

The Dispensation of the Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Dispensation of the Spirit is a new economy where the Holy Spirit takes the place of the Law, allowing believers to live spiritually and have a deeper understanding of Christ's work.

Scripture: John 16:7

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "Transformation in Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks discusses 'The Dispensation of the Spirit,' emphasizing a significant transition from the Law and the Incarnation to a new era characterized by the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence. He highlights the transformative power of the Spirit, which enables believers to experience a deeper spiritual life and understanding of Christ, contrasting it with the limitations of Christ's physical presence. Sparks points out that the Holy Spirit's work is essential for both personal revelation and the conviction of the world regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment. He challenges believers to recognize the importance of the Spirit's role in their lives and the necessity of embracing this new dispensation. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper engagement with the Spirit to fully realize the implications of Christ's work in the believer's life.

Transcript

With the phase of John's revelation of spiritual truth that is marked, in our arrangement, by the beginning of Chapter 16, we are presented with an immense development. It is nothing less than the grand turning point in the dispensations. There is here coming into view another dispensation, with its own particular and peculiar nature; an altogether new economy is about to be inaugurated. It is

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For many centuries the Law had reigned. Then came the brief interlude of the Incarnation, in which as to the past - for the first and only time, the Law had its perfect fulfillment in a Man, and - as to the future - the new reign of the Spirit also in a Man was exemplified.

Now, the "going" of that One to the Father is shown to be imminent. It is also shown to be essential in order that all in Him through faith should move on to that new basis.

There are one or two things in this part of the Lord's discourse which had a point and edge that startled those who heard them, and which need to be recovered from the blunting effect of familiarity and tradition

where we are concerned. That the invisible should be of value far transcending the visible, that the intangible should transcend the tangible, the inward the objective, the inaudible the audible, was by no means a simple thing to believe. That this chance was "expedient" was far from easy to accept. To let go the personal, physical, present embodiment of all hope and expectations - all that He had come to mean to them - for One who seemed so impersonal, incomprehensible, and mysterious, was a change to be contemplated only with misgivings and fears.

And yet it was being categorically stated that the one was incomparably more important than the other - the Spirit than the Incarnate Christ as visibly present!

Then again, this was all being stated with such an air of assumption. It seemed to be assumed that the coming of the Spirit was a part of the course of things, and essential as the complement of Christ's work. In what ways would this be?

(1) Christ's physical presence was outward and objective.

The Holy Spirit would be within and subjective.

(2) Christ physically would be limited to one place at a time, and by all the straitness of time and geography.

The Holy Spirit would be immanent, omnipresent; with all, everywhere, at all times - or apart from time.

(3) Christ physically must do His work and return to the Father.

The Holy Spirit would "abide for ever" ("unto the age").

(4) Christ came that in the body He might accomplish eternal redemption through the Cross.

The Holy Spirit would make that work the basis and means of world-wide and continuous conviction as to man's need of it.

(5) While the relationship of men to Jesus in the flesh remained, it would remain a matter of following and falteringly responding to commands and regulations imposed, with all the contradictions which did actually mark the three years with Him.

By the coming of the Holy Spirit to reside in them, they would become actually spiritual men, with the Spirit of Christ within.

The proof and evidence that this was right - this great and critical change-over from Christ in the flesh to the Holy Spirit - is seen abundantly in the transformation which took place in these same men with and from the Day of Pentecost. It is a very profitable thing to tabulate the points of difference in them before and after that event. Not only was that immediately so, but the progress spiritually was more in three months than it had been in three years; and so it continued.

This is the inclusive and fundamental difference between this dispensation and the earlier, and it is a challenge to us as to whether we have really entered into the distinctive nature of the dispensation in which we live, according to God's order. More on this later in another connection.

The next primary thing in this section of the discourse is

The Holy Spirit's Work in Relation to Christ

The Lord said that the Holy Spirit would make it His active business to work in relation to Himself Jesus Christ.

This work would be in two directions.

(1) As to themselves.

(2) As to the world.

(1) As to themselves, He would be to and in them the Spirit of revelation.

It is positively affirmed that, as they were before, and without this definite gift and reception of the Spirit as an event, they were without the capacity or ability to receive and "bear" the much that Christ had to say to them. Let us note - "I have many things to say to you." Into that statement must be gathered all that they came to know in after years, much of which comprises our "New Testament." But even Apostles had to confess to being unable to say all that they wanted to because of the limited spirituality of believers.

What was true of the Disciples before Pentecost is true comparatively of believers always, according to the life in the Spirit.

Spiritual knowledge is not only the result of study, reason, deduction or information.

The Scriptures, or what the Lord has said and which is recorded for us, are essentially the Holy Spirit's basis and means of operation, but revelation as to what the Lord meant, and of the inexhaustible content of any Divine utterance, is a plus, an extra, whilst at the same time consistency with Divine principles is preserved.

