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## Glory by the Spirit

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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Message given at Whitsun conference, 1955.*

Reading: 2 Corinthians 3.

We do not make a great deal of the ecclesiastical calendar as such, the special times and seasons of the year, because it is a part of our religion, but sometimes it is good and well to dwell upon the great epochs which lie at the very foundation of our faith, such as the birth of our Lord, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and the coming of the Spirit. When we think of the day of Pentecost, we think of the coming of the Spirit. And I am sure that we, the Lord's people, are always in need of both reminders and fuller instruction as to what that really means. For it was indeed a great thing that happened. The whole of the dispensations turn upon it. Up to the time of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the conditions of one dispensation obtained. From that day, the whole dispensation changed, and entirely new conditions came in, and we need to know the greatness of the change and the changes which have come with the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The chapter which we have just read, as a portion of a much larger argument or setting forth of truth, ought not to be confined or restricted to the verses marked by chapter 3. This chapter embodies something momentous and tremendous of that very change of dispensations, from Moses to Christ; and from Moses to Christ ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the difference is marked by the prevailing word throughout the chapter - glory! - verse 7, verse 8, twice in verse 9, twice in verse 10, verse 11, three times in verse 18. Underline it! In eighteen verses, the one word occurs ten times, really indicating what this is about. And then lay beside it the word or the Name: Spirit. And you find that the Spirit and Glory is a governing or a ruling matter. And the argument of the apostle is just this, that there was a glory which faded, which went out in the Old Dispensation, and that dispensation resolved itself into a dispensation which was anything but glory!

But, by the coming of the Spirit, a dispensation of glory came in and a glory which never was before: a new, fuller glory, with a new meaning.

To analyse and sum up this chapter, we may put over it the statement that the theme here is *glory*. The medium of glory is the *Spirit*; He is clearly set forth here as the medium of glory, the Spirit of Glory. The instrument of the glory is the Word of God becoming alive by the Spirit and producing glory, as we shall see. The sum of the glory is Christ: "*when it shall... turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away*" - the glory breaks out. Or, if we pursue this a little further than the mark of chapter 3, we come to this: "*God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*"; the sum of glory is Christ. The place of the glory is the heart of the believer: "*has shined in our hearts*"; "*has written on hearts*"; "*tables of flesh*". The place of the glory is the heart of the believer. The effect of the glory in the heart is transformation. We are being transformed as we behold the glory, into the same image "*from glory to glory*". And the power of the glory is liberty; "*where the Spirit of the Lord is* (or where the Spirit is Lord) *there is liberty*". That is the chapter in brief, in outline. With the coming of the Spirit the way has been opened up and the glory has come in.

But you notice, through this chapter, and through what Paul is writing, that there are these fundamental contrasts which are of such tremendous importance. I do not feel that I can put sufficient emphasis and stress upon this matter; it goes far deeper, and more into the present situation than most of us realise. My difficulty is to make it clear. But here we are in the presence of something of tremendous importance to Christians, because, after all, the real need where we Christians are concerned is that our Christianity shall be glorious! And that we should be glorious Christians, in the right sense. Well, of course you agree with that. But how? Well, you see, it is by not only recognizing, but coming into the good of these fundamental contrasts which are presented to us in this chapter. There is this contrast at the heart of the others: the contrast between the Law given by Moses, and the Revelation given in Jesus Christ. There is the contrast between tables of stone, and hearts of flesh and so on. But right at the centre of these contrasts there is this one:

### **"The Letter Kills, but the Spirit Gives Life."**

Now, let us be very clear as to what that means; that is not a contrast between the Word of God and the Holy Spirit: it cannot be that. The 'letter' is the Word of God. But it is not set in contrast to the Holy Spirit as necessarily bringing death while the Spirit brings life. I want you to be very clear in your mind about that. You see, when you use that phrase: "*the letter kills*", don't think for a moment that that means that the Word of God brings death! You have got to get it in its setting, and understand what it is the apostle is saying here. It is between *legalism* in relation to the letter or the Word of God, and *Life* which comes by the Holy Spirit's action upon the Word of God. This is what the apostle is saying here, as he has said much more fully in other parts of his writings. He is saying: "Look here, because of a state in persons, 'their heart was hardened', because of a state in persons, the Word only comes to them as a legal statement of 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not'. It is something imposed upon them; it becomes a heavy and dead weight upon them; it becomes a matter of oppression: 'now you must do this, and you *must* do that'; 'you must do the other thing'; and 'you may not do these things'". And so it may be the Word of God, but because of a state in those concerned, it becomes simply legalistic, and therefore it becomes bondage. It is the same Word, it is all the Word of God, but it is the effect that it has upon us, and that depends entirely upon our state.

