

The Advent of the Holy Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Holy Spirit's advent marks a new dispensation in which God's purpose is to make us Christ-like and conform us to the image of God's Son.

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Living in Resurrection Life"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the Holy Spirit's advent, marking a transformative shift in God's economy and the believer's relationship with Him. He explains that the Holy Spirit's role is to actualize the work of Christ in believers, making the realities of the Incarnation, earthly life, Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension manifest in their lives. Sparks highlights that the Holy Spirit is committed to glorifying Jesus and enabling believers to live in the newness of life, free from the old man. He urges Christians to recognize the importance of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives and to live in accordance with the resurrection life that He brings. Ultimately, the sermon calls for believers to embrace their identity in Christ and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

As we come to the sixth note in the octave, which is the advent of the Holy Spirit, we approach the matter, as before, with the question: Why the Holy Spirit? We know, of course, that the advent of the Holy Spirit inaugurated a new dispensation here on this earth. It is for us, therefore, as Christians of this dispensation, to know just what that implied, and what it is that particularly and peculiarly obtains in the dispensation in which we live.

Of course, when we use that word 'dispensation', we are using a word that means more than just a time period, although that is the way in which it is generally and commonly used. We think of a dispensation as bounded by certain events and dates, and running from one particular point in time to another. But while the word means that, it means more than that. The word itself means literally 'the running of a household', or 'the job of a steward', and hence 'stewardship'; and thus it comes to mean the order or nature of things obtaining at a certain period--what we mean by the word 'economy'. It is, in fact, the same word in the original as 'economy': that is, how things are done, what is done, what are the principles governing the things that are done, in any given time.

I repeat therefore: it is most important that the Christian should know what is peculiar to this period in the history of the world, in the matter of what is done and how it is done, and the principles governing the 'what' and the 'how'. For you and I--let us bring this very near home--are people of this particular economy.

Failure to recognize that has led, and will lead, to much confusion and weakness. We must know what are the particular features of that dispensation, or economy, of God which was inaugurated on the day which we call the Day of Pentecost. Of course, Pentecost only means 'fiftieth'--the feast of the two wave-loaves being held on the fiftieth day after the feast of first-fruits (Lev. 23:10, 15-17). The 'day of Pentecost' was one of very many such 'fiftieth days', but, being the most outstanding and most wonderful of them all, it is marked out and thought of by us as the only Pentecost. However, something happened then which changed the whole economy of God in the government of this world. What that was, it is for you and me to understand, and to understand very clearly.

It was not merely that on that day the Holy Spirit took over the government of things. That was not so. The Holy Spirit had always been in charge of things. He was in charge at the creation: "The Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2); and all the way through the old dispensation the Holy Spirit was active. He was there, not only in types and symbols and figures, but oft-times in actual power and wisdom, endowing men. He was there, superintending, all the way. What we have to understand is not just that He took over on the day of Pentecost, but that He took over on an altogether new basis. A very big change in the basis of operation by the Holy Spirit took place on that day.

Perhaps the most helpful way of presenting this fact is by drawing attention, first of all, to the sequence of events in this octave of redemption. The advent of the Holy Spirit is but a part of the whole, a part of redemption, but it is a very important note in the octave. As we follow through these stages, these phases, of the octave, it will help us to understand each successive movement in the scale if we can recognize the follow-on, the sequence in it all.

(1) The Incarnation

Let us look over it. The first note, or phase, of the octave, was the Incarnation of the Son of God: God's Son coming in human form into this world. You will remember that we tried to explain that there was a three-fold object in the Incarnation--it had three quite definite meanings. Firstly, the redemption of man: we saw something of the nature of man, from what it was that man had to be redeemed; secondly, the re-constituting of man according to God's original pattern; and, thirdly, the perfecting of man. Those three things were taken up by the Son of God, under the title of the 'Son of Man', and in Himself personally they were made true. He was not only the Redeemer, but He was Himself the Redemption. Redemption became personal. It was not only what He did, but what He was as the Pattern of redeemed man. Is it necessary for me to safeguard what I am saying? Let me repeat that. Jesus was not only the Redeemer, and Redemption was not only what He did: He stood there as the personal embodiment and representation of redemption; He was the representation of redeemed man, of the kind of man that would emerge when redeemed.

