

# The Place and Work of the Holy Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The Holy Spirit is essential for spiritual growth, and we receive Him by faith in the Lord Jesus, which is the basis for our continuation in the Spirit, power for service, and inheritance.*

**Scripture:** John 14:26, Acts 1:8, Romans 4:13, Galatians 3:1-2, Galatians 3:5, Galatians 4:6, Galatians 5:16, Galatians 5:22-23, Galatians 5:25, Ephesians 1:13-14

**Topics:** "The Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the critical role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual growth as outlined in the letter to the Galatians. He explains that the Holy Spirit is received through faith, not by works, and is essential for both the beginning and continuation of the Christian life. The Spirit empowers believers for service and assures them of their inheritance as children of God. Sparks encourages believers to walk and live by the Spirit, highlighting that true spiritual maturity and the fruit of the Spirit stem from this relationship. Ultimately, he asserts that all aspects of the Christian life, from initiation to service, are sustained by the Holy Spirit through faith.

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## Transcript

There is one line running right through this letter to the Galatians which seems to reveal perhaps the main factor in spiritual growth: the place and work of the Holy Spirit. We should do well if we were to follow that line through at this time. There are some thirteen references to the Holy Spirit in the letter. We shall not refer to them all, but confine ourselves to several quite distinct features or factors connected therewith.

It is quite clear from this letter, and, of course, from other parts of the Word, that the Holy Spirit is essential and basic to the realising of all the purposes of God in the individual believer and in the church. It may help us to come to quite a simple presentation of that truth as it is unfolded in this letter.

### The Receiving of the Spirit

In this connection read chapter 3:1-2: "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified? This only would I learn from you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

Those words in verse 2 touch the matter right at the beginning in the simplest, most elementary form. They have to do with the receiving of the Spirit. We must pause for a moment to recollect the connection

between this interrogation and the whole purpose of the letter. It would seem that the apostle is doing something like this. He is saying, "Now you Galatians responded to the message of the gospel, and in doing so you made a tremendous move from one realm to another. You came right out of that whole pagan realm with its externalities of religious observance, all its practices. You forsook all, and you took the position of simple, definite faith in the Lord Jesus. When you did so, the seal of your acceptance, the seal upon your faith attitude, the mark which God gave that you were a new creation in Christ, was that you received the Holy Spirit; and you received the Holy Spirit from God, that all God's purpose in you should be realised, now that you had come into a living relationship with Him in His Son, Jesus Christ. That receiving of the Holy Spirit was basic and all-inclusive. It was the seal, the earnest, the guarantee. With the Holy Spirit you had the assurance of everything, you had the dynamic of everything; there was nothing more to be anxious about. Receiving the Spirit, the inheritance is secured unto you, you are sealed. It was a tremendous thing for you to receive the Holy Spirit, because it meant that God had started His work and had got the ground in you for carrying His work right through to completion. Yes, the Holy Spirit was everything for the purposes of God."

"How then did you receive the Spirit? You know quite well that you did not receive the Spirit by all your religious observances in paganism; they never got you through to that. It was when, upon hearing the message of the gospel concerning God's Son, you stepped out of that whole system of religious activities by a definite act of faith, and reposed your trust in the Lord Jesus. It was then that you received the Holy Spirit, 'not by works of law'." (You must drop out the article there. The margin corrects it. It is, "by works of law". There was the pagan law, just as there was the Mosaic law.) "It was not by works of law in your pagan religion that you received the Spirit, but by hearing the message of faith. It was a tremendous thing for you to receive the Holy Spirit; everything was included".

"Here are these Judaisers, coming along and telling you that you must observe the Mosaic law; that you must come back, not to your pagan law, but to Jewish law. To give heed to them is to be in danger of going back behind the Holy Spirit, back behind the gift of the Holy Spirit, back on to a ground which never issued in your receiving the Spirit".

Now that is the connection of the question. You can see how big a question it is, how much is involved. Thus the simple fact is the point for the moment. The receiving of the Holy Spirit includes all that God intends as to purpose, and power to realise that purpose; and all the light, and the guidance, and the knowledge, and the understanding, and everything that will bring about spiritual maturity unto God's end, is with the Holy Spirit. Receive the Spirit and you have all that in Him. It has to be worked out, but there it is. There is no work or effort of any kind whatsoever on our part bound up with our receiving the Holy Spirit. That is basic. We receive the Holy Spirit on exactly the same ground and basis as we receive justification, as we receive forgiveness, and that is by faith in the Lord Jesus, the hearing of faith, the message of faith. How did we receive forgiveness? We know that we never got forgiveness by struggling after it, or by working for it. How did we come into the blessed place of the justified? Never by any works of ours, but by faith in the grace of God. Not until we came to that position of simple, positive and definite faith in the grace of God in Jesus Christ did we receive forgiveness and justification. In exactly the same way we receive the Holy Spirit. That makes the beginning of this thing very simple: too simple for a great many people; too simple for this active, practical disposition of ours.

