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The Need for Having the Holy Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"God hath made Him (Jesus) both Lord and Christ... Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:36-38).

"Now when the apostles that were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John; who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for as yet it was fallen upon none of them; only they had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14-17).

"While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word. And they of the circumcision that believed were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:44-48).

The Gift of the Spirit a Part of the Gospel of our Salvation

The first thing that you will notice about all three of those passages is that the Holy Spirit being received is immediately connected with the beginning of the Christian life, with conversion. It is preached as a part of the gospel of our salvation. If you have any idea that the indwelling, the receiving the life in the Spirit are something which relate to the Christian life a bit further on along the road, a bit later than becoming the Lord's, these passages at least will remove those ideas. Here it is, right at the commencement, brought immediately before those who are exercised about their salvation. It is a part of a statement made to those who asked, under conviction, what they were to do, and that meant what they were to do in relation to the Lord Jesus in the very first step; and that is the first thing to underline - that the gift and the receiving of the Holy Spirit is intended by God to come about right at the commencement of the Christian life, and that unless it does, the Christian life will be without that essential, indispensable factor to make it true, to make it real. We will come to that in a moment. The point here is that to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit is positively stated to be a part of the gospel of our salvation.

The very first mention of receiving the Spirit by those who were making this enquiry shows us that God's thought is this, that when the Holy Spirit has operated from without to touch us into a sense of need or desire or concern to the point where we are that much exercised as to be of an enquiring heart (for that is an outward operation of the Holy Spirit, that is the effect of the Holy Spirit coming to us by the preaching of the Word, the gospel, by the exalting of Jesus Christ) - when that heart exercise, that heart concern has been produced by the Holy Spirit's operation from without, the other side and the completing of that operation is the residence of the Holy Spirit within. The one just fails of its object if it does not lead to the other.

First there is the impact upon us which arouses us to that state which is represented by these brethren - "What shall we do?" - a state of enquiry. The first operation from without is intended by God to lead immediately to the inward possession of the Holy Spirit. Nothing could be simpler than that, but it is of the most vital consequence. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is, in God's intention, meant to be something from the very beginning of the Christian life, and really the Christian life does not begin truly until the Holy Spirit is in. There may be a lot of things happening under the hands of the Holy Spirit, but remember: concern, interest, exercise and all that sort of thing where we get our eyes and our thoughts in the direction of Christ and of Christ's things is not conversion or the beginning of the Christian life; that leads up to it. The beginning of the Christian life is when the Holy Spirit enters into us and becomes inwardly resident. The Word of God makes that perfectly clear. "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9).

But that will lead us on to this second passage in the eighth chapter. Here we have that stage reached. The Samaritans had heard Philip preaching and Philip preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, and under his preaching they had gone down; a tremendous effect had been registered upon them, and they had made a response to the preaching. They had turned to the Lord, they had accepted Christ, but it was perfectly clearly recognised by the apostles that you can go that far and fall short and the thing passes off. You can come under powerful influences, Holy Spirit influences, and you have turned and answered, responded, and, so far as your part is concerned, you have accepted Christ as He is presented, and yet you may not yet have passed right through; the thing has not yet been consummated. There are many people who have done that. It is one of the vital weaknesses of very much that is called gospel activity to bring people under the impact of the preaching, and then from their side to get some sort of response, and they think that they are Christians. They go away and in very many cases it is a very unsatisfactory life afterward, or sooner or later it becomes perfectly clear that there is the tragic absence of something that really makes the

Christian life a mighty reality. They know the teaching, they have accepted it, they have, in their way, believed it and they have turned to the Lord and still something is lacking.

That is exactly what happened at Samaria; so that, when these came down from Samaria, what did they do? They "prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit", recognising that the movement was good so far, but it would not do to leave it there. This thing must be clinched; it must be sealed. You can go a long way and then assume that you are a Christian, and really not be. The thing here, of course, was very strong, very powerful, but many of us know how the same thing works for years before we really do come into the good of the Christian life. I wonder how many of you have had an experience like that. I know in my own experience this is just what happened. I had been taught in childhood about the Lord. I had desires towards the Lord and I went to meetings and I assumed that I was a Christian. But I well remember it was in my teens, when I was between 17 and 18, that I leapt right out into reality. Until that time it was all indefinite, in a sense unreal, and certainly all shut up; there was no expression, but then everything became alive. I will not tell you for the moment how that was, but it is just the fact that you can assume, because you know, you have been taught all about the Lord and you have had certain exercises towards the Lord, you have made certain responses, you have assumed it is all settled; and then you come to realise there is not the reality, the livingness about it; something is lacking.

The apostles always recognised the peril of an assumed conversion and left nothing in doubt about it; knowing that the presence of the Holy Spirit within the life was the only guarantee, the only surety of that life really being the Lord's and being set on the way to all that the Lord means in the Christian life, they would have this matter settled every time. It was not sufficient for them that things had gone so far. What they wanted to know and be assured of was that the Holy Spirit was actually within. They could never feel comfortable about the future of those believers until that was an established fact. And you see in this book which is written so vividly - intentionally - in order that, standing right at the very beginning of this whole dispensation, it might be seen without any doubt or question what the Lord's mind is for all time. You see it here accompanied by such things that leave you in no doubt at all that the Holy Spirit is in here. God has made it clear at the beginning that it is to be a very definite matter and a very great reality that the Holy Spirit is within.

