

T. Austin-Sparks:

"I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, that he may be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him: ye know him; for he abideth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you..."

"These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Advocate, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (John 14:16,17; 25,26).

"...That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Ephesians 1:17).

In our consideration of the Holy Spirit as Divine character for Divine testimony, we now move round to another angle, to view Him as Light. We have seen Him as Truth and Holiness; we have now to consider Him as Light.

"God is light" (1 John 1:5). Jesus is the Light of men and of the world, it is stated (John 1:4, 8:12, etc.). The Holy Spirit is called the 'Spirit of Revelation'. God dwells in the light (1 Tim. 6:16). The City, which is the last presentation in the Bible, has the light of God (Rev. 21:11). The Word of God is a light, a lamp (Ps. 119:105). Christians are said to be 'children of the light' (Eph. 5:8).

So, everything related to God is light: 'in Him there is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5). It is Satan who is the prince of darkness; his works are 'the works of darkness'; his children are the 'children of darkness'. These are the two contrasted and conflicting kingdoms: the Kingdom of Light; the kingdom of darkness. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Light. We recall those further words of the Lord Jesus: "When he... is come, he shall guide you into all the truth... He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you" (John 16:13,14).

Light Precedes Building

Let us look, then, at the Holy Spirit, first as character and then as function, in terms of light. God never begins to build until there is light. In the creation, before He proceeded to build, He divided the light from the darkness - He said: "Let there be light". That is an intimation of an abiding law, that God does all His work on the basis of light. Those two great symbolic representations of God, the Tabernacle and the Temple, were the result of spiritual illumination, to Moses and to David respectively. Before they could be, light had to be given. Someone had to be the receptacle, the vessel, of the revelation. When we come into the New Testament, we find that the first definite intimation of the Church - "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18) - was made immediately after the illumination had come to Peter as to the Person of the Lord Jesus. "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee" - revealed it - "but my Father..." "I will build my church..." Note this consistency in the principle of God.

We pass from the first intimation of the Church in the New Testament, from that first mention of the word, to the full disclosure of its eternal calling, vocation, destiny, in this Letter to the Ephesians, and we find that, as in the beginning, so in the full-orbed presentation, it is along the line of illumination, or revelation, by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus said: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Advocate..." "He shall guide you into all the truth". In the mind of the Lord Jesus, there may well have been the thought of the pillar of cloud in the wilderness, guiding to the land. But He said: 'I will pray the Father, and he will give you One who shall guide you into all the truth.'

Paul is in prayer: he is praying in the same way as his Master; his prayer is on the same line: "I bow my knees unto the Father" (the same Father), that He "may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him". Here it is not the beginning of revelation: that was with Peter - that was in Matthew 16. Here, it is another word, which it is difficult to translate adequately; it is really 'in the full knowledge of Him'. "A spirit of revelation in the full knowledge of him".

The Nature of Light (a) As to Character

So we have to see, first of all, what light is. If so much depends upon it, so much rests upon it; if it is, as it were, one of the pillars upon which the whole structure of the church rests, then it is very important that we know what it is. And firstly, as to character.

(1) Transparency

Light is transparency; light is clearness; light is absolute purity; light is honesty; light is openness of character. Light hides nothing; its whole action and nature is contrary to hiding anything. It has nothing to hide; it shows everything; it shows all: in other words, it is not deceitful. It does not want to cover anything, or to pretend or make believe that something is other than what it is. Light is single; it is not double; there is no duplicity about light. And light is just - light! There is 'no darkness at all' where there is light.

Now, we have pointed out that the City - which, as we so well know, is one of the titles of Christ corporate, Christ and His members, the Church - is characterized by everything that speaks of the nature of light. It is characterized, as a whole, by crystal clearness; it is like "a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (Rev. 21:11). Its street is of pure, transparent gold (5:21b). The water of its river is bright as crystal (22:1). Everything about it is of the nature of light. It has so much light in its character, that it has no need of the sun. The light is in its own constitution. It takes its character from the Lamb, who is "the lamp thereof" (21:23b). You can see through this City, and everything in it. Perhaps we should not like to live in transparent houses on this earth! But when you live in this City, to adopt the figure, you will not be ashamed for anybody to see what is going on: you will not need to hide anything. You can just 'see through it'. All the sin which produces cloudiness and murkiness, indefiniteness, mists and fogs, and all that sort of thing, will have been finally abolished - "there will be no night there" (v. 25).