We do so often find ourselves in the attitude and position and state of mind that we must somehow do something in order to receive the Holy Spirit. Well, let us give heed to the apostle's challenge. The Holy Spirit is basic and all-inclusive for the purpose of God, you can have nothing greater. With the Holy Spirit

you have everything, and all that on the simple, definite act of faith in the grace of God. We must remember that just as eternal life is spoken of as the gift of God to faith, so the Holy Spirit is also spoken of as the gift of God to faith. When you had forgiveness through the exercise of definite faith, did God give you instantly the witness that you had forgiveness, that you were a new creation? Were you not put to the test as to whether it was really faith or feeling? Were you not compelled to stand your ground very often without a sensation? "God for Christ's sake has forgiven you your sin, has justified you, has imputed unto you Christ's righteousness, has accepted you". Against a good deal of challenging you had to hold that ground. You found everything rising up to deny it, but faith called into operation became the ground of the ultimate assurance and the life which has issued therefrom, that you today know you are the Lord's. In exactly the same way the Holy Spirit is received, not in sensation, not in feeling, but in faith.

That is very elementary, but that is where the letter begins in this matter of the Holy Spirit, and you see what a lot is bound up with it. We have spent all this time in these meditations stressing the tremendous issue involved in that. How far-reaching this matter is! How heaven and hell are locked in a terrific conflict in relation to these souls, in relation to God's full purpose, and how the soul of the apostle is in travail because of the issues involved! Now right at the outset all that is brought to hang upon the simple yet definite receiving of the Holy Spirit. If you have truly recognised the ground upon which God gives the Holy Spirit you can never return to law, the law of carnal commandments contained in ordinances; you can never return to any ground of works; you can never return to any place where the externals of religion become the ground of your acceptance with God. It begins in faith, and it goes on in faith.

Let us recognise that everything begins with its beginning, everything hangs upon the first thing, and perhaps it is often necessary even for veterans in Christ to return to their beginnings. I am not sure that the next point does not find us out.

#### Continuing in the Spirit

"Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?" (verse 3).

The margin renders it thus: "Do you now make an end in the flesh?" Having begun in the Spirit are you going to reach the end in the flesh? The apostle says quite clearly that the whole life has to be sustained and maintained by the Holy Spirit through faith, just as the beginning had to be made through faith in the Holy Spirit. The fact is that we do not change our position from one of abject need to one of personal ability when we become children of God. Having received the Spirit by faith, and having become the children of God, we are no more competent in ourselves to go on than we were to make a start. It is no more possible for us to reach the end now in ourselves than it was for us to make the beginning in ourselves. To change the basis at a subsequent point of time to the beginning will prove fatal. That is what happened here. The word to us, therefore, is that just as we made the beginning by the Spirit through faith, so shall we reach the end, and only so shall we reach the end; by the Spirit through faith. The Spirit has to do every bit of it, and we cannot do one fragment. Our only position is one of abiding faith in the Holy Spirit to carry it through to an end. But, seeing that, that is how it is done. There is not a fragment that God presents to us relative to all His full purpose but what the Holy Spirit given to us, is given for the purpose of making that real and actual, and not one fragment of it all can ever become real and actual apart from the Holy Spirit.

Now what is presented to you? A standard that is too high? Oh, that is far too high a standard, that is an ideal to which we can never attain, it is a life beyond us! It is all very wonderful, but it is not for simple folk

like ourselves! Is that how you talk? Do you realise what you are doing? You are guilty, on the one hand, of unbelief, and you are setting at naught the Spirit of God. If God has set before us any goal, no matter how high, how great, how wonderful, then the gift of the Holy Spirit is to the end that we should reach that goal and not fail in one fragment of all the divine will and purpose. So our attitude should not be: "It is not too much for me; it is not too high, too great, too wonderful"; our attitude should be: "I have the Spirit, He can do it; I trust the Spirit implicitly to make it all good". We start in the Spirit and we go on in the Spirit; we cannot reach the end in the flesh. We can no more maintain our life than we can start it. It is with the Spirit.

### The Spirit and Power for Service

"He therefore that supplieth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal. 3:5).

