

The Heavenly Man and the Word of God (Continued)

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Heavenly Man is governed by the Word of God through the Eternal Spirit, and the full value of the Word is given when it is incorporated in a body.

Scripture: John 1:14, John 14:10, Colossians 3:16

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "The Word of God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound relationship between the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the Heavenly Man, illustrating how the Holy Spirit is integral in the birth, conflict, ministry, and life of Christ. He explains that the Word must be internalized and lived out, rather than merely understood intellectually, as true knowledge of God comes through a heart exercise that leads to faith and action. The sermon highlights the necessity of the Cross in empowering the Word, asserting that a crucified life is essential for effective ministry. Sparks calls for believers to recognize the Word as a living expression of Christ, urging them to engage with it deeply and personally. Ultimately, he stresses that the Church, as the corporate Heavenly Man, is birthed through the Word and the Spirit working together.

Transcript

Reading: John 1:14, 14:10; Col. 3:16,17; Rev. 19:13.

In the course of our previous meditation, we noted the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Word of God and the Heavenly Man, and before we pass on to further considerations it may be well to sum up that relationship under three or four specific heads.

The Holy Spirit Related to the Word of God and the Heavenly Man

(a) In Birth. We observe, then, that the Holy Spirit is related to the Word of God in the birth of the Heavenly Man. The Word was presented to Mary, and it created for her a problem. In the human realm there was perplexity as to how the realization of this thing could be; how she should attain unto that; how this wonderful presentation and unveiling of possibility and meaning, purpose and intent, and Divine thought could ever become a realized thing. That was her problem. The angel answered her enquiry and cleared her perplexity with one statement: "...the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee..." (Luke 1:35). So we see that, related to the Word of God, there was the Spirit, in this birth.

The Holy Spirit did not take up the Word to make it a realized thing in Mary until she had committed herself to the Word. That is always a law. But when she committed herself deliberately to the Word, then the Holy Spirit took up the realization of the meaning, the implication, the content, the purpose of that Word.

(b) In Conflict. In the same way the Holy Spirit was associated with the Word of God in the conflict. When the Spirit had come upon the Lord Jesus, as the Heavenly Man, at Jordan, He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the Devil. Being led of the Spirit, governed by the Spirit, actuated by, and moving in, the Spirit, the Word of God was, by the Spirit, the instrument for the overthrow of the enemy, and for the ultimate advance rather than the arrest of the Heavenly Man. You notice that there is the mark of enlargement, because when the Devil left Him, it says, "...Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit..." (Luke 4:14). There is the mark of enlargement, the sign of increase through this that has happened. The Spirit was associated with the Word in the conflict, unto victory, and unto enlargement.

(c) In Ministry. The same was true in the ministry of the Lord Jesus: "...the words that I speak unto you I speak not from myself; but the Father abiding in Me doeth His works" (John 14:10). The words are the issue of an indwelling activity of the Father, by the Spirit.

We are speaking solely of Christ as the Heavenly Man now, not of Christ in His Deity and Godhead, as the Son of God in the highest sense. In His ministry, by the anointing, by the indwelling Spirit of the Father, there are activities going on in Him which result in words coming from Him. But they are not from Him apart from the Father, they are not from Him out of relationship with the Spirit, they are coming from the inward activities and energies of the Spirit of the Father. The Spirit is producing the words by His operations in the life. That is why they are always practical words, that is, words of practical effect. We will come back to that presently.

(d) In the Life. What was true in His spoken ministry, and in these other ways, was also true in His life. His life was a continuous and spontaneous fulfilling of the Scriptures, not by continuous reference to them, but through the indwelling of the Spirit, Who had the Scriptures in possession, having Himself given them, and inspired them. They are eternal, and the Spirit in Him was moving in such a way that the Scriptures were being fulfilled all the time. On many occasions the statement is made to indicate that fact: "...that the scriptures might be fulfilled..." So He was energized and actuated in His life, and in all its incidents, by the Spirit in relation to the Word. The Heavenly Man is governed by the Word of God through the Eternal Spirit. That is true of Him personally.

