

The Person, and the Work, of the Holy Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Holy Spirit came to reproduce Jesus Christ in the lives of men and women, making Him present in a mighty way.

Scripture: Luke 12:50, John 14:12-16, Acts 2:16, Acts 4:13, Acts 5:2, 1 Corinthians 14:25

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "Christ's Presence"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the true nature and purpose of the Holy Spirit, clarifying that He is not an impersonal force or mere influence, but a divine Person equal to the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit's mission is not to establish a new religion or movement, but to reproduce the life of Jesus Christ in believers, making His presence felt in a powerful way. Sparks highlights that the early Church experienced the Holy Spirit as a living Person, and their actions were driven by His guidance rather than a set of doctrines or teachings. The essence of being filled with the Spirit is to be filled with Christ Himself, leading to a genuine manifestation of His presence in the world. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit's work is about glorifying Jesus and making Him known through transformed lives.

Transcript

At the end of our introductory section, we asked the question: What is the ground of the Holy Spirit's work? For this should give us the answer to our previous question: Why, at a certain point in the early history of Christianity, was His work arrested? We must therefore now ask the further questions: Who is the Holy Spirit? and what is the Holy Spirit?

What the Holy Spirit is Not

First of all, what the Holy Spirit is not, and what the Holy Spirit did not come to do. Here, a very serious error is to be avoided: that error of making the Holy Spirit impersonal, and making everything of the effects of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not, in the first place, an influence. He may exercise an influence, but in the first place He is not an influence. He is not, in the first place, a 'sense': we may sense Him, but He is not just a 'sense'. The Holy Spirit is not, in the first place, a 'principle', though He may work by principles. Nor is the Holy Spirit in the first place a 'power'. We are always in danger of making the 'effects' of the Holy Spirit everything. These things are just characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

What the Holy Spirit Is

The Holy Spirit Himself is a Person, just as truly a Person as are the Father and the Son. The Lord Jesus did not refer to the Holy Spirit as 'it'. Although the word for 'spirit' in the Greek is neuter, the Apostle John always reports the Lord Jesus as speaking of the Holy Spirit as 'He', in an emphatic way: "He, when he is come..."; "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come..." (John 16:8,13). Now you may feel that this matter does not require such emphasis, that it is accepted and recognised by most evangelical Christians. But we can get into difficulty if we are not careful - if we put more upon the characteristics than upon the Person Himself. In the Person of the Holy Spirit we are reckoning with God Almighty. We may ask for spiritual sense, consciousness, light, wisdom, power, influence, but we must always keep in mind that what we are really seeking is this Divine Person Himself, who with the Father and the Son is one God. It is God present; it is as truly God present Himself in Person, as ever Jesus Himself was God present in Person.

If you go through the book of the Acts, you will see that neither in the Church nor outside of the Church were people having to do with some abstract thing - they were having to do with a present, living Person. To Ananias and Sapphira, Peter said: "Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 5:2). You do not lie to an abstraction. It was like that in every connection: people were dealing with a living present Person - God Himself. When the Apostle spoke about strangers coming in to the assembly, and giving expression to their feelings, he did not say: 'They will say that there is some powerful influence here! I am conscious of a strange atmosphere here!' He said: 'They will say - God is in the midst of you!' (1 Cor. 14:25). 'They will relate everything to God, and will say - It is God that I meet here!' It is a very important thing that the registration should be of none other than of God Himself. If that is true, there are far-reaching implications. The Holy Spirit is not an 'it': He is a Person.

What the Holy Spirit Did Not Come to Do

The Holy Spirit did not come to start a new religion. Let it be very carefully noted that Christianity was not a new religion. It was not something set up over against, or alongside of, other religions, so as to become a subject for the academic discipline of 'Comparative Religions'. It was quite a long time before some of the leading apostles themselves realised the implications of their new position. They did not at once come to the conclusion that their Jewish religion, as such, was finished, and now they were in the 'Christian' religion. There was no such dividing line in their consciousness. The implication of their new position did not immediately dawn on them; it did not become clear-cut in a moment, they grew into it gradually. They found themselves moving in spirit in a certain direction - gradually moving away from something, feeling themselves to be more and more 'out of it' - out of something that they had been in - and more and more involved in something altogether other: but what this 'something' was, was not at first clear to them.

Think of Peter and the house of Cornelius. Peter was not at all clear as to the implications of this strange departure, this innovation of God. If Peter had had the idea that Judaism was now wound up and finished, and that Christianity had now come in to take its place, there would have been none of that battle in his heart over the Gentiles at all. In Jerusalem there were others, leading Apostles and elders, who took a very long time, if indeed they ever managed, to get quite clear on this matter. The Holy Spirit did not come to set up a new religion, called the 'Christian' religion. It is very important for us to recognise that.

