

Features of Spirituality

by T. Austin-Sparks

A spiritual person is one who seeks to know the revealed will of God in His Word and is directed by the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, John 16:13, Romans 8:17, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 5:26, 2 Timothy 2:12, Hebrews 5:14, James 1:22, 1 John 2:27

Topics: "Spirituality", "Holy Spirit Guidance"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the distinctive spiritual features of the Levites, emphasizing their unique relationship with the Cross, the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God. He distinguishes between spiritual and carnal Christians, highlighting that true spirituality is characterized by being governed by the Holy Spirit rather than self-interest. Sparks illustrates how spiritual people are sensitive to God's voice and the importance of aligning one's life with the Word of God, which serves as a mirror for self-examination. He concludes by discussing the Levites' inheritance, symbolizing spiritual governance and the call for believers to live under the Lord's authority. The sermon encourages Christians to seek a deeper, Spirit-led life that reflects God's will and purpose.

Transcript

We have seen that, in the Old Testament dispensation, the tribe of Levi occupied a distinctive spiritual place. They were different; they were marked off by certain very important spiritual features and factors. In our last study we were seeking to show what those factors were. The first thing was in relation to the Cross - that, of course, is using the New Testament counterpart of the altar and the sacrifice of Levitical times - a deep work of the Cross within themselves. And then they became people in the power of another life, represented by the blood shed and sprinkled. Another distinguishing feature of those people was the oil of anointing - type of the Holy Spirit - constituting them spiritual people.

What is a Spiritual Person?

It is always an exceedingly difficult thing to explain what a spiritual person is. The mental reactions to that very phrase are often strange and peculiar. The idea of a spiritual person is that your feet are off the earth, you are living somewhere up in the clouds, and you are very unpractical as to the affairs of this world. You are too 'spiritual' really to be here at all - you ought to be in Heaven! Of course that is an entirely false apprehension of the meaning of being spiritual. Let us try a little further to explain what it really means that by the Holy Spirit we are constituted spiritual men and women.

But let me first draw a distinction, because not all Christians are very spiritual people. The New Testament has a very great deal to say about Christians who are carnal people, and that is a word which just means fleshly people, and if you want to know what that means - selfish people. You can be a Christian and be very self-centred, self-occupied, self-interested. Self - who can run to earth all the many aspects of what self means? When you think you have compassed the whole thing, it breaks out somewhere else in new forms. You just cannot finally lay your hand upon the multiplicity of the expressions of this deep root, with all its fibres, this self life.

Now a spiritual person is one who is not dominated and governed and influenced by the self nature, but whose thoughts, interests, actions are directed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in charge of the life. It is not what I think - and how often Christians are talking like that: 'I think', 'I think', 'I think' - that does not come into it with a spiritual person at all. There is no asserting of what I think, it is, 'What does the Lord think about this? What is the mind of the Lord about this?' Not, 'I want', and 'I will', but, 'What does the Lord want? Let us seek to know the Lord's mind, the Lord's will about this. Let us put our own mind and will and feelings out of the thing altogether, and let the Holy Spirit tell us. We will not move until we have a sense of what the mind of the Spirit is. At least we must know that our own minds are not governing.' The government of the Holy Spirit, the anointing, means that spiritual people are like that. And of course it means a great deal more. This complete, inward enthronement and government of the Holy Spirit touches things in all directions.

That again is discriminating. You see, we can be governed, as I said in an earlier meditation, by objective truth. It can be 'the truth' - orthodox, sound, Bible truth. We can be governed by that simply because it is taught; we do it objectively. But there is something more than that. There is such a thing as the Holy Spirit taking hold of the truth of God and making it something that lives in us. As I said previously, many Christians are just Christians: that is, after they are saved, after they are born again, their Christian life consists in doing as they are told by the minister or the Christian leader or the Bible class teacher, because it is presented to them as the thing they should do. It is what is in the Bible, and they do it so. But there is a very much higher level of life than that. The thing is right, but it is altogether transformed when the Holy Spirit brings it home to us in an inward way, and adjusts us to it. We no longer do it because it has got to be done: we do it because the Lord has done something in us, and shown us that that is the thing He wants done.

