

The Cross and the Holy Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Holy Spirit's purpose in coming is to bring God's Son into ever-increasing fullness in the saints, making us know in continual progress and development more of the meaning of Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 3:16, Galatians 3:13

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "The Cross"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound relationship between the Cross of Christ and the Holy Spirit, illustrating how the Spirit has been God's agent throughout creation, the life of Jesus, and the Church. He explains that the Holy Spirit's work is fundamentally tied to the Cross, as it is through Christ's sacrifice that believers are freed from the curse of the law and can receive the promise of the Spirit. Sparks highlights that true spiritual growth and understanding of Christ's greatness come through the Holy Spirit, who reveals the vastness of Christ's nature and the necessity of the Cross in the believer's life. He warns against spiritual complacency and urges believers to seek a deeper knowledge of Christ, which is facilitated by the Holy Spirit's guidance. Ultimately, the message calls for a continual reliance on the Cross to experience the fullness of the Spirit in the life of the Church.

Transcript

"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" (Matt. 3:16).

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth 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" (Gal. 3:13-14).

The matter to which we are directed now is the Cross and the Holy Spirit. Let me say at the outset that this is not a treatise on the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, but primarily an emphasis upon the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Cross of Christ.

God Working By His Spirit

Before we can come immediately to that matter, there are some preliminary things that it will be helpful to remember. They are of a more general character. Firstly there is this fact, that the Scriptures make it quite clear that whenever God has moved to realize any phase of His comprehensive purpose, He has done so

by the agency of His Spirit. The Spirit of God has been the wisdom, the power, the energy, the initiator, the continuer and the consummator of that which God has at any time taken in hand to bring about. That is quite patent to all, I think, on the most superficial glance at the Scriptures.

Then we see it in creation, that is, the creation of this world. The Spirit of God is there as the Agent initiating, pervading, conducting and always in evidence in relation to the bringing of this cosmic order into being.

The same is seen to be true in the history and life of Israel. The whole of their life and the ordering of their life was a matter of the Spirit of God. He worked with their fathers, He led them out of Egypt as the pillar of fire and cloud, He sustained them in the wilderness; He endowed men amongst them for the framing, the making, the constituting of that great symbolism of Christ - the tabernacle. Bezalel and Aholiab were men peculiarly endowed by the Spirit of God unto all manner of work in connection with the tabernacle, and in many other ways and connections it is seen that the Spirit of the Lord was in charge of this whole matter of Israel's life and history. God was fulfilling His purpose, or that phase of His great purpose, by the agency of His Spirit.

What was true in those connections is seen to be true in the case of the life and work of the Lord Jesus; begotten of the Holy Spirit, anointed of the Spirit, fulfilling His ministry, uttering His teaching, performing His works, all by that anointing of the Spirit, and eventually offering Himself to God without spot "through the eternal Spirit." In all things, again, God carries out His work by means of His Spirit.

And then we pass on to the Church. It becomes abundantly clear that this great aspect of the purpose of God through the ages is again in the hands of the Holy Spirit. The Church is brought into being by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and from that time everything is committed to the Spirit to carry out.

What is true as to the Church, its calling, its vocation, its purpose, is true, according to the Scriptures, of every member thereof, every individual. The life of every child of God is begun by the Holy Spirit, born of the Spirit; and then to be, under the Spirit's conducting, led into all the will and thoughts and ways of the Lord; perfected by the Spirit; saved, sanctified and glorified, all by the Spirit of God.

That is a very elementary consideration, I know, but it is basic because the assumption is this, that man has in himself none of the requirements, moral, intellectual or spiritual, for realizing any part of God's purpose. If it were possible for man to do so, then the Spirit of God need not have come; but the very coming of the Spirit is the great Divine declaration that God must do His own work or it will never be done - that man is totally incapable of realizing any part or fragment of the great purpose of God, and, without the Spirit, no part thereof will ever be realized. That is what it means that the Spirit of God is always in charge of the things of God, because man is not capable in that realm.

