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"He That is Joined to the Lord is One Spirit"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: John 4:24; 1 Cor. 15:45; Heb. 12:9; Rom. 8:10; 1 John 5:11; 1 Cor. 6:17; Job 32:8.

That is a declaration of very great importance, and carries with it everything that concerns us in our lives as the Lord's people. God is a Spirit, and in the new creation in Christ Jesus all things are ours from God; therefore all things are, in their essential nature, spiritual.

We will begin right at the beginning, because the starting point is that which has to do with

Death and Life.

Death and life are related to the spirit, (we are not now speaking of the Holy Spirit, but the spirit of man). Spiritual death is the separation of the spirit of man from God. When we remember that the Lord Jesus tasted death in the behalf of every man, and poured out His soul unto death, we must be quite clear as to what death was in His case. As to the moment when death actually took place in Christ, it was when the Father forsook Him. Other things followed. Other things perhaps immediately issued, and worked out a little later; but the moment of death for Him was the moment when He used that word "forsaken". "*Why hast thou forsaken me?*" That was when He tasted death. It was when His spirit suffered the full consciousness of separation from the Father. That had its physical effect in a broken heart, and worked out a little later in His physical death. But the physical death was not the full death, neither was it the real death. The real death was spiritual. We may (and unless the Lord comes, we shall) know physical death, but we need not taste death at that moment. Death is essentially a spiritual thing, and a thing which has to do with the human spirit.

The value of the death of the Lord Jesus is found in that very connection between His spirit and the state and position of the spirit of every man of the Adam race. The spirit of every man of the Adam race was separated from God, and is by nature so separated. It is, therefore, in death, although in most cases unconscious of the fact. The death of the Lord Jesus, which was that separation of His spirit in the moment of the forsaking, was His associating Himself with that condition, and suffering all that the full consciousness of that condition means; and so suffering it as a penalty, as a judgement, in a full, an inclusive, a universal way, that no member of Adam's race need awake to the consciousness in fulness of their own condition. If you want to know what hell is, it is waking up! Man's hell already exists in his state, but he is not awake to it. He has only to awake to his condition out of Christ to know what hell is. The Lord Jesus became wholly and utterly conscious in a moment of man's lost state in separation from God, and suffered it, not for Himself, but representatively, in order that no member of the human race need wake up in that realm. The value of Christ's death is found in His voluntary association and identification with the state of every man, in His human spirit in separation from God.

The Nature of Redemption

The first thing about redemption is our recognition of what Christ did for us, and our faith in Him leads us to take a position, and that position is one of faith's identification with Him, not in reality, but in faith. We recognise that He entered into our state, and into all that that state involves, of which we are unconscious; that He dealt with that state, suffering all that that consciousness of it means as expressing the sinfulness behind it, which has caused that state of separation. We see Him going out into that condition - to which we must inevitably awake unless someone does substitute us - and we by faith accept that, take our place with Him, and say: "That position is my position; that state is my state; that judgement is my judgement!" It is no theoretical thing; it is a *real* thing, and the reality will break upon us in eternity unless we fasten our faith upon Him as our Representative. That is where redemption begins. That is the basis of the outworking of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

It is, therefore, *redemption from death*, which is the main factor. He has redeemed us from death. That is something deeper than sin. He has redeemed us from all iniquity, but that which lies in association with iniquity, with sin, is death; and He has redeemed us from death in all its full and terrible meaning.

That is where redemption touches bottom. There is nothing deeper than death. Hell is death. Death and hell always go hand in hand. Hell is not something beyond death. "Die and go to hell!" is a way of putting things, but death and hell are the same thing. Wake up to the meaning of death, and you are in hell. Redemption touches bottom when it touches death.

We are redeemed from death, and, being redeemed from death, at once the whole question of life arises. Being redeemed from death there of necessity comes in the positive side. Being saved from separation, you are joined to the Lord. It is in the very nature of the thing. To be delivered from death, which is separation in spirit from God, means, on the other hand, that you are joined to the Lord, and life is given. "This is the witness, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."

The point that we want to keep before our mind is that it is bound up with the spirit - the *spirit* redeemed from death, and the *spirit* being made alive. That is a very impressive statement in Romans 8:10: "And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is *life*...". It is "zoe", not "zoa". "Zoe" is "life"; "zoa" is "living". It does not say: "The spirit is living"; it says: "the spirit

is Life". Its basis is union with a risen, death-conquering Lord: "If Christ be in you...", "This is the witness, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this Life is in His Son"; "He that hath the Son hath Life." It is union with Christ in our spirit, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit".

This is all necessary foundation work to everything which issues in the life of the child of God.