Do you grasp that? We can illustrate it, of course. A little child may obey what mother says because mother says it - love, perhaps; perhaps a spirit of obedience; or perhaps there is just no choice in the matter - mother says it! But there is a lot of difference between that and anticipating what mother would like, doing it without mother having to lay down the law at all. It is a difference of realm: one is law and the other is grace. And grace is only another word for love. Different kinds of Christians, you see; anticipating the will of God, being very sensitive. The same in practice: the Church teaches that certain things are rites of the Church, the ordinances of the Church, and therefore those who belong to the Church ought to do certain things, and so they go to Holy Communion, because the Church says that is what they ought to do, it is an ordinance of the Church, and other things which we might mention. They do it because that is the thing that is done. But oh, if the Lord has spoken in the heart and revealed the meaning of these things spiritually, how different the life is! It is no longer mechanical - it is vital.

The Government of the Word of God

Let us return to the Levites, and consider some other features of spirituality - things that were true in the life of the Levites in a typical way, that is, they pointed on to the spiritual truth of our own time. A marked thing in the case of the priests, the Levites, the sons of Aaron, was that, as anointed men under the government of the Holy Spirit, they came in a very utter and immediate way under the government of the Word of God.

There was a symbol of that, as you know, in the court of the tabernacle. It is called the 'laver'. The laver, as we know, was made from the mirrors of the women. They had metal mirrors, shining, bronze mirrors, into which they looked, as women are wont to do, and saw what they were like; and when they saw that there was anything not right about them, they put it right in the face of the mirror, they adjusted to what they conceived to be the right kind of thing. They brought those mirrors, and there was made of them this great basin called the laver, and it was filled with water; and the priests, the Levites, could not perform or fulfil their ministry, could not enter upon the ministry of holy things, except as they came to the laver and washed hands and feet. They could never take a further step in the fulfilment of their service to God without coming to the laver to wash.

Now you can see quite clearly that that is a very simple and easily understood picture. This laver undoubtedly represents the Word of God: that is the thing into which we look now and see where we are wrong. If we look into the Word of God, we see where things are out of the straight: if we look into the Word of God, we see what God requires, what God's picture is for us, and what we are in contrast. We look in, and then, as we adjust to the Word of God, the Word of God has this mighty power of putting us right, cleansing us, and keeping on cleansing us, "by the washing (or laver) of water with the word" (Eph. 5:26).

That is brief, but it is very important. A spiritual person is first of all one who seeks to know the revealed will of God in His Word. You cannot be a spiritual person, after the kind of which we are speaking, and neglect or be careless about the Word of God. You will be one who is really diligent in reading and searching the Word of God, with one object - to know what God wants where you are concerned. If there were more of that, there would be a different kind of Christian, stronger, purer, and far more satisfying to the Lord.

No Violation of the Word of God

Moreover, a truly spiritual person will never violate the Word of God. Should they do so, they will know all about it inside of themselves. The Holy Spirit will make it clear to a spiritual person that they have gone contrary to the Word of God. Under the government of the Spirit we shall never be a contradiction to the Scriptures. It does not mean that all at once we shall be a perfect expression of all that is in the Word of God, but it does mean that the Holy Spirit will be dealing with us in the light of what is in the Scriptures. Have you not sometimes experienced an inward, unaccountable sense of grief? You may not have put it that way, but you had a strange sense of grief, of distress. The Holy Spirit has been grieved about something you have said or done, the way you have behaved. You cannot explain it or put it into words, but you just say to the Lord, 'Now, Lord, I am conscious that something is not right. I put it into Your hands, and trust You to show me, and make it clear.' Either sooner or later, you come on something in the Word of God, which exactly explains just where you failed, just where you defaulted. There it is, and you did not know that it was in the Word of God. You know, it is possible to get a surprise over what is in the Word of God. I have been reading and studying the Bible for quite a good many years, but some eighteen months ago I came on a fragment in the Bible that I never knew was there - I had never seen it before! I expect

there are plenty more. If you told me that that was in the Bible, I should not have known where to find it. But it just suited and fitted into a position in which I was at that moment. I needed something at that time for my deliverance - for my salvation, in a sense - and I came on that something. I opened my Bible, and there it was, right there. It amazed me; it was so fitting to the whole situation. It described my situation in one single sentence.