So the advent of the Holy Spirit is nothing less than the very advent of God Himself to project, to constitute and to accomplish a new spiritual creation, a spiritual cosmos (I very much dislike that word, but it is a fuller word than "world" and it means something more than even a creation, it is an ordered system) - the advent of God the Holy Spirit is to project and constitute and consummate a new ordered spiritual system, a spiritual cosmos, an entirely spiritual nature of things of which the natural and the physical is but a shadow, a type.

Christ A Comprehensive Spiritual System

Now, the pattern of this spiritual order or system or economy is God's own Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is a vast and comprehensive spiritual system and order. That does not mean that He is not a Person, an Individual, but He is something more than that. In His Person there is the embodiment of this vast, this comprehensive, system of Divine thoughts, of Divine elements, of Divine laws, Divine principles and Divine nature. This physical universe we know, and are learning more and more, to be a vast system of laws and principles. It is a great whole, inter-related, inter-dependent, moving together by influences and forces and tides, bound up as a marvelous order and harmony, nothing just taking its own independent course, nothing unrelated, nothing unaffected by the rest; one marvelous whole. And the knowledge of this physical universe is more than a matter of a life's application, a lifetime's study. It has taken all the generations from the beginning to reach even the present point which those who know most admit to be far short of all that we have yet to know about this universe. When you read some of the works of men who know what there is to be known now, your very brain reels when you read of distances and speeds in this universe, the rate at which light travels, and all these things; I say it is a vast order, and it is more than a lifetime's study for understanding.

But, my dear friends, we have said that the physical universe is only a symbol, a type, of the spiritual, and Christ is a universe, a universe of spiritual laws, of spiritual principles, of spiritual forces. Christ is a vast unity, a marvelous harmony, and when you begin to glimpse that, you just begin to understand what the Apostles have seen or begun to see when they themselves are found in the grip of a passionate quest to know Him. "That I may know Him" (Philippians 3:10). "I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). This even at the end of a lifetime of learning Christ, this even after marvelous revelations in heaven itself of things unspeakable which it is not lawful for a man to utter; still in the grip of this tremendous quest - "that I may know Him."

Then you understand also why there is coming from that this urge, this constant and ever increasing urge upon believers to follow on to know the Lord, to go on to know. You understand the meaning of a little prefix which is, I think, tremendously impressive. They not only speak about knowledge, the knowledge of Christ, the knowledge of God, the knowledge of the Lord; not only do they so often use that word "gnosis," but you find later, as they have moved on, they introduce this combination "epignosis." "Till we all attain unto... the full knowledge..." (Eph. 4:13); not merely "the knowledge" now. This is to Ephesians, those well on in knowledge. (If you care to look up the usage of that particular form of the word you will find it tremendously impressive, as it is seeking to take believers beyond even a fairly matured stage of spiritual life.) Here, then, is their own quest; here is their urge upon the saints, because they have glimpsed by revelation of the Holy Spirit something of this vast comprehensiveness of Christ. He is a universe, a new and entirely different system of things spiritually. Who knows anything about it? What do we know about Christ? We may have been the Lord's people for a good many years. The fact is that the longer we live and the more we are associated and in touch with things of Christ the more we are overwhelmed with our ignorance, because we are realizing that Christ is a land of far distances. He is so far beyond us, we cannot comprehend Him. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended" (Phil. 3:13). That is Paul near the end of his course. "I press on," "that I may know Him." Yes, Christ is a universe of Divine thoughts, Divine laws, Divine principles, all of the most practical character, and I do want to underline that statement, because what I am saying may be regarded as something very abstract.

But come back to the analogy, to the type. Are these things in the physical universe abstract? Are they without practical meaning and value? We know that these forces and these laws at work are the very things which make life possible upon this earth. What would happen but for the effect of the heavenly

bodies upon this earth? The very tides of the sea are governed by heavenly bodies. Every time the tide rises on our shores, it is in response to a great governing body in the heavens. Every time the tide recedes and goes out, it is simply obeying a heavenly power; and the tides are of value, they do mean something. And in many other connections it is like that. Our life here on this earth is only possible because of this ordered universe and the influences at work as from without; and in this universe of Christ our very life, our very coming to the great goal for which we are destined by God, depends upon our response to the laws of Christ, our reaction to the influences of Christ, and upon our knowledge of these things - because in this realm it is God's will that we should understand these things, we should have understanding in Christ, we should be intelligent. So far as this physical universe is concerned, in order to derive the benefits we do not all have to be scientists. We are getting benefits every day without understanding any of these things; but in the spiritual realm it is God's thought that we should know.