Now that is true also of Him corporately. The corporate Heavenly Man is the result of the same process. The Church, His Body, in its every part, is brought into being by the Word, firstly presented, and then contemplated, considered, responded to, and the Holy Spirit taking it up and making it a living thing. The result is the Church, the Body of Christ, the corporate Heavenly Man.

That is how the Church comes into being, and to contemplate any kind of thing called the Church, which does not come in by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, is to contemplate something that does not exist in the thought of God. Set the Word of God aside and you will have no Church. What you will have is something that is utterly false. Set the Holy Spirit, in relation to the Word of God, aside, and you destroy what you are trying to build up.

That is viewing it in a very general way, but for us it becomes an immediate matter that our very being, as a part of Christ, issues from exactly the same principle as operated in His incarnation, the Word and the Spirit co-operating.

A Reiteration of the Divine Purpose--The Principle of Incarnation

Let us break this up, going back a little in thought. God requires a Man for the expression of His thoughts. To put that in another way, God has never meant just to utter words, statements; to make Himself known and give expression to Himself by verbal utterances. There is a great deal more hanging upon that than appears for the moment, but that is the simple fact, that God has never intended to make Himself known by statements, by words, by verbal utterances. That is why it is infinitely perilous to be occupied with teaching as teaching, and to take up teaching as teaching, to take up things said, and think that because we have the thing said to us we have the thing itself. We never have! Many people have all the things that have been said, but they have not the thing itself. There is such a position to come to as that of learning, and never coming to a knowledge of the truth. That is a position of great peril. Yes, for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years we may have heard all that there is, and know it all, and yet never have come to a knowledge of the truth. It sounds like a contradiction, but it is possible, or the Word of God would not say so. What is the trouble? Where is the flaw? That is what we are trying to see now.

Now, as we have said, God never intended to try to make Himself known, to give expression to Himself, by words, by statements, by mere utterances, that is, by things said. For the expression of His thoughts God requires a Man. The Word, therefore, becomes flesh; for the man God desires must be the product of His Word in an inward way; that is, life must be related to truth, and truth must be related to life.

Again, there is the terrible danger of speaking apart from the Word of God having been inwrought. There is a fascination about the great truths, and connected with this there is a danger, especially if you happen to be in what is called "ministry." The danger is that of getting hold of truths, of doctrines, of themes, of subjects, of things in the Word of God, and all the time talking about them. You go and hear something fresh, and it is a new idea, and so off you go to give it out. In reality you are collecting material for your ministry in that way, and there is a terrible danger in so doing. It is going to put you and your hearers into a false position. As we have already said, it will make things top-heavy. You are building teaching upon something that is not life, that is not growth. It is simply a case of putting teaching on to people, and presently the whole thing will topple over, down will come your edifice, and you will wonder what is the matter. It is only life that counts. You have to lay a foundation, but there must be an excavating, an upheaving, a breaking up, an inworking, before you can add teaching. That is why doctrine followed the working of grace in the heart, in the New Testament. The word of grace was begun, and then the Lord explained by the doctrine what He had been doing. It is often thus with ourselves. The Lord takes us through something which we cannot understand, and which to us, while we are passing through it, is a deep, dark, terrible experience, but afterward He explains it to us in His Word, and we are brought into a full interpretation of what we have gone through. It is far better to have it so.

The receiving of the Word of God by the Old Testament prophets is described by the Hebrew verb *hayah*, which means "happened." Thus the literal rendering of the Hebrew is, The word of the Lord happened unto so and so. In our translation this is expressed by the word "came": The word of the Lord came to so and so. It is an event, not just a verbal utterance. That is how it has to be through us to others. That is why the Lord said, "...the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life..." (John 6:63). There is an event with His words, not always in the immediate consciousness of those spoken to, but, as we have already pointed out, something is done, and it will come to light one day. Upon that everything in destiny hangs. God speaks, and something is effected one way or the other. Thus the Word of God is not merely a saying, a speech, it is an event.

