

The Nature and Reality of Spiritual Energy

by T. Austin-Sparks

The nature and reality of spiritual energy is the energy of God that results in His activity and movement, and is the source of eternal and incorruptible values.

Scripture: Luke 2:49, John 2:11, John 5:19, John 5:30, John 9:4, John 10:16, John 14:10, John 16:13, 2 Corinthians 12:5-9, Ephesians 3:20

Topics: "Divine Purpose", "Spiritual Energy"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the nature and reality of spiritual energy in the life of Christ, illustrating how His purposeful actions were driven by divine energy from above. He highlights that Jesus' life was characterized by continuous movement and activity, fueled by the Holy Spirit, and that this same energy is available to believers today. Sparks urges the church to recognize that true spiritual life is not passive but actively engages with the world, reflecting God's purpose and power in every situation. He warns against relying on human strength, asserting that eternal value comes only from God's energy and direction. Ultimately, the sermon calls for believers to embody the heavenly resources available to them in their daily lives.

Transcript

In our previous meditation, we were speaking about the extra world of resource which the Lord had at His service, at His command, with which He was in communication and from which He was drawing. Everything for Him was from above that is, out from heaven. We are now going to consider a further element in His unseen reserve and resource, namely, the nature and reality of the spiritual energy that resulted in His activity and movement. That is something about which you and I will have to learn a great deal, if there is going to be anything commensurate with His life as the result of our own activities here on this earth.

The Purposefulness Of Christ

No one can read the Gospels without being greatly impressed with the purposefulness of Christ. It characterized Him from His youth, or even childhood. At the age of twelve, it was one thing which came out pre-eminently in the, shall we call it, altercation that took place between Him and His parents, when they had been to Jerusalem and had returned, not found Him amongst them, and gone back seeking Him for three days. In all their anxiety and concern He just quietly explained it all. "Knew ye not that I must be in My Father's house?" (Luke 2:49) - with the emphasis upon the 'must'. 'I just must, I am governed, I am

controlled, I am under the mighty persuasion and girding of a heavenly thing, a heavenly relationship.' And how often afterwards, when He had taken up His life-work from the Jordan days, that word came from His lips. "We must work the works of Him That sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring" (John 10:16). You see this tremendous imperative in His life of purposefulness, leading to so much of vital activity and involving or expressing such a tremendous energy.

Whilst I was reading in this connection, I naturally turned to the Gospel by Mark, and I thought that I might perhaps be able to put down on paper His movements in the first few chapters of that Gospel. But I found that by the time I reached the end of the fourth chapter, it was necessary to give it up. You just look at the movement - quick, rapid, incisive movement. 'Straightway He...!', 'straightway He was...!', and on from place to place. It is a picture of continuous activity and constant movement, from place to place, here and there, this and that; a life just crowded and crammed, the working out of some tremendous energy that was in Him. That was His life.

And when you move to the Book of the Acts, it is impossible not to recognise that same energy in the apostles and in the Church. It is a book of continual goings, of tremendous energies, of vital activities. It is the Spirit of God in action. And when you move still further, into the Letters of the New Testament, you find this same thing; but now it is carried into the spiritual life of the Church, the spiritual life of believers, and the constant urge is to go on, go on - "let us go on". It is the spirit of movement, of progress, of advance. It is the expression of the mighty energies of the Spirit, the goings of the Spirit of God in the Church and in believers.

Surely this is a true fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim, and the wheels, and the Spirit in the wheels, going straight forward, turning neither to the right nor to the left, but going. "The Spirit... was in the wheels", and they were going straight forward. And again, it seems to be so much the counterpart of what we have in the Book of Numbers. There, as you know, the Spirit is in charge, in the symbol of the cloud. When the cloud rises and moves, the tabernacle has to be taken down and moved, because the Spirit is on the move. The Spirit stops, and the tabernacle is set up - but only for a time; presently the Spirit rises and goes on, and the same thing is repeated - all under this forward movement of the Spirit, this going. The tabernacle, as you know, is that which sets forth the whole heavenly Person of Christ, Christ from every standpoint, and here it is the matter of all things concerning Christ being in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and constantly projected forward. It is the fulfilment of His own words in John 16:13, that "the Spirit... shall guide you into all the truth". All the truth; ever on. Christ is the fullness, the whole heavenly revelation, and the Spirit is here to bring the Church ever on. There may be a pause, for a purpose; but the pause, when the purpose is accomplished, is terminated, and on we go again.

My point is to indicate the tremendous energy that there is related to God's purpose as embodied in the Lord Jesus. Perhaps we have in the past put too much emphasis upon the negative side of this. So often we have quoted the words of the Lord, "I can of Myself do nothing" (John 5:30), "The Son can do nothing of Himself" (John 5:19), and similar passages of Scripture which indicate the negative side, the impossible side, the side of limitation. I say, perhaps we have put too much emphasis on that. It is a most impressive thing that the Lord who said that - "I can of Myself do nothing", "The Son can do nothing of Himself", "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not from Myself: the Father abiding in Me doeth His works" (John 14:10) - the Lord who said all that was the most active and energetic person that has ever been on this earth: His was a life more crowded with movement - I mean movement to effect, movement with an issue, movement with values of eternal character - a life more crowded with that kind of thing than any other life

has ever been.

Perhaps therefore we should pass over to the positive side; but, as we do so, we must understand that this is not just bare activity, this is not merely energy, this is not a restless, feverish drive. There is a NATURE here, and it is that nature of things, of the energy and of the movements, which contains the quality of the result. There have been, and there are, many full lives, tremendously active lives, but again we come back to our great test of everything - how much is of the incorruptible character which will appear again, and what proportion of it all will be there in glory for ever? That is the test; that is the question. My point is not just to say that the Lord Jesus had a very busy life, that He was always on the move. My point is to say that there was something in it which was not just the movement of a very energetic person; there was something very much more about it than that.