Of course, we have to recognise that the Holy Spirit is the Agent in all this. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead be in you...". The Agent of all this, so far as we are concerned, as in the case of the Lord Jesus, is the Eternal Spirit.

The Progressiveness of the Life of the Spirit

This is not the Holy Spirit, but our spirit now redeemed. It is a progressive thing. Something has been started by the Spirit of God in redemption. Something has been brought into being: a living spirit in us in union with Christ by the activity, the operation of the Holy Spirit. It starts in a birth, a babyhood, and it has got to grow, "Growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" is in the realm of our spirits. While in Christ we have everything at the beginning, we have to learn to know what we have in Christ, and we know very little about it at the beginning.

It is growth as on this wise: on the one hand it is, by the Holy Spirit, a progressive deepening of our death in Christ; if you like, an increase of death in the realm of what we may call the 'non-spiritual' life, that life which we have before this great thing has taken place in our spirits whereby we have been redeemed from death and from hell, and have awakened (blessed reality for the spirit to awaken before; an awful reality for the spirit to awake after), and become alive unto God.

What a contrast that represents from what it might have been. Alive unto - what? Unto God! Over against that: "Without God and without hope...". Alive unto an eternity without God, and to everything else that that means. But - No! - through Christ's death we are saved from becoming awake to all that, and now we are made awake.

Do you remember what the Lord said about Lazarus? "'Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep'. They said: 'Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well'". But Jesus recognised that they had misunderstood Him, and said: "Lazarus is dead". There you have a figurative thing (you must not take that literally in connection with what we are saying). Lazarus stands as a great illustration of Christ as the Resurrection and the Life, and He is saying: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." The spirit of every son of Adam, is sleeping as to its real condition and it must be an awful thing to disturb that spirit. If the Lord by His Holy Spirit begins to awaken a soul to its spiritual state, it would never do to allow that spirit to realise it all, and to allow as much as He does, sometimes drives that soul into the utmost despair. Is it that something has come which was not there before? Is it that the Lord has laid some sin upon that one which was not there before? No! He is only awakened; he is only convicted of a state; he is only touched into consciousness as to the condition. But it is a blessed thing that the Lord, on the ground of resurrection and life, says: "I go to awake him!" That is a waking not unto judgement, but unto glory; not unto death and unto condemnation, but to life and into liberty.

But we have a life, even while our spirit is in death, separated from God; and it is a life with a vast system, a very complete order. It is not the life of spirit union with the Lord. It is the life we live as natural men and women. It is that life which, while so wonderful in many of its aspects and possibilities, is still out of union with God. It may go a long way; it may be developed to a very great degree; it may do wonderful things; but still it never passes from one kingdom to the other, from

one realm to the other; it never passes from death to life. It is another order of things. When we are brought into the new relationship to the Lord, and the spirit is quickened and made alive unto God, we find that we have an entirely new basis of life. But what is working against the new is the old. There is a new mentality, but the old mentality continually conflicts with the new. We have an old system of things in that realm which constantly conflicts with this new system, and the only way in which the new spirit can grow is for death to work in that old; therefore, for an increase of death; and the increase of death in that realm is an increase of suffering.

The more you go on in fellowship with the Lord - which means, the more you become spiritually sensitive - the more agony you suffer when you act or move in that old natural realm. If you, at a certain point of spiritual advancement, move in the flesh, something of hell rises up, you feel the judgement, you feel that death is no longer a thing to which you are asleep: death is an awful thing. It takes a spiritual person really to understand the terrible nature of death. So that the more spiritual we become, the more we know the terrors of moving in a realm of life from which we have now been brought, which at one time was our very life. If we argue as we used to argue we get into a terrible state of condemnation, lose our peace, our joy, and a complex is set up, and we have entirely lost our position. If we react as once we did to things, we know quite well that we have moved out of one realm into another, and our only thought is how can we get out of this, how can we get back. We have changed our realm altogether.

On the other hand that produces what we may call the travail of spiritual increase. The experience associated with that is very often this, that the Lord leads into a new stage of utter defeat to all our natural powers to understand what is happening, even what He is doing with us. We get into a place where we are less able than ever we were in our experience to understand with our natural intelligence what the Lord is doing. So far as any human capacity, equipment, outfit is concerned, we are more at an end than ever we were, and more utterly incapable than ever we were of following the Lord. We try to work it out, to puzzle it out, we call upon every resource that we have to explain the Lord, and we are at a standstill. Something deeper has taken place than ever we have known before.

