

T. Austin-Sparks:

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he afterward hungered. And the tempter came and said unto him, If thou art the Son of God... Again, the devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. 3:16-4:3,8-10).

"And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (Matt. 6:13).

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God these are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

"And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance... Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2:2-4,36).

In the first of these passages we see the link between the Holy Spirit and sonship: the Spirit is seen lighting upon the Lord Jesus and a voice out of the heavens is heard saying, "This is My beloved Son". That truth is taken up again in the passage in the letter to the Romans, chapter 8:14: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God". In the second passage, Matthew 4, the Son, under the government of the Spirit, is led into the wilderness, and the issue of that particular leading of the Spirit was a mighty victory for the rights of God. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him for a season." That is the end of that battle and it is victory in the hands of the Son under the government of the Spirit.

What I feel the Lord wants us to recognize at this time is what a life or church that is led and governed by the Holy Spirit does, what it means to be led and governed by the Holy Spirit so far as we personally and collectively are concerned: in other words, what are the marks of sonship. You see, beloved, we have to begin here, that sonship is proved by our being led by the Spirit. How do we know that we are sons, what is it that evidences sonship, in what way does sonship manifest itself and work itself out? The clear precise statement of the Word of God is by being "led of the Spirit". It was so in the case of the Lord Jesus. The marks of His Sonship were in His being led of the Spirit. The statement moreover is quite positive in Romans 8:14. How tremendously important it is, therefore, that we both have the Spirit and are governed by the Spirit. That is fundamental to everything. I venture to say that, if that which I feel the Lord wants to bring to us could be truly got over to us now, it would be a matter of tremendous value to every one of us. Let me repeat: the basis, the foundation of everything, so far as our relationship with God and God's purpose is concerned, is the presence and government of the Holy Spirit, and that government, of course, means and presupposes the absolute Lordship of the Holy Spirit; because the Holy Spirit does not come save on the ground of the death, the burial and the resurrection. It was when Jesus was baptized and came up out of the water that the Holy Spirit came upon Him, and baptism, as we all well know, sets forth in testimony the fact that, so far as any other government is concerned, be it the government of Satan, or that of the world, or be it the government of the self-life, that government is broken and we are out of it; and our resurrection, typified in our coming up out of the baptism, means that we are alive and alive unto God only. Thus the ground is provided for the Spirit to come in as Lord, and so become the basis of everything in our relationship with God and God's purpose. The thing that I feel we want to recognize is what that really means.

A Principle of Spiritual Guidance

There are a great many questions which arise, questions we are often asked. They sometimes seem to be theoretical questions, technical questions about the Christian life. Now, we may seek to help one another by giving what we might call a technical answer, an answer, for example, from the Scriptures on some passage or some interpretation. But I am always doubtful as to the real helpfulness of that kind of answer. I think, beloved, there is an answer which goes deeper and which is much more satisfactory.

I have recently been asked a question, and I will answer this question publicly so that what help there may be in the answer will be afforded others. The question turned upon the difficulty over the difference between soul and spirit, and the place which the soul is going to have in the future life. Is it going to have any place at all or is it going to cease? Now you know I might answer a question like that with passages of Scripture, but I do not think that would be the most helpful way, because it would probably only raise more questions. But I am going to answer it in this way, because, although we are not dealing now with the matter of soul and spirit, I am seeking to get at a principle of guidance, a principle of spiritual guidance, the law of sonship.

