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The Increase of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: 1 Cor. 3; Heb. 5:11-6:3.

"We desire each one of you to show the same diligence unto *the fulness of hope*.... that ye be not sluggish, but... through faith and patience inherit the promises."

"Walk worthily of the Lord... increasing in the knowledge of God." - Col. 1:10.

"Holding fast the Head from whom all the body being supplied... increaseth with the increase of God." - Col. 2:19.

"The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another." - 1 Thess. 3:12.

"We exhort you brethren that ye abound more and more." - 1 Thess. 4:10.

"Speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into HIM, who is the Head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love." - Eph. 4:15-16, A.R.V.

The Lord's thought for His children is *fulness*; and in connection with all the works of God there is always the thought of fulness; that which the Lord desires for His children is fulness, increase, abundance, growth, development. When the Lord was on earth, He met the need found in the multitudes of people with an abundance and fulness, although having very little naturally with which

to meet it. We see His thought is abundance - "and they all ate and were filled and they took up that which remained over of the broken pieces twelve baskets full." (Matt. 14:20).

His utterances likewise are full of this thought, "Give and it shall be given you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over," Luke 6:38. There is fulness and abundance.

If we but realised the possibilities of the Holy Spirit resident within us in correspondence to the energy that He energises in us, how different things would be; "Having the eyes of your heart enlightened that ye may KNOW... what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to that 'energising' of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenlies far above all." (Eph. 1:18-21. A.R.V.).

"I was made a minister according to that gift of the grace of God which was given unto me, *according to the working [energising] of His power.* (Eph 3:7). "The Lord Jesus who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory according to the working [energising] whereby He is able even to subject all things unto HIMSELF" (Phil. 3:21). "I labour also striving according to His working who worketh in me in power " (Col. 1:29, A.R.V.)

"There are diversities of workings [energising] but God who worketh [energiseth] all things in all... but all these [energiseth] the one and the same Spirit dividing to each one severally as He will" (1 Cor. 12:6-11).

"It is God who energiseth in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

The Lord's thought is to add, to give increase, to bring into fulness.

But there is a side of responsibility where we are concerned, and we need to ask whether the measure of power working in us has to do with ourselves; as to how much we limit those powers, energising, working in us? The Holy Spirit in the power of the Lord Jesus is capable of realising "far above all that we can ask or think," but so often we limit the work by getting in His way. There is a tremendous stress in the New Testament to our *going on to the fullness*; 1 Cor. 3, and Heb. 5 lay special emphasis on our responsibility to go on.

The Golden Measuring Rod

The measuring rod of God has been set up in the midst of His people, and everything is brought to that golden measuring rod set up in the House of God. To the last detail all that has part in the House of God is brought to that rod - the measure of Christ, and tested by it as to whether it is meet for the Divine requirement.

The measuring rod is the Lord Jesus HIMSELF, HE is the fulness of God, "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," (Col. 2:9) and everything has to be brought to measure in the Lord Jesus (Col. 2:12 - "In HIM ye are made full.") to be seen whether it comes short; "Lest any of you should seem to come short" (Heb. 4:1). "Lest any man falleth short of the grace of God." (Heb. 13:15). "Wherefore, having the doctrine of the first principles of Christ, let us press on unto full growth." (Heb. 6:1 A.R.V.).

God has a very full standard of completeness in the Lord Jesus in relation to spiritual life, and truly for the child of God there should be no other kind of life, but all the life a spiritual life, where

everything is brought by God's Holy Spirit to God's measurement in Christ. Are you coming short of God's measurement in Christ for your business life? If there is anything crooked in your business life the Holy Spirit will bring the straightness of the Lord Jesus against that thing. Also with the home life both personally and unitedly, everything is brought by the Holy Spirit to God's degree and standard in Christ Jesus and tested by HIM. And it is made manifest if there is crookedness, and where there is a falling-short of God's requirement you get conditions which make for unhappiness.

Likewise our secret prayer life, and reading of the Word of God, all must come to the measuring rod of God. Everything in the House of God, i.e., the Lord's people, is brought by the Holy Spirit to God's measurement in Christ, to be tested whether all is according to Christ. The ministry of the Word should be to the straightening out of all to the straightness of Christ. Sometimes it is a cutting off, if we have gone beyond the measure of Christ. We are not so much in peril of doing this, but rather of falling short and not coming up to the "stature of the fulness of Christ." The Holy Spirit's operations with us are according to the standard of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spirituality

Let us look at some of the things which relate to the increase of God. Firstly, and in some sense all inclusively, it is a matter of spirituality.

