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The Promise of the Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Luke 11:5-13.

Gal. 3:13-14: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree: that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

The word "that" stands between two things, what we might call the negative and the positive. "That" links the great work of the Lord Jesus in His Cross directly with the receiving of the promise of the Spirit. What is here stated very clearly and definitely and precisely, is that all that the Lord Jesus did in His Cross was in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit; the putting out of the way of everything that comes under the curse of God, in order that the greatest blessing of God might come: the putting away of a curse, in order to make room for a blessing.

It is not our thought to dwell upon the negative side, that is, the necessity for putting away all the ground of the curse; but rather to dwell upon the positive side: "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith".

Definiteness of Attitude Toward the Promise

There is one thing about the New Testament teaching on the Holy Spirit which should impress us. It is that the receiving of the Holy Spirit is regarded as something almost as a matter of course. It is

assumed, taken for granted, that the receiving of the Holy Spirit is the thing which has been God's purpose, and God's will, and is therefore the thing which is to become the common experience and enjoyment of all the Lord's people. You notice how natural is the way in which it is put here: "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit".

All through the ages that promise had been made. You will find numerous passages in the Old Testament which relate to this promise. It was something looked on to, always something fixed, determined by God, a day, an advent in the Divine plan, a promised day with a promised gift. All through the Old Testament there was a looking on toward that day, and the prophets especially dealt with that day.

Joel has much to say about that day; Isaiah has not a little to say about this promise; Ezekiel speaks of it. The day came, and when you come to the day, it is as though a long-looked-for morn has broken, and the narrative simply reads like this: "Now when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all together in one place". And suddenly... it was all fixed, determined, arranged by the Father. It was necessary that a certain thing should be done, that the promise might be fulfilled. That certain thing is here with regard to Christ: "...redeemed us from the curse, being made a curse for us", that is, the putting away of all the ground of the curse. When that had been done in the Cross, then the way was clear. The promise is in fulfilment, therefore it can be taken for granted that we may enter into the fulfilment of the promise, and receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Deliberateness even in Relation to God's Promise

Thus we find that the New Testament teaching is very clear, very simple, very definite, and it takes the whole thing for granted. Some surprise would be felt if there were a profession of Christ without the accompaniment of the evidences of the Holy Spirit having been received, as in the case of those Ephesian disciples to whom the apostle Paul went. While they professed to be disciples of Christ, there were lacking the evidences of the Holy Spirit, and Paul simply said to them: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Some surprise is in his question, for he finds a perplexing state.

To be true children of God should mean that the Holy Spirit is there, but here is a profession of Christ and the evidences of the Holy Spirit's presence lacking. This is not normal, this is something strange, there is something wrong. And then, of course, he discovered by his question that it was an abnormal state, and they said that they had not so much as heard that the Holy Spirit is. Paul's further question is still full of surprise: "Unto what then were you baptized?" As much as to say: "If you had been baptized with a right understanding of the meaning of baptism, your union with Christ in His death, by which the ground of the curse is put away and the way open for the blessing, this ought to have followed". Then he discovers another fault, that they had not understood baptism into Christ at all, and they said: "Unto John's baptism". Well, that is one thing; to be baptized into Christ is quite another thing. So it is taken for granted that believers ought to know the meaning of the indwelling Holy Spirit. That is their birthright.

The Nature of the Holy Spirit's Presence

If that is true, it surely gives us good ground for approach, a good ground upon which to come to the Lord in absolute confidence and assurance. But it leads us to this, that there is also quite a definiteness associated with the matter. It is regarded as the normal course that a child of God

should know the indwelling Spirit. It is also seen to be something which is quite definite, the knowing that the Holy Spirit has come and taken up residence.

Wherever you find in the New Testament a touching on the Holy Spirit, you will find definiteness associated with the matter. In this passage in Luke 11 we see that all that precedes the reference to the Holy Spirit is in the nature of definiteness of recognition of this thing. The man visiting his friend at midnight, with importunity prevailing to receive what he is asking. Then the case of the parent. A child asks for bread, for fish, for an egg; the parent's intelligence, governed by love, gives what is asked, and not something else, and certainly not a detrimental thing. That is the wisdom, and the love, that when a good thing is asked, a detrimental thing is not given. The love and intelligence of the father is brought into view, in the good gift. You see it is a question of asking. The man had importunity, and there is no mistaking his asking. He knocks! There is no voice! He knocks again! There is no answer! He knocks! And then from inside a muffled murmur! He knocks again, until the man is wide awake, and then he tells the man what he wants and refuses to take no for an answer. Because of his importunity he gets, because he says: I have made up my mind that this is a need, an absolute need, I cannot do without it; I must have it; therefore I am not going to take no for an answer. And so he sticks to his position until he gets what he wants. That is his definiteness of approach.