He, then, was a Man as re-constituted according to God's mind; Man, in representation, re-constituted and different. And in Himself He was 'made perfect through sufferings' (Heb. 2:10). He represented man perfected through sufferings and trials: not, of course, in the sense of being made good or sinless, but brought to completion. We must always remember that the word 'perfect' in the Bible does not just mean a state: it means a measure, a maturity, a completeness, an 'all-round-ness', a 'finalization' or final realization of something. In Him the perfecting was not making Him better--nothing could do that--but it could, as Man, increase Him. And He did increase. We noticed that it was said twice over about His early years, first up to the age of twelve, and again afterwards, that He 'grew in wisdom and stature', that 'the grace of God was upon Him', and that He was 'in favour with God and men' (Luke 2:40,52). He was

growing. And then, as for the three-and-a-half years, what an enlargement of patience, enlargement of faith, enlargement of love. He was the Man perfected, made perfect through suffering; that is, He was made complete. That is the Incarnation.

(2) The Earthly Life

Then we considered His earthly life. As we watched Him through the thirty years, and then the three-and-a-half, we summed it all up by saying: Here is the kind of man that God is after. Under every test and trial, in all circumstances of adversity, He is presented to us as the kind of man that God intends to have--a true humanity: not, as we said, a 'theophany', a mere transient visitation of God in man-form, but living from infancy through into maturity of life as a man, and standing there as One approved of God, of Whom God could say: 'In Him I am well pleased' (Matt. 3:17, 17:5): satisfying God as a Man. In the earthly life there is presented to us, set before us, the Man that God intends to have, the Man that God is after.

If only we had eyes to see, and understanding to grasp, all that He was in Himself, and all those laws and principles by which He was governed! How different He was from every other man--utterly different, a mystery to all. "In the midst of you standeth One Whom ye know not" (John 1:26; A.S.V.). It was not only that He was the Divine Son of God manifest in the flesh. It was proved true again and again that even as Man they could not fathom Him. The most intimate friends misunderstood, or failed to understand. There is something about Him as a Man that is different and inexplicable. But He is the kind of man that God is going to have.

I should perhaps say here, in parenthesis, that, in a measure--it may be a small measure, but a very real measure--that is, or should be, true of every Christian. The world knows us not because it knew Him not (John 1:10, 16:3; 1 John 3:1b). There ought to be about a true Christian something that the world cannot fathom, something which it is no use trying to make the world understand, for it never will. There is something different. We have no need to try to be different and singular and odd, for we shall certainly be that, if we go on with the Lord!

(3) The Cross

Then we came to the Cross, and in the Cross we saw three things. We saw, firstly, one man, one kind of man, exposed. The Cross of the Lord Jesus was a terrible exposure, uncovering, of man as he is. If ever man divulged what he is like, showed what he is and can do, he did it then. If ever it was made manifest that man is really actuated and driven by the Devil himself, who has a foothold in him and only needs occasion for it to be revealed, it was done then. Don't let us think: 'Oh, they were very terrible people! We are quite different from those people; we would never do that.' Wait until we are put to the test. There is nothing--nothing--of which we are not capable, if only the circumstances are such as to uncover the depths of sin that exist in our natures, and draw us out. Yes, man was exposed in the Cross.

Secondly, we saw man classified: man shown what he is and where he belongs, put into his right category. Is it not true in our own case, as Christians, that, as we come, under the light of the Holy Spirit, really to understand something of our own hearts, in some measure to know ourselves--is it not true that we know where we belong? But for the mercy and grace of God, we know where we should be in the end--we should go to 'our own place', where we belong. The Cross classified man and showed where he belonged.

Thirdly, the Cross put all under judgment and death, for "all have sinned". One man exposed, one man classified, one man judged and put away--that is the Cross.