Seeing The Greatness Of Christ By The Holy Spirit

All this brings us to the whole matter of the Holy Spirit. What do we know of Christ after all? If we know Him as our Saviour, our Redeemer, our Lord, our High Priest, our Advocate on high, in all these ways, what do we know of Him after all? That is nothing. Paul knew all that, but here he is speaking and acting as one who knew nothing, because the knowledge yet to be possessed was so far beyond anything already attained unto. We know nothing.

But the advent of the Spirit, the coming of the Spirit, has had that whole matter in view - to lead us into this vast universe which Christ is, this wonderful spiritual system and order of things of which Christ is the embodiment, to make us know in continual progress and development more of the meaning of Christ. I know I am failing to convey to you the tremendous impression that this has made on my own heart as I have thought about it, as it has come to me. As I stand so far behind these Apostles but listen to what they say, the impression to begin with is that these men have evidently seen something in Christ that is immense and it has taken out of their lives anything in the nature of spiritual contentedness with their apprehension, with their attainment. This that they have glimpsed has made them men who are on full stretch to know all that it is possible to know, not because they are just men of an inquisitive turn of mind who want to know for the sake of knowledge, but they see that that knowledge is unto the fullness of God's purpose in their own lives and in their lives as related to a Body, the Body of Christ, His Church. The Church will never go on to that realization, and the individual members of the Church will never grow, save as the Church and the members thereof glimpse something of the greatness of Christ. The way of spiritual growth is the glimpsing of the greatness of Christ by revelation of the Holy Spirit, and that is why Paul prayed as he did "having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe" (Eph. 1:18-19); that you might know this by His giving to you "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the 'epignosis' (in the full knowledge) of Him." That is how the Church will grow, that is how the saints will make increase - seeing in a new way how vast and great is Christ.

Do you not agree that among all the needs that exist today in the people of God one of the most potent is the need to be delivered from spiritual contentedness, satisfaction with a small measure of the Christian life? There is a sad, a tragic absence of a really adequate reach out to know Him. Oh, I know that needs perhaps qualifying and covering. There are many people who say they want to know and want to go on, but their quest, their desire, is not of that character, that nature, which obtained in the case of the Apostle Paul - "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." All THINGS.

With many Christians and Christian workers, if you touch their work, their organization, their system of things, their religious thing of which they are part, then you meet awful resistance. Prejudices and suspicions and all those things rise out of this weddedness to things rather than to the Lord. If only people were wedded to the Lord and He was their only quest, you would get rid of 95 percent of all the prejudice and suspicion that exists. It is things that produce it. We need to drop our things and be found only concerned with the Lord. Our one question, governing every situation, should be, Does that contribute in any way to a larger measure of Christ? If it does, then in my heart I am with it; it does not matter what it does to existing institutions. If that can lead on to a knowledge of Christ beyond what we have, then that is the thing that matters. It is Christ, not OUR Church, not OUR fellowship, not OUR mission, not OUR organization, not OUR tradition, but Christ. He is a tremendously enlarging and emancipating factor. It is these things that have cramped us down and made us small, mean, petty and peevish. Christ delivers, Christ enlarges; oh, to see Him! Oh, that we could be brought by the Spirit as the Queen of Sheba was brought and shown the kingdom of Solomon, his glory, his table, his servants, until there was no more spirit left in her and she said, "I heard... of thine acts and thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not... until I came and mine eyes had seen it: and behold, the half was not told me" (I Kings 10:7). And a greater than Solomon is here! What you and I need is that enlargement which comes by a Holy Spirit inward revelation of Christ and we shall be emancipated. These other things will fall into their own place as we see Him more fully.