The Revised Version margin says, "...doeth he it by works of law, or by the message of faith?" Here we come beyond the beginning of the Christian life, and beyond the question of the maintenance of the Christian life, to that of service, and of power for service. What is the basis? I think there is no more helpful way in which this could be put than the way in which it is put here: "He therefore that supplieth to you the Spirit, and worketh... among you". This, of course, refers to the Lord. The Lord supplies the Spirit to you, and works among you. It is the working power of the Holy Spirit in you and amongst you, that work of God, which is the evidence of His presence in service. He supplieth the Spirit: and in what way? How are we to find power for service? In what way shall we receive it? By nothing whatever that we can do. Oh, how many people are doing something to get power for service; doing lots of things very energetically, very patiently, with all the strength of their mind, in order that there may be the manifestation of God's power. They are making a tremendously strenuous business of it, and that is always a very dangerous thing to do. Here the apostle says that power in service is on exactly the same basis as the two previous questions we have dealt with, namely, that of the Holy Spirit as the seal of our acceptance, and of the Holy Spirit as the means of our maintenance. The Lord does not supply the Spirit in response to any energetic exercises of ours; He supplies the Spirit in response to faith, the same kind of faith as we exercised for our salvation, and as we are called upon to exercise in relation to reaching God's end.

The workings of the Spirit amongst us are gifts, and the Spirit is supplied through faith. Do you realise that? It will save us a lot of trouble, a lot of stress, and it may save us from a good many deceptions; for if there is one thing patent it is this, that a terrific soul-stress, soul-projecting, soul-concentration upon receiving power for service, is responded to by other powers, whose very vehicle of expression is our soul. We get the psychical in service, psychical powers and manifestations by other spirits, through this tremendous outgoing of soul-force in relation to power for service. It is a very dangerous thing. Perhaps we have touched something with which we should not go further, but it is a matter of much exercise of our hearts in these days to see how Satan is governing the world along that line. If you want the explanation of dictatorships it cannot be found in the natural realm. They are not men who are naturally capable of doing what they are doing. Their early life finds them as nonentities, something at a discount, and here they have come to be world factors with marvellous powers and phenomenal influence over the masses, so that they literally control and hold nations as slaves in their own hand. You look at their history and you find that it is the history of a projecting with unspeakable intensity of their own soul-force, providing the very platform upon which the powers of evil alight to carry out the work of Satan.

Now that is in the wide range, but you find this in what are called spiritual realms too. People begin to concentrate or project their souls upon spiritual things, and you get a manifestation of a false Holy Spirit,

signs and wonders. It is psychical, and satanic through the psychical. The question of power is much simpler than that. "He that supplieth the Spirit and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of law, or by the hearing of faith?" Is your exercise and effort on the basis of what you do, or on the basis of faith? Power for service is on the basis of faith. It brings faith into a place of tremendous prominence and importance, but it shows that it is the Holy Spirit keeping things in His hands, and not putting them into our hands, not letting go to us. It is His work, not ours.

Let us cherish that little fragment, "He that ministereth (or, He that supplieth) the Spirit". It is the Lord who does it, and He does so in response to faith.

### The Spirit and the Inheritance

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith". (verses 13-14).

This is a very wonderful statement. The blessing of Abraham in Christ is for us. It is a tremendous thing that we who are Gentiles should receive in Christ this blessing. This promise has two parts to its fulfilment: firstly, They that are of faith are Abraham's seed. Christ is Abraham's seed. "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one. And to thy seed, which is Christ." Thus faith makes us one with Christ as Abraham's seed to receive the covenant promise. The second part to its fulfilment is, "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit..." So that the Holy Spirit in the fullest sense is secured unto us in Abraham through faith. The receiving of the Spirit embraces all the promises in Christ; for, "How many soever be the promises of God, in him is the yea: wherefore also through him is the amen, unto the glory of God by us." How far-reaching this promise to Abraham was is hinted at in Romans 4:13: "For not through the law was the promise to Abraham or to his seed, that he should be heir of the world, but through the righteousness of faith".

How is the promise that he should be heir of the world to be fulfilled? In Christ. By what means? By the Holy Spirit. Thus in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, we come into that which was first promised to Abraham, namely, the possession of the world. It is a wonderful thing. We are getting the purpose in view through the Holy Spirit. We are moving from beginnings, step by step. The progressiveness of things in this letter is remarkable. Here we come right in full view of the purpose: "heir of the world". The covenant was with Abraham; the covenant was fulfilled in Christ; the means by which the covenant is made good is the Holy Spirit, and we are the receivers of the Spirit. What, then, do we receive? The promise of heirship to the world, inheritance in the ages to come. Elsewhere the apostle speaks of the Holy Spirit as the earnest of our inheritance. "That he should be heir of the world"! How great a promise that is, and we are partakers of it.

