

In the Spirit or in the World

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of spiritual separation from the world to truly experience and understand the life in the Spirit.

Scripture: Luke 12:20, John 3:6, John 17:16, Colossians 3:1, Revelation 5:5-6, Revelation 21:9-11

Topics: "Living in the Spirit", "Spiritual Separation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the distinction between living in the Spirit versus being consumed by the world, using the imagery of the New Jerusalem as a representation of a spiritual people rather than a literal city. He argues that true understanding of spiritual truths requires a separation from worldly concerns, as illustrated by John's vision of being carried away in the Spirit to a high mountain. Sparks highlights that the Christian life is about being alive in the Spirit, which allows believers to perceive divine truths and realities beyond the physical realm. He warns against the dangers of being 'worldly Christians' and encourages believers to seek a deeper spiritual connection with God. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to spiritual growth and a rejection of worldly distractions.

Transcript

"And there came one of the seven angels... and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, ...clear as crystal" (Revelation 21:9-11).

There are those people who think that I am wrongly spiritualizing everything, and they say that I am wrong when I say that this city is not a literal city, but represents a spiritual people. But I hold to my position! One would think that it only needs one phrase here to justify that position. The angel said to John: "Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb," and when he got John there, there was no wife or bride at all: he showed him a city. And there is so much more like that in this book. There was a time when there was a book sealed without and within, and John wept because there was no one who could open it. The angel said: "Weep not: behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome, to open the book..." (Revelation 5:5). And when John turned to see this Lion: "I saw... a Lamb" (verse 6). Well, what is there in common between a lion and a lamb? You can only explain it if you get the spiritual principles. I think it is worth while taking just a few minutes on this particular point, especially for the Bible students, but, of course, for everybody.

It is essential that we really understand the particular form that John's ministry took, and this was his method more than of anyone else in the New Testament. John was most concerned with the spiritual meaning which lay behind material things. You know how true that was in his Gospel - everybody will accept this principle in his Gospel! He called all the miracles of Jesus 'signs', and did not just say: 'Now this is something that Jesus DID' but: 'This is what Jesus MEANT when He did that.' When Jesus turned the water into wine, John meant it to teach us that Jesus can give us an altogether new kind of life. When the old wine - or life - fails and disappoints us, Jesus can give a new life. When Jesus raised a poor man from his bed after he had been there, unable to walk, for thirty-eight years, John says: 'That is a sign.' Jesus can take a poor moral and spiritual cripple and put him on his feet: He can give him the power to walk in a new kind of life. When Jesus gave sight to the man who was born blind, John says: 'That is a sign: a sign that Jesus can give us a new sight so that we can see spiritual things that we never saw before.' And so it is with all the eight signs in the Gospel by John.

You accept that in John's Gospel and say: 'Now these things in the natural world are signs of something in the spiritual world.' But if you accept that in his Gospel, why will you not accept it in his book of the Revelation? This city, the new Jerusalem, is a sign of something else. Every part of it signifies something spiritual, something in relation to the Lord Jesus.

Do you accept that? If you do, we can go on.

We come again to this tenth verse of chapter twenty-one: "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem."

Well, "a mountain great and high", and "he carried me away IN THE SPIRIT". In spiritual terms that just means that John was alive in the spirit. Do you think that this angel took hold of the Apostle John when he was on the Isle of Patmos and lifted him right away to some great high mountain? There would have been trouble in Patmos if that had happened! The Roman authorities would have been saying: 'John has escaped!' Do you see what I mean? This was a spiritual experience. It may have been a dream, or a vision. You know that in our dreams we can travel a long way. I have sometimes dreamt that I was in America, and then I have awakened a few minutes afterward and found that I was still in London, but I had been travelling a very long way. You will accept that in the natural. Why will you not accept it in the spiritual?

Now there are two things here, and you must remember that these are fundamental laws of the New Testament, or of the Christian life.

Firstly there is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a great reality. You believe in the reality of the Holy Spirit as a fact, but you cannot see Him, or hear Him with your natural ears, and you cannot know the reality of the Holy Spirit until something happens in you. Early in his Gospel this same John speaks about being "born of the Spirit". When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about being born again, Nicodemus' mind was just working in the natural realm and he said: 'Impossible!' Jesus said: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit IS spirit" (John 3:6). What is it that is born of the Spirit? It is our human spirit. Because it has become separated from God it is looked upon as dead, and death is just separation from God, whether it be in time or in eternity.