That, then, is the very meaning of the Holy Spirit having come. I say again, what do we know? How small is our knowledge! Ah, but God knows that, and the Spirit of God has come. What for? To be at our service, for us to use, that He might be taken hold of to give us prominence and importance and name and reputation? No, He has come for no other purpose than to bring God's Son into ever-increasing fullness in the saints, to make Christ in the Church what He is in the sight of God, that He may become in the Church the "fullness of Him That filleth all in all." That is the Holy Spirit's purpose in coming. Well, what a heritage we have when we have the Holy Spirit! - "the Spirit which is an EARNEST of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14). With the Holy Spirit, all the inheritance is bound up and guaranteed. Having the Spirit, all that fullness is potentially ours.

Now it is for us to be taught by the Spirit, and the Holy Spirit does not teach us as out of a book, as by a manual. He does not teach us just by addresses and talks and lectures, not by words as such. The Holy Spirit teaches by practical experience, and the instrument of the Holy Spirit's teaching of Christ is the Cross of Christ. You and I will learn nothing except as the Holy Spirit makes the Cross of Christ a reality in us. We shall come to that presently.

The Unity Of Christ

I am first of all concerned with this emphasis upon the greatness of Christ, the vastness of Christ, and the fact that the Holy Spirit has come to bring that greatness into the Church. There is so much detail bound up with that. We have referred to the laws and relationships and dependencies and inter-dependencies of this physical universe. Christ is that; difficult as it is for us to grasp, Christ is that. And then the Church has to be the reproduction of what Christ is, so that in the Body of Christ you find all these spiritual laws of inter-relatedness, inter-dependence, and no member of the Body can say to any other member, however remote the other member may be in the matter of distance and position, "I have no need of thee" (I Cor. 12:21). The head cannot say to the feet - there are your extremities! 'Because you are so far removed from me, I am not dependent upon you.' It cannot be. "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee." Proximity makes no difference in this matter, distance makes no difference. The relatedness

constitutes the Body a perfect whole, a perfect ONE, a perfect harmony, all inter-dependent, inter-related. That is Christ. "So also is the Christ" (I Cor. 12:12 Greek).

And in the realm of the Spirit that sort of thing is going on. We need, of course, spiritual perception to be able to grasp it. It may be that a very great deal of our spiritual experience which cannot be explained at all by anything within the immediate circle of our lives is due to something that is going on in some children of God or child of God far removed from us geographically. There may be some tremendous conflict in a life, or in a company of the Lord's people, on the other side of the world, and because the Spirit is one we are involved in that conflict, and we are going through something, and we are moved to pray, and the issue is one issue. Geography does not touch it. Very often we do not understand what is the meaning of that through which we are passing. We know of certain things in our spiritual experience, something is going on, there is conflict on, there is pressure on, and there is nothing immediately around us to explain it. There is no occasion for it so far as we can see here and now. But there is some issue in the balances, some issue over which there is spiritual conflict somewhere, and because the Spirit is one and the Body is one, we are bound up with that conflict. That is the oneness, the harmony of Christ, that is the interaction of these laws of one Body, a new spiritual system. Some of us have known how true these things are and how very practical they are. If the Church only had intelligence about this and lived up to its intelligence, what loss it would be to the enemy! How often the children of God are caught misinterpreting their experience, things that are happening, what is going on in another life. The enemy puts a false construction upon a thing, and, instead of bringing those concerned together to cooperate for victory, he sets them apart by misconstruction. If the Church saw this spiritual oneness, this spiritual inter-relatedness, inter-dependence, and threw itself right into that, what a mighty thing the Church would be here in this universe! And that is the spiritual system that Christ is, which is to be constituted in His Body, reproduced in His Church.

You say that it is a hopeless thing to expect so far as the whole Church is concerned. It is a very beautiful ideal, but what are the prospects of realization? Well, we cannot dismiss it like that. We have to come back. It will begin, perhaps, between two of us, and that will constitute a sufficient ground for instruction and for victory, for understanding. Even the perfect harmony of two children of God is a terrific cause of battle, but get it and see what an effective thing it is for God! And that is why the battle rages - just to separate two children of God who are vitally related. Satan has always tried that, and what things come in to do it!

