speaks and we respond, we go on. The Holy Spirit adds and adds.

SPIRIT-DIRECTED SERVICE: NO EXCLUSIVISM

As you come into the Book of the Acts further, you find that the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of service. You get to chapter 8, and the movement out from Jerusalem is absolutely spontaneous. Philip goes down to Samaria. Who told him he should go to Samaria? Surely we may say that the Holy Spirit led him there. They moved out under the sovereign control of the Holy Spirit. He was the Spirit of service; He brought it about. And when you come to chapter 10, oh, what a blessed aspect of that development! We find it in

keeping with what the prophets, though imperfectly, were made to see. In chapter 10 the Holy Spirit precipitates the whole matter of going beyond the bounds of Israel out to the Gentiles. How do the prophets come into that? Well, what about Jonah? It is a terrible story, that story in the little book of Jonah. It is not the whole life and work of Jonah, but it is practically all that most people know about him - that he had a fierce quarrel with the Lord. "Doest thou well to be angry?... I do well to be angry" (Jonah 4:9). Think of a man answering God like that! Why? Because the large-hearted grace of God had said, in effect, 'There must be no exclusivism; I am not bound up wholly and solely with Israel; my heart embraces the heathen as well; the whole world is the scope of My grace.' Jonah was so exclusive - there could be nothing beyond his own circle, and he came into controversy with the Lord.

The Lord has scattered here and there through His Word lessons and illustrations which emphasize that. What about Ruth? She is a Moabitess, a heathen, outside the pale of Israel. It is the most beautiful romance in the Bible, that little story of Ruth. What is the Lord saying? Look at the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, and you will find Ruth, the Moabitess, there. But if that is impressive, what about Rahab the harlot, the resident in doomed Jericho, who had faith and expressed it by the scarlet cord in the window? And in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, Rahab the harlot has a place. What is God saying? He takes up in the new dispensation the principle of that prophetic work of the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament. In Acts 10 He precipitates it, as if to say, 'Go out to all; let there be no exclusivism.' It is impossible to be people governed by the Holy Spirit and not to have the world in your heart - not to be concerned for all the Lord's people, and for all who are not the Lord's people. He will precipitate that issue. Let us allow that truth to search us deeply.

The point of all that we have been saying is this: that when the Holy Spirit comes and really has His way, all these things are spontaneous: they happen: these are the features of His government. Oh, that the Lord might recover a people like that, free from all set, ecclesiastical, religious, traditional limits and bounds - a people in the Spirit! The Lord make us every one to be of that kind.

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