In his first letter to the Corinthians the apostle had a lot to say at the beginning, which bears very much upon this matter. You remember how in that part which is marked by our chapter 2, he is speaking about 'the wisdom of this world'. Now, he is talking to Christians concerning "*the wisdom of*

*this world*" and the utter inability to understand the things of the Spirit of God by reason of natural wisdom. Yes, you may have all the wisdom of the philosophers, all the wisdom of the great Greek world and empire, and yet you are utterly incapacitated where the things of God are concerned. It is no use! It is no use approaching the things of God, the Word of God, with the most complete intellectual outfit naturally, whether you are born with it, or trained to it. You may bring the fullest, ripest scholarship, the best education, the finest brain to the Word of God, but there is no Life; it does not produce Life; it is all dead. You handle the Word of God in that way, and it does not communicate Life to anybody. It is very wonderful, of course. It may be very interesting, almost fascinating, but afterwards, has it ministered Life? And has it resulted in this transformation into this same image? No!

And I am going further. We may have the most thoroughgoing knowledge of the Bible, so that we are able to analyse every book of the Bible, and have it there in our head clearly, and tell anybody at any moment what is in this book, and that chapter. We may have the whole thing, and yet it may still be in the natural mind, and neither change us nor the people to whom we give it. And worse than that, it may entirely incapacitate us for understanding spiritual things! We may be altogether in another realm from what is real, spiritual understanding. It is necessary to recognize this, that it is not a matter of Bible knowledge, though that is so important. It is not a matter of brain and intellect and scholarship, it is not at all a matter of our attainments in that realm, however valuable such things may be, given the other; but it is a matter of "*God having shined in our hearts to give the knowledge*". It is another kind of knowledge; an altogether different knowledge comes by the in-shining.

Now, I take it that this natural knowledge, this 'natural' wisdom of which the apostle spoke in his first letter corresponds to the tables of stone. After all, tables of stone are cold, dead things! Hearts of flesh are warm, living things! And that is the difference between a 'natural' apprehending, grasping and handling of the Word of God, however great may be the natural ability in that realm, and the Spirit revealing God's Christ in our hearts! They are two different worlds and I am not talking now about the unsaved on the one hand and the saved on the other; I am discriminating between the people of God, as this Word does. Israel was the people of God; but you see, there was this objective attitude to things. They were not 'spiritual' people; spiritual men and women. And, when we say 'not spiritual' we mean they had not got the Holy Spirit indwelling and working. After all, everything was outward. And so they came to the Law as something written on tables of stone, and said: "Now, it says, 'Thou shalt... and thou shalt not.'" And it was all there like that as a cold commandment and there was no corresponding light in their hearts; no Spirit indwelling! And so it was dead; and it killed.

I know how hopeless it is to try and explain this. But take even the commandments written on the tables of stone; how do they affect you?

Now, you can take any one of those commandments, such as, 'Thou shalt not steal'! As a Christian, do you feel bad about that? A terrible rebuke to you, and a terrible warning not to do that in any way whatsoever, and there are ten thousand ways in which you can do it. How do you look at that? What does that say to you? Does it just say, 'Thou shalt not steal', a cold commandment, imposing something upon you? Or has the Spirit of God within you taken up that with all the rest, and said: "Look here, Christ, rather than draw to Himself, even what belonged to Him, to say nothing of what belonged to other people, was simply, but always, thinking rather of how He could *give* rather than get." There is a principle, you see. Stealing embodies a principle. It means that you are drawing to yourself; you are going to have for yourself, willy-nilly, any how, lawfully or unlawfully, to get something, because you want it. It is a spirit, it is a principle. Stealing is unlawful, but when you lift it

into the realm of the spiritual, you see something infinitely more than: "You shall not go out and take something from somebody that does not belong to you" stealing, in that ordinary sense. Behind the commandment there is the nature and the disposition of God.

