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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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Stripping Off Principalities and Powers

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"All nations compassed me about: in the name of the Lord I will cut them off. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: in the name of the Lord I will cut them off. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: in the name of the Lord I will cut them off" (Psa. 118:10-12).

"Having despoiled the principalities and the powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). Triumphing over them in it - that is, the Cross.

It seems that from the verses we have just read in Psalm 118 to this verse in Colossians, there is a transition which requires Eph. 6:12 - "the principalities, the powers, the world-rulers of this darkness, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies".

There is no doubt that Psalm 118 is prophetic and Messianic. There is so much in it that is distinctly expressive of our Lord's conflict on the cross. "Thou didst thrust sore at me that I might fall... I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." That is clearly taken up in the case of the Lord Jesus and His cross, therefore this tenth verse and what immediately follows must have the same association. What is here, all nations compassing about like bees, transferred to Him in His cross is transferred to the principalities and the powers and the world rulers of this darkness. It is the spiritual hosts of wickedness which encompassed Him, besieged Him, pressed upon Him, sought to overwhelm Him in His cross, but which He cut off or stripped off from Himself and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His cross.

While the Lord's work in His cross was unique and conclusive as to the ultimate issue, you hardly need to be told that something akin to this experience is common to all those who are in close association with Him. It is not an unheard of thing to experience something of this compassing about of evil and deadly forces with intent to press under and completely neutralize. You know something about that, some more, some less; as you go on with the Lord you will know more.

The Need to be Alive to the Meaning of Things

But that being a common experience, we are not always alive to the meaning of things. In the case of the Lord Jesus on the cross, there is no doubt that with Him it was a naked spiritual experience, and yet it may have become extremely acute because of a number of circumstances; that is, the circumstances in which He found Himself may have given real effectiveness to this whole thing. It was not altogether a kind of abstract spiritual experience. We have our mental pictures of things, and I wonder what your mental pictures are of Christ's temptations during the forty days in the wilderness. Have you visualised that about some picture of the devil actually, literally and visibly coming to Him? The whole thing may have been just an inner experience; we make it objective, and the point of it was circumstances. We are not always alive to the significance of the effect of things, that the forces of evil come along all sorts of lines, and we too often look at the means or the methods which they employ, and go down under those, rather than looking through the things which they are using and seeing exactly what the point, the object, is.

After all, it is through our souls, and if it were not for our souls, the whole thing would not happen, would have no meaning, no significance at all. It could not happen but for our souls. Something happens that touches our souls, and that is only saying that touches our ego, touches our self-life, and then we take the thing itself and fail to see that behind the thing is something other. Something may be said. It might be a criticism, it might be a rebuke, something might be done. It is very unfortunate that that was done, or that it was done in that way. Something might be forgotten, overlooked, and it just stings us. These things have an effect upon us and we go down under the thing at once.

We take that rebuke, that correction, or that unfortunate thing that is done, or that overlooking, or whatever it may be, any one of ten thousand things which happen in our course, and we go down. And before long we find that that silly little thing really - for that is all it is in itself - has simply brought us into a terrible state. We have lost our touch with the Lord, we have lost our life, our fellowship, our joy. We become wrapped round as with a blanket, shut up in ourselves, simply paralysed in our spiritual life, and we go through a bad patch which lasts for a shorter or longer time, and in the end, what has to happen? If it goes on long enough, we say, "We are out of touch with the Lord, something has happened, we have lost our joy in the Lord, our testimony, we have become blanketed, wrapped around." These are the simple forms.

The thing becomes much more accentuated in other realms where it is like bees compassing about, one thing after another. It seems as though the enemy is bent on getting us down, if he cannot with one thing, he will bring another and another till he has a storm at us trying to push us under.

My point is this, that we need to ask the Lord to keep us alive to what lies behind these things. That is the first thing, to make us alive to the fact that this thing can do me spiritual damage. Therefore it is for me to get over this quickly, it is for me to refuse to take this on as something in itself. I see the

devil is after something in my life, he is after my testimony, he is after my joy, he is after my prayer life, he is after my communion with the Lord.

The Priestly Work of Cutting Off Principalities and Powers

And then how much we need this Spirit of the Lord to strip them off, put them off and cast them off. How much we would be saved if we were more alive in that way! After all, that is exactly what is meant by priestly work, the work of Levites. We are Levites now in the house of God, and what was all the work of the Levites about? If you got near that tabernacle and that temple and saw the Levites, you would find them busy all the time, always engaged in something, keeping the way clear to God. It is dealing with things on the right and on the left, so to speak, which represent obstacles in the way of perfect, clear fellowship with God. The whole business is to be girded to keep the way open to God, and that is priestly work. Oh, to be girded and to be more alive to the meaning of this suffocating, blanketing, smothering, encompassing, besieging work which is to put us out of action, and to ask the Lord to make us of this spirit of the true Levite, that we are not going to let anything get in the way or stay in the way. "I will cut them off."

Do you not have experiences when you say, "I must get down before the Lord and have a good time of prayer"? You get to the point where you must get your soul free out of this prison, out of this net. The enemy often tries to get us to the place where we cannot breathe or move. We must be alive to it and seek energizing by the Holy Spirit for this stripping off, saying, "I am not going to have any more of this." There must be the uprising within us of a holy intolerance and saying, "This is not going on any longer, it has gone on too long, I am going to kick back at this sort of thing." It is the spirit of His Son when, inundated on the cross, He said, "I will strip them off. All nations compassed Me about... they compassed Me about like bees... I will cut them off... I will cut them off... I will cut them off..." - three times: "I will cut them off." He stripped off principalities and powers.

Oh, Lord, strengthen us to resistance! We lie down too much. The Lord loses too much and we lose too much because we let things go on too long before we get up and say, "Enough of this!" We put up with things for so long and then we say, "I am not going to put up with this any longer!" And then something happens and there is an explosion. Whatever may be right or wrong about that where people are concerned, it is always right where the enemy is concerned to have a downright explosion, to strip off.

Let us ask the Lord that He will make us like this, that we shall be moved by a mighty resistance and intolerance against the enemy doing this suffocating work and bringing into bondage, bringing under.

Then let us always seek to be watchful, not to take account of the things that people say or do or do not do that upset us, but rather to see the effect that the enemy would bring about by these things. We have the secret of victory. If only we say, "Yes, that was unfortunate, that was wrong, there is no justifying of that so far as people are concerned, but I am not going to let the devil get hold of that and bring me under arrest and get in between me and the Lord." That is true Levitical work.

The Lord put into us this "I will strip them off". Do be alive at all times, especially in prayer gatherings. How often we feel just smothered, no getting through, just blanketed, and the peril is to sit down under it and accept it. We must say, "We are not going to have this; God is accessible, He is open to us, He has commanded us to pray; the enemy is against the values that he discerns are

wrapped up with this." It may be in a meeting; how often we have known, in giving a message, a blanketing for a time until an inner heart cry to the Lord, and then a breaking out by a resistance, not accepting it.

Be careful what you accept. The enemy is always offering you something - do not take it. Say, "No, why should I? Is this in the Lord's interests?" So when we meet for prayer, stand up, resist, do not take on. Let us ask the Lord more and more to put in us the spirit that was in Him on the cross, while weak and emaciated, in such conditions as we shall never know, nevertheless inwardly, submitting to the Father's will, not having the devil's will for a moment. "I will strip them off", and He stripped off principalities and powers. The Lord strengthen us!