

"We... Beholding... The Lord Are Changed Into the Same Image"

T. Austin-Sparks:

"And when the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jeremiah 18:4).

(So we are occupied at this time with the second vessel being made by the Potter. The first vessel, Israel, was marred and broken and, for the time being at least, has been set aside, and God has taken up the business of forming a second vessel, which is the heavenly and spiritual Israel.

Now we have been speaking latterly about the pattern of the new vessel, and this pattern is the Person of God's Son - we are "foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29); so that the Lord Jesus Christ is the pattern to which God is seeking to conform us. We have seen the first movement in this new formation, that is, we have been with the Lord Jesus at the Jordan for His baptism, and we have seen that in His baptism He stepped right out in an utter committal to God.)

We turn now to the third chapter in the Gospel by Luke and read from verse 21: "Jesus... having been baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased."

You will notice that the anointing of the Holy Spirit went with the baptism in water, and there is an essential connection between these two. In His baptism Jesus had stepped completely off the ground of the self-life and had taken the ground of the heavenly life with God. This position was witnessed to immediately by heaven - "the heaven was opened" - and was attested by His Father. Jesus was attested by the declaration which the Father made and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and it was impossible for that to happen until He was on the other side of baptism. The Holy Spirit is never given to the life of the flesh. In the Old Testament it said that the holy anointing oil should not be poured upon man's flesh (Exodus 30:31,32), and the whole life of the people of Israel carried a symbolism of this fact. If you had gone amongst those people then you would never have found anyone wearing a short skirt, for both men and women wore long skirts, and their heads were covered. Their very dress was a symbol of the fact that their flesh should not appear before God.

Now I am not saying that this has to be literally the case in our time, but there is a good deal that symbolizes the refusal today to accept the laws of God. Both men and women seem to think that the more flesh they show the happier they are.

Well, of course, this is symbolism, but it points to a spiritual principle. Right through Israel, from the high priest to the smallest child, the garments were long. They were regarded as God's anointed nation and the anointing oil could not come upon their flesh.

In the baptism of Jesus Christ the life of the flesh was entirely repudiated. To use the words of the Apostle Paul, He had symbolically "put away... the old man" and, in rising out of the water. He had "put on the new man" (Ephesians 4:22,24). That is, He left earthly ground and took heavenly ground with God. There was a link between His spirit here and God in heaven.

You may think that is an unnecessary remark, but the Holy Spirit has put a very small fragment in here. It says: "Jesus, having been baptized, and praying"; so that, on this side of the grave, He was united with heaven, and, that being so, He received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. These are very important things for us to recognize. They are vital to our union with Christ, and they set forth the essential connection between baptism and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The normal sequence would be that both happen at the same time; that is, there ought to be no lapse between the meaning of baptism and the receiving of the anointing. That was normal in the New Testament. There were one or two exceptions, but they were not the normal thing.

The point is that you and I ought to follow up as quickly as possible with this matter. I think I would be right in saying that what has become the normal is a division between these two things. My own experience is the experience of many of the Lord's servants: there was a gap of years between my baptism and my coming to know the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and that gap meant a great deal of limitation which was only removed when I came into the knowledge of the anointing.

What I am trying to say is this: We should never regard the beginning of our Christian life with baptism as just something in itself, and that later on we are to receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit. From God's standpoint there is no such thing as a second blessing. I have been asked if I have received the 'second blessing', and my

reply is: 'No. I have come into the first blessing.' It should be like that.

Well, if we take the Lord Jesus as our example, these two things really are inseparable.

But, even if it takes time, I must try to make this helpful to you. You will understand that I am not here to try to give a full explanation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. However, because baptisms are going to take place today; there are those who have said: 'Oh, I wish I could be baptized again! I did not understand when I was baptized all that I see now. Should I not be baptized again? Should I not bring my baptism right up in line with my present knowledge?' Well, if we were to adopt that procedure, every bit of fresh knowledge that you received would require a new baptism! If when you were baptized you really meant to give your life to the Lord, and your heart was right with Him, then God knew all that it meant, even if you did not. I do not think anyone could have known much less about the meaning of baptism than I did when I was baptized. I wanted to belong to the Lord and to go on with Him, so I was told that I ought to be baptized. There were other people who wanted me to be baptized more than I did myself so, in my simple way, I just yielded to their wishes. The only thing was that I wanted to love the Lord. Years afterwards I came to understand a great deal more about the meaning of baptism, so I went to the Lord about whether I ought to be baptized again, and He just showed me that it was not what I understood but what He understood, and that into the first simple step that I took He put all the meaning of that step and said 'I will lead you through your whole life into the meaning of that simple step.'

I hope that is helpful. Of course, it would be another matter if you were not definitely saved when you were baptized.

I think we must leave that there and return to our Pattern: These are the first things that have been shown in the Pattern: the meaning of baptism as changing our ground, leaving the whole ground of the flesh and taking the ground of the Spirit, and, by so doing, coming under the direct and complete government of the Holy Spirit. By doing this we become marked out by God - "This is My beloved son". Thus we are distinguished by heaven and amongst men as being in a new relationship with God. It is a very important thing that every Christian should be a distinguished Christian.