The Holy Spirit did not come to launch a new 'movement' in this world. If that had been His object, then we should have found in this book records of committees, consultative and executive, being set up, and plans being laid for the evangelization of the world, with all its attendant machinery and organization. But the impressive thing about this whole book is that you never find anything like that as the basis upon which the work was initiated. No thought-out campaigns existed. The Apostles and their brethren were so often

taken by surprise; they were compelled to do things that they had never thought of doing, nor ever intended to do; they found themselves altogether beyond their depth. Many things that they had planned never took place, or were set aside. No, it was not a new 'movement' - not a 'Movement' at all (spelt with a capital 'M') - that the Holy Spirit came to inaugurate.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit did not come to inculcate a new 'teaching'. We need to be well informed and instructed on this matter. There is no ground whatever for asserting, there is nothing in the whole story upon which to rest an affirmation, that the Apostles went out into the world with 'the teaching of Jesus'. It may surprise you, even startle you, to hear that said. But there is absolutely nothing to warrant the notion that these men went out to spread 'the teaching of Jesus' - as though to say, 'Whatever Confucius may teach; whatever Buddha may teach; whatever the other great religious teachers or leaders or founders may teach, this is the "teaching" of Jesus.' That was not their idea at all, and that was not the Holy Spirit's idea. They were not in any way propagating a 'system of doctrine'.

Our New Testament 'teaching' was made necessary by what was 'happening'. All the things 'happened' before the explanation was given - the teaching came after the event. Things happened, and then explanations followed. It was not: Now, this is the 'teaching' - now go and put it into practice, constitute everything according to it; here is the teaching - therefore have everything conformed to 'it'. That would be the wrong way round. You do not get a New Testament church like that; you do not get a moving of the Holy Spirit like that. The Holy Spirit took things into His own hands, launched the Church right out into the deep, and landed it far beyond its own understanding and comprehension; and it was not until afterward that He raised up anointed or endowed men to teach the believers the meaning of their experiences, of what had happened to them. We have got to get things round the right way. Would that we could get back there - where the Holy Spirit does something, and we do not understand what He is doing, or what He means; and then we go to the Word and find - "This is that..."! (Acts 2:16). This is the explanation - here in the Word of God!

Lastly, the Holy Spirit never came to make some 'thing', called 'the Church'. It is true that the Church was born on the Day of Pentecost. But here we need to get our ideas a little clearer, a little straightened out. Our mentality in relation to that word 'church' may be a bit confused. We may have an 'object' in view in our minds - a 'thing' called the church, or going by that name, among many others. But the Holy Spirit did not come to make a new 'thing' by the name of 'the church'.

What the Holy Spirit Came to Do

Now, if the Holy Spirit did not come for any of these things, what did He come for?

The Holy Spirit came to reproduce Jesus Christ in the lives of men and women. The Church is that or it is nothing; the teaching relates to that, or it has no meaning. Any movement of the Spirit is in that direction, or we have entirely misunderstood. He came to reproduce the Lord Jesus in the lives of men and women! Everything has to be tested by that. All our activities and efforts and energies and expenditure; all our sacrifice and machinery, our movements and our teaching: everything that has become a part of 'Christianity' has to be tested by one rule: Is it resulting in the reproduction of Jesus Christ in the lives of men and women, so that it is demonstrated from heaven that Jesus is as truly here in this world now as ever He was in history? He should, indeed, be present here, not only as powerfully as then, but even more so, because He spoke of Himself as being limited until the Spirit came. He should be present, not only in works such as He did then, but, according to His own words, in "greater works than these" that believers

should do, "because I go to the Father" (John 14:12: cf. vv. 16-18; ch. 16:7-15; Luke 12:50).

That is how it was in those first thirty years; that was the thing that men everywhere realised. The presence of Christ was the great impress. "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). That was why the believers were called 'Christ-ians' - 'Christ-ones'! It was the only way of explaining. It is Christ! The Holy Spirit came for that. And if there is to be any continuation or repetition of those experiences, it will only be - it will only be - not merely through a belief in Jesus Christ, His Deity, His sinlessness, His atonement, as doctrines, but as by the Holy Spirit He is livingly present in us. In those early days it was just that: that, by the Holy Spirit, Christ was present in these believers in a mighty way. When you think or speak of being 'filled with the Spirit', what do you mean? What do we really mean by that expression? Well, what the New Testament means by being 'filled with the Spirit' is simply being filled with the Lord Jesus.

I will stop there for the moment. But we are now getting near to the meaning of the Holy Spirit: this is just the point where we move over into the real significance of Pentecost. It is, so to speak, the bringing of Christ back again, in a new mighty advent; not externally, this time, but inwardly. And I repeat that everything has to be judged according to that. Yes: when He has His place, the place that He ought to have, the measure that He ought to have, in His people, things will happen; they will happen as spontaneously and mightily as they did then. It is all resolved into the matter of Jesus being glorified!

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