These things, as you will recognise, are symbolic terms. They show symbolically what the Holy Spirit has come to do, in men and women, and in the creation. He has come to bring about in human nature a condition like that. He has undertaken a tremendous task! He is the Spirit of Light - that is His character - and the purpose of His presence is to bring to an end everything that is of the nature of darkness. How many shades and aspects of darkness there are! - a whole vocabulary of words. The Spirit has come to bring all that to an end by applying the Cross, in which it was all brought to an end in the Person of the Lord Jesus; to work out the meaning of the Cross in our lives, so that everything that belongs to that kingdom of darkness is removed: so that in the end, with us too, there is no darkness at all.

Is that really what we think of, when we think of having, receiving, being filled with the Holy Spirit? Here again, perhaps, a little re-shaping of our ideas is called for. It is true that He is many other things, as well as light: He is the Spirit of Power, He is the Spirit of Wisdom; yes, He is many other things; but, with them all, He is this. And we must not make more of those 'demonstration' aspects of the Spirit, in power, in gifts and capacities, in works, than we do of His character side. If He really does His work in you and in me, He will make us to be people who can bear to be 'looked into' without any fear, without any drawing of the blinds. Our lives and our motives will bear looking into.

The Holy Spirit knows us, He knows us. We cannot deceive Him; we cannot, as we say, 'hoodwink' Him; He knows us through and through. We must therefore give the Holy Spirit credit for dealing with us according to a knowledge of us beyond our own. Looking inside us, He has seen something that is contrary to His own nature; He has found something that does not answer to His character of absolute transparency, and He is dealing with that.

We often think that sincerity on our part is all that is called for: we have only got to be 'sincere' in order to satisfy God. (I would remind you that there is, in any case, a difference between sincerity and reality.) But Saul of Tarsus was the most 'sincere' man alive in his day, and yet he was the most mistaken. Sincerity may be required, may be very important, and it is; but do not let us deceive ourselves with our sincerity, and say that because we are downright sincere, then we must be right; that is not the case. The Spirit may require sincerity to open the door, for anything that is insincere means a closed door to the Holy Spirit. But, after all, it is only an opening of the door, so that He may come in and then begin to show us that, 'sincere' as we were, we were wrong after all.

It is exactly what happened with Paul, is it not? "I verily thought... that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). 'I verily thought that I ought to do...': absolutely sincere, absolutely conscientious, and yet so ignominiously mistaken and wrong - until the Light came. Then he saw it. You see the point. The Holy Spirit does not just accept our sincerity as the everything. He comes perhaps through that door; then He begins His work of showing that even our purest motives were probably mixed; our most sincere intentions were tainted. He works according to His knowledge, and we must give Him credit always for doing that.

If you and I are really meaning business with God, and the Holy Spirit has taken us through an experience,

through a depth, which has been very self-revealing, a real shock to us: we have discovered that there was that there that we would never have believed, had we been told: the end is that we are on our faces, worshipping Him as the Faithful and the True. No rebellion, no bitterness, but thanking God that He has been so faithful with us, and so true. We do not want to be let off anything that is of the darkness, do we?

This, then, is the first thing about the Holy Spirit as light. He is, and He works for, complete transparency and honesty and purity, without a shadow. He seeks to bring us to that end of glory - "having the glory of God" (Rev. 21:11) - because there can be no glory in anything that is of the kingdom of darkness.

(2) Fearlessness

Another thing about light is that it is absolutely fearless. If the Holy Spirit is really there in this character, we are never afraid of something being discovered. A good conscience, a clear conscience, is a wonderfully courageous thing. It is a very strong thing; it puts you in a very strong position. Where there is light, and no darkness, nothing to be hidden and nothing that we do not want to be discovered or uncovered, there is no fear. There is a great strength of confidence and assurance.