The proof that the "eyes of the heart have been enlightened" is that the truth has become a power, a life, a revolution, not just a system of doctrine. Christ never violated any Scripture or Divine principle, and yet the mass of those who believed that they were the custodians of the truth firmly and fiercely believed that He did so. This stands to emphasize the fact that in the realm of Scripture there can be two positively opposed positions that of the men of the letter, and that of the men of the Word plus the Spirit.

While everyone will agree that the phrase "Spirit-taught men" expresses the need of all times, and that this is no contradiction to the teaching of Scripture, yet strangely enough, this marks a distinction which issues in the conflict referred to in John 15:18-26; 16:1-3.

It is here made unquestionably clear that persecution has its chief force in those who hold firmly to a traditional position as to their apprehension of Scripture, as against those who, having the same Bible, have had a mighty work of the Spirit of God done in them by which they have been introduced into a realm which, while not contradictory to the Word, yet holds the all-inclusive and overwhelming significance of Christ in God's universe. "These things will they do unto you because they have not known the Father, nor me."

That knowledge of the Father and the Son is a revelation of the Holy Spirit, without which we may be the fiercest protagonists of Biblical tradition and yet like Saul of Tarsus be all wrong. So, when it comes to summing up the meaning of the new dispensation where believers are concerned, it amounts to this: "Have we really, by a definite work of the Holy Spirit within us, seen the significance and meaning of Christ

in God's creational, redemptive, and consummate scheme of things?" If not, then there is an open door to every one of the unhappy conditions in Christendom. If so, we are on higher ground than all that is petty, personal, earthly, and cruel.

(2) As to the world (verse 8).

The words of this statement are often quoted, but their inclusive meaning is often overlooked or missed.

Note - The focal point of the world-convicting work of the Spirit is Christ and His work.

(a) The Sin question.

Note that it is not in the plural - sins.

The Holy Spirit may convict believers of sins, but He does not do this with the world.

The judgment of the world will not be on the basis of sins, greater or less, these or those. If that were so, it would be unjust. Some are - as General Booth put it - "damned into the world." That is from birth or before the most terrible forms of sin are their heritage. Others inherit and come into much more helpful and propitious conditions, which conduce to a more moral conduct. To condemn the one and be generous to the other would be totally unrighteous. God has His basis of judgment for both, and on it all are brought to a common level. The basis is:

God sent His Son into the world to redeem the world (John 3:17; Gal. 4:4,5).

What have you done with Him?

And: "Because they believe not on me."

The whole sin question is focused in acceptance or non-acceptance of Christ.

(b) The Righteousness question.

"Because I go to the Father."

If Jesus was - while truly God - truly man, taking man's Place before God, representative and substitutionary, and eventually - as man - goes to the Father, then, seeing that no unrighteous man will ever be in the presence of the Father, the whole question of righteousness must have been settled in Him as Man for man. This is the vast subject of "Righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ"; but in our passage it is concisely stated that the Holy Spirit's convicting work will be on the basis of Jesus Christ the Righteous, and on no other ground of righteousness, more or less, whether ceremonial, claimed, professed, worked up, or striven after.

(c) The Judgment question.

How wonderful are these simple though comprehensive formulae.

Here the tremendous field of judgment is covered in one concise phrase: "Because the prince of this world has been judged." What does that mean?

Well, in God's thought and intention there is only one prince for this world. But another, a false prince, a usurper, a rival, has gained a position of lordship, and this by man's assent or acceptance.

"The whole world lieth in the wicked one."

But in the Cross of Christ this other has been judged, condemned, and "cast out." By that Cross his casting out of Heaven has been followed by his casting out of the earth - in the thought and rights of God for His Son.

From the day of the Spirit, when Jesus began to be preached as "Lord," "prince and Saviour" (the great Apostolic theme), judgment is gathered into the matter of a deliberate choice of sides. In Christ judgment has been finished. "Out of Christ" means "in Satan": therefore in the realm of double judgment - exclusion both from God's kingdom here and from Heaven.

So judgment is solely a matter of taking sides, but it is Christ again who is the deciding Factor.

Thus the Spirit has as His ground the Person and work of Christ, in their respective meanings for the believer and the world.

This may be an added factor in that hostility to which the Lord so much referred at that time, and which was so satanically manifested after the Spirit had come.

But there is much comfort for believers in this chapter. The Spirit who was in the Lord Jesus is promised and given to all who will receive Him. All the possibilities and potentialities of His indwelling, for progressive and never-ending knowledge of Christ's fullness, and for service, are for those who will take the ground of the new dispensation - the ground of Christ's absolute Lordship, His perfected work and who live abidingly in and by the Spirit.

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