(4) The Resurrection

The Resurrection speaks of another Man brought in and attested. In the words of the Apostle Paul: "Jesus Christ... was declared", or 'marked out as', "the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:1,4). That sums it all up. The resurrection was God's attestation of the Man Who--far from being put away--is brought in in the place of the man that has been rejected.

(5) The Ascension

The ascension and glorifying is all gathered up in this: the installation of the new Man, representatively, as the first of the sons being brought to glory; the new Man installed in Heaven.

The Spirit Came To Make These Things True In Believers

With this brief reminder of the first five steps in the octave, we come to the advent of the Holy Spirit. You notice that each step must follow on the preceding, each is a part of the other. The advent of the Holy Spirit was to take up all those things that had preceded, to bring them down from the glorified Lord in Heaven, and to make them good in you and in me. The Holy Spirit came to make effectual in you and me the redemption for which Christ came--"the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24)--the re-constitution of man that is set forth in Christ. He came to take up that work which was perfected in Him, and carry it to perfection in us--to perfect us also, to make us complete with the completeness of Christ.

So that the basis of the Holy Spirit's operation is nothing less than all the meaning of the Incarnation, in those respects.

As to the earthly life, here is the Man, the kind of man that God is after, and the Holy Spirit has come to conform us to that kind of man, to the image of God's Son: in a word, to make us Christ-like. That is the Holy Spirit's work; that is the thing for which He has come. That is a glorious hope for us.

As to the Cross--yes, it is equally true that the Holy Spirit's activity is constantly to bear witness against that man that has been put away. If you and I are really indwelt and governed by the Holy Spirit, we shall know when we touch that man. We shall know that that is prohibited ground; we shall know that there is a notice up there: 'No Trespassing--Keep Off!' . Any Christian who does not know by a sting and a kick-back when he or she touches the old man, is lacking in sensitiveness to the Holy Spirit. But there is the other side. The Holy Spirit is to keep us on the positive side by saying: 'Now this is the way, the way of life. Keep off that old ground--keep on the ground of life!' Dear Christian, do take this to heart: do finish with that old man! Do not be constantly digging him up and looking at him, going over him and round him, trying to find something good in him--that is, in yourself; for you never will! The verdict of God is that in him there is "no good thing" (Rom. 7:18); so keep off that ground, and keep on the ground of the new man. The old man has been exposed: surely you know by this time how bad he is. Why have anything to do with him?

The Holy Spirit has come to make us know that there is another ground upon which we must live our lives. He has come to carry into effect the work of the Cross, the putting aside of one, and the bringing in of another: in other words, to make way for the resurrection. You and I are now by the Holy Spirit called to live upon the ground of His resurrection, by resurrection life. Resurrection is the great feature of this dispensation. These are twin truths--the putting aside of one in order to make way for the other. And the

Holy Spirit has come to work on that ground.

Finally, all this is gathered up in the Man in the glory. He is the embodiment of all these Divine things. He is installed there beyond any earthly risks, beyond any possibility of interference from down here. He is out of reach of any kind of touch from this world that would seek to alter things. He is right above it all. And then the Spirit comes to take up all this that is embodied in Him, and to work it out in us and in the Church.

That, then, is the answer to the question: Why the Holy Spirit? To make good the meaning of the Incarnation, so far as that Incarnation relates to mankind; to make good the meaning of the earthly life; to make good the meaning of the Cross; to make good the meaning of the Resurrection; to make good the meaning of the Ascension and Glorification of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit takes up all these things, with the object of bringing them to realization in believers.

The Holy Spirit Is Committed To The Lord Jesus

Thus the Holy Spirit is wholly committed to the Lord Jesus. He has one all-inclusive, all-embracing concern: He is focused with all His attention and all His resources upon the Lord Jesus, to make Him glorious, and that in believers. As we know, the Lord Jesus said: "He shall glorify Me" (John 16:14). That is His work. Perhaps it is too familiar a thing to create any kind of stir, but I find a good deal of comfort to my heart from every fresh contemplation of the fact that the great advent of the Holy Spirit was centred upon and summed up in this one thing: the making good in you and in me--that is, in the Church--of all that the Lord Jesus was and has done as Son of Man. That gives a ground of confidence in prayer, a ground of assurance of hope. That is how the Holy Spirit has taken over in this dispensation.

