

Release by Illumination

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores how spiritual illumination by the Holy Spirit empowers believers to understand and apply Scripture effectively.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:17

Topics: "Power of the Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Illumination"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of spiritual illumination in understanding the Scriptures and experiencing true power in the Christian life, as demonstrated by the apostles on the day of Pentecost. He argues that while the New Testament is complete, the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit is essential for revealing its meaning and applying it to our lives. The apostles' transformation from confusion to clarity illustrates how illumination can release believers from spiritual bondage. Sparks highlights that true understanding comes not from mere intellectual grasp but from a divine revelation that empowers and transforms. He calls on believers to seek this illumination as a vital aspect of their faith journey.

Transcript

In this quest for the secrets of power and effectiveness as characteristic of things in the book of "The Acts", we are seeing that these secrets are so largely found in what happened in the apostles themselves, not in a complete system of teaching and practice or order in a Blue Book in their hands. It is still quite impossible to know exactly how they conducted their meetings. There are certain features mentioned and a number of details given as to things that happened, but so much was just spontaneous and unarranged. There is enough known to make a present-day conformity to it so revolutionary as to upset very much of our common forms, acceptance, and procedure. For instance, our present form of the "Holy Communion" or "Lord's table" bears very little resemblance to the New Testament way, and the meetings of the local church were almost entirely different from our "church services". Apart from a very few major and basic factors and features, and even those more general than specific, such as baptism and the FACT of the breaking of bread, there is no rigidly specified blueprint in the New Testament. It is therefore a false hope and effort to try to "form" perfect "New Testament churches". This does not mean that there are not very definite spiritual principles which, if really governing, will produce the power and effectiveness of those early times. It is to unearth these that we are giving ourselves in these considerations.

The spiritual principle to which we are now giving attention is one around which there rages the strongest controversy and opposition. That is usually true in the case of the matters of greatest importance, and we

are convinced that this matter now before us is of VERY great importance indeed. It is what we will call

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In this connection we must begin with what happened to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

It is surely clear to everyone that, in spite of all the teaching and explanation given personally by Jesus to His disciples, they neither understood Him nor their Scriptures. Even when He gave two of them what must have been a masterly and matchless discourse on the key to all the Scriptures, from Moses onwards, and for the moment, "opened their mind that they might understand the Scriptures", it is evident that the "root of the matter" was not IN them. It was like Peter's transient illumination as to the Person of Christ, of which Jesus said that flesh and blood had not revealed it to him, but His Father, who is in heaven. The fleeting illumination did not save Peter from the most tragic and terrible thing that a man could do: deny the knowledge of Jesus with anger and vehemence. No, up to the burial of Jesus and for fifty days afterwards, their Bible was largely a closed book.

But look and listen on the day of Pentecost! Peter and the eleven are in the good of an opened Bible; the Scriptures are all alive. Look at the quotations, citations and interpretations. The Bible was all alive and was pricking men's hearts and making them cry out.

The closed book had meant bound and imprisoned men. Spiritual illumination was their release. The Lord was released by the Holy Spirit and thereby they were released men.

So far, no one will raise any objection. But we have to go further. What we have as our New Testament is the product of the continuance of that illumination. How glad we Christians ought to be that our Christianity is not a matter of treatise and handbooks on religious subjects, discourses on the philosophy of religion or doctrine, but divine truth revealed to meet crucial situations arising in real life. Light given by the Spirit of God in the midst of battle, adversity and absolute necessity. Spiritual history hammered out on the anvil of deep experience. The New Testament is revelation given over against conditions and situations needing nothing less than sheer salvation, life or death as to destiny. It is not a volume of abstract theories but of light from heaven to deliver souls. Therefore its value is practical, not theoretical; it is vital, not static; it is consequential, not optional or capricious.

So far, so good. But now we come to the vital point.

Let us hasten to say quite categorically and emphatically that, as a divine revelation in substance and instrumentality, the Bible is closed and complete. There is no adding to it in substance and content. God will give no more Scripture any more than He will give an extra Christ. In giving His Son He has given in Him all! With the Scriptures He has given ALL in content.

But when we have said that we can be just with the New Testament as were the disciples with the Old. We may have the letter, the Book, the record, and still not have the MEANING. The work of the Holy Spirit was twofold in this connection. Firstly to give the all-sufficient substance and seal as final in that respect. Secondly to reveal or illuminate what is in the substance. The first reached its climax and finality when the last apostle left this earth. The second goes on. The New Testament uses two words in this matter. It speaks of "knowledge" (i.e. of Christ) and it also speaks of "full knowledge" ("of him"). One is by initial eye-opening; the other is by continuous illumination. Hence, the apostle Paul prayed for BELIEVERS that "He would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the (full) knowledge of him, the eyes of your

heart being enlightened" (Ephesians 1:17-18). It is by such illumination that life is maintained, growth is secured, and release is made.

The disciples on the day of Pentecost were emancipated men and a mark of their emancipation was the coming alive of the Scriptures by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But it did not end there. See Stephen's discourse. See Peter in the Cornelius episode. See Philip and the Ethiopian, and so on. This is no claim to special or extra revelation to add to the Scriptures, but it is a declaration that "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from His word".

In this matter hear what a highly respected and accepted servant of the Lord has to say:

"The inward kernel of truth has the same configuration as the outward shell. The mind can grasp the shell but only the Spirit of God can lay hold of the internal essence. Our great error has been that we have trusted to the shell and have believed we were sound in the faith because we were able to explain the external shape of truth as found in the letter of the Word. From this mortal error Fundamentalism is slowly dying. We have forgotten that the essence of spiritual truth cannot come to the one who knows the external shell of truth unless there is first a miracle of the Spirit within the heart." (A. W. Tozer in *The Divine Conquest*.)

Many a servant of God has had his entire life and ministry revolutionized and released -- like the apostles -- by the illumination of the Holy Spirit of the Word of God which had for long been in his hand and very familiar as to its language and substance. This is certainly one of the secrets of the power and effectiveness of life and preaching "As it was at the beginning". The same Scriptures can be used by two distinctly different preachers or teachers with as distinctly different results. One with an opened heaven and anointing ministering by spiritual illumination in his own spirit, with the result that heavenly impact is registered and life imparted. The other with but a mental apprehension, studied and more or less clever, but spiritually unproductive, leaving the heart empty.

Thus far, in this particular connection, we have only stated facts. We cannot be too strong in this statement. There remain two things to be done. One is that the Lord's people, especially His servants, should realize that the gift of the Holy Spirit (which is for ALL born-anew believers) is definitely for illumination, or, as the apostle says -- "A spirit of... revelation"; to uncover, to interpret, and to guide into "all the truth". John makes a very definite point of this in speaking of "the anointing which ye have received". He says that "the anointing teacheth you all things". All believers should be living in the good of new eyes and new sight as an integral part of their new birth. This faculty of spiritual sight and apprehension should be increasing in strength and depth throughout the whole life. It is not an extra; it is the growth of a capacity given at new birth.

However, there may be a certain necessity, even a crisis, which results in the release of the Spirit, and the release of the disciple. It is to be recognized that the ministry of the apostles, so very largely to believers, had this spiritual illumination and understanding as its motive, which means that even true believers can be limited in this matter. Let us, however, believe in our birthright of spiritual illumination and have definite exercise about it before the Lord.

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