Light is a fearless thing. If there is anything doubtful or questionable, anything about which we are not sure; if we have some question, if we are not sure whether our position is right or wrong: then we are always afraid, we are in the weakness of fear. Darkness and fear always go together - it is like that naturally, is it not? - fear belongs to darkness. There can be no confidence, no strength, where there is darkness. This City, this people, at the end, is a strong city, "having a wall great and high" (Rev. 21:12); it is the very embodiment of the idea of strength: but its strength lies in its character - in its purity, its light.

(3) Disinfection

Another thing about light is that it combats disease. We know that physically, do we not? We send people with certain diseases to the country, where all is sunny and light. We have learned to expose our wounds to the sun for their healing. The light is healing; light is purifying; disease cannot abide the light. Now, come back again to the City. It is said: "the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2c). Disease cannot abide this light that is in the City. The light deals with everything that is working corruption: it destroys it, and repairs the damage.

I am thinking especially now of the more recent discoveries and uses of light in healing. I remember how it began. In the first world war, I had a great deal to do with wounded soldiers - thousands of terribly mangled bodies, torn by shell; and it was in that war, when it was so difficult to cope with this terrible situation, that the method of healing, and even of making good the loss of flesh, repairing the destroyed tissues - the method was adopted of just putting the wounded out in the sun, exposing them to the sun. It was marvellous what the sun did. It built up the bodies; it made good the destroyed tissues, it healed in a wonderful way. That was the introduction of a new technique which has now, of course, been resolved into the various kinds of ray for healing. Light does it: it heals; it repairs; it destroys disease.

(4) Joy

Another thing about light - and we are building up for an application - is that it is something joyful. It is a joyful, an uplifting, an inspiring thing. Darkness is nearly always depressing. You can see something of this in the people of this world. Those people who live in extreme northern realms, where they do not see the sun for months on end, often tend to be heavy, serious, grim, taciturn, even joyless people, whereas, when you go to more southern climes, what a difference you find - laughter, merriment, lightheartedness. Light has that effect. People of the sun are sunny people; people of the shadows are marked by shadows.

So we can see that light is a very important thing in character. And you have got to have the character before ever the function can begin - that is the point. You see, it was when the Holy Spirit Himself had come into the Church, and given His own character to it, that the Church broke out on its great world mission, and challenged darkness everywhere. You can see the contrasts in those early chapters of the Church's history. There were tremendous contrasts in the apostles themselves. Oh, what a change has taken place in them - what different men they are! They were men in the shadows, in the dark, but now they are in the light - or rather, they are men with the Light in themselves. Something has transformed those men; they are changed. The Spirit has come - the Light is in them.

Take those two representatives on the Emmaus road. What a veil was over their eyes as to the Scriptures!

When the Lord Jesus opened up the Scriptures of the Old Testament, from Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms, that was not their first introduction to the Bible. They knew their Bible; they knew the Scriptures; they were not just being introduced to the Book - but how dark their minds were! Now, listen to others like them on the Day of Pentecost! What light they have! They now are seeing, and are proclaiming wonderful illumination out of the Scriptures. Light has come into them, changed them, made them into a different kind of people. In many respects you can hardly recognise them as the same persons. You cannot recognise the old Simon Peter, can you, in this man who is now standing up and speaking, and challenging everybody. Only a short while before, he could not stand up to the challenge of a serving maid, but now he can challenge the rulers. Something has happened to this man: the light has come in - in other words, the Spirit has come into him - and he is now seeing in a new way.

The Nature of Light (b) As to Function

That is how the testimony begins; that is how the functioning begins. You see, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the work - of the world testimony, of the testimony in the nations. The Holy Spirit is not out just to make us 'retailers of the Truth', in a secondhand way. That is one of the weaknesses of the whole order, that certain things are taught in schools, and then people are sent out with what they have learnt - all this school-learning. And they go out and they give it out - in a secondhand, 'phonographic' way! You are not surprised that there is not the impact upon the darkness that there was at the beginning; that the healing of spiritual and moral diseases does not take place; that the whole scene is not transformed.