"Whom having not yet seen ye love, in whom though now ye see Him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter, 1:8). "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible." (Heb. 11:27). "Enduring as seeing." This is a measure of spirituality. With us faith is still largely measured by sight, and the Lord is seeking to bring us to the place where we are spiritual; the natural side of things does influence us so much, and the Lord is trying to cut in between this approving and apprehending by the senses.

Paul could not speak to the Corinthian believers but as to carnal; yet this first letter to the Corinthian Church is largely occupied with "spirituals"; "Now concerning spirituals, brethren," (1 Cor. 12:1). And yet this declaration "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1). Now what has happened? These Corinthian believers were tremendously interested in the spirituals, yet they were not spiritual, not really growing, and to have these things on the gift side does not represent maturity. Interested in these spiritual gifts and probably possessors of the manifestation side of things as the spirituals, yet not spiritual.

Love, the Law of Increase

What are some of the laws of real spiritual increase? LOVE, 1 Cor. 12. If I have all gifts, and have not love, I am nothing, I am not spiritual. In the opening passages note how "increase" is linked with "love." What was the reason of the Thessalonian believers' quick growth? Look at the testimony they bore. Paul found he had no need to speak of them, for wherever he went they were known. "From you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Acaia, but in every place your faith Godward is gone forth, so that we need not to speak anything." (1 Thess. 1:8). What was the secret of their increase? The letters to the Thessalonians are often thought to be the elementary letters, but, the order in which God has sovereignly arranged the letters of Paul, represents far greater facts than mere chronological order. Romans begins with justification by faith; Thessalonians ends with the coming of the Lord, and with the coming of the Lord you have got to have maturity. And Thessalonians represents coming, to maturity in a very rapid way, a coming, to an "End Time" place - the holding the word in much affliction (1 Thess. 1:6).

The key to the Thessalonian position is LOVE; yes, spiritual increase is by love. Along that way is growth and maturity. You can have all the gifts and be very immature. Spiritual increase is not by *knowing* all these things, the way of growth is not by faith's power externally manifested, but more by inward endurance. Do you want to know the way of the increase of God? It is by LOVE.

What the Lord needs is an open pure spirit towards HIMSELF, and love toward ALL saints, the Lord will bring into His greater fulness where there is a genuine love one to the other - IN HIM. The sure way of being locked up and limited is to have a closed heart to any of the Lord's children. LOVE is the way to spiritual increase. The Ephesian letter in which there is the fullest unveiling of heavenly truth in the deepest teaching concerning the Church, the Body of Christ, there is from start to finish the golden thread of LOVE running all through, this is significant when you consider what the letter contains.

1 Cor 13 is the great chapter on love, and is put over beside all the "gifts." Love is the real spirituality *that is spirituality*. Love is the most difficult and the greatest of all gifts. "Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own affections." (2 Cor. 6:12). You are so narrow, so limited, like a closed hedge, pent up, cramped! "Our heart is enlarged, ye are not straitened in us."

The measure of our spiritual life is no greater than our heart; the knowledge that is in the head is not the measure of spirituality, the way for your release, emancipation, increase, abundance is the way of the heart. Spirituality is not mental agreement on things stated in the Word, it is the melting of one heart to another - to all saints. The devil has locked up a number of the Lord's children as in a padded room of their own limitations; frozen their love by something between them and other children of God. The way out is by increase of love; and we shall remain locked, up until we are there!

In the book of Leviticus where the offering to the Lord is introduced, we read "If any man of you bring an offering to the Lord"; then there follows the nature of the sacrifice, what it is to be and what it is to be like, and "he shall offer it of his own voluntary will." In Leviticus it is voluntary, "*If* any man," "of his own voluntary will." In Numbers the offering is obligatory and dealing with another aspect of truth. In Leviticus it is a matter of the heart, a voluntary matter, a coming into the presence of the Lord in fellowship; it is the heart going out to the Lord, and wanting something for the Lord, that the Lord should have something. That is fellowship, that is worship. Then notice the character of the offering to be given, it must be that which *wholly* speaks of the Lord, it must represent the Lord Jesus. Leviticus opens with the heart going out voluntarily to God, that HE shall have something, and what He shall have is His own satisfaction and be wholly according to Christ. Spiritually this is seen to be a matter of love to the Lord, the desire to have all things according to Him.

True spirituality is the measure of love of God shed abroad in the heart, all the spirituals rest upon and have their rise out of *Love*. Not power, or knowledge, or different gifts, these are not the first things, the first thing is love. *That* leads to the increase of God. There are other things that lead to increase but love is first and basic to all other. Any threat to fellowship among the Lord's people is the way of arrest in growth.

"That He would grant you according, to the riches of His glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man that ye being rooted and grounded in love may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled into all the fulness of God." (Eph. 3:16-19).