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Spirituality: The Key To All That is of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

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A spiritual state is the key to all that is of God. Spirituality is the door, and the key to the door, beyond which lies everything that relates to God. Without spirituality there is no way through; the door is closed. The word "cannot" stands written as an impassable barrier - "cannot understand or receive the things of the Spirit of God."

The world of things temporal is only a shadow of another world and has no abiding qualities or values in itself. It is governed by the law of vanity, vanity meaning simply that it cannot of itself realize its own destiny. It will reach a point, and from that point turn back and in upon itself; its efforts, its groanings, its travailings, never issue in a final realization of its intention. Nothing of it, by its own properties, can realize Divine purposes and ends. It is very important to recognize this.

As we get closer to this matter, we see how it applies specifically to Christian work. Oh, how many things are gathered into organized Christianity with the idea of making for effectiveness! The idea is that if you can have these things you are going to get results.

Money - oh, how much could be done if only we had money! We must have money! I ask you, how was it in the book of the Acts? Was anything done? With all the money today, how much is done of an abiding, eternal, spiritual value? If only you can get names and titles on your programs and advertisements, you are going to effect something! Are you? If you can get reputation, scholarship, learning, ability, physical strength, business acumen, the work will be affected. Will it?

I want to say that not in one of these things, nor in all of them put together, *in themselves*, is there any spiritual value, and there can be a very vast amount of spiritual value without any of them. God has taken pains along both lines to prove that. Along the line of their presence in abundance He has proved their spiritual futility; and along the line of taking the weak things and the despised and the foolish and the things which are not, by something which was nothing in itself, He has through the ages demonstrated His own power and done mightily fruitful things for eternity.

Well, that is simple and obvious, and it is only one more contribution to this fact, that it is spirituality that counts, that is the effective thing, the thing that gets through, and nothing else. The learning, the money, and all the other things may have a place, provided they do not govern, provided they are subservient to what is spiritual and are never banked upon as the things which are going to do the work; provided it is never assumed that if you have these things, a great work for God can be done. God will make evident the folly of that assumption. A whole range of things is employed by organized Christianity to secure Divine ends, but it does not work. Well, that is the first thing that we note in connection with spirituality.

We proceed in the next place to recognize that for spiritual - that is, Divine, eternal, ultimate purposes, we have to be reconstituted on a spiritual level and basis. That, of course, is the very heart of John 3. Nicodemus is interested in, and concerned about, the Kingdom of God, wanting to know about it, and has come to the Lord Jesus by night, evidently to talk about it. He had, like all other Israelites, an entirely temporal conception of the Kingdom, an earthly idea. It was formal, an official matter. The Lord Jesus does not waste any time at all with that. He simply brushes it all aside, ignores it, and says, "Ye must be born anew". "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." That is elementary, but we are coming to this fact: in order to know anything at all about the things of God (and I take the Kingdom of God to be that realm in which all that obtains is of God - that which belongs to God) we have to be constituted according to God.

Nothing is possible until we are reconstituted on a new principle, until we are in other words constituted spiritual beings in a new way. The very beginnings of things in relation to God are that they are a new and altogether other constitution, just as absolute as would be the reconstituting of us to live a fish's life, and perhaps more so. We have to begin over again. For the very first thing of God, that is necessary. I know that I am not saying anything that is new in itself to you, but I feel very much that there has to be a reconsideration of the whole Christian conception of things if we are going to have effectiveness.

The ideas of doing God's work, and of what His work is, are very often far from the truth. The ideas of the means by which God would work are very often largely outside of the pale of God's acceptance. We are concerned with real spiritual effectiveness, are we not? Then we have to learn the secret of it; that is what we are after. There is a crippling, paralyzing "cannot" resting upon the natural, the soulical man where the things of God are concerned; and yet how much of that soulical life is employed and relied upon in Christianity today to secure spiritual ends! If only you can get high-tensioned atmospheres, a good deal of stir and movement and emotion; if only you can get certain conditions brought about by a forceful, powerful personality with its impact upon the people; then you will get results!

