

The Soul, the Spirit and the Evil Spiritual Powers

by T. Austin-Sparks

The soul's possibilities, capabilities, and tendencies, and the dangers of demon domination and possession, are contrasted with the deeper reality of spiritual union with God.

Scripture: Luke 22:3, John 10:10, Acts 26:18, Romans 8:37, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Ephesians 6:12, 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12, Hebrews 11:3, 1 John 4:4, Jude 1:6

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks addresses the complex relationship between the soul, spirit, and evil spiritual powers, emphasizing that while the soul can be influenced by demonic forces, true identity and victory for believers lie in their spiritual union with God through Christ. He explains that many suffer from mental and physical afflictions that can lead to feelings of despair and self-doubt, but these do not define their status as children of God. Sparks distinguishes between demon domination and possession, warning that the enemy seeks to exploit the soul's vulnerabilities. Ultimately, he encourages believers to recognize their spiritual reality and the power of Christ over all evil forces, asserting that true service and warfare are rooted in this spiritual understanding.

Transcript

This is not a treatise on demon-possession, although reference will be made to the unhappy reality.

At one point we have said that, in the Fall, the powers of evil entered into alliance with the soul of man by his complicity with Satan. Then we have sought to show how those powers of evil take full advantage of any undue projecting of the soul in order that they may further the interests of Satan's false kingdom. We have also, on the other hand, also to make it clear that the innermost reality of new birth and spiritual union with God is something much deeper than the soul and all soul-sense. It is this, for one thing, that we now wish to follow up a little more closely.

First of all we must refer to that very real and painful experience into which many--even of God's children--pass by reason of physical and mental injury. There is the 'nervous breakdown', and there is neurasthenia; there is anaemia, and blood-pressure. Not invariably, but more often than not, these maladies are made an occasion for the enemy to make cruel assaults. There is the terrific sense of--is it too strong to say?--devilishness within. The most wicked person alive could not be more wicked than such

sufferers feel and believe themselves to be at times. Not only do they feel this, but at times they speak and act out of harmony with a truly Christlike disposition. Then, with one of these maladies at least, there is an extra factor; it is that of secondary personality--the sense of another presence as being in the immediate offing. We need not enlarge upon this. Many, sadly enough, know all about it; and if any who read this have no experience of this kind or with such sufferers, let them thank God, but not pass hasty judgment. Then what of that fact, which it is not pleasant to mention, but has to be recognized--the drive to self-destruction, which, alas, has not always been overcome? We cannot say with truth that these are conditions which lie outside of the experience of true children of God. We have known the most godly and saintly to suffer thus.

Well, in the first place, the soul is the soul and the stark reality is that it has these possibilities, capabilities, and tendencies bound up with it. At such times, and in such conditions, when the helpfulness of good health and a balanced physical system is no longer present, we see what is possible to any mortal under the same conditions. This is only a matter of the degrees in which a basic fact is manifested. Much can be done to relieve this condition and produce amiability and a more happy frame by physical readjustment and renewal, but good health with its attendant good demeanour never was saintliness in its essential nature. A man is not made really more Christlike in his nature by being relieved of certain nervous and mental aggravations, pressures, or sicknesses. Perhaps the greatest value of such relief is that he loses the melancholic beliefs about his spiritual state. But what we may believe about ourselves under certain conditions, and what is actually the truth, may still be worlds apart. Satan has led many children of God to extremes of despair, and even to self-injury, by the lie that their own soul-life is the criterion; whereas, for the child of God, Christ is the criterion. Be the most self-assured, self-complacent, self-possessed, self-composed person imaginable, and you are not necessarily therefore a child of God. Be the most pressed, harassed, tortured, devil-assailed person possible, but this need not alter the fact that you are a child of God.

Demon Domination and Demon Possession

But before we go further with this there is another aspect of the matter to note. There is a difference between demon domination and demon possession.