I would ask you, What is your experience as a child of God in the matter of soul and spirit? Perhaps those words are too technical. Let me put it more simply. What is your experience with regard to that side of your life which is directly in touch with the Lord, in the measure in which you have a conscious life in the Lord (I think every child of God ought to have some little measure of a conscious life with the Lord), and that other side of your life which you know to be yourself, not the Lord, but yourself, your natural life; your spiritual life on the one side and your natural life on the other. Now when, as a child of God, you take just a little excursion into that region which is your natural life, what is the result? It may happen through a slip, a momentary breakdown, an indulgence - "overtaken in a fault" is how the Apostle expresses it - anything which means that, just at that moment, you drop down into the natural life, or the natural life rises up and gets the advantage for the moment, asserts itself and becomes the dominating thing. What is the effect of that upon you? If you are a true child of God and are really seeking to live with the Lord, you have a terribly bad time, and it is not just a matter of your conscience in the same way as any man might have a twinge of conscience. You know that there are other factors in this, that of the Lord being grieved, of something between yourself and the Lord having been damaged. It is something much more than just conscience. You have a bad time and you react, you rebound, you are stung by that, and you make haste to get back on to the other side. You seek to recover your spiritual ground as soon as you can with considerable regret and remorse and repentance. What has happened? Well, you have come out of your spirit in its union with God into your soul. You have learned a lesson. You take account of this thing and you say, "How was it that I slipped up there? Why was it, what accounts for that? I will prayerfully watch that in the future. I know now what that means." Now, it does not follow that you never do slip in the same way again, but as you go on you do spiritually grow out of that particular thing, and what is happening is that in spirit you are taking the mastery of your soul. You are not annihilating your soul, but you are bringing it under government and making it your servant; for mark, that frequently the occasion of stumbling is only the evil form of an expression which is necessary. Take anger, for example. You became angry; but you became angry in your nature, your natural life, and it was because there was a self-interest or some self-element in your anger that you had such a bad time. Anger is not evil. "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psa. 7:11). "Be ye angry and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). Anger is not evil. You are not therefore going to annihilate your soul and make anger non-existent. I instance anger, but you can take any other feature that you like in the same way and you will find that the soul itself is not essentially evil. The evil lies in the evil principle that has got hold of it.

What are you going to do then? In spirit you are going to destroy the evil principle and get the mastery of your soul, so that anger is going to serve you. Love may have personal elements in it; but you are not going to annihilate love because you find love trips you up sometimes on a personal line and leads you astray. You are going to destroy the evil principle by the power of the death of Christ and master your soul and bring it under, so that by your spirit you use love, you govern the matter of love. Now then, the point that I am after is not so much the difference between the soul and spirit, but rather something related to the Holy Spirit Himself.

The Holy Spirit an Earnest

The Holy Spirit is a basic necessity, but mark that the Word puts it in this way, "...hath given us the Spirit as an earnest of our inheritance" (Eph 1:14). What does that mean? Well, if the Holy Spirit is the energy, the power, the intelligence, by whom we are doing this very thing of which I have been speaking, He is pointing on to something. What is it that He is pointing on to as an earnest of something that is to be? Why, He is pointing on to a time when you and I will, in spirit, have our souls utterly and perfectly under our government; not annihilated but perfectly under our government, and I do not believe that in the resurrection life, the life hereafter, we are just going to be naked spirits. We shall be men, we shall have souls, but without the evil principle and without the soul being in the place of mastery. Through the organ of the spirit we shall govern all the rest of our being and enjoy a perfectly adjusted manhood. Manhood is not a temporary thing. It is an idea of God which is to go on.

Well now, you see the principle. But the question is answered when you get the law. All questions are answered. The question is this in general: What does the Holy Spirit do in us? How does the Holy Spirit lead us? What does it mean to us in a practical way day by day to be led of the Spirit? Oh, do not just narrow that

down to the question of, Lord, shall I go here or there, shall I do this or that? That is only a mere fragment of being led of the Spirit. Without any such questions arising, the Spirit is in us to lead us, and to lead us to moral issues in the way I have just been speaking; that is, to show us the way and to say to us, No, that is not the way, this is the way; and we know, not by His pointing it out but by His effective working in us. Our reactions, as true children of God, are the work of the Spirit. That jumping back from the ground that we have touched to our hurt, that is the energy of the Spirit in us leading us, and it is a terrible thing for any child of God ever to come to the place where he can indulge without a reaction. The enemy would like us, because of our failures, to say, Oh, well, it is no good, we give it up! If you and I have a bad time when we touch the natural realm, that is a glorious evidence of sonship. Do not try to rule out all your bad times and make light of them, but beware that the enemy does not turn them to such effect as to make you introspective and morbid. But remember the Spirit will keep alive in you a very active sense of what is, and what is not, in accord with the mind of God. These are the sons of God who are thus led by the Spirit of God.