This was the very burden of our Lord during those last very full days with His disciples. He stopped His public ministry, withdrew from the multitudes, and for many hours before the end gave Himself with concentrated attention to His disciples. And if you look at those final days and hours, so tightly packed with this instruction, this teaching, this unburdening of His heart, you will find that His burden at that time all related to the day that was coming. "In that day..." , "In that day..." , He was saying; and 'that' day was the day of the Holy Spirit. 'When He is come...' ; 'In that day, when He is come...' He put the greatest importance and value upon the coming of the Holy Spirit, because He knew very well that all that He had come for, as in Incarnation and earthly life and Cross, would be without value unless the Holy Spirit reproduced it organically and vitally in other people.

He gathered that up into one so familiar statement: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit" (John 12:24). Now He said that in response to certain people who had expressed a wish to "see Jesus" (v. 21). It was a strange, mysterious rejoinder. "The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified... Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone...". Surely His meaning was: 'Though you ask, though you seek, ever so earnestly, you will never see the Son of Man glorified, only in His being reproduced in other people, like the corn reproducing itself. There you will see Me, there you will see My glory.'

For there is a sense in which there is no seeing of the Son of Man, the glorious Son of Man, except in the Church, in believers. Alas! what a poor, poor showing we make of it! But that is His way. I say, He spent those hours and those days concentrating upon this thing. 'For all that I have come to be and to do, the necessity is that the Holy Spirit shall come. It is far more important that He should come than that I should stay. If I stay, I am like the grain of wheat alone; if I go, I make room for Him to reproduce.' He taught, therefore, that the only way to know Him, the only way to see Him, was this way.

Death, The Obstacle To God's Purpose, Has Been Removed

What effect ought that to have upon us? Surely, first of all, it ought to give us real exercise about the matter of the Holy Spirit having His rightful place in us, having no obstruction, being free to do His work. Let us remind ourselves that God, from His side, has moved to remove the greatest obstruction of all. When, in the Letter to the Hebrews, the Lord Jesus is presented as the Man installed in Heaven--"We behold... Jesus... crowned with glory and honour" (2:9)--it means that it is possible now for God to get on with His work in relation to mankind. God's thought is always concerning man. "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the Son of Man, that Thou visitest Him?" (2:6). Here is the Man to whom men are to be conformed: but there was a great obstruction, a great obstacle that made that impossible, and that was death. Death was in the way. Man can never come to that while the sentence of death rests upon everything. For when man sinned in his first father, death, the great enemy to all God's purpose, was passed as a sentence upon all men; and so it stands in the way. That man, that race can never come there and be like that.

But "we behold... Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour". He has taken the obstruction, the obstacle, and destroyed it. 'Through death He brought to nought him that had the power of death' (Heb. 2:14). He has 'tasted death in the behalf of every man' (v. 9). He has taken up the great obstacle and put it out of the way. Now we can come to that likeness! From God's side, the greatest obstruction to the fulfilment of this Divine purpose has been removed--and if you deal with the greatest, you have dealt with everything--and so the way is open.

The effect of this upon us, then, ought to be that we see to it that we get off, and keep clear of, that ground of death--the death that rests upon the old man. This may sound mysterious, it may sound abstruse, but in fact it is very real, very practical. If you and I begin to have any truck with ourselves, as we are in ourselves, we know that death begins to work. It is always like that. And the enemy knows it too. If he can set in motion this "wheel of nature" (Jas. 3:6), get it stirred up and get us involved, he knows that he has us again under the power of death. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life, and He works on, and only on, the ground of life. You and I, therefore, should make it our exercise to be always on the ground of life. We need to remember that God's thought for us is life, not death. If we will lay hold on life, God will react: the Holy Spirit will move. We accept death too easily. The enemy is always offering us death in some form or other and trying to get us to take it on. If we start flirting with death in any way, we just provide a playground for the Devil, and he will spoil everything. It is contrary to the Holy Spirit. May the Lord teach us what that means.