This difference might be the salvation of many if they recognize it in time. It is far from our thought or intention to imply by anything that we have said that all men by nature are demon-possessed. An alliance is not a possession, and it need not be domination in the full sense. No two allied nations would agree to that. But we are now going further than just alliance, while stopping short of the possession. There are those who, because of a strength of soul-life being on any of its sides--reason, emotion or will--become deceived and dominated by the evil spiritual forces. In time they show signs of something extra to human wit and perception. They develop an uncanny power of mind in giving interpretations and explanations. These are often unanswerable along ordinary lines of reasoning. But of course, this acuteness of mind is always in support of their own course, and it is so deeply and terrifically set in their conviction of right that even their course cuts right across the precise Word of God they either do not see it or will not have it. Other symptoms also show themselves, in looks, conduct and voice. Here is domination. It is in the realm of the soul and although it is on the high road to possession, it is still short of that. This kind of thing can clear up without demons being cast out, but it comes by much suffering and humiliation.

Surely, this was the history of Judas Iscariot. He will ever remain a mystery from some points of view, but we do know that his was a progressive course. He first allowed his own soul, or self-life, in avarice to

govern him. Then, having capitulated to it, the ever present evil powers made their suggestion--to his gain! Playing with fire, he became dominated by those forces and plotted. At length--the inevitable issue of such a course being pursued--"Satan entered into Judas" (Luke 22:3). This is something more than soul. An evil spirit may be allied to a soul, but it can possess a spirit, like to like.* This is "spiritual wickedness".

*FOOTNOTE:

Of course evil spirits can inhabit bodies, as in the case of the swine, but this is not in the same realm of things as spiritual possession. The incarnation of Satan in human life is something more than inhabiting a beast's body, which has no spiritual basis.

Satan's supreme and final object is to capture for possession the whole man--spirit, soul and body. We know that the disembodied evil spirits revolt against their condition of 'nakedness' more than anything. Perhaps this was their penalty when they "kept not their first estate" (Jude 1:6). Hence came Satan's eye upon man--God's creation--and hence his wish to sever man's spirit from God and possess it himself. But even before this he would use it.

The Key to Spiritualism

And so we must point out that it is because man has a spirit that he can have intercourse with fallen spirits. We believe that this explains the whole system of spiritism (spiritualism) and that the supposed departed with whom spiritualists communicate are none other than these "spiritual hosts" impersonating the departed, whom they knew in lifetime. Leaving the many phases of this thing in its outworkings and issues at the end of the age, let us note the terrible nemesis in wrecked minds and bodies; haunted, driven, distraught, reason-bereft souls; crowded asylums, prisons; suicides, moral and spiritual wrecks, etc.; all because that which was given to man specifically for union, communion and co-operation with God, namely the spirit of man, has been used as the medium and instrument for this demon invasion and control of his life. The tremendous warnings and terrible judgments associated with all kinds of spiritism--necromancy, witches, "familiar spirits", etc.--are because of the spirit complicity, dalliance, consorting, with fallen spirits whose purpose is always to capture men and women through their spirits. This they will do even by adopting the guise of an angel of light, and talking religion. Strange, isn't it? that fifty years ago men threw off the belief in the supernatural in the Scriptures, and today they and their school so strongly embrace spiritism. Surely this is the "working of error" sent that they who received not the truth for the love of it "should believe a lie: that they all might be judged" (2 Thess 2:11,12).

It was the spiritual background of their life which led to the destruction of the Egyptians, Cannanites, etc., and this was spiritism in different forms. But it was their being joined to demons that involved them.

The Deepest Reality in the Child of God

Now, to return for a moment to the thing that is deeper in the true child of God than all else. We have devoted a whole book to this matter in *The Battle for Life*, but our present purpose would lack something vital if we omitted the particular point. We must always seek to realize that what has taken place in the new birth, that is, the renewing of our spirit and the imparting to it of eternal life, with the Holy Spirit and sonship, is far deeper than all surrounding conditions and circumstances; and far deeper than our physical or our soulical life. Unless we hold on to that we have no ground of victory. It is possible for a child of God to pass into great soul-darkness, mental darkness, even to lose the reason and have to go to a mental home; yes, and for things worse than that in the outer life; and yet for the real relationship with the Lord to

be unbroken. These extreme conditions may be no part of a Divine plan, but it is true that a part of God's ways with His children in their education is to cut off their sense-life at times. When this happens they have nothing to prove that they are His children: that is, nothing in all the realm of their own human consciousness. What is left is God, His Word and the fact that they have put their trust in Him. The real battle of faith is joined here. Not what we are, but what He is! Not what we feel, but His facts.