You see how we answer all our questions. I answer all my technical questions by looking to see what it means to me that the Holy Spirit is in me. What is the Spirit pointing to? What is the significance of today's touch of the Spirit upon my spirit? That is an earnest of something. If that is followed out, followed through, it will grow and develop and it will lead me somewhere. That is going to answer all my questions if I have got that principle. Have I been too difficult for you? Oh, listen to the Spirit, come under the government of the Spirit, and then, when the Spirit checks you, urges you, moves in you, gives you a bad time or gives you joy in your heart, note what that means, what it is leading to. Oh, there is something bound up with that, there is something at the end of that. I interpret everything in life by that touch of the Spirit and that answers all my questions. If the Spirit touches my mortal body today with His living finger and quickens it, I do not at once conclude that I have become immortal, that death for ever has gone and incorruption has settled down in my mortal frame. But I can say, "My resurrection body will be like that in fulness. It will simply be the consummation of that touch I have known today. I have a wonderful accession of life today, but the time is coming when that very thing will have been developed to its fullest extent and it will be nothing but Divine life. I have the Spirit as an earnest". I am trying to illustrate this thing. The Spirit touching us in any way, dealing with us in any way as sons of God, is pointing on to what it will be when sonship is manifested (the day of the manifestation of the sons) and the creation is delivered from the bondage of corruption.

Now all that is detail. You can drop the detail and get back to the foundation. What is it? The Holy Spirit is basic to everything. We will never get anywhere without the Holy Spirit; we will never know anything without the Holy Spirit; we shall never teach anything in the purpose of God without the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit has to be a conscious life with us; growingly so, as in the case of a baby. The baby has very little self-conscious life to begin with. As a baby, most things are done for it. But it is not long before the very first and remote signs of conscious life are there. Whereas up to a point there seems to be no consciousness of anything in particular, suddenly you will see a baby get its eyes fixed upon something, suddenly it sees something. From that time, the baby is taking account of something. It does not understand, but is aware of some object and it cannot take its eyes from it. It comes back to it, and as the days go by seems to look for it. Self-conscious life has started, and from that time onward that grows. In the spiritual life it is just like that. At the beginnings, most things are done for us as from the outside, although there is a remote sense of a new self-conscious spiritual life. But, as we grow, the Spirit's presence in us has to become a more and more conscious life of government; and these who are led by the Spirit of God are sons. That is the foundation. It is the foundation of growth, it is the foundation of understanding, it is the foundation of God's purpose, it is the foundation of all that is wrapped up in our relationship with God.

Forgive me for being so elementary, but if we can only get this, it is the key to everything. We do not want to have certain questions answered in a technical way to the satisfaction of our minds, but we get at the answer spiritually. We are never really satisfied by having a question answered so that our minds can grasp it. Presently we shall come up against new features of the thing and want new explanations. But if we can have the answer conveyed to our spirit - ah, then we are satisfied; and I say the answer is found in the presence of the Spirit and what the Spirit is indicating by His present dealings with us. What do His dealings with us indicate? What is the end of it all? If the Spirit today touches us upon a question of wrong, of evil, of something doubtful, what is the end of that? The end is holiness, perfect holiness. It will take some time because there are many things to be dealt with. But the end, when reached, is a holy being. So with everything else. In this the Spirit is therefore the foundation.