And a great deal of result is obtained, but it is not spiritual; it is not abiding and eternal. But unfortunately, the consequences are not limited to that. There issues ever more and more this great

tragedy of people having tried and been disappointed, and determining never to try again. The world is strewn with people who have had an experience and no more. Oh, the devil is clever!

We are saying that there is an unbridged gulf between the natural and the spiritual, and there can be no carryover; and yet in the Christianity of our day there is a tremendous carryover of the natural to the spiritual. We find the realm of God's things is simply full of natural elements, and they are all paralyzing the spiritual. There has to be a tremendous removal of all this smother and cover of natural elements - men coming in with their drive and their ideas and conceptions and ways. It is killing the work of God. Until that is really dealt with in the power of the Cross of our Lord Jesus and all set aside, and God is free to do His own work by His own means along His own lines, there will be no commensurate result. God's means and God's way is spirituality from start to finish - the impact of a spiritual constitution.

Yes, there is an unbridged gulf between the natural (the soulical) and the spiritual, and there can be no carryover. Look at the fact. It is so often very striking that a person of very considerable natural acumen, learning intelligence and ability in this world is nothing in real spiritual things, though he be a Christian. Are you not often up against that? A Christian man may be tremendously able in business affairs and most acute in his business transactions, full of intelligence and worldly wisdom, able to carry the weight of an immense concern, to be the driving force of a great business, man of weight and consideration in this world, but when it comes to spiritual things he may be a babe. You speak about the things of the Lord, and that great brain is altogether beaten by the simplest things of the spiritual life. You can get nowhere in talking about the Lord.

I am often amazed as I meet and talk with Christian men who are carrying great responsibilities and who have undoubtedly great abilities, and when you talk about spiritual things they are unable to say anything, to make any contribution; you are talking in another realm. And yet they know they are born again, and they have been so for a long time. What is the matter? Well, there is a gulf. They have all that greatness on the natural side, but they are very small on the spiritual. All that they have of intellectual ability and equipment and power in every way to handle big things naturally serves them in no stead whatever when they come to handle the things of God; whereas somebody who has none of it is a giant, a teacher, in the realm of things spiritual. Well, that is commonplace in our experience.

But it comes right back to this, that there is a gulf, and there is no real bridging of this gulf, there is no carrying from one side to the other. The word "cannot" stands there. Here the word is not about the unregenerate, the grossly sinful. It is the Christian who is still natural, living on the basis of his soul rather than in the realm of his renewed spirit. The natural man "cannot". That is the closed door in things spiritual. Whatever he is in things natural, in things spiritual he is a babe or a fool.

Let me say without any hesitation: the measure of external ritual and formalism and that sort of thing determines the measure of spirituality. The more you have of that, the less you have of true spiritual life, of real spiritual food. A real life with the Lord is something very simple, shorn of all the art of religion; a few children of God gathered together in something which has no ecclesiastical traditions, no religious embellishments, no external forms, but just a simple meeting in the Name of the Lord. There you have life, power, fullness. I am not saying that things must be shoddy in order to have spirituality; I am saying that the law of life is spirituality.

It works in another way. The nearer to earth we get, the more we ourselves feel our importance. Man is biggest when he is nearest to the earth; he is smallest when he is farthest away. I remember my first time in an aeroplane; at ten thousand feet up, I looked down on the ground that meant so much weary toil to cross. It looked only inches big; the people and animals were like toys. The nearer to heaven you get, the less important are the things of earth. All this religious embellishment is the importance of the earth, of the world. The nearer you get to things spiritual and heavenly, the less of that you want, it all goes; you see how really petty and insignificant it is. See the Church from heaven, and all this that goes on down here is like playing at going to church, it is so small. There is a great deal of difference in the spiritual constitution.

To sum up what I am saying, it is this: Spirituality rightly understood is the secret of all that belongs to God. At the very beginning of our life with God, we have to be reconstituted as spiritual beings.

"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

"He that is spiritual....."

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."