The Holy Spirit, then, is committed to the risen Christ, to the realizing in us of all that His risen life means, with the end in view of glorification.

Present Chastening Related To Future Government

There is in Christ a very full purpose concerning man, a very full purpose indeed. We said something about that from Hebrews in our last chapter. "Thou madest Him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands" (Ps. 8:6); "Thou didst put all things in subjection under His feet" (Heb. 2:8). 'The inhabited earth of which we are now speaking was subjected, not to angels, but to man' (Heb. 2:5). That is a tremendous calling, a tremendous vocation: nothing less than government of this world, in union with Christ, in the ages to come. Do you say: 'That is a wonderful idea, a beautiful conception--but what is the practical value of beautiful conceptions and ideas that are afar off in the ages to come?' After this wonderful presentation

that we have seen of Christ, and of man in relation to Christ, and of their fellowship or partnership in the government of the inhabited earth to come, there are two things that come out of this letter to the Hebrews.

One is that, in relation to that purpose, God is doing something in believers now. Do you remember Hebrews 12? 'We have had fathers of our flesh, who chastened us as it seemed good to them for a season, and we gave them reverence: how much more to the Father of our spirits?' (vv. 9- 10). The whole letter really heads up into this. With chapter 12 the writer is nearing the end of his message; he is summing up. What is it all about? "Holy brethren, partners in a heavenly calling..." (3:1). Government of the inhabited earth to come in union with Christ--that is our calling. But we have got to be trained for it; and what is happening to us now in our spiritual life is our training for that, and it is very practical.

If there is one thing that you and I find that we need to learn, it is how to get spiritual ascendancy. Why does the Lord allow all these things--these adverse things, these trying things? why does He not prevent them? It is in order that we may learn ascendancy of spirit: for this government is not official--it is spiritual government. The real government of this world is spiritual. Behind men and everything that is happening there is a spiritual system at work. But it is an evil thing. God is going to clear that out of His universe and put a good thing in its place. It is going to be a spiritual but heavenly government, and when there is a heavenly background to this world, what a different kind of world it will be. God is going to make this world a wholesome place by placing a wholesome spiritual government over it, and that government is going to be put in the hands of the saints.

But with that in view we are going through an awful grueling, an awful schooling in the hands of the Father of our spirits. It is all over this matter of getting spiritual ascendancy. Every day we have something to get on top of, spiritually; something that must be put in subjection under our feet. Too often it gets on top and puts its feet on us. In order to bring it under, we have to co-operate with the Lord, and our training is so that we may learn how to bring it under our feet. The Holy Spirit is here for that. All those words about being "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man" (Eph. 3:16), 'strong in the strength of the Lord' (cf. Eph. 6:10; 1 Pet. 4:11)--all such words have to do with the matter of gaining spiritual ascendancy, getting on top.

Need For Encouragement And Warning

The other thing that comes out of this letter to the Hebrews is that so constantly struck note of exhortation, of encouragement. "Let us go on..." There is so much of warning and entreaty. Why? Because of this high calling, because of this great vocation, because of this very purpose in our new creation and union with God's Son. It is our inheritance--the inhabited earth to come and the government of it. We need much encouragement, we need much exhorting, we need constant warning; it is so big a thing. I believe it is that to which the writer refers when he says: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (2:3). The "so great salvation" is not just escaping hell and somehow scraping into Heaven--it is all this that is in this very letter. "Partners in a heavenly calling".

The Holy Spirit has come for the very purpose of making that good. Perhaps the names by which the Lord Jesus called Him do not impress us very much: for instance, when He calls Him, in our language, 'the Comforter'. Of course, that is very good: we need comforting; but that is only a part of the meaning of His Name. Its fuller meaning is: 'the One called alongside', co-operating with us; 'the Encourager', 'the Advocate'. He has come to be alongside--to be our Helper and Encourager in this great work of conformity

to God's Son and fulfilment of eternal vocation in the ages to come.

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