The Cross Basic To All The Spirit's Work

That brings us to that to which we have been working, the Cross and the Holy Spirit; for the basis and the door of all the Spirit's work is the Cross. You will, with the slightest knowledge of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, at once recall very much that brings these two together. Back in the types we see them brought together; in the fire upon the altar - the altar typifying the Cross, and the fire upon the altar, the Spirit consuming the sacrifice. Or again, as in Exodus 17, the rock smitten and the gushing water - the Cross and the Spirit. Or, coming to the New Testament, the Jordan of our Lord's baptism setting forth in type His death and burial and resurrection, immediately issuing in the open heavens and the Spirit in dove-like form resting upon Him - the Cross and the Spirit. Or, going back with that in mind to Israel's beginnings as a nation, the lamb slain, the blood sprinkled, the pillar of cloud and fire taking charge immediately afterwards - the Spirit by way of the Cross, all pointing to the great inclusive reality, Calvary and Pentecost. It is always like that. The two are always together. And these are but fragmentary selections of a vast amount in the Word of God which shows this close and inseparable oneness between

the two.

When we come to the Lord Jesus, we know that His very messages or discourses on the Holy Spirit in a definite and specific way were reserved until the eve of the passion. It was with the shadow of the Cross thrown fully across His path that He began to speak about the coming of the Comforter and what that coming would mean to them; and He never did say, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22) until He could show them His hands and His side, His pierced hands, His riven side. Just as the Spirit came on Him at the time of His typical death in baptism, so that Spirit led Him to the actual Cross, where we are told He "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish unto God" (Heb. 9:14). Well, if it were necessary, much more could be gathered to show how the two are kept together - the Cross and the Spirit. The Cross leads to the Spirit and the Spirit ever brings back to the Cross.

Why is the Cross basic to the Spirit's work? Our passage in Galatians 3, gives the answer. Because a curse exists, is resting now upon the old creation, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us," or, literally and correctly, "having become a curse in our place." The human race by nature lies under a curse and the Holy Spirit can never, never, come upon an accursed thing. The promise of the Spirit can never be fulfilled in those who still remain under the curse. The curse must be removed, for the anointing oil shall come upon no flesh; "upon the flesh of man shall it not be poured" (Exodus 30:32). The curse must be removed, and Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse in our stead, in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit. The removing of a whole condition and state under a curse in order to clear the way for the Spirit - that is the answer. Therein lies the necessity for the Cross and for our faith identification with Him Who was made a curse for us. And, however uncomfortable and unlovely it may sound, the fact is that when the Holy Spirit really gets to work in a life, on the one side the course and history for that life is such as to make the one concerned very well aware that the flesh is an accursed thing.

There are no people in this world who are more ready to admit and acknowledge the accursed nature of the flesh than those who have the Spirit. It is the very pathway to glory to discover how accursed the flesh is. That is on one side. No doubt many of us know something of that history. The Holy Spirit really does make the meaning of the Cross known in that sense that the Cross speaks of a place where a curse is, and we are there in Christ. Something in the way has got to be removed.

Here, in the case of these Galatians, the Apostle says that they had begun in the Spirit; did they hope to be perfected in the flesh? And bringing in this passage, it makes the question very emphatic and very terrible. Having begun in the Spirit - which pre-supposes that you are outside of the curse to be able to make a beginning at all, to have any prospect of going on - do you think you are going to be perfected by getting back under the curse? No; the argument is that that is only to close the door again, to cut off all the prospect, to bar the way to any further progress. "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?" The deduction, while not exactly stated, but quite clearly implied, is that, having begun in the Spirit it is only possible to continue in the Spirit on the ground on which you made a beginning. That is, by the Cross you get away and continually keep away from that ground of the curse; or, in other words, your progress requires the continual position to which the Cross brings you, just as your beginning required that position. That is, to continue is to continue in the Spirit.

But you can continue in the Spirit only as you began in the Spirit. That was only made possible by the Cross removing the curse, the old man, the accursed old man. So that to continue in the Spirit, to go right on to all that the Spirit intends, means, and is after, demands a continual cutting off of the flesh, a keeping

cut off of the flesh by the Cross. So the Spirit keeps the Cross in evidence, and the Cross makes all the Spirit's purpose possible.

We have not to be continually occupied with our crucifixion; the Holy Spirit will attend to that. We have to walk in the Spirit. To do this we have just to obey the Spirit. It is positive, not negative.