How are we going to inherit the world? God has called us to that. How are we going to enter into it? By works of law, by efforts of our own, by our external activities of a religious kind? No, we must come back again to the simple foundation of faith. The Holy Spirit has come to bring us into that inheritance. The inhabited earth to come shall be placed under man according to God's mind, and that is the issue of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, Lord, it is a great thought, too wonderful for us, that we should inherit the world, that we should reign over the earth, that we should be in governmental union with Christ in world dominion in the ages to come. Can it be? The Lord answers, I have given you the Holy Spirit, and He is the earnest of it. You put faith in

Him, and He will bring it to pass.

World dominion is not such a strenuous thing, after all, as it is made out to be. It is a question of faith in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the sum of all the promises, and all the blessings made and promised to Abraham.

#### The Witness of the Spirit

"And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father". (Galatians 4:6).

Here is the progressiveness in view again. We have seen the end, the inheritance. Who are they that inherit? Heirs. Who are heirs? Sons, firstborn sons. How are we constituted sons, and therefore heirs? He has sent forth His Spirit into our hearts, the Spirit of His Son who is the heir of all things. When the Holy Spirit constitutes that cry in our hearts, "Father", that very expression, as born in us of the Holy Spirit relates to the inheritance. It not only signifies that we are in the family, it relates to the inheritance. It is the Spirit of sonship. This is not the sonship of regeneration, but it is the sonship of full union with Christ and all that this means.

#### Walking by the Spirit

"But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh". (Gal. 5:16).

You see how all this is linked with spiritual maturity, full growth. Here is the whole secret of sanctification. I say, Face your besetments manfully, and wrestle with them courageously, and set yourself not to be beaten by them, but to master them! What poor advice, what tragedy is linked with such a course. It is much simpler than that. "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh". Oh, to give men something stronger! Yes, all right, here is something stronger: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would." (verse 17). It just amounts to the question of who is the stronger, the Spirit of God or the flesh. Yes, the flesh lusteth against the Spirit. Is that a hopeful prospect for the flesh? No, for the Spirit is dead-set against the flesh, and working against it.

How does this work out to victory? The Spirit lusts against the flesh. You walk in the Spirit. What is it to walk in the Spirit? You take sides with the Holy Spirit, you cooperate with the Spirit, you let your exercise be in relation to the Holy Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. The Spirit will get the upper hand of the lusts of the flesh as you take sides with Him; not as you struggle and fight against the lusts of the flesh, but as you cooperate with Him. It is only when you and I lean towards the flesh and take sides with it that we fail. There is present an energy and a power, and if we will deliberately take our place with that energy, that power, that person, there will be deliverance. It would be a hopeless thing otherwise, but that is the secret of sanctification, and that is the way of spiritual full-growth. The bringing in of the Holy Spirit there makes such a big difference. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh..." I have an idea that instead of "and" the word should be "but". If that is true it makes a lot of difference. It puts hope into the whole. Whether the word is there like that or not, the fact remains.

#### The Fruit of the Spirit

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control: against such there is no law". (Gal. 5:22-23).

The peculiar form of those words must be noted. "The fruit (that is singular) of the Spirit is (then you get plurality) ..." The correct grammatical form would be, The fruits of the Spirit are -- The fruit of the Spirit is love, and love comprehends all the rest, and all the rest are love in expression in different forms. You can test that. If you really have the love of God in your heart, what do you have? You have joy, love exulting; peace, love trusting; longsuffering, love enduring; gentleness, the refinement of love; meekness, love, as someone has said, with a bowed head; goodness, love in action; temperance, love in restraint; faith, love confiding.

All these things are included in love. The fruit of the Spirit is love. If you want to know what love is, it is all there. This is the outworking of the Holy Spirit. Has this anything to do with maturity, faith, growth? Of course it has. Spiritual maturity comes by the Holy Spirit bearing His fruit in us. The fruit of love working out in joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, temperance, faith.

### Persevering in the Spirit

"If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk". (Gal. 5:25).

This is our voluntary and continual relationship with the Spirit actively. If we live by the Spirit -- and from beginning to end it is all by the Spirit -- then let us also walk by the Spirit. It is a voluntary handing over to the Holy Spirit and going on with Him continually. After all, we have everything by the Spirit from start to finish. Seeing that it is so, let us go on with the Spirit. But notice, it is not a passive life, it is an active life, an exercised walk. The point is the Spirit seeks that we shall be of moral and spiritual character. It is not a question of His taking it all out of our hands, doing it all apart from us, so that we simply recline and say, "Well, we have the Spirit and we need not do or think anything about it, it is all going to be done for us". Everything truly is by the Spirit in our life, but let us be active, not passive; let us walk by the Spirit. He is seeking to produce spiritual character, and that can only be through exercise, and our exercise must be towards the Holy Spirit, and as that is so we shall come to God's end, full growth.

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