That is one side. It is as though we were trying to break through, to escape, to emerge, and within us our spirit is in travail. And then, in the Lord's time, when the exercise has been brought to a certain point, and has done the work, just quietly, not as breaking through in some tremendous act of emancipation, but just quietly we move out of that phase, and it *seems* to pass. Very often we hardly know of its passing; all we know is that we have come to rest. We are not sure that we see any more than we did. We are certainly not seeing all that we wanted to see, but we are conscious that the strain is gone, the intensity is past, the agony is ceased, and we have come out to a place of rest and quietness. As we go on it may become manifest in the realm of spiritual effectiveness, spiritual value, spiritual helpfulness. We have something more of the Lord, some deeper understanding, some fuller knowledge; we have not just got mental and technical knowledge, but we have knowledge in the spirit. There has been an enlargement of the spirit, a strengthening of the spirit, a clarifying of the spirit, an enrichment of the spirit, and we do not know how, but somehow we know the Lord in a deeper, stronger way than we did. And that is resource for life; that is the real abiding value of our lives. We have increased in spirit. The stature of our spirit has grown.

That is the way of spiritual development, spiritual progress. We go on for a time, and perhaps we rejoice that that phase has passed, and then we have another dose, a little more stiff than any before. We have often likened it to the tide of the sea. The tide comes up, and then it goes out; then it comes back and seems to come up a bit higher next time, and out it goes, further than ever it has gone out; then it comes up and seems to be higher still, and you sometimes think that surely this is

the flood, it could never be any higher than this; but next time there is something more. So our spiritual experience is on that wise, and every time it is an enlargement, an increase of spirit, and of spiritual capacity and resource; but it is through travail. It is a working of death; on the one hand against nature, because every time sees nature less capable of coming to our assistance than before. We come to the place where nothing within or without can afford us any assistance, and we are driven to the Lord; and sometimes we have to wait a long time for the Lord even. All that time we are looking round to see if we cannot find some way out; we explore every avenue to get out of this difficulty; and we are learning and increasing.

One feature of this increase is that we are not conscious of the increase when it takes place. The increase comes about so quietly and imperceptibly, that we move into what is a normal state. There is nothing abnormal about our new condition, our new position, our new gain. It is just so spiritual (so to speak), but it is a real increase. If we saw how we were growing; if only we were aware of how we were developing; how dangerous it would be! It would be a direct setback to our true spirituality if we knew how much we were developing. If the Lord let us see that now we were something more than we ever were before it would be a contradiction of the whole thing. It represents a quality (not just a measure), something out from, not only bigger than, nature.

A Different Personality Brought into Being in Relation to the Spirit

What is personality? It is the kind and quality of the human spirit - speaking generally and naturally about it. A new personality and a different personality is brought in in relation to the quickened, renewed spirit of man. A new quality is there. There is an energy, a strength, a feeling which belongs to the spirit. It differs altogether from natural energy, natural strength, natural feeling. It is energy by the spirit, strength in the spirit. It is that which constitutes this new personality.

We begin to know spiritual things, not because we study them, not because we read about them, not because we hear addresses on them, but because our spirit is joined to the Lord, and we are being taught in our spirit to know. That kind of knowledge is tremendously valuable.

Spiritual knowledge is a kind of knowledge which gives quality to the person concerned. It was that kind of knowledge which marked the Lord Jesus: "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" Where did the Lord Jesus get His education? He spoke as one having authority, and not as the scribes, who were the educated people. It was not that the Lord Jesus, after His day's work, got away with His books and studied the Old Testament, and studied nature and all those things. His spirit was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, taught and instructed. He, in His spirit, had spiritual knowledge. (It was His human spirit. We must remember that Christ was true Humanity; He was man; there was no mock man about Him. He had a human spirit, and His human spirit was instructed by the Holy Spirit).

Of what value is spiritual knowledge? It is not that the Holy Spirit dictates things to us. It is that the Holy Spirit puts us through experiences by which we become aware of spiritual things. We are taught in our spirit, and it is that kind of knowledge which counts. Two men may get up and speak. One may give the riches of a well-informed mind, of a wide reading, of a close study, of a very faithful application in research. It may be tremendously informative, tremendously interesting. It may even be tremendously important as human knowledge. Another one will get up and, not having ignored study and hard work perhaps, speaks, not from books, not from accumulated matter, but from the heart. You are able to discern the difference. Your verdict is that the one informed the mind; the other helped the life. One was speaking from a human resource; the other was speaking from an inward knowledge of the Lord. The difference of the effect and the value is recognised.