In the New Testament Letters we get a many-sided application of the Cross as the Spirit's instrument. Let us look at some of these. Firstly there is "Romans" which has to do with:

The Cross And The Sinful Body Of The Flesh

Up to chapter seven everything circles round and centers in the Cross. The Cross is the great issue toward which everything is intended to lead. The Apostle steadily and thoroughly works his way to that climax. All that is in those seven chapters finds its end in the position set forth in the words of chapter 6:3-11, and especially in verses 3, 5, 6: "... all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death... we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death... our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away." Until this has become a position established and entered into, the revelation of a life in the Spirit is not touched upon. But when this has become basic, then we have all that follows about the Spirit's Presence and Work.

"Ye are... in the Spirit, if... the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Romans 8:9).

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

"The mind of the spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). And so on.

Here, then, the specific emphasis is upon the fact that, for the Presence and Work of the Holy Spirit in the believer and the "Body" (chapter seven) to be really known, the whole body of sin (the man out of Christ being a sinful creature and lying under judgment and condemnation) must be - not reformed, remedied, improved, educated to better things - but crucified and buried; not just sins being taken away or pardoned, but HIMSELF put away. As a man he must depart from God's sight, his good (?) and his bad. He belongs by nature to a race which no longer stands in the light of God's intention. God has departed from that race, and has made a "new creation." Christ in resurrection is the "Firstborn among many brethren." He is "the last Adam," meaning that as the First of a new race, a new humanity, finality is with Him; there will be no need of another. This "last Adam" stepped back - so to speak - and before becoming in resurrection the "Firstborn from the dead," He gathered up all the race of the first Adam and representatively took it into the full judgment of God-forsakenness, crying "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" That is God's ultimate mind toward the whole race in the first Adam. We are called upon to recognize that, to take a position and make a declaration that we accept Christ's death as our death and His burial as our burial. The New Testament says that that is the declaration which baptism makes, or that that declaration is made in baptism.

While very much more ought to be said on this whole matter, we will gather it up in this inclusive observation, that the position in "Romans" is God's foundation, and it is all-comprehensive. A Holy Spirit governed life will be brought back to the implications of the Cross as the end of the old man. There will be one basic crisis, but through the years there may be many crises in which we have to refer back to the original inclusive position fresh issues which have been raised as we could bear to know them. The final

position which the Cross establishes and to which the Holy Spirit works is that all shall be - in every direction and connection - Christ only, and not ourselves in any respect. Thus we are led to the next specific application of the Cross as in the First Letter to the Corinthians.

The Cross And The Natural Man

Here those concerned are in Christ. So far as the "Romans" situation is concerned as to "Justified in Christ," the position is all right. Their standing is complete; they have accepted Christ as their substitute. It is not that they are in the flesh, but that the flesh is in them, and they are being largely influenced and actuated by natural considerations. In their case it is the natural or soulical man who is riding over the spiritual man. "Natural" in 1 Corinthians is, in the Greek, "soulical." The Apostle explains what "soulical" means when he points out that their own minds and hearts and wills are governing instead of the mind of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Their reasonings, judgments, ideas, standards of values - "the wisdom of the world" - result in their unspiritual and un-Christlike behavior. The soul-life finds its way even into the most spiritual realms; e.g. spiritual gifts, to use them for self-glory; the Lord's Table, to turn it to self-gratification; etc. Thus their progress toward the full purpose of being "In Christ" is retarded; they are not spiritual but "carnal"; not grown up ones but "babes."

In this connection the Apostle says: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). What is needed is that application of the Cross, not to make us saved men and women in a general sense, but to deliver us from our own souls as they overflow the life of the Spirit in us. The Cross must clear the way for the Spirit, and what must be dealt with is the dominance of our own soul-life.

We pass to another phase of the Cross and the Holy Spirit when we come to the Letter to the Galatians. Here it is:

The Cross And Legalism

You will remember how much there is in this letter concerning the Spirit and the Cross. Look at the following two series of passages - (a) Chapter 3:2-3,5,14; 4:6; 5:5, 16-18,22,25; 6:8. (b) 2:20; 3:1; 5:24; 6:14.

