

The Burning Fire of the Spirit - Part 2

T. Austin-Sparks:

We come back again to the book of the Revelation. Chapter 4, second half of verse 5: "There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven Spirits of God."

Chapter 1 at verse 4: "Grace to you and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come, and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne..."

Seven lamps of fire... burning before the throne... which are the seven Spirits of God.

I will do my best to help those who were not here this afternoon, to draw into line with us in the way that we feel we are being led at this time. We were pointing out that these seven Lamps of Fire before the throne represent the seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Lord Jesus as He is presented in chapter one.

Careful reading and meditation upon these three chapters will, I think, make it quite clear that the presentation of the Lord given in chapter one is the ground upon which the churches - as here, but representatively the church - is being judged; and that in the light of all that the Lord had given. We said that there comes a time in the history of the Lord's people sooner or later when He comes to draw up the accounts and to challenge and test in the light of what He has given. A crisis comes, it may be in the individual life, as in the life of the whole church, or of any local representation of it. There comes a time, when the Lord, having given and been very patient and sought to make His grace known, when of necessity, for Himself and for them, He must say, "Now here, we can't just go on giving and teaching. We must know where we are over it all. We must see how much there is that really represents what has been given". It's a time of crisis, it's a time of upheaval, a time of deep searching... it may be a very painful time. There are big issues bound up with such a time, as for the future. And that is what is represented by these three chapters so far as the church is concerned.

You go on through the book and you'll find the same thing is carried into the world and the nations and everything is being judged in the light of the fact of Jesus Christ. The title of the book ought to be its first words; I notice that the title that men have given it is, "The Revelation of John the Divine". The book says it's the "Revelation of Jesus Christ"; that is the title and that applies to the whole book, not only the beginning, but right through. And everything is being brought to the judgement throne by the Holy Spirit.

Now this, we have said, this presentation of the Lord Jesus, as a seven-fold, mainly a seven-fold, characterisation. That is, He is presented in the main in seven particulars; particular features. And the Lamps of Fire correspond to those features. And these Lamps of Fire are the burning testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Lord Jesus - heavenward before the throne - you go on to later in the book and you find the phrase is used earthward which are the seven Spirits of God sent into all the earth. So that in heaven and on earth everything is being judged and determined according to Christ; that's the final judgement of everything, or the basis of the final judgement. Well, that's rather a poor synopsis or summary of a lot of time and a lot of ground covered earlier.

We looked at the first of these Lamps of Fire. I would like just to add a word to what we said in that connection. It relates to the first feature of Christ presented: "Clothed with a garment down to the foot". And this is the Holy Spirit's burning testimony to the fact that it is only what Christ is, as a covering for all that we are, that can stand before God. That is one of the seven things that the Spirit saith unto the churches, unto us. It's a burning testimony of how greatly has the Lord taken pains to burn that into the church, that it must, it must be a church that is covered as to its whole natural life. If it is not, as at Corinth and some other places, if it is not, it's a terrible exposure and a terrible judgement.

The judgement of Corinth, or the threatened judgement of the church in Corinth, was, as you know, that all its works would go up in smoke, in the testing of the fire. And they were to be saved only and just so as by fire and nothing else, but just getting through. And everything else lost... because they were naked, that is, as you look into that letter, it was what they were in themselves. Paul says, "When this and that obtains... are ye not men? Do you not speak as men? You're behaving as men." He's saying, "This is not Christ! This is just not Christ, to behave like that, to go on like that, to do those things, to have those conditions; that's just not Christ! You are naked before God." We need to be clothed with Christ. That's a burning thing in the New Testament. May we not be found naked before Him in the judgement.

The first Lamp of Fire... and how intense is its heat! How searching is its light. How discriminating is its effect. Oh, dear friends, do not take this just as words, teaching; you and I have to stand in the everlasting burnings.

The test now, and the test at last is going to be: How much of Christ adorns us to the hiding, the hiding of what we are in ourselves? Something to think about and pray about, it's our battleground. That is the testimony of Jesus.

Now we pass then to:

The Second Lamp.

These Lamps, or these energies of the Holy Spirit (for a lamp of fire is a thing of energy, there's nothing merely passive about that, it's energetic) if these Lamps of Fire correspond to those aspects of Christ in the presentation, what is the second lamp? To what does the Spirit direct attention in the second place?