Teaching is Not Sufficient

No, it is not that way. The disciples had had all the information that ever they needed: they had had all the Lord's teaching; they had seen all His work; they had seen Him die; they had seen Him after the resurrection; and they had heard angels declaring from Heaven that He would come again in like manner as they had seen Him go up (Acts 1:11): and yet, with all that, they are not allowed to go out into the nations and preach it! This has got to become more than something said to them - something that they have been told - something that they have heard with their ears. This has got to come into them by the Holy Spirit, as a mighty power within their own being. Hence, He gave them commandment that they should not depart from Jerusalem, until they received the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4).

No, it is not the truth that we have been taught - it is the truth that has come into our hearts, by illumination of the Holy Spirit, that is powerful; not any other. That is most important! I venture to say that, if only a small percentage of the teaching that some of us have received were to come up in the power of the Holy Spirit, some tremendous thing would happen: there would be an impact and registration that would be comparable to what was at the beginning - just wonderful. Let us not be content with our 'truth' and our 'teaching'. The Lord made it perfectly clear that, much as He had given, and much as He had shown, and much as they had come by through their association with Him, that was not all that they required. You must not go out into the world with nothing more than that; that must not be the sole basis upon which you go. That will have its place; it is necessary, and it will come to life; but - you cannot just go on with that only. 'Tarry ye, until ye be endued with power': and when the enduement came, what happened? It was what He had said to them that sprang into life; it was what He had done that came to them with a new revelation as to its meaning. The Holy Spirit is absolutely indispensable, even when you have a very, very large wealth of instruction, of teaching, of information.

The Church Should Make an Impact

This is true as to the individual, but remember that the Holy Spirit is the Light of the Sanctuary. When Paul prays about this 'spirit of wisdom and revelation', he has the Church before him. He is thinking of the Church as the dwelling-place, the "habitation of God" (as he calls it) "in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22). The Church is to be here in this world, universally and locally, as a challenge to, and with a powerful impact upon, the darkness in each locality, wherever it may be, by the Holy Spirit. The darkness cannot go unchallenged and it cannot eventually triumph. It was said of the Lord Jesus that life was in Him, and the life was the light of men, and the darkness overcame it not (John 1:4,5). It looked as though it did, but it did not.

The presence of the Church, with the Holy Spirit within, ought to be like that, registering a tremendous challenge; and it should be that, whatever men do, or Satan does, that light is not quenched; the light survives. You and I, individually, when we have passed from this earth, should be remembered for having been vehicles or vessels of light - this kind of light. It was a challenge; it was healing; it was effective. It should not be merely that we had teaching, or that we had truth, but that there was that which had the Holy Spirit in it, which left a

mark. We all ought to be like that. Do you think it would be possible for anybody really to have the Holy Spirit in any measure, and for it to make no difference where they are? Surely that could not be. It was said of the Lord Jesus: "He could not be hid" (Mark 7:24); and so it should be with us.

Light Can be Shut Out by Prejudice

Now this is the 'truth' about the Holy Spirit as light; and I am sure that you agree with the truth, and that your heart goes out that it might be so in your case. Perhaps there is a need for us to give the Holy Spirit a better and a larger chance than He has hitherto had. We can, you know, deprive ourselves of this light of the Spirit; we can shut out the light; we can have bandages over our eyes. What might such bandages be? Well, take prejudice. Prejudice is a terribly blinding thing. It means, as the word clearly indicates, that you have pre-judged something, some situation, before you really looked into it. You prejudged it - perhaps on the basis of report, or on any one of many pretexts. And, in pre-judging, without a first-hand, honest, sincere, true investigation and enquiry, pursuing this matter till you really knew, you closed down - you foreclosed on it. Very well: you have put the bandage of prejudice on your eyes, and there is no hope - no hope - until that is removed.