What then is the point in this combination of the two - the Cross and the Spirit? The Galatians were being urged and tempted to return to the old legal order of "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not"; to the outward imposition of the whole system of religious regulations and rules; to the strait-jacket of legalism. Legalism is not only Jewish, it is a persistent tendency. It is the easiest thing into which to fall. It is so easy for a person who has the Spirit to begin to lay down the law to others; to say, "You ought (or, ought not) to do this or that"; "You must give up (or, adopt) this or that." Thus the straitjacket of legal bondage is imposed, and it is forgotten that the main need is not law but that the Spirit should be Lord within, and that when this is so, many things will fall off, and those concerned will know what the Lord requires of them. This, as the Apostle says in this letter, is the way of sonship and liberty. The Lord within can be trusted, and hands need not be put upon lives to govern them. Let it be said quite definitely here that, as it was circumcision particularly which occasioned this letter to the Galatians, so it may be (and often is) some one or more of the Christian ordinances or forms or orders or observances which are made focal points of legal pressure and crisis issues. Important as such things may be, we cannot be too strong in pointing out that they may safely be subjected to what is supremely important, that is to say, if the Cross has really been so truly wrought in a life as to deliver from bondage to tradition, popular acceptances, and indeed all that is but the

letter apart from the Spirit, thus giving a full and clear way for the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit within the life, all such things will take care of themselves, and they will be brought in (that is, those which are required by the Lord) in a LIVING, rather than a legal and dead way. But what a mighty work it is for the Cross to have delivered from the inheritance of generations! Setness and finality are features of a legal system, and make spiritual growth and enlargement impossible. Truth without life is fatal, as is righteousness without love. Prejudice and suspicion are fruits of bondage to some religious THING and not of the Spirit.

It is possible to have the most perfect New Testament order and framework, and a most devoted adherence to the letter of the Word, but to be almost totally devoid of life and unction. This is usually due to a failure in a deep experimental working of the Cross and consequent hindering of the Spirit.

Every one of these aspects of the Cross and the Holy Spirit ought to have a volume to itself, and we are only able to give here the vital points. We shall now pass on to those companion letters known to us as "Ephesians" and "Colossians," but more truly, circular letters to churches in an area. Here the particular application relates to:

Deliverance From The Earthlies

And the matter in view is THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST. In "Colossians" it is fullness in Christ as Head of the Church, the Body. "He is the Head of the Body, the Church:... that in Him should all the fullness dwell" (1:18-19). "... in Whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge..." (2:3). "In Him dwelleth all the fullness... and in Him ye are made full" (2:9-10), etc.

In "Ephesians," the fullness is in Christ IN THE CHURCH. "... gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him That filleth all in all" (1:22-23). "... that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God" (3:19). "... till we all attain unto the fullness of Christ." (4:13).

This is all revealed to be the object of "the eternal purpose," "the counsel of His will." It dates back to before times eternal and on to "the age of the ages." It is a vast and unspeakable Divine intention, and one unto which not all will attain. It costs the Apostle much travail, agony, and striving on behalf of the Church (Col. 1:28; 2:1).

This "attaining" demands a special application of the Cross and consequent operation of the Holy Spirit. A phrase particularly characteristic of these letters is "the heavenlies." "Ephesians" has it five times, and the point is carried on in "Colossians" (see Ephesians 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12; Colossians 3:1-2). This is shown to mean a spiritual position, life, and vocation, and when we look at the context we find that it is of very practical implications. Of course, it is especially related to the Church, the Body, and is corporate; but what is true of the Body must be true of every member, hence many personal exhortations. The practical implications referred to combine to emphasize that "fullness" is heavenly and spiritual, and therefore the Lord's people - if they are to attain, not to salvation, but to "purpose" - must live on the heavenly line. Thus, all merely earthly features as governing factors have to be left behind. There is nationality. "There cannot be Greek and Jew." We have got to leave that ground, both as to ourselves and others. If we stand on national ground, which not only means nationalism, but temperament and disposition, we are going to cut short spiritual growth. The same applies to the social "bondman, freeman"; to race or civilization "Barbarian, Scythian"; to religious rites - "circumcision, uncircumcision" (Col. 3:10-11).

