

T. Austin-Sparks:

"The Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name..." (John 14:26).

"John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 1:5).

We are now going to think about the Holy Spirit as the 'Spirit of Holiness' (Rom. 1:3) - the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament He is referred to by the latter title somewhere about eighty times, which is in itself a very impressive thing. He is the Holy Spirit.

Mistaken Ideas of 'Holiness'

The subject of 'holiness' or 'sanctification' can be a very oppressive and heavy-going matter. I confess that for a long time it was a subject that I never enjoyed looking into, or having anything to do with. The fact is that, as a subject, it has been resolved into various systems of teaching, has been made the ground of particular cults and movements, and has even provided a name for a 'church' - the 'Holiness' church. It has brought many Christians into bondage and confusion and frustration of life.

This is mainly due to holiness or sanctification being focused down on certain particular aspects of human life. When you come to ask people what they mean, you usually find that they refer to certain common sins in human nature: if you desire to be delivered from these, then that is a 'longing for holiness', and if you are actually delivered from them, that is an experience of 'holiness' itself. I am not saying that holiness does not involve that; but holiness in the Scriptures is a very much bigger, greater thing than any of our systems, or our movements, or our crystallized teaching, or our 'foci of application'. It is not intended to bring anybody either into bondage or into a life of struggle or strain. It is just in this connection that Satan has shown his cleverness. Having himself brought about our unholy condition, he then turns upon his own victims, bringing them under terrible condemnation and accusation, and involving them in a whole constellation of complexes, so that they have become completely tied up on this matter of sin and sanctification and holiness. That certainly ought not to be the effect of a healthy occupation with holiness as presented in the Word of God. It is just the opposite of what God has intended.

Satan as the Spirit of Unholiness

This is, of course, a matter that goes far beyond the limits of a few brief pages. But let us seek at least to get it into its right perspective. At the outset, holiness must be seen in its full setting. We will not stay to argue that this is the supreme characteristic of God. We have to see it in its full background. The Holy Spirit is set over against an un-holy spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit is a Person, so, just as truly, there is a personal un-holy spirit. This whole matter of 'holiness' has to be seen in that light. Satan it is who has brought in an unholy State: not merely as an unholy condition, but State with a capital 'S', as when we speak of the State in the sense of the Kingdom, the regime, the system or government. Satan has brought in an unholy condition and an unholy kingdom or State. He has defiled everything: he has defiled human nature; he has defiled the creation; and the proof is in the universality of death - God's verdict on all that it is unclean, that it is defiled, that it has been touched by Satan.

It is therefore impressive and instructive to note that, as soon as Jesus had been anointed by the Holy Spirit, He entered upon a direct and immediate battle with Satan himself. From the Jordan he went straight to the wilderness, to meet and encounter this arch-foe of all righteousness. As Jesus went into His baptism, He said to John: "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). For, in figure and representation, His baptism, as a type of His Cross, in death, burial and resurrection, was truly the fulfilment of all righteousness. On that ground, then, He encounters the one who is the embodiment of all unrighteousness. And it is under the anointing that He does it. The Spirit of Holiness, the Holy Spirit, takes the Righteous One to encounter the universality of unrighteousness, as represented by Satan, there in the wilderness. I say, it is most impressive and instructive to note that that was the very first thing after the baptism and anointing.

Now the method of Satan is always to bring about a link with his State, a link with his kingdom, thereby achieving his object of effecting a link with his defilement. Remember that! Let me repeat it: the object of Satan is always to bring about, if possible, some complicity, some touch, some link with, or some foothold in, his own unholy kingdom, or State, or condition. That is what was happening in that battle in which the Lord Jesus found Himself. All the time, Satan, from one angle and another, was moving round, trying to involve that Righteous One in his unrighteous kingdom. We are not going to argue out these three temptations, but it is perfectly clear.

At last it comes out: 'If Thou wilt worship me' (Matt. 4:9; Luke 4:7). 'If only You will recognise me, accept me, give me a place' - 'If only Thou wilt worship me, all this will I give Thee!' In other words, 'If only I can get You on to my ground, I have spoiled Your kingdom, spoiled You: I have established myself, if I can but make that link.' Blessed be God, that Holy and Righteous One saw through it all, and said, in effect: 'No, not a hoof - not one iota. Nothing for Satan.' "The prince of the world cometh: and he hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). That is victory, absolute victory.

The Principle of Non-contamination

Remember, then - what was true in His case is always true. Satan is ever seeking to find some way in which he can link us in with his kingdom, which is his power, by getting us on to his ground. Hence all those Old Testament prescriptions made by God against contamination, against mixture: "Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together" (Deut. 22:10). Nothing wrong with the ass, as such, for Jesus rode upon an ass, and we read in the Bible of the ass serving many a good purpose. But from God's standpoint they belong to two realms, two kingdoms, they represent two orders of life, and He says that you cannot mix them up. The work of God must not be done on the basis of a mixture of two things which belong to two different kingdoms and realms.