It is the definiteness of approach which is carried over: asking, knocking, seeking. What is the good thing which transcends loaves, fishes, eggs? "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit?" Good gifts? Yes, but here is the supreme gift. "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" There is a definiteness associated with this matter; that is, the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

The Meaning of the Holy Spirit's Presence

Why is such definiteness required? Why is it that, while it is the Father's promise, while it is the will of God through the ages, while it is God's appointed thing, must there be such definiteness about it? Why can it not be simply automatic? The answer, or a part of the answer to that question, is that we have to be brought to recognise how *tremendously* important this is. We have to come to the place where we recognise what the Holy Spirit is meant for, and that means that we have to recognise that nothing at all is possible without the Holy Spirit. Not the very first thing in the life of a child of God is possible without the Holy Spirit. From the first breath to the last, from the first movement to the last, through everything in the believer's life, both as to nature, character, Christ-likeness, and as to service, works, ministry, if it is truly spiritual and of God, it must be utterly by the Holy Spirit and not one fragment of it is possible otherwise.

The natural man lies under a curse, and that which lies under the curse can never do God's work, can never be conformed to the image of God's Son, can never in any way be used or blessed by God. The natural man, therefore, has to be put away in the Cross of the Lord Jesus; he must be born of the Spirit, and that is the first movement. Everything from that point is of the Spirit. We must come to the place where we recognise that the Holy Spirit is not just some extra blessing that comes into the Christian life. He is an indispensable foundation of the Christian.

The Holy Spirit is not some thing to be got late in the spiritual life, when you reach a certain point and get a new "blessing". The Holy Spirit is everything from start to finish of the spiritual life. That

does not mean that we cannot enter more and more fully into the life of the Spirit; that does not mean that we cannot enter into fulnesses of the Spirit from time to time in advance of all that we have known. From time to time we have to come to the place where we recognise anew that, for the fuller revelation that has come to us of God's will, God's pattern for our lives, we need a fulness of the Spirit that we have never known. It is true that we have increased from the beginning, but what is in Christ for us at the beginning in fulness has to be appropriated from time to time as we come to the place where we recognise the need. The Holy Spirit is given. When He is given, He in Himself is complete, but you and I know quite well that it is only as we go on in experience that we come to know how much we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit, and how much more we need the Holy Spirit; and then we may by faith know a fulness of the Spirit we have never known before.

The Basis of the Holy Spirit's Presence

It is absolutely necessary that there shall be complete obedience to all the known will of God at the time that we seek Him for that enlargement, that increase. If we become conscious of a greater need, if we seek the Lord for enlarged fulness, if it comes to us that there is something more than we have ever known of the Spirit's fulness for us, and we begin to reach out, it will be necessary for us to be turned by the Lord to consider the question as to whether we are at present obedient to the will of God, as we know it now. That will mean different things for different people. But it is a law which will hold good at every stage. The Lord has made known His will for us; it may be for our salvation, it may be in connection with some special thing in our lives; it may be that the Lord has given us the knowledge of His own mind and desire for our lives or for some particular things in our lives. It will only be possible for Him to enlarge our experience and enjoyment of the Holy Spirit's indwelling fulness as we come abreast of the known will of God in obedience. It is a very simple thing, but it is quite true, and we may take it as settled that there never will be an increase if there is some disobedience at any one point in our lives. We have to begin there.

Following that, there has to be an absolute abandonment to the purpose for which the Holy Spirit is given. God does not just give us the Holy Spirit for our enrichment, for our enjoyment, for our gratification. God never gives the Holy Spirit just to satisfy us, for us to use. If He is the Spirit of Power, God does not give us the Holy Spirit just because we want power in order to have power. If He is the Spirit of Life, God does not give us the Spirit as the Spirit of Life just that we might have Life as such. God has an object, toward which the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Power, as the Spirit of Life, or as the Spirit of Light, is moving.