The point is this: Christ is in heaven. He is there as "Head of the Body." Christ is essentially a heavenly Man, representative of a new humanity, not of this divided, conflicting, chaotic, disrupted race. He is other and different. Divine fullness will be only known in Him AS SUCH. We have got to leave the ground of this humanity at every point and LIVE ON THE GROUND OF CHRIST - where "Christ is all, and in all."

To do otherwise is to lower Christ, to divide Christ, and to limit Christ.

Unto this heavenly position and fullness the Holy Spirit has come to lead the Church - which, as the "One Body," cannot recognize or tolerate schism or divisions except to its own destruction. So we have in these companion letters much about the Holy Spirit. See Ephesians 1:3 (instead of "spiritual blessing" it should be "blessing of the Spirit") 1:13-14,17; 2:18,22; 3:5,16; 4:3-4,30; 5:9,18; 6:17-18; Col. 1:8.

But this work of the Spirit demands that the Cross has really come in between earth and heaven, and that - because of it - in a true spiritual apprehension we have taken our place with Christ in heaven. "Made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus."

Because of the advanced position set forth, the Cross is largely taken for granted in "Ephesians."

"We have our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." "The exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe... which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead..." "And you did He quicken when you were dead... and raised us up with Him." "That ye put away... the old man and put on the new man." (Ephesians 1:7,19; 2:1,6; 4:22,24).

In Colossians it is more definite still. (See Colossians 2:11-13,20; 3:3,9).

It is a vast revelation which is given in these letters, a "land of far distances" and of inexhaustible riches. We shall only keep ourselves out of it if we live on, and become actuated by, earthly considerations. Here we are forbidden to talk in a discriminating way, either favourably or unfavourably, about British, American, Chinese, German, etc.; social distinctions; or any other feature of the old humanity. If that were our realm of business and sole consideration then we should have to be so affected; but in Christ's interests and in the Church we are crucified to all this, and now we seek to meet believers solely on the ground of Christ. Only so can there be the building up of the Body. There are many other dividing factors among the Lord's people, both as to their natural constitution and their religious acceptance. The Cross is the remedy for all, and the Spirit of God demands the Cross if spiritual fullness is to be reached.

Our final word for the present will arise from the Letter to the Philippians. It is the climax of the risen life.

The Cross And The Throne

In the first place the case of Christ is cited as an example. "Existing in God-form... emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant... humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the Name which is above every name..." (2:5-9).

Then the Apostle is seen to be aspiring with a tremendous aspiration unto something that he calls "the prize of the on-high calling" (3:14). It looks very much as though this is all of a piece with the call and promise to the overcomers of the Laodicean Church. "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with Me in My throne..." (Rev. 3:21).

Thus it is clear from these Scriptures that (1) not all will "attain," and (2) a special work of the Cross is basic to attaining. The Cross has to deal with our "mindedness." "Have this mind in you." "Emptied Himself." This "mindedness" is seen in Paul. "I count all things to be loss... and do count them but refuse." Into the balances with the THRONE both Christ and Paul placed all PERSONAL "gain." Position, rights, reputation, advantages, etc.; this was the way and outworking of the Cross. "Obedient unto death." "Becoming conformed unto His death."

It is all so much a matter of "mindedness." There was a situation at Philippi which represented a real hindrance to that "pressing on" and "attaining," a real menace and threat to the "prize"; a real challenge to "the on-high calling." Two people were not of one mind; there was a clash and a breach. The implications seem to be that personal interests and earthly considerations were the strength of this strain. Only as the Cross dealt with THAT "mindedness," and made way for Christ-mindedness could the way be cleared for apprehending that for which they had been apprehended by Christ Jesus. Satan is terribly against saints coming to the THRONE. That THRONE and that Transcendent Name mean his final undoing. He knows that a "mindedness" which is not the fruit of death to self and Resurrection to Christ alone can frustrate that Divine "calling." Everything, then, lies behind this Throne-union - "Romans," "Corinthians," "Galatians," "Ephesians," "Colossians," and "Philippians," in their specific and cumulative application of the truth that the Spirit always works by the Cross, and the Cross always leads on to the Spirit.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-cross-and-the-holy-spirit/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net