"Thou shalt not wear a mingled stuff, wool and linen together" (Deut. 22:11) - they belong to two different kingdoms. There is nothing wrong with wool in itself: God clothed the man and wife with the skins of animals - that is, in principle, with wool; and I suppose all the patriarchs wore woollen garments. But here it is forbidden that the animal and vegetable fibres be woven together to form a 'mingled stuff'. They belong to two realms, and God is simply saying this: You must not try to bring together things that do not belong to each other. It is a foreshadowing of this great principle of distinctness, separation, non-contamination.

When the remnant came back from captivity, for the rebuilding of the temple and wall, as we read in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the whole thing headed up to this - the mixed marriages (Ezra 9, 10; Neh. 13:23-31). And when that was settled, the books close; that is the end, it is all right; now we have got to the point - the mixed marriages between the people of God and other, idolatrous, nations. These two things must not come together. "Be not unequally yoked..." (2 Cor. 6:14); God will not have it. It is providing Satan with that which he is always seeking, towards which he is always trying to work - a link with his own kingdom. This is the whole point of 'holiness' in its right setting.

New Testament Illustrations

Now this is very thorough-going, and it is very comprehensive. For instance, let us allow this principle to take us right into the First Letter to the Corinthians. Everything in that book is explained by this.

First of all we read of "the wisdom of this world" (3:19; 1:19-2:13). The wisdom of this world: we remember what the Apostle says about it there. But listen to another Apostle earlier: "This wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above, but is earthly, sensual, demoniacal" (Jas. 3:15). 'The wisdom that is from beneath is demoniacal.' What, the wisdom of this world, demoniacal? Well, so the Word says; and if we want the proof of that, let us come back to Paul's argument, that it was in "the wisdom of this world" that Christ was crucified (1 Cor. 2:6-8). In the wisdom of this world, it was thought to be the 'wise thing' to put Him to death - what folly! what madness! what devilishness!

Anybody who really touches the wisdom of the world knows that it is a realm of death. Anyone who has dipped into philosophy knows that there is no more deadly thing in all the sciences than philosophy. If you touch it, you touch death. That was the wisdom in Corinth - the wisdom of this world. Yes, Satan had a good foothold in that church, along that line; he had got them on to his ground right enough.

Again, we read of - "divisions among you" (1:10). "There are contentions among you" (vs. 11). Remember - and this may be anticipating - the Holy Spirit is essentially the Spirit of unity. Satan has got them on to his ground, for he is the great divider. Satan never stops until he has divided the last thing: if he comes to one, he will make two of it! "Divisions among you" - they are on his ground. Nothing need be said about the next thing mentioned - fornication. But then the Apostle speaks about the Lord's Table, and you hear him say: 'You cannot - you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons' (1 Cor. 10:21). 'You cannot mix things up like this!' But it was actually there in Corinth.

Practical Details in this Light

At this point let me utter a very emphatic word. These chapters in the First Letter to the Corinthians must be read in this light. Do not extract subjects from those chapters, about women wearing hats or headcovering, and all those difficult things - do not just lift them out, as separate subjects: for, if you do, you will just get into confusion. What the apostle was dealing with then was the coming in, among the Lord's people, of the spirit of this world. He was saying to the Corinthians, in effect: 'That is how the world behaves - or misbehaves; that is how the world does it; and that world is Satan's world. If you let this sort of thing in, you are lining up with the world - with his world.'

Study it in this light, as to all these details, all these practical matters. It is not just that you are having to do with an apostle who you think had no great liking for women! No, no; you are up against tremendous things here. It is Satan seeking to get inside and get a foothold - a link between what is holy and what is his - in order that, by thus bringing the world in, and touching with his corruption and defilement, he may destroy that which is of God. Read it all in that light, for that is where the New Testament puts it - "that no advantage may be gained over us by Satan" (2 Cor. 2:11).

You see, the whole of the bulwark is raised against this one - this un-holy spirit that is in the universe; this corrupting influence and power; this defiling work. The Church is to be always on its guard against these spirits of uncleanness that are everywhere. Why? Because of the power of holiness. It is not just to have a clean condition, as something in itself. Never make 'holiness' an end in itself. No, it is because of the power, the mighty power, of holiness.