The full value is given to the Word of God when it is incorporated in a body. That is, of course, patent in the case of the Lord Jesus Himself. The full value of the Scriptures was reached when they were incorporated in Him personally, when it could be said, "And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us... full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

The Word of God and a Living Assembly

On the corporate side there is something to be recognized which perhaps may occasion difficulty for the moment, but which is nevertheless true, and something that must be taken into account, and be remembered, that the Word of the Lord in a living assembly has special value and power. If you have not seen that mentally, and recognized that as a truth, possibly you have known it as an experience, as a fact. In a living assembly of the Lord's people, with the Word of the Lord in the midst, what power that Word has, and what value. But how unprofitable it is to try to preach the Word in the midst of an assembly that is not living, but dead and dry. It may be the Word of the Lord, and, so far as the preacher is concerned, it may be in the power of the Holy Spirit, but of how little profit it is. When you get an assembly really alive unto the Lord, a body throbbing with life, what value, what power, what fruit there is in the Word. It was true in the case of the Lord Jesus. There you have a living One, with the Word of God in Him, and you see how, so far as He was concerned, the Word was spirit and life. The Word had special value in Him, because in Him was life.

That is a true principle in relation to the Heavenly Man, as corporately set forth. You have there a living body, with the Lord's life and the Lord's Word in the midst, running, having free course, and being glorified. On the outer fringe of that company there may be the unsaved, and others who are not alive to the Spirit, but the fact that the Lord has a nucleus of living ones in the midst gives to the Word something of value, which makes it far more powerful, far more effective, than where this is not the case. This is a thing that those who minister in the Spirit know all about in experience. If the Word is ministered in a fairly large company, not very far advanced, and not having learned the language of the Spirit, and anything is said very much beyond early simplicities, they look at you almost open-mouthed, and think you are talking a strange language. But when the Word has been released and there have been two or three who are alive to the Word, it has taken on power, and these people, although not perhaps understanding the terminology, have become alive to something. Some of you when preaching may have looked round the congregation to find one co-operating spirit, and the Word has found release. If there is a nucleus in the midst of a realm of death, or comparative death, the Word of God has a special value by reason of a Holy-Spirit-actuated unit. It is there that we have to see the importance of being alive unto the Lord for the ministry.

We have been dealing with the fourth chapter of Ephesians, where we read of the Heavenly Man giving gifts; apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry. The saints are to minister. Now here is a way in which the saints minister. All the saints do not come up on to the platform and give the message, but they marvellously minister when they co-operate with the ministry, and really the ministry of the apostle or prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher, is fulfilled by the living company. It is a poor look-out for the one who is ministering, if there is not a company to fulfil the ministry like that, by spiritual co-operation. In that way the Lord gets through with a revelation of Himself. How much more can the Lord reveal Himself when He has a living company.

The Lord seemed severely limited when He was here, so that He could never say all He wanted to say: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). Nor, again, could He

do what He wanted to do: "And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matt. 13:58). But, given a living company, there is no end to the possibilities. The Lord can reveal and express Himself there. The Lord needs a Man, a heavenly Man for His self-revelation, the expression of His thoughts, and the full value is only given to the Word when it is incorporated in a body.

Christ and the Word of God are One

Now we come much closer. The thing that must be said at once is, that by the Holy Spirit the Word is Christ. It is not a statement of things, it is the expression of a Person. What we mean to say is, that we have to take the same attitude toward the Word, that we take toward Christ. We have to face the Word of the Lord in the same way that we face the Lord Himself. It is not something of the Lord presented to us in words, but it is the Lord Himself coming to us. We cannot reject any part of His Word and keep Him. We cannot divide between the Lord and His Word. People seem to think that they can take some of the things the Lord has said and leave others. The Word is one. The Word is the Lord. To refuse the Word in any part, is to refuse the Lord, is to limit the Lord, is to say, in effect: Lord, I do not want You! Lord, I will not have You! It is not that we will not have the Word, but that we will not have the Lord Himself, for the two are one: "His name is called The Word of God." "The Word became flesh...." You cannot get in between, the two are one. He is the Word of God. God does not come to us in statements, He comes to us in Person, and the challenge is to take an attitude, not towards the things said, but towards the Lord Himself.