Now, if you think that I am too elementary, that this is spiritual baby talk, I want to say to you that I am constantly amazed unto distress at the lack of evidence of the Holy Spirit being within Christians of long standing. I cannot understand how many Christians, who have believed all the doctrine and have been the Lord's for so long, how they can do things that they do, how they can say things they say. Where is the Holy Spirit in them? While I must not question that He is there, my point is that we have to make very sure that He is there to begin with, because He is there to take up all the rest in an inward way. The Holy Spirit within is something very definite and very positive in the intention of God right at the very beginning, from our very conversion, and there must be no assumption about this. If you are assuming that you are a Christian because of certain things, just pause and ask yourself this question: Do I really know without any doubt that the Holy Spirit is actually resident in my life?

Well now, not taking up the problems connected with that, the next passage will bring us clear on this matter. The point is, let us make sure about it, let us not allow ourselves to be in any doubt on this matter as to whether the Holy Spirit is really within.

Well, they believed, they turned to the Lord in some way, but the apostles who went down from Jerusalem saw that this thing wanted to be ratified and established, that it must not just remain there. The thing must become a fixed thing in an inward way, and so they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

Then you come to the third passage in chapter 10. There are some difficulties here, but I am not going to stay with them. It seems to upset a good deal of our accepted order. These people were baptized after they received the Holy Spirit, but leave that. It is merely a matter for explanation; we are not digging into questions like that now. Come to what lies on the surface again. They were baptized, they believed, they received the Word and were baptized. But don't you ever believe that being baptized makes you a Christian. Being baptized does not make anybody a Christian. There are many baptized non-Christians. They were baptized in all sincerity, but while their baptism did not make them Christians or make them the Lord's and they had received the Spirit, the Spirit whom they had received demanded that they make declaration that their life now was wholly the Lord's. They received the Spirit before they were baptized, clearly indicating that you can be baptized and think that being baptized makes you a Christian. But here, in this strange, this unusual incident and order, it becomes clear. The Holy Spirit Whom they had received immediately led them to the place where the meaning of having the Spirit had to be testified to and proclaimed in an act. The meaning of having the Spirit is that you are wholly the Lord's and baptism is your testimony to that. The Holy Spirit makes you the Lord's, brings about absolute union between you and Christ. Here a declaration to that fact was made in baptism. The Holy Spirit requires that, the Holy Spirit demands that. He calls upon us, when He gets His way in us, to take that position, that we are wholly the Lord's, that we are dead to all the world beside, and it is Christ only. These are the simple facts related to these passages.

The Holy Spirit Makes Possible a Living Intelligent Relationship with the Lord

Now, why is the Holy Spirit, then, so essential right at the very beginning? For this very reason that I have just stated, that it is the Holy Spirit who makes our relationship with the Lord a living and intelligent thing. Again, without raising the question as to whether many are the Lord's truly, we are distressed that so few give those two evidences that they are the Lord's - the absolute livingness of their relationship with the Lord - they are Christians, but there is not much that indicates that their relationship with the Lord is really a living thing, that Christ is a great and wonderful reality to them. Now, is He? That is the work of the Holy Spirit, and it is unto that that the Holy Spirit is so necessary.

Then I would couple with that word *intelligent relationship* with the Lord, and again there are so many whose relationship with the Lord is not an intelligent one. That is, they are not walking in the knowledge of the Lord, knowing the voice of the Lord in their own hearts, knowing the government of the Lord in their own lives, knowing what the Lord wants them to know, hearing Him speak in their hearts and having their lives really directed and governed and influenced by the Lord Himself. They have accepted all the truth, they assent to the creed, but this intelligent union with the Lord is lacking. I ask you again: is your relationship with the Lord a matter of daily intelligence, knowing the Lord for yourself?

You see, one of the great values of the Holy Spirit is just this, that He makes the relationship with the Lord such a personal thing. It is just something between you personally individually, and the Lord. You are taken out of the general mass and multitude of other Christian people and movements and general teaching and doctrine, and it becomes something personal in your own life. This to you is as

though you and the Lord had a life which, whatever other people have, you know you have that life with the Lord yourself. If there were no other Christians in this world anywhere, you know the Lord personally in such a living way, such an intelligent way, that you know when the Lord speaks to you. You know what the Lord says to you, you are really able to say in truth, "The Lord has told me, has made very clear in my heart what He wants where I am concerned." Those are the very beginnings of Christian life, but they are very important, and it has to be increasingly like that all the way along.

Do you have a life like that? Perhaps it may be necessary, after years, to ask yourself that question. Oh, that we should not be just lost in the crowd! Sometimes, the Lord leaves the net for the hook.