Now, being 'born again' means that our spirit is brought into life union with God, and what the New Testament means when it speaks of 'being alive in the spirit' is 'in living union with God, the Holy Spirit', that is, our spirit being alive unto God and unto Divine things. Here John was only saying in principle that

his spirit was alive to the Holy Spirit at this time, and when that is true, as it should be of every one of us, we see a new world. "And (he) shewed me the holy city", and the Holy Spirit will do that with every one of us, so that we are able to say: 'I have seen something that God has shown me.' Will you believe me when I say that that ought to be true of every Christian? The Christian life is not just a matter of reading the Bible, saying prayers and going to church. Those things may be good and necessary, but the Christian life really is a walk with God in the light. It is a matter of being alive unto God in the spirit and God being able to show us in our hearts what is His will, so that the true Christian should be able to say 'The Lord is showing me things'.

Now, you mature Christians, be very patient with this, because there are some young Christians here, and we can never go on very far until we have laid a proper foundation. What I have just said, then, is fundamental to the Christian life from its beginning.

Now we can go on to the next step. You say: 'Well, that is very wonderful and I want my life to be like that, but how can it be?' We have our answer here, but in spiritual principle. What the Lord shows to your heart will depend upon how far up the mountain you are. Again you say: 'Oh, Mr. Sparks, what do you mean?' Well, I am not talking about climbing the Jungfrau or the Blümlisalp. What does this mountain mean? What does it mean to go up any mountain? It just means getting away from this world. When you get up the mountain you have left the world behind; there is a great separation between you and the world, and you will never see heavenly, spiritual things until that has happened.

Do believe me: this is not a matter of age, or years. There are multitudes of Christians who have been saved for many years, and they are still down on the earth. They have still got their interests in this world - this world, and the things of this world, still have a large place in their life. They are what are called 'worldly Christians'. Of course, that is a contradiction in terms, because it is not true Christianity. Listen to Jesus as He is praying to His Father about His disciples: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:16). 'They are not of the world. They do not belong here. They belong somewhere else. This world is not their life; their life is above.' That is in John's Gospel, and it is just clear, straight language, is it not?

In the book of Revelation John puts it in this way of illustration - of a great and high mountain - and he is saying: 'The people who make this city are heavenly people, not earthly people. They are people who are separated in spirit from this world.' The Apostle Paul put it in this way: "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is" (Colossians 3:1), and that only means: 'Get up on the mountain. Leave this world in spirit, in heart, and come up with the Lord Jesus.'

Let me go back again to what I began to say. This life in the spirit, in union with Christ, is not a matter of years or of age. It is possible that you were only born again yesterday and yet you are high up the mountain, and that is because you have said 'good-bye' absolutely to this world. You are very utter about this matter of new life with the Lord.

As we move about this world we meet many people who call themselves Christians, and the strange thing is that we cannot talk to them about the things of the Lord. These professing Christians open their eyes and their mouths when you begin to talk about the things of the Lord. To them it is as though you were talking the language of another country, and the reason is that they have not yet come right away from this world in spirit. Let me say to the young Christians that this mountain is for you from the day that you are born again.

Now I want to say a very strong thing, and it may be difficult for you to accept it. Do you realize that this world lies under a curse? God has pronounced a curse upon this world as it is, and what is the expression of a curse? The law of frustration operates where a curse is. You just go so far, and you can go no further. Human life just goes so far, and that is the end. It does not go right through to fullness and perfection. Everything is imperfect, and is frustrated by death. A man spoken of by Jesus Christ accumulated great stores in his lifetime, and then he rubbed his hands together and talked to himself: 'Soul, you can retire now. You have great stores laid up for yourself, so just eat, drink and be merry.' But God said: "Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee; and the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?" (Luke 12:20).

The curse and death mean the frustration of all the purposes of man, and what is true of human life is true of the world. Oh, what a lot man has done to try to break through the sound barrier of frustration! What a long way he has gone today! Why, if you had been told twenty-five years ago how things would be today, you would never have believed it. Yes, man has gone a very long way, even to the moon - and then someone just puts his finger on a button, the nuclear bombs begin to fall and all his work is wiped out in a moment. Everybody knows of that possibility, and the Word of God has told us quite clearly that that is exactly how it will be. Because a curse rests upon this world it can never go right through to perfection.

What I am getting at is this: If you and I in spirit get bound up with this world we shall come under spiritual death. Any Christian who is sensitive to the Holy Spirit will register something wrong when they touch this world and their reaction will be: 'I have come down. I have touched this cursed world and death is registered in my spirit.'

You will never see the things of God until you get above the fog of this earth. If you come down into the self-life, then it is frustration. If you touch the world's life it is frustration, and you will never see the things of God until you get above this world in spirit. The language is very simple and very significant: 'I was in the Spirit, and I was on a great, high mountain, and then I saw something.' You see, these are spiritual laws of the Christian life and they are very real. I hope we do know something about this.

May the Lord explain to our hearts just what it means where we individually are concerned!

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