We need to have every commandment dealt with in this way to see that behind there is the disposition of God, the nature of God. That is mediated to us in Christ by the Holy Spirit, that a Holy Spirit governed life does not want to be 'getting' all the time, even to the point of taking what they have no right to have. But, right round the other way, the really Holy Spirit-governed child of God does not need to come under an awful weight of condemnation when it is said: "Thou shalt not steal," or thou shalt not do any of the other things. The Spirit inside has dealt with that quite thoroughly and changed the disposition and the desire. Something has got to be done inwardly otherwise the 'letter kills', brings death. But the same 'letter' taken up by the Holy Spirit, illuminated, brings Life. The Word comes to life, and makes us live. "*Written*", says the apostle, "*in our hearts*"; "*not on tables of stone*", but "*in our hearts*", in hearts of flesh. Along the one line, there is no glory at all, but along this other line there is glory.

I am compelled to close at this point, but I want you to grasp one more thing.

There is a tremendous difference, indeed, there is all the difference of two worlds, even among Christians, of those who have the Word of God, believe it to be the Word of God, would lay down their lives for it as the 'inspired word of God' and yet, it is just a book of law and commandments, and regulations. On the other hand, there are those to whom this Book has come alive by the Holy Spirit, and they are seeing by the Holy Spirit far more than just the written letter.

If you get into the one realm, you see, you get a dozen, more: a hundred different interpretations of the same passage of Scripture - and you are all at variance. One says it means this, and another says it means that, and that is because it is all approached by the 'natural' mind. The only way to get over that, to come to oneness of mind, oneness of heart, oneness of understanding, and to move livingly with the Lord, is for the Spirit Himself who knows what the meaning is, dwelling in our hearts, to tell us that; not to go beyond the Scripture, but bearing witness in our hearts that this is God's mind about that. And so the Holy Spirit has come to take up the Word of God, and bring it from becoming just a book of commandments, into the realm in which it becomes the Book of Life, where we really *live* by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.

We may be fascinated with its studies and its subjects, and think that is life, but that is not what I am talking about. It may be tremendously interesting but that is not what I mean. Life is something which *changes* us, that is the point. Life is that which transforms us. Now, the test then, of whether we have even the Word of God in a legal realm, or an intellectual realm, or whether we have it in the Spirit, is the transforming effect that it has in our lives: or, to gather it all up again into this word - glory! And if you know what I am trying to talk about, you know how great a thing that is.

Have you really come to know so truly, so really, the Holy Spirit indwelling as a Teacher, as Illuminator, that you have passed out of the merely intellectual realm as far as the Word of God is concerned, into the realm where the Heavens are opened and the Word of God lives for you? That is a dispensational matter. And it makes a very great difference in which realm we live.

I am trying to say to you that the greatest treasure that a Christian can have, is a Holy Spirit-illuminated Word of God. It does not mean that we know everything that is here all at once, for we go on in this realm of vast fulnesses and we shall never exhaust them. But, we are not just studying it as dead matter - it is alive to us! Is it like that with you? Well, you see, it is a matter of whether you

have grasped the significance of the day of Pentecost; the dispensation changed on that day from the one to the other. Are you living in the old tables of stone, objective presentations of divine commandments? Or are you living in this dispensation where, *"God has shined in your heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus"*? Mark you, it is always through the Scriptures, by the Word of God; not something extra but something there. And yet something more than the letter; there is the blessed, powerful witness of the Spirit to the meaning there. You may have that; that is our birthright in this dispensation.

Oh, for more Holy Spirit indwelt and taught children of God who really know what is theirs by right in this dispensation, to have the Holy Spirit within! Not just believing in the truth, the doctrine, the statement that it is so, but being in the good of it, knowing that it is true: "The Holy Spirit is *in* me! And the Holy Spirit is teaching me, and the Holy Spirit is showing me what God means by His Word. I am coming to realise, as the Holy Spirit teaches and instructs and illuminates, that God meant more than ever I realised He meant when He said that, and that." It is a living relationship by the Holy Spirit, and when it is really Life - indeed it is glory!

It is a fact that you can pass from one realm into the other, even as a Christian; pass from that realm where, though you believe in the Lord and have the Lord, and you know you are saved, and yet there is, as it were, a dome over you, a brass dome over your head where the Word of God is concerned, and you fumble and try to find your way about, and you ask, what does it all mean? And then you can have that dome removed or split, and the Spirit then shines right into your spirit and the whole thing becomes illuminated. It is the same Word, but two different dispensations.

Well, I have stated the facts, and know them to be facts. But if you do not know what I am speaking about, well, go and have some dealings with the Lord on this matter. It must be like that, for the ministration of the Spirit is glory in relation to the Word of God.