The Holy Spirit knows the Bible, He knows what He has written; and if the Spirit is in us, and we are seeking to live in the Spirit, we shall live in the Word. The Word is a living thing when that is so. Spiritual people are people of the Word, and consciously or unconsciously they are checked up by it. And I do say to you, especially to young Christians (it may be necessary to many others as well): Be very careful about your life in the Word of God. Do not choose only the things that you feel you can understand. Do not just pick out the things that you like. How we like to take up our Bible, and find out something so nice and helpful - perhaps a lovely promise and just to live on that sort of thing, the delicacies of the Word of God. It is just lovely! And all the time there are whole sections that we pass over. 'Those are parts that we do not understand - we do not read them.' Now, do not make any mistake like that. You will find that there are treasures which come to light in times of special need in the very parts that you would never read. You do not like all those long lists of names - that is all they are - difficult names at that. You cannot pronounce them, so you quickly turn the page. You will find some treasures there - hidden treasures!

But how much more necessary it is for us to read this Word first of all that it shall be there for the Holy Spirit to work upon. It is just there, that is all. We read: for the moment we do not realize what it means, or that it is a message to us; but we have read it, and it is there. Presently, the Holy Spirit begins to speak to us about that very thing, and it becomes most valuable, and by it we may be guided. I suggest to you that you read this Word always with a view, first of all - What has God to say to me here? It is going to touch everything.

And do not accept any human reasonings about the Word. Paul has a number of things to say, in his first letter to the Corinthians, for instance - things that people do not like, especially moderns - about dress and head coverings and all sorts of things. The modern mind says, 'Oh, well, Paul was old-fashioned, he was a woman hater', and so on. If you listen to that, you will get out of harmony with the Word of God. That Word is there to put you right and keep you right with God. Violate those things, and you will limit your own spiritual life. Conduct and behaviour are governed by the Word of God, and there is nothing in the whole range and realm of our human life that is not touched by it. I say that thoughtfully: it is true. The Word of God touches all our temperament; it touches our dress, our behaviour, our talk; it touches everything that you can think of. Somewhere in the Word of God there is something about it. A spiritual person gives a large place to the Word, and allows the Word to adjust them. They do not argue at all. If the Word of God says that, then that is all there is to it.

So the laver is a very important thing in the matter of our relationship with and service to God. A life in the Spirit will never violate the Word. A life in the Spirit will always mean adjustment to the Word, and that we shall not allow other influences to affect us if they are contrary to the Word of God. We can only be ministers - that is, spiritual men and women who have to minister to the Lord and to His people - in so far as we are governed by the Word of God.

An Anointed Ear

And that brings us to this matter of sensitiveness to the Holy Spirit. For the priests, the Levites, the blood and the oil were given a threefold application: to the ear, to the thumb, and to the great toe. The blood and the oil were applied first of all to the ear. As regards the blood, that meant that the ear was opened and made alive to God, vivified Godward, while the oil, as symbolic of the Holy Spirit, meant that the ear was wholly and completely under the government of the Holy Spirit. Now hearing is a very, very important thing, it typifies spiritual perception. When the Lord, in dealing with the seven churches in Asia, in the Revelation, is trying to check them up as to the faults, errors and failures that are among them, the appeal at the end of every message is: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches". The ear symbolizes spiritual perception, discernment, detecting, sensing. A spiritual person is one who is sensitive to the voice of the Lord.

That is the great contrast that is seen with Samuel. When Samuel began his Levitical, priestly ministry in the temple as a lad, it was just that. It was a day when even the high priest himself had no ear for God: he had lost his sensitiveness to God's voice, his ear was dull, and the people therefore were not hearing the voice of God - they were all dull of hearing. It was a bad state. And, in the sanctuary that night, young Samuel heard the call of the Lord, had an ear for the Lord; and it was through his sensitiveness to the voice of the Lord that things were so marvellously changed in Israel, and an entirely new regime came into being. The situation was saved by a sensitive ear, and that is something of great value to the Lord's people.

Oh, for men and women who have this anointed ear, who have this sense of the Lord, who are not dull of hearing; whose senses are not preoccupied and jaded by a multitude of conflicting, clamant, distracting voices and interests, but who have the quiet ear, and reap the harvest of a quiet ear for God. Be careful about your ear. In the physical realm, the purity of our hearing - our sensing through this faculty - depends so much upon what we listen to. If you listen constantly to jazz, you will probably lose your appetite for the classics, if I may illustrate it in that way. You will always be in a jangle, and you will lose your fine sense of what is good, what is pure, what is high and what is elevating in music. If you and I listen to gossip, if we listen to what is not good, not profitable, the Holy Spirit will cease to have a place of speaking. If you want to be of real value to the Lord, watch your hearing, have an anointed ear alive unto God.