The Necessity for Heart Exercise

The question that arises in most of our hearts when we have been hearing a great deal is, How is that to become our life? How is that to become a part of us? How are we to become the living expression of that? That is the question which should arise, at any rate. Let us remind ourselves, and those for whom we have responsibility in ministry, that it is possible to be ever learning, and never coming to a knowledge of the truth. We can attend conferences, go right through every meeting, and mentally take in all that is said, and go away with it in our minds, or have it in our note-books, and then have to come back to another conference to get more, and then to another, and still another. We look back over the years of conferences and begin to take stock, and we ask ourselves the question: What is the result of all this? I remember that on such and such an occasion, such and such a thing was spoken about, and on another occasion something else; these have been the things which have been the subjects of the various conferences; and now, what does it represent? That is a very solemn question. Is it that we know these things; that is, if they were repeated, should we take the attitude: Well, we have heard that before; we know that! That is what we mean by ever learning, ever learning, without maybe ever coming to the knowledge of the truth, in the sense in which that word "knowledge" is used. What are we going to do? How is all this to be translated into something more than words, more than thoughts, more than ideas, more than truths as truths, more than teaching, so that it really does become incorporated, expressed in a Man? It can be, and it must be. Exactly the same principle must operate as when Christ was born of Mary. It means that the Word presented has to lead us to exercise of heart. That is what happened with Mary. She immediately entered into an exercise of heart about it. You know what measure of exercise has resulted from your hearing of the Word. Consider it thus: What does that mean? What does that involve? What cost will that entail? What is that going to lead to? Is that the will of God for me? The need is of a present, direct, and deliberate taking up of the Word, and facing it, contemplating it, entering into exercise of heart about it. That is the first step towards incarnation of the Word.

Having looked at it, having been exercised by it, we must take a deliberate step in relation to it in faith. That is necessary. You will never get anywhere unless you do. When, having faced that Word, weighted it, looked at it in the light of God's will for you, and having come to a position you take a deliberate attitude, if it is to be towards the Lord, the attitude must be: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord (behold, the servant of the Lord); be it unto me according to Thy word." "I do not know how it can be; it seems an impossible thing, too high for me, but be it unto me." That is faith. Mary did not stand back and say: Well, it is a wonderful revelation, far too great for me; I do not believe it can ever be, I cannot really accept it! Wonderful as it was, and impossible as it was on any other ground but God, with the sheer impossibility of its ever being on any natural ground, she said: Nevertheless, be it! That is faith. It is not according to what I think is possible, what I feel to be possible, what seems to me to be possible, but "according to Thy word." It is according to the Word, and that Word is not an impossible thing! If You have spoken, You do not speak impossibilities, You do not challenge me with impossibilities! "...be it unto me according to Thy word." It is a committal of faith, a deliberate act of faith in relation to the Word, that is required. How many of us have so acted over things which we have heard? How many of us have got away and, in exercise of heart, said: "Lord, that is a tremendous thing, and for me in a natural way it is quite impossible; but it is Your Word, therefore, be it unto me. I stand on it, and I stand for it, You make it good. I can do no more than say, Yes, and I believe God." There is a great deal in a transaction like that. Without that we do not grow. Without that we are ever learning and never coming to a knowledge of the truth. Without that so much of truth becomes merely mental in its apprehension, and is not living, is not effective.

However much we have failed in the past, there is something to be done in this matter. When the Lord has been speaking to us, we should make it our first business to get apart with Him. You would not believe the heart-break it is, to one who has been pouring out that Word, to find that almost before he has finished his message, and the gathering is closed, people are talking on all the trivialities of their domestic and business affairs, on things that can quite well wait. It is not as though there were any serious or critical situation to be enquired into, but mere talk ensues along the lines of ordinary, every-day things. Our point is that there has to be a deliberate transaction with the Lord, if that Word is to become an expression of God in a life; and God can never be satisfied with anything else. God can never be satisfied with mere statements, but only with the man as a living expression of His words.