Adjustableness a Mark of a Life Governed by the Holy Spirit

There are some other things that come up in that connection. One of them is this, that a mark of sonship or a Spirit governed life is adjustableness. Now, I want you to grasp this. You see, it means that nothing is final with

us, so far as our attainment is concerned or our light, and that we can never, if we are under the Holy Spirit's government, come to a fixed place. We can never come to the place where we just accept everything and go on with it as it is. Oh no, a Spirit-governed life can never do that, can never become stagnant, can never become fixed. There can never be any sense of finality about the position or state in such a life. I am not talking now about those great truths which are settled, to which nothing is added or need be added. We are settled, of course, in the matter of what Christ has done and what Christ is, those great objective truths of our faith. I am not talking about that, but of our understanding, our apprehension, our knowledge, our growth, our relationship to these things, our position. These are all things which must remain open to enlargement, to expansion, and it may be, to drastic changes. You see, in traditional Christianity we have come into something that is more or less fixed. It is fixed in different ways. If you are a Baptist, then your position is a fixed position. If you are a Presbyterian or a Methodist, it is the same. These are things which are rounded off. I am only illustrating, not judging. What is within these things is something to which you have conformed, of which you are a member. That is your bound, your world: and I have only cited one or two examples; I could take any number more.

Now then, where are we? How did we get in? Perhaps we were born, brought up, in those things, or perhaps we came into them later. But they are something, and they represent a fixed position and we, if in them, are fixed and governed by that position. That is to say, within them, certain things are interpreted in this way, certain things are practised in this way. The method there is this method: and how often, when you have been speaking of things, have you had this reaction from people, "Oh yes, but I was never brought up to that way of thinking. In the church to which I belong" (really referring to the denomination) "it is taught and practised like this". That is a fixed position. Let me say it, without judging of these things, that any fixed position is a contradiction of the Holy Ghost and of sonship. It does not matter what the position is, and it may be (I am only going to say it may be, I could put it more strongly than that) that if you really come under the government of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of sonship, you may have to make very drastic changes and cease to be that and that, and go on with God. Adjustableness is a mark of sonship, and, as the Holy Spirit has never brought any of us yet to a final position, there is more light and understanding yet to be received. The ways of God are not all known to us yet.

We must remember there is all the difference between the permissive will of God, for such instruction in us as can never be gained in any other way, and the whole will of God, which is another thing. We all have to look back on our lives and believe that certain steps which were taken and courses followed were in the will of God for us. Yet, in later life, we have had to repudiate the position into which we then came, entirely change and adjust. But, beloved, I am going to say this: it does not mean that it was not the will of God for us that we took that step. The Lord may at one time, in His permissive will, lead us in a certain way, because of its being the only way we can learn certain things we have to learn. But that does not mean that God intends us to stay there for ever; that He has settled us in that, and that, because He led us in that way and into that, we dare not ever contemplate moving out of it. That is bondage. You and I as sons have to know liberty from bondage of every kind, and that means that we are to be adjustable, free for adjustments, not bound by any kind of conception that would prevent us from making changes as we are led by the Spirit: and it is true of every life that is Spirit-governed that tremendous changes take place. The things which at one time would never have been considered nor contemplated, have become actualities now. The basis of the life is the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit producing sonship means that you and I have to be adjustable, and if we are not adjustable, there is arrest at once. We are in bondage, we are in limitation. The Lord Jesus was adjustable under the government of the Holy Spirit. He was not playing a trick on His brethren when one day they came to Him and said, 'We are going up to the feast. Are you going up with us? If you do not go, people will wonder; you will prejudice your interest'. He said, 'No, you go up, I am not going up'. Yet when they were gone up, then Jesus went up to the feast. Is He playing a trick on them? Was He simply saying, Well, I would rather go alone, I would like to get rid of you? He had not the witness of the Spirit at that moment that He was to go, and therefore He had to stand His ground and take the risk of being misunderstood. But when they had gone up, He evidently got the Spirit's witness that He should go up, and He did not say, I have told them I was not going up; they will think I have played a trick on them, that I did not want them. No, He did not argue like that, but moved in the Spirit, and left it all with the Father. He was not bound by those considerations, of what people would think and say either way. If they should talk because He was not there - all right, let them talk. As for Him, He must be true to the Lord. Adjusting, even if it is at an hour's notice, that is life in the Spirit, that is sonship.

This is the basis of victory over the Devil. There is no defeating Satan save on this ground of walking in the Spirit, of being governed by Him. May the Lord give us understanding in these basic things about our life with Him.