An Anointed Thumb

Then the blood and the oil were placed upon the thumb of the right hand of the priest, the Levite. Of course, the thumb of the right hand is symbolic again. The hand is very, very much at a discount if the thumb is not there. We require that for everything, for all the rest. Some people manage very wonderfully without thumbs, but the thumb is really a very important factor. It stands for the hand itself in fulness, and it applies to what we handle.

Be careful what you handle. Some people can handle all sorts of things and still be Christians. Be careful what you handle in your reading, young Christians. Be quite sure that what you read can be turned in some way to value for the Lord. Is that too hard? Well, I think you will come to the time, if you go on with the Lord in the life of the Spirit, when you pick up something, and you will say, 'Oh, there is nothing in that, that is no good, that does not lead anywhere'. You begin to discriminate like that. On the other hand, with this - 'Ah, now we are finding something, there is a lesson in this'. Perhaps you are wondering about what I said in an earlier message about a certain book - the story of Lindbergh's crossing of the Atlantic. That was quite a secular kind of book. But I got tremendous lessons out of it, wonderful lessons, just as out of the Everest story. I could turn it to real account. And you have to test everything you handle by whether it

can be turned to real account for God.

Much depends, too, in the Christian life, upon what you hold on to and what you let go. You do that with your hands. There may be a lot of manipulating of things, 'pulling of strings' to our own advantage. Be careful: it is all just a matter of our interests. We put our hands to our own interests, our own occupation, and behind it all there is a purely selfish motive and concern.

An Anointed Great Toe

Finally, the same blood and oil were placed upon the great toe of the right foot - full of significance. The tread of a person very often betrays the character of the person. There is the heavy tread of the heavy-handed - to confuse the metaphors again. They come down, as we say, with a heavy hand. They are not sensitive, they are not careful, they are not sympathetic, they are not gentle; they are brusque. We know the heavy tread of the heavy, hard kind of nature, and the light tread of the sensitive, sympathetic and careful. We do not stop to think about this: it is just what we are - it happens. Our tread, our walk, betrays our character, without our thinking about it at all. And there is the uneven and unsteady step of the indefinite life. If you are indefinite in your life, it will come out in some way in your physical manner: an unsteady, uneven walk so often betrays a similar character. And there is the tread of the double soul - furtive, stealthy, lacking in transparency, ulterior in motive, betraying the character. And so we could go on.

But how necessary that all this should be brought under the government of the Holy Spirit, that our heaviness may be turned into sympathy and sensitiveness, our indefiniteness into steadiness, our self-interest and furtiveness into singleness and transparency. I think you see the point. A life in the Spirit means a certain kind of walk, it produces a certain kind of character and behaviour. How differently we walk when we become Spirit-governed men and women from the way we walked before! Where once we were so hard, so cruel, so insensitive, so heavy-handed, now we have learned to be sympathetic and understanding and sensitive, and so on. It is the oil of the Spirit upon the great toe, bringing our goings, our course, our movement, our response to the Lord in obedience, all under the Spirit.

The Inheritance of the Levites

In closing, just a word about the privileges of the Levites. They were very real. You know that the Levites were eventually granted forty-eight cities of their own. They had no inheritance themselves on the earth: God was their portion and their inheritance. They were not allowed to have what other people could have. In the same way, some Christians can have many things that other Christians cannot have. Whether you can do what some Christians can do, and get away with it, depends very much upon how utter you are for God, upon how much value you are going to be to the Lord. Vocation is always governed by that.

But the Levites were given these forty-eight cities, and that came about when the wilderness journeys were over, and they had no longer to carry the different parts of the tabernacle through the wilderness. They came into the land, and were given these forty-eight cities, distributed amongst the Lord's people throughout the whole of their territory. That is a very, very rich realm of thought and truth, for cities are always figures or types of governmental centres. The Lord's ultimate thought is that He shall have those who govern spiritually all the rest and all the others, who are distributed amongst His people in a position of spiritual government. There is much in the New Testament about that. The Lord wants a heavenly people for a heavenly government, in the day when the wilderness journeys are finished and the kingdom is established, to be seated in the midst of the nations in order to govern and rule with Him. The word

which, after all, so aptly applies to the Levites is: "If we suffer with Him, we shall be glorified with Him" (Rom. 8:17); "if we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12).

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/features-of-spirituality/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net