The Holy Spirit has certain objectives in view related to God's eternal purpose in Christ; and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Power for *that* object, or those objects, the Spirit of Life for those objects, the Spirit of Light for those objects. The Holy Spirit has come in relation to a Divine plan. The only way in which the Holy Spirit can have a full way and large place with us is that we are utterly abandoned to the purpose for which the Holy Spirit is given. Get into line with God's purpose for our lives in Christ in this direction, or that direction, or in another direction, for this object or that object, or another object. Whatever may be our specific calling and vocation and place and business, in relation to God's purpose concerning His Son, when we are adjusted to that, and utterly abandoned to that, and are not holding back or rebellious, then the way is clear.

We may take it as settled that if we want our own way in any one thing, or, to put it the other way, if we do not want God's way in some direction for our lives - God would send us here, and we do not want to go, and we are holding back or God would keep us in this place and we do not want to stay,

we want to go somewhere else - God would say: 'This is the line along which I have called you'; and we do not like that way, we want someone else's line - anything like that immediately renders it impossible for us to know the liberty and life and the fulness of the Spirit. It is when we come into full adjustment and absolute abandonment to God's desire and thought and purpose and plan that the way is open. The Holy Spirit is given for certain objectives in our lives, and in line with those we may lay claim to the promise.

There must be willingness for identification with Christ in the consequences of a Spirit-filled and a Spirit-governed life. A very great many people have the idea that if only you can know the fulness of the Holy Spirit, know what it is to be filled with the Spirit, have a Spirit-filled and governed life, it is going to be simply wonderful, that it is going to be the end of all your troubles. But there are no other things which get you into trouble more quickly and more fully than a Spirit-filled and a Spirit-dominated life. There is nothing which provokes hell more than that, and there is nothing which comes into spiritual collision with the world more than that.

You will soon discover that the spirit that works in the children of disobedience is altogether out of harmony with the Spirit that works in the children of obedience. You will soon discover that the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of satan have nothing in common, and the more filled with the Spirit we are, the more we shall come into that realm of antagonism with the enemy and with the world. And so much the more sensitive shall we be to our own flesh. It is a costly thing.

When Jesus came up from the Jordan, the Spirit having descended upon Him, He went into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil for forty days and forty nights. And when He came through that He went in the power of the Spirit to Nazareth, and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city stood to cast Him over. It was because the Spirit of the Lord God was upon Him that there was this unceasing clash. Let us make up our minds that a Spirit-filled life is going to have consequences, and we have got to be willing for complete identification with Christ in the consequences of a Spirit-filled and Spirit-governed life.

The knowledge of the Spirit's indwelling, and the experience of the life of the Spirit, will compensate for very much, and will mean victory over everything, but it is going to be a big "everything". We shall very often find ourselves in trouble. There will need to be a complete willingness to be one with Christ in the result of being absolutely under the government of the Holy Spirit. That means far more than perhaps we realise.

The more Holy Spirit governed and dominated we are, the more we shall find it impossible to do Christian work according to man's judgement, man's desires, man's ideas, man's methods, man's means; so much the more shall we find ourselves cut off from the usual order of man's doing the work of the Lord. That means misunderstanding; that means that only those who are going the same way and are having the same experience of the Holy Spirit will be able to go with us; all others will not understand, and will not follow on. It is a costly thing, therefore, to go right on with the Lord and have something which is not of man, but which is wholly of God.

There will have to be willingness for that, and there may be many battles over that: but it is the way unto a knowledge of God by His Spirit in Life and in Power, in fruitfulness and in effectiveness, which is not small, but which is great and wonderful.

Let us seek to gather up these things. The *promise* of the Spirit. The *definiteness of attitude* toward the promise; for every promise has to be appropriated by faith, and this, the greatest of all the promises, is not an exception. Definiteness and deliberateness in relation even to a thing which God has purposed. The *nature* of the Holy Spirit's presence, the meaning and the basis.

Let us seek the Lord yet once again with renewed definiteness and earnestness, that we shall not fail to receive, to enjoy, to live in the highest good of all: "how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him". But now we know how we must ask, why we must ask, and be willing for the consequences of our asking.