Holiness is Militant

Remember that, in the Bible - and it is so strongly illustrated in the Old Testament - 'holiness' is always militant. It was the priests that led the nation into battle; it was the sacrifice that was the ground of the warfare. It is a most impressive thing that even the Levites are spoken of as set apart for the "warfare" (Num. 4:3,23, etc.; 8:24,25). Levites, priests, set apart for warfare? We thought they were set apart to offer sacrifices and deal with all that side of things! No, holiness is militant, and it is a mighty power against a militant foe. "Our wrestling is... against the principalities, against the powers..." (Eph. 6:12). They are making war, there is no doubt about it. They make war. What is the ground of our hope? It is not our language, our phraseology or our terminology, or our doctrine: it is our holiness of life. That is the point of attack. Unholiness puts God back. God is holy, even as the Holy Spirit is holy, and unholiness just keeps Him back; it binds His hands; He cannot do anything. When there is unholiness, it is as though the Lord is bound, helpless, paralysed, in the midst of His people (cf. Jer. 14:7-9).

The following extract provides a simple, fragmentary illustration of what I mean, and brings out some very practical points. It is the story of a Christian college that depended for all its support upon prayer and faith.

'The College was based on the simplicity of daring faith in God for the provision of need. As long as the spiritual life of the men was maintained, the necessary funds came in in answer to prayer. If supplies failed to come in, or were low, with no signs of replenishment, it was recognised that the finger of God was on some failing, or unconfessed sin, among them, and not until this was put right would supplies come in. Thus, the meeting of material needs became, as it were, the spiritual barometer. One instance of this may be recorded: Funds were so low that a meeting was held, and the students were urged to a more complete surrender to God. Still matters did not improve, and it was thought that possibly the men were not devoting sufficient time to prayer, so the curriculum was curtailed, and more time devoted to prayer, but still no supplies. And, finally, all funds came to an end, and there was only the garden produce left.

'Then, late one night, two students came to the tutor and confessed secret drinking. He gave urgent advice to repair to God, and confess their sin and plead forgiveness, and not for the sake of the loaves and fishes, but because of the leaven of hypocrisy. And they did that. Confession was made before the whole college, and united prayer was offered. The next day was set apart for fasting and humiliation and prayer, at the close of which they gathered together with a great heart-thankfulness, feeling the moral and spiritual atmosphere was cleansed, and that God would be able to give an exhibition of His faithfulness. God honoured their faith, and the very next morning came a cheque for fifty pounds.'

A very simple story, but it illustrates how the whole work of God can be held up; a whole assembly can have its spiritual life injured, limited; the warfare of the saints can be turned into defeat, if for some reason the Lord has to stand back and say: I'm sorry, but I cannot go on with them - there is this, and that; there is an Achan, or an Ananias and Sapphira... Yes, He knows! It may be unholiness in something which is, after all, only a small part of a whole - two men in a whole college, or one man in all Israel, or a man and his wife in the Church at the

beginning. Yes, the majority are all right; the mass are not doing this sort of thing. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit focuses right down on that, because He is bound and committed to the corporate principle. On the one hand, "whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it"; but, on the other, if "one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). There is a relatedness which to the Holy Spirit is sacred. And while our blessing benefits the whole Church, our sin, our unholiness, may cripple the whole Church.

Holiness is the Character of Christ

Holiness, then, is militant; it is the power of triumphant warfare. But holiness is also Christly character. Holiness is not formal make-up, something put on. The Lord Jesus saw right through that with the Scribes, Pharisees, Rulers. None of that, no 'make-up' spiritually, will pass with the Holy Spirit. Holiness is more than teaching; more than profession; more than pretence; more than formal outward procedure. It is the very Person, the very life, the very character of Christ in the believer and in the Church. It is a very big matter, far bigger than I have been able to indicate in these pages. But the Spirit is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Holiness; and because He is that, everything else follows.

Now, just a few words in closing, for our comfort. Those men who were gathered in that Upper Room for those ten days: I do not think they were, in themselves, any more holy than when one of them denied the Lord Jesus thrice. They had all forsaken Him and fled, and in that way denied Him - they were all guilty. And I do not think that, even on that particular Day of Pentecost, they were in themselves any more holy than they were before. But the Spirit came upon them - for what? In order to make them holy; to set up, establish, a holiness of life within them. We do not have to struggle in order to get to a place of holiness; we have not to try to make ourselves 'worthy' of the Holy Spirit. We have to be where they were - just before the Lord: set upon all that the Lord has spoken of; obedient to what the Lord has said.

That is what they were doing. "After that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit..." The first part of that 'commandment' was to wait until endued with the Spirit. The writer almost immediately continues: "He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem..." (Acts 1:2,4). "After he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit..." They are obeying His command: that is, they are there, as men with many, many imperfections, but open, diligent, committed, earnest, ready, waiting on Him. The Holy Spirit saw a way in them, and He came, and took the way He found.