When we went out to the Far East this year and arrived at the airport in Manila, we were given a little card by the airport authorities and on it were three letters: V.I.P. 'Very Important Person'. Of course, that was not true, and was just a courtesy on their part, but it may serve as an illustration.

When Jesus stepped on to that new ground after His baptism God gave Him that ticket: 'Very Important Person', and that was what He was in the eyes of heaven, though not in the eyes of men and of this world.

Now, do you notice the first thing that distinguished Jesus as heaven's Very Important Person? "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matthew 4:1). If men did not recognize who He was, hell did. Satan said: 'This is a Very Important Person', and he paid Him very great attention all His life. At the end of these temptations in the wilderness it says: "He (Satan) departed from him for a season" (Luke 4:13). It was as though Satan said: 'You have defeated me now, but I will be back again' and how true that was!

Heaven's Important Persons are known by the enemy, and he will do everything he can against that anointing. He will do it by persecution, or he will try it by deception. There is no numbering of the ways in which the enemy tries to counter that anointing. But it is the anointing of the Holy Spirit which gives us our importance - we are not important in ourselves.

Now I think we can leave Jordan and go on. That is the Man presented, the first view of the Pattern that has been shown. From that point the Pattern is described, and that description is all gathered up in a very simple phrase, spoken by the lips of Jesus: "I AM". That means that He is the all-inclusive representation of the Mind of God. Jesus Christ as a single personal reality encompasses all the original intention of God. He is personally universal. We have often said that when God reaches His end, in everything that we shall see and touch, we shall see and touch the Lord Jesus. What a glorious state that will be! You will meet me and I will meet you, and yet we shall not meet one another - we shall meet the Lord Jesus. All the difficulties that we find in other people will be gone and we shall just meet the Lord Jesus. He will be everywhere and in all things. "A great multitude, which no man could number" (Revelation 7:9), and yet one all-comprehensive Person, the Lord Jesus. He is universal, timeless, without beginning and without end. He speaks of the glory which He had with His Father before the world was (John 17:5), and the Word is that that glory is to be in Him "unto all generations for ever and ever" (Ephesians 3:21). He is universal and eternal, and yet He comes down into history. This One of whom

we are speaking as God's Pattern, or Vessel is all that.

Just before we finish let us look at a three-fold declaration that Jesus made about Himself. The words are so familiar to us: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He did not say: 'I have come to show you the way, to tell you the truth.'

"I am the way." That is not the Pattern's idea, doctrine or theory: the way is a living Person. You can have all the doctrine and all the theory, but not be in the way. Difficult as it is to explain, this is what it means: It is not by coming into the teaching of Jesus, but by coming into Him Himself that you come into the Mind of God. Being 'in Christ' means that you have been introduced into the very Mind of God. When we come into Christ we are introduced into the Mind of God. But that is only an introduction. We are being introduced to one another here at this time 'This is so-and-so' ... 'Oh, I am glad to meet you' - but no one imagines that that is all there is to know about that person. There are some people you can know all about in five minutes, and after that they have no more to give you, but there are others whom it takes a whole lifetime to know. It is one thing to be introduced to Christ, but it is going to take all eternity to know Him. He as a personal reality is the full embodiment of all that God has to give us. The Apostle Paul did not say at the end of his life: 'Oh, I do want to know more about Christ!', but he did say: "That I may know him" (Philippians 3:10).

So Jesus says: I am the Way. If you want to come into the full knowledge of God's Mind, you will find it in Me. It will be a matter of knowing Me more and more' ... "I am the way... no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

"I am the truth." Again, it is not what Christ says, not the teaching of Jesus. That may be important, but what He is saying is: 'I am personally the truth.' All the truth of God and heaven has become a personality, has become embodied in a Man. When He says "I am the truth", He is saying 'I am unique. There is not another like Me. In the matter of the truth I am the first and the last. I am the beginning and the end.' He is the unique presentation of the Mind of God, the exact expression of the Father. If we want to know the truth, it can only be in a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.

"I am the life." What a vast amount that comprehends! This takes us right back over the ages to the very beginning, and on to the consummation. God has comprehended everything in one thing. Is it the way, with all that that means? Is it the truth, with all that that means? All this is gathered into divine life. It was the original intention of God that man should have eternal life, and should share with Him His own life, but not one man of all the vast multitudes that ever lived on this earth had that life until this Man came and gave it. "I came that they may have life" (John 10:10) ... John says: "The life was manifested" (1 John 1:2). He is the life and "he that hath the Son hath the life" (1 John 5:12) - not the teaching about eternal life, but the Person Himself. You see, He is God's Pattern.

So we repeat: the Pattern is a Person who is shown to us by the Holy Spirit. There is one test as to whether we have seen this Pattern. We may think we have seen because we have a lot of Christian truth, but there is one, and only one, proof that we have seen the Pattern. I use the words of the Apostle Paul: "We... beholding... the Lord are changed into the same image" (2 Corinthians 3:18-AV). The proof is that as the years go by we are becoming more like Christ. It seems all too slow, but it just must be like this - that more of Christ is being manifested in us as time goes on. That would be the only justification for our being here in this way - not that you have a lot of notebooks full of notes (whatever you are intending to do with them - it might be that you are going to preach all this to someone else, but that will not justify your having come here). The only justification will be that, having seen the Lord, we will be more like Him.

May the Lord make it like that!