Some of us know that quite well. Some of my brethren know that it was just on that very point that, many years ago, everything turned in my life from what I have called a 'closed heaven' to an 'open heaven'. I was preaching one Sunday morning on the subject of 'prejudice'. Some people think that I can be emphatic, but on that day, I had - metaphorically - my coat off, and my sleeves up! I was lunging at 'prejudice' with all the strength that I had, calling it by all the names that my vocabulary could provide, saying it was a cruel thing, a thing that gave neither God nor man a chance... and so I went on. That was the Lord's Day morning.

Tuesday morning, I was in my study. A letter was handed to me, in which I was invited to attend a certain conference, with all expenses paid, including travelling. And I looked, and I said: No, not on your life; you will never find me there; I would not touch that with a twenty-foot barge-pole! And I took out my diary, quite sure that, in those very busy days, of course I should have my answer - I should have other engagements. When I looked in my diary, the only dates that were free were those very dates! And I left it on my desk, wondering - How am I going to get round this? what am I going to do about it? Very kind of this person, to offer me all my expenses; but what am I to say?

While I was trying to find my way out, my backdoor of escape, my wife came in with my morning cup of something, and she saw that I was a bit disturbed, looked a bit worried; and she asked me about it, and I told her what it was. She said: Well, have you any engagements at that time? I said: No, just at that time I have none. Well, she said, it looks to me as though you have one of two alternatives: either tell them that you will not go, or go! (I suppose that is the value of having a practical wife!) I was left with that, and she went out.

And as I began to think about this again, it was as though somebody stood at the side of me - I did not see anybody, and I did not hear any voice - but it was as though someone stood at the side of me and said: What about your sermon on prejudice?

Well, I had to face that whole thing before God. It was just that that brought a great turning-point in my life, opened the way for the Lord, for something very much more. By dealing with that whole spirit of prejudice I came into an altogether new way with the Lord. You can perhaps understand how afraid I am of prejudice - what it can do, how it can close the door, how it can figuratively put a bandage over the eyes, so that we are deprived of what the Lord wants to give.

Light Can be Shut Out by Pride and Policy

And then there is pride: unwillingness to humble ourselves; unwillingness to say that we have been wrong, to take something back. Pride can blind. Perhaps there are few things more blinding than pride. And policy: you can just shut the Holy Spirit right out if you are going to be governed by policy. Policy means taking into account how things will affect you and your interests, your future, how it will close doors to you; what other people will think - that if you do this or that you will be regarded as a 'speckled bird', and so on; you see, secondary considerations. Oh, that is a hobgoblin of the Devil to rob you of something! Yes, it will blind; you will not go on if there is any policy about it - make no mistake.

There is a passage in John's Gospel, by which I have often been greatly impressed (and which I have tried to make a guiding principle in my own spiritual life) - those words in John 5:44: "How can ye believe, who receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?" 'How can ye believe?' You see, that whole nation, and those Jewish rulers and teachers and leaders, were shut out of all that Christ came to

The Spirit as Light

give on this one thing - policy: thinking more of the glory of men than of the glory of God; walking more as before men than as before the Lord. If Abraham has a great inheritance - and there is no doubt that he has, for the covenant of promise concerned his seed, 'which seed is Jesus Christ' (Gal. 3:16) - what an inheritance! - remember that the covenant with Abraham was made at the point where God appeared to him and said: "I am God All-sufficient; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 15:1).

'Walk before Me! and be thou perfect.' That is the way of the enlarging inheritance. 'Before Me!' Not before men; not before systems; not before public opinion; and not before your own interests, with an eye to how they are going to be served, and what is going to happen to you. 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect. I am the Lord All-sufficient'. 'How can ye believe, who receive glory one from another, and do not seek the glory which comes from God only?' This is the way of light; this is the way of power; this is the way of the Spirit. It is the way of 'walking in the light, as He is in the light', and walking with the light in ourselves.

We can, of course, see how all this relates to the Church's witness in the world. We can understand much in the light of that. When the Church was filled with the light of the Spirit, what an effect it had upon the kingdom of darkness, everywhere! But when the Church began to lose that basis of life, it began to lose its influence in the world. The Lord save us!