Again, look at the vision of the Son of Man and then look at the churches. You come on it immediately, come on it immediately: "Clothed with a garment down to the foot..." and what next? "And girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle... Girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle".

We know in Biblical symbolism what a girdle suggests or represents, it is strength unto action. The girdle speaks of strength, girdedness not looseness, strength for action. A garment drawn together so that it does not in any way interfere with the work on hand. The girdle, then, is strength for action.

Breasts, ever and always, suggest the service of love. The service of love. And the gold, as we know well, is that which is of God. That which is of God. Putting these three things together we have Christ in that feature of steadfast, steadfast and purposeful love, steadfast as purposeful Divine love, as against the fickleness and impersistence of human love, of man's love where God is concerned. And I say to you that you come on it immediately, the very first address is to Ephesus.

Ephesus... the final word about Ephesus, with whatever commendation could be, or recognition of virtues, the final word is, "I have this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love, consider from whence thou are fallen. Repent and do the first works". First love, first works... there's your example. The Lord comes in terms of this steadfast, purposeful, consistent, persistent Divine love to which they, and we, owe everything. Where would any one of us be tonight if He hadn't kept on loving, persisted in love, if He had been as fickle as we are, as impersistent as is our love? That was the trouble which to the Lord was greater than all the other values at Ephesus; with Him it outweighed everything else, indeed He placed the continuance of that vessel as of service to Him upon this issue, this issue:

First Love.

Turn to the gospel by John. We have this: "Jesus..." (chapter 13) "Jesus, knowing that His hour was come that He would depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end, unto the uttermost". And the next is the girdle of that love: "He riseth from supper, layeth aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself, then He poureth water into the basin and began to wash the disciples feet, to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded..." Having loved, He loved to the end. The persistent love.

I read this morning what we all know so well, how one man declared that his love for his master could stand up to anything, even to death. We know what happened. But I noticed this, that when it says that about Peter, his declaration that though all should forsake Him, he would not, he would not! I notice that the writer adds, "and so said all of them". So said all of them! We put it all onto Peter, but they all said the same thing. You can almost hear them, if you like, Peter said that, and so, so said the others, "So will I!", and another, "So will I", and "So will I". So said all of them. Then Jesus said, "All you shall be offended of Me this night for it is written, I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." And the sequence when the soldiers came from the high priest with their torches and their spears and staves, it says, "They all forsook Him and fled". Well, He knew all about that, how they were made, what would happen; He told them so. But having loved, having loved, He loved to the end.

He was indeed girded with that kind of Divine love that presses through, that suffers long, that does not give up; persistent, faithful love. Faithful love. Now, we all agree that that is a characteristic of the Lord Jesus. And we must be impressed with the fact that the very first thing that He talks about to the church is that very thing; is that very thing. That is really where, when He comes to the seven churches, where He begins.

I don't rush on dear friends, because I'm not concerned to say so much, I'm concerned that we are all before the

Lamp of Fire. And our search? And we see in its light what the Lord is after, what is here called: "first love", first love. What are its characteristics? Well, of course, it is a fullness to the first motive. I trust that it can be said to be true of all of us here that there was a time in our Christian experience when the Lord just captured and captivated us in such a way that He gained a complete committal of our life to Himself and was everything to us; when it first became like that. If there's anyone here that cannot say that that was their experience, it's not too late, it's not too late - you can be captivated by the Lord Jesus more than once in your life and some of us do know mightier captivations at different times. But those of us who do know that first wonderful experience when we saw the Lord and the Lord found us... how full of Him we were! How absorbed we were all the day and while we were having to be engaged in other things, absorbed we were with the Lord, just longing for the other things to be got out of the way in order to get busy for the Lord in a more direct and immediate way. How He filled everything for us!