We are saying all this to show what the true value of the Christian life is, and the nature of it; what the real nature of ministry is. We are only going to be of real value (and when we say "real", we mean abiding, eternal value, value beyond time and beyond this world) insofar as we are spiritual. It will be just the measure of our spirituality which will be the measure of our abiding value. That spirituality is a spiritual energy and a spiritual strength. There is such a difference between natural strength and spiritual strength; between the force of our natural will, and that inward strength of the spirit. One is hard, cold, barren, and it can bring a blight upon everything. Spiritual strength is quite a different thing. It is steady, it stands, it is unwavering, and yet about it there is a beauty, a softness. It does not lose its sweetness, its strength, and it is tremendously helpful to find real strength of spirit. Very often strength of spirit goes side by side with a great conscious sense of dependence. Natural strength does not carry any of that with it, but real inward, spiritual strength is very often there when the person themselves seems to be anything but strong. You do not recognise a grim determination; all you know is that within they are at rest, they are settled, they are unwavering; and yet all the time conscious of their need of the Lord to uphold them. It is a quality. It is this which constitutes this new personality.

The Lord's Prospects Dependent Upon a Spiritual State

The Lord has no prospects with us only insofar as we are spiritual. He can do nothing, only on the basis of our aliveness to Him - the fact that we have been definitely cut off from nature and brought into a place where now all things are out from God. That is the only ground upon which the Lord has any chance, but all His prospects are in that realm. So that life is a spiritual thing, because we are spiritual beings in the truest sense, in the deepest reality of our being; that is, life is entirely composed of living on the Lord and getting all from the Lord.

Work is Spiritual

We talk about spiritual work. It is not that it does not mean that it has any expression through men and in things. But it is more than that. It is spiritual in its nature; that is, that spiritual things are being accomplished by spiritual means through spiritual people; and then the thing stands for ever. The opposite of that, of course, is that you are doing things, getting things done and established and set up. But they are the works of men; they are with natural resources; they are on the earth. The men go; times change; the things go; and there is nothing left. But that which is done in this living union with God is a spiritual thing, and it abides.

Training is Spiritual

All the Lord's dealings with us are unto spiritual growth, spiritual increase, and in the Lord's hands all training is spiritual. There may be values in institutes, in colleges, and so on, but they can simply be temporary things, the value of which is not permanent, not eternal, only on this earth. The Lord, when He takes us in hand, trains us for spiritual efficiency, and that is the real value. Recognise that the Lord's dealings with you are to make you spiritually efficient, and that is the only efficiency which counts. You may study. Do not fail to work, and give the Holy Spirit material upon which to act, but remember that the main thing is your spiritual experience, your walk with God, your knowledge of the Lord; and one of the most vital things in all your career is your trial, your difficulty, your times of intense suffering in the Lord's dealings with you. Probably the Lord's holding of you back, and keeping you out of work, and tying you up is the most valuable thing in all your history, if only you knew it. The fact that the Lord is not realising your vision for the time being, but is putting you through an intensely difficult time in inaction is all of tremendous importance, of the greatest value.

I do not know how Moses would have fared but for those forty years. He owed a lot to those forty years under the providence of God. It is those experiences which count, those times of difficulty under the hand of the Lord, which mean so much. You will be grateful for it all later, but for the time being it is exceedingly trying. You are just longing to be of greater use, craving to be out at things; you are perhaps in danger of regarding your present experience as something without value, and you are chafing against it instead of recognising that it means something. The Lord is trying to put something into you, to enlarge you, to increase you, to enrich you by this very desert, this very wilderness. The Lord is trying to put into you spiritual values, so that when His hour comes you will count for something in Him. Do not throw away the time that seems to be without meaning. Do not take the attitude that: I shall be so glad when this phase is past! Do not try to hurry past it by being restive, and perhaps murmuring against the Lord. It is the time of the increase of real spiritual value, if you knew it.

What is it doing *in your spirit*? That is where you are to look. Do not look on the outside, and say: "I am doing nothing; my life is passing and being wasted!" Do not allow the colourings of the enemy to be given you, that the Lord has done with you and you are mistaken in your course. Ask the question: What is this doing to my spirit? What can this do to my spirit? It is a test, a trial; it is an adversity, a suffering; but what can it do for my spirit? If we look at things like that it will help us, and we shall come out enriched. *Spiritual increase is the most important thing for life and for service.*

As the Father of our spirits, and our being "joined to the Lord one spirit", the one thing upon which the Lord is concentrating is spiritual increase, spiritual growth, spiritual development; and upon that our value to Him and to others in life and in service depends. We shall never be of more value than our spiritual measure, however much we may know or do on another basis, in another realm. The real value from God's standpoint is the measure of our spirit in fellowship with Him, which, of course, is saying in other words: That is the measure of Christ in us.