"He cannot fail, for He is God.

He cannot fail, He's pledged His word.

He cannot fail, He'll see me through;

'Tis God with Whom I have to do".

It may please God to risk being misunderstood and, to our way of thinking, seem to contradict Himself.

The education of 'sons' is important above all in this one respect, that they are to represent the reversing of the unbelief, and disobedience thereby, which led to man's spirit-separation from God. That spirit-union has to be established without the help of the soul, so that the soul will once more be put back into that place from which it so forbiddenly asserted itself.

This is the forming of Christ fully in us--that is, in our spirit.

Spiritual Service or Warfare

Having seen that the basis of all fellowship and cooperation with God is spiritual, in and through the born-again spirit, we must realize that this at once defines the real nature of our service. The background of all cosmic conditions is spiritual. Behind the things seen are the things unseen. The things which do appear are not the ultimate things.

"The whole world lieth in the evil one". There is a spiritual hierarchy which, before this world was, revolted against the equality of the Son with the Father in the Throne, and in spite of the hurling out of heaven and the eternal doom which followed, has been in active revolt and antagonism to that "eternal purpose" right through the ages. A certain judicial hold upon this earth and the race in Adam was gained by Satan through the consent of that first Adam through whom the purpose of God should have been realized on this earth.

Thus we have Paul telling the members of the Body of Christ--the last Adam--that their warfare "is not against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (lit. heavenlies) (Eph 6:12).

What a lot is gathered up into that inclusive phrase "this darkness"! How much is said about it in the Scriptures! The need for having eyes opened is ever basic to emancipation (see Acts 26:18). The cause of all "this darkness" is said to be "spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies". Literally translated the words are "the spiritualities" or "the spirituals", meaning spiritual beings. "Wickedness" here does not just mean merely inherent wickedness or evil, but malignance; destructive, harmful.

"In the heavenlies" simply means inhabiting a realm beyond the earthly; not limited to earthly geographical localities; moving in the realm surrounding the earth and human habitation.

"World rulers" means that these malignant spiritual hosts are directing and governing the world wherever the government of Christ has not been superimposed through His Body--the spiritual Church.

"Principalities and powers" (authorities) represent order, rank, method, system. Satan is not omnipresent, hence he must work through an organized dividing of the world under these principalities and authorities, and he himself goes "to and fro in the earth", and has his seat "here and there" (Job 2:2; Rev 2:13 etc.).

The Apostle declares that the explanation of situations is to be looked for in the unseen, behind the actual appearance.

What looks like the natural has its rise too often in the supernatural. Man is always trying to give a natural explanation and therefore to put things right by natural means. But when he comes up against a situation in which interests of the Christ of God are involved, he is floored and beaten. Such situations have become the commonplaces--nay, more--the overwhelming order of the day amongst 'Christian workers' in these days, both abroad and at home. We have no intention of dealing with the subject at length here, but state the fact, and remind the Lord's people especially, that in more realms than that of Divine activity, "What is seen hath not been made out of things which appear" (Heb 11:3); but that multitudes of the things in daily life which are inimical to spiritual interests must have their explanation from behind. Let us emphasize that this spiritual union with God in the super-cosmic significance of the Cross of Christ means that our supreme effectiveness is in the spiritual realm. We who are the Divine "spirituals" are to be energized by the Holy Spirit to take ascendancy in Christ over the Satanic "spirituals", and thus know something more than mere earthly dominion. Seated together with Him "in the heavenlies" as to our spirit we are to learn to reign in that greater "kingdom of the heavens" of which the earthly millennial kingdom is only an earthly counterpart.

Again, let us affirm that all the energies of God in our spirit are toward a corporate spiritual union with Christ, whereby the impact of His victory and sovereignty shall be registered among and upon the "principalities and powers", etc., and their domination paralysed, and ultimately destroyed.

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