Now, the apostle Paul gives us a marvelous picture in his letter to the Philippians. First of all he says, "That is exactly, exactly what happened to the Lord Jesus Himself". I put the meaning of it this way, that isn't what he said, but there's no doubt about it that this is what it meant; speech after the manner of men. There was a point where the love of the Son toward the Father in terms of the Father's interest and glory, heart purpose and desire, that love of the Father was so great, so captivated Him, that He stripped Himself of everything and emptied Himself of everything in heaven's glory - what He called in His prayer, "The glory which I had with Thee before the world was...". He let it all go out of His love for the Father and the Father's love for this world. That's one side of the picture. You turn over the page, and you find that that same love has been begotten in the heart of this man Paul and he tells us there, in such strong full terms, what effect it had upon him, just tells us all the glories, that men call glories in this world. Glories of ancestry, of inheritance, of birth, of training, of position, of achievement - all the things that this world calls glorious, and then Jesus came into the picture for Paul and he said, "Those things which were gain to me in those days, in that realm, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea, I count them as refuse for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Here's a man, maybe only in the human terms, but following the way of his Lord, the way of love, showing that first love with him right at the beginning meant the Lord had first place in all things, in all things, indeed nothing else could possibly stand in the way or the place of the Lord Jesus. That's first love - first love - what it does, the effect that it has. Now, we know that Ephesus had had an experience like that.

(By the way, let me put in parentheses, I heard that one of the brothers gave a message on this here a few weeks ago. I have deliberately refused to inquire what he said, or to read the notes, because I'm always afraid of subconsciousness; that something might come out that was not my own. So I'm quite in ignorance. If the Lord says the same thing tonight, it's the Lord speaking; that's my confidence, it's the Lord speaking, not anything that has come secondhand.)

Now, Ephesus had had an experience like that, you know what happened when the Word was preached to them when the Lord Jesus was brought to them. They were devotees of the sciences and of the pagan mysteries and they had a library which ran into a very great sum of money for value. When Jesus came, through His servants in the marketplace, they piled up their books, their treasures, their costly things and sent them all up in flames. That's the value compared with Jesus! First love... "Consider from whence thou art fallen...".

Dear friends, this is what the Lord comes back for, and says, "I've loved you like that, oh I've loved you, and kept on loving you like that... at very great cost, but I've not counted the cost for love's sake, for love never does count the cost in that way, in that way. I've loved you like that. I have given you so much, I really have given you so much for so long..." What's the measure of your return? What is the measure of that where you're concerned? Is it like that now? Was it more like that at one time? Is it less like that now? Is it? Blessed be the man and woman here who can stand up and say, "No, it's more today than ever, it's more today than ever". That's good, but it may be some of us have got to meet this challenge.

Oh, oh, the blunted edge... blunted by familiarity with Divine things. How the edge can be blunted by familiarity, "Oh, we've heard it all before! We know it all." See? Familiarity. Perhaps that was Ephesus; the tragedy of familiarity, of easy facility to get Divine things. You see when people can't get them! Some said to me, even today, "We're starved, we've come to be fed, we're starved!" And there are many, many like that in this world we know. When it's so easily obtainable and there's so much of it to hand, how it just blunts the appetite, the edge of the appetite.

If we settle down because... well, it doesn't matter very much, it doesn't matter very much, we won't take the trouble, put ourselves out... it's always there when we want it. Sometime perhaps when we would go miles, miles, hundreds of miles for a bit of spiritual food; today we might perhaps not be willing to walk a mile. So much, when we feel inclined, is there; forgive me if I put it wrongly, but you know it is so possible for first love

to lose its edge because of this familiarity and this facility, this abundance; that it's there.

Or it might be the lost freshness of a walk in the Spirit. Now, a life in the Spirit, a walk in the Spirit, always has a freshness about it; really it does! It doesn't matter, dear friends, how long you've been on the way, how much you've received, how much you know, this is the marvel of a life in the Holy Spirit: you never seem to overtake what there is for you, you know it! It doesn't lie in the past, indeed, you know quite well that your life won't be long enough to catch up on what you've already sensed and discerned. I'm not exaggerating, no, what I'm saying is that a life in the Spirit has about it a continual freshness, newness, a sense that there's something more, something more. Now that was the characteristic at the beginning, wasn't it? "My, what a world we've come into! What a new world! How everything is new! What can we do with it? So big, so wonderful!" Is that true of every one of us today in our spiritual life? Like that? It's a wonderful world that we've come into, this world of Christ. Is it like that?