The Relation of the Word to the Cross

That is why the Word is always related to the Cross. The Apostle Paul uses this phrase: "For the word of the cross is... the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). It is the power of God. It is the wisdom of God. We know that the word used is the "Logos" of the Cross. The Logos is the combination of a thought and expression in a personal way. It is the Word in a Person, related to the Cross. That is why it is put in this way by the same Holy Spirit of knowledge and understanding, in the Book of the Revelation: "And He is arrayed in a garment dipped in blood: and His name is called The Word of God" (Rev. 19:13). You see the two things, the garment sprinkled with blood, and His name "The Word of God." Then you look into the Letter to the Hebrews, and you will remember that in chapter nine and verse nineteen, you have these words: "...he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself, and all the people..." There is the Word and the Blood. It is the Cross that gives the working power to the Word.

The Cross of the Lord Jesus is a tremendously effective thing. The Cross of the Lord Jesus, in its spiritual value, will break down everything that stands in God's way. It will clear the ground of the old creation. It will destroy the power of the enemy and his works. The Cross is a tremendous thing for breaking down,

destroying, overthrowing. The Cross, on its resurrection side, knows no bounds to power: "...the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead..." (Eph. 1:19, 20). The Cross has these two sides, the breaking down side and the raising up side, and it is in the power of the Cross of the Lord Jesus that the Word of God finds its effectiveness. He becomes the Word of the Cross, and the garment sprinkled with blood is the garment of Him Who is "The Word of God," and as "The Word of God" He gets His power by way of the Cross. Christ crucified is the power of God. When the Cross has its place in our lives, the Word of God is tremendously potent. An uncrucified preacher is an ineffective and unfruitful preacher. Ministry in the Word of God from any but a crucified minister or vessel is impotent, fruitless, barren. Find the crucified man giving the Word of God, and you know it will be effective, fruitful, powerful.

Take Jeremiah as a great Old Testament illustration. If ever there was a crucified man in spirit, it was Jeremiah. He bears the marks of a crucified man right from the beginning. If you want to know what a crucified man is, read the first chapter of Jeremiah's prophecy, and you will see him indicated at once. Read right through Jeremiah, and you will see a life size portrait of a crucified man. Turn to chapter one, verses four through six:

"Now the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations."

Any natural, uncrucified man would leap at that, and say: My! I am somebody! What power is entrusted to me! What a life-work I have!

"Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child."

Such is the reaction of a crucified man to a great prospect set before him by the Lord. See what a crucified man can be when the Lord has him in His hands--verses nine and ten:

"...I have put My words in thy mouth: see, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and to overthrow; to build, and to plant."

There is the Cross in the word of the crucified man: "...My words in thy mouth..." destroying, overthrowing, plucking up, casting down. That is the power of the Cross. The Lord does that with regard to ourselves. The Cross works havoc in our flesh. It brings us to an end. But there is another side of the Cross, and that is to build, and to plant. That is the working of the Cross in resurrection. Thus we have the Word in the mouth of a crucified man. It is the Word of the Cross in effect. It is Christ crucified, the power of His Cross bringing into view a heavenly Man, through the embodiment of the Word of God. The Cross gets rid of that other man who looms so large, and who is to be summed up in Antichrist, the super-man, who will sit in the very temple of God giving out that he is God; some great one of this old and cursed creation, so lifted up in pride that he assumes the very place of God. The Cross casts him out, and brings God's Man into view, greater than he. Over against Antichrist is Christ, and there is no comparison. The Cross brings in that Man by putting out the other. All that is in us of that other man the Cross brings to nought, and thus makes room for the revelation of the Heavenly Man, both personally and corporately, and gives to us a ministry which is the result of the work of His Word within. It is a ministry which is a work, not a ministry of statements. That is why we have stressed the words in John fourteen--"...the words that I say unto you I speak not from Myself: but the Father abiding in Me doeth His works." The Father dwelling in Him was doing His works. The words that He speaks, He is not speaking from Himself, they are coming out of the

Father's works. Thus, it is not a case of truth, teaching, words, ideas; it is a ministry (evidenced, maybe, by words, but by "words, which the Holy Spirit teacheth") resultant from inward works, the works of the Spirit within. The Lord lead us more into that.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-heavenly-man-and-the-word-of-god-continued/>

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