The lost freshness of a life in the Spirit, the deadly effect of formality, of routine - many Christian things are routine - you go through the same routine all the time, you've brought it down to that; it's the way it's done, it's the form of things. Oh, God deliver us from the blighting, deadly effect of formality and make everything live! Now, we can't do that, mark you, by trying to be original and change things in order to get out of that difficulty. No, you can't do it that way. This is the burning Lamp of the Spirit.

Burning Lamp of the Spirit

If the fire is not there, no methods or changed methods, or uniqueness, or singularity, or anything else can take its place. It's the fire of Life, the Life of the Spirit.

It may be putting things in the place of the Person, even Christian things. Christian work, you know, can be a very, very harmful thing if it becomes an end in itself. The enemy is very, very busy to make Christian workers so occupied with the work and all its demands, and all its many aspects, to draw away from the Lord Himself. That is, of course, the confession and the tragedy of many a servant of the Lord. The work... got to give an address, got to give addresses; very well, very well. Oh, there's a subtle snare in always reading your Bible, or listening to messages with your eye upon people to whom you're going to give it. You can't believe how damaging that is. Perhaps I'm only speaking to some here.

Dear friends, if you and I do not speak to others the thing that has already spoken to us, and dealt with us, and challenged us, and faced us up, the Lord deliver us from our speaking. It must be like that. But, you see, the work, the demands can just come into the place of the Lord Himself and the fire, the fire is damped down like that.

Well, first love is always characterised by vision and purpose; you know that in the natural, it is more so in the spiritual. Vision! That is, there's a future, there's something on ahead. There's a tremendous prospect that is a constituent of first love. You see it in the natural: there's something to live for now, some purpose in life, some meaning in life, something ahead that draws you on. That's first love; quite pure and simple. Are we like that all of us? Vision? Purpose? If that goes, if that goes, we are fallen, we are fallen in the eyes of the Lord. We've come down.

First love is preparedness to suffer, to pay a price, to go on with the object of our love whatever it costs and whatever people say or do; that's first love. Well, one could go on like this, but you see, and I'm quite sure you know, many, many other features belong to this: "thy first love... thy first love". And because of it, "thy first works".

Oh, may the Lord find His appeal to us having some real effect and drawing out our hearts again. If this does search us like the lamp, if this does burn us like the fire, may we listen, repent, and do the first works. "Listen to what the Spirit saith unto the churches..." There's the Lord.

I know we'll never fully measure up to Him in this matter, we'll always fall short of the pattern. But the question is: there's a lamp of fire, is it burning? Is it burning? There's no hope unless the lamp of fire, or in other words, the Holy Spirit, is just having His true effect in our lives - for that's why He is here. That is His work: to reproduce in us what is true of the Lord Jesus. And we all agree that this is true of Him; this is true of Him - having loved, He persists in love, He doesn't give up, His love does not break down and disappear. The Holy Spirit has come that the love of Christ should be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit - that kind of love. And if this is a call, let us respond. If, dear friends, you can stand up to this and say, "Yes, I know what you're talking about and I can say without any hesitation that today there's no loss, no loss from what there was,

indeed it's much more so now". Well, alright, that's good if you can say that, I hope we'll all be able to say that.

Nevertheless the Lord's word is given to us, He speaks. He comes before us in this vision and He says, "This is what I'm like. This is what I want you to be like". First love...

Shall we pray.

Our Father, we can only just pray and appeal to Thee, that it may be true of every one of us that rather than there should be loss and weakening, there should be the blazing up of that flame, the intense heat of Thy love in our hearts, that all these characteristics of it may be made more true. Oh Lord, save us from all the vitiating influences and possibilities of this life, this world. Deliver us, we pray Thee, from losing anything that Thou hast given us. Thou hast said so much, in Thy love Thou hast said it, given us so much in Thy love and now Thou dost come, and Thou dost come for the fruit that Thou hast the right to expect. We do not want disappointment to be in Thy face, or disappointment to be in Thy heart. The Lord find in us that which answers to His own heart, more and more so, that He may be satisfied with seeing the fruit of His travail. We all need more love, much more love for the Lord, we need much more love for one another. Oh Lord, increase this great, great virtue in our lives by the mighty operation of Thy Spirit in Jesus Name. Amen.