The Goings Of God

In the first place, these goings were the goings of God. They were not goings initiated by man. These goings were not of the planning of man; these movements were not promoted by man. They were the goings of God, and the Lord made it perfectly clear that, with all that He was doing, He was getting it from above, it was what the Father was doing that He did, and He did nothing other than that. It came from above. All the plan, all the purpose, all the activity, every work, and the time of every work, was given Him through the eternal Spirit from above: that is why it is all eternal, that is why it was so full of potentiality, and all so tremendous in its effectiveness.

We can, of course, easily test that. We know quite well that that is not true of a great mass of energetic activity, even in Christianity. The percentage of the really eternal, incorruptible value is very small in all our work for the Lord. What the Lord is wanting to say to us at this time is this: that He wants the maximum of the intrinsic, the maximum of the eternal, the maximum of that which will not pass when its vessels pass, when those used have left the scene; that which will be established for all time, appearing again and again in the spiritual life of His people, and appearing in glory as the substance of that whole Kingdom which is to be. The maximum of the intrinsic value - if it is to be like that, as it was with our Lord, it must be on this wise, that the goings are the goings of God.

But let me say again that the goings of God are really very, very much in action. I think some people imagine that a life in the Spirit is a life which is very passive, with much waiting and doing nothing. Perhaps we have to adjust ourselves about this. There are times when the Lord keeps us out of action - as we call actions - but there are another lot of actions going on in us. There are times when it seems, outwardly, that we are not being allowed to fulfil any great purpose, but the Lord is doing something which is very vital to His purpose. His goings are in operation all the same. A life in the Spirit is never a passive life, never a quiescent life, never a life without movement. If ever, inwardly or outwardly, you come to the place where there really is nothing doing, you may take it that you have got out of the way of the Lord. There is always something doing provided the Holy Spirit is in charge. You must not put your judgment upon it and say that there is nothing doing. God is at work IF we are under the government of the Holy Spirit; there is no doubt about it. We must always keep on the positive side of this, and not think that a spiritual life is a life without purpose or action. It is nothing of the kind. We will come back to that again presently. The goings are the goings of God: they must be so if the values are to be eternal values; and the value, the eternal value, will be in proportion to our oneness with God in His goings, not our own.

The Direction Of God

Then the directions are the directions of God. God has never yet asked any man to make a plan for Him - never! You will never find anywhere that God says, 'Please plan My work for Me, please arrange things for Me, please provide Me with a schedule'. God has never done that. God keeps the plan in His own hands. God designs everything; and mark you, again, the measure of real value from heaven's standpoint will be the measure in which we are moving in God's plan, not in our own, in the way in which God has predetermined He should fulfil His purposes.

The Energy Of God

Not only the goings, and not only the directions, must be of God, but the energy must be the energy of God. That is the pivot of our present consideration. It is the energy of God, and this also makes a big and very deep discrimination. Our energies, as such, will never accomplish anything eternal. Let us settle that. We start on that side, and come to the other side in a moment. Our driving force, our strength of will, our strong-mindedness, our determination, our forcefulness, in itself, will get nowhere in eternal things. We admire people who overcome many difficulties, who accomplish great things, and especially who overcome the handicaps of human life, by sheer force of will. Yes, that is heroism, in its own realm to be admired, but never let us think that we are going to accomplish anything of eternal, heavenly value by force of will, by our own energy of mind, soul or body. Not at all! The Lord Jesus had tremendous energy, but He drew it all from above. It was all the energy of the Holy Spirit by whom He was anointed, and that is borne out overwhelmingly by the whole teaching of the New Testament.

Saul, the persecutor, was a man of tremendous will. The driving force of that man was terrific. He was a dynamic force amongst men, and what Saul of Tarsus determined no one would withstand but God. He was a man like that. But what does Paul say about himself, and what did Paul have to learn all through his life? This very thing - "I can do nothing of myself". He came to the point, to the wonderful height of spiritual attainment, where he said, "I will not glory, save in my weaknesses" (2 Cor. 12:5). "Most gladly... will I... glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may tabernacle upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). That is rising very high. It was one of his life lessons, that, with all his natural drive and force, power of will, of mind, nothing was accomplished in that way, by that means. It had to be something coming down like a tent and then enfolding, enwrapping him, so that he was moving within the sphere of another mighty energy that he called "the power of Christ". He spoke of himself as being insufficient, wholly insufficient, for these things; he cried, "Who is sufficient...?" (2 Cor. 2:16). And he answered, "Our sufficiency is from God; Who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:5,6).

The real effectiveness of that man's life, which was by no means a passive or negative life, came from heaven. It was not because Paul was such a forceful man, with such a tremendous will - so energetic that he could never stop going. No. He put it all down to one thing, when he summed it up like this: "according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20). Here is another energy which is responsible for all things. There were certainly many times in the life of Paul, as no doubt also in the life of the Lord Jesus, when he could not have gone on, when he would have just had to give up in sheer exhaustion, under a "sentence of death". But how many times did this servant of God rise and go on when it was humanly impossible! The energy is the energy of God, not the driving force of man.

The Impact Of God

And yet once more the impact of these lives and of all this activity was the impact of heaven, the registration of heaven. We make a mistake when we attribute things to the natural side of servants of God.

When we attribute anything to what Paul was himself, we make a big mistake. Men have got into the habit of talking about Paul's wonderful powers of intellect, of Paul's wonderful powers of recuperation, of Paul's wonderful powers of survival and continuance. Paul may have had a wonderful brain, but that wonderful brain did not produce the revelation that we have got through him. The Lord may have had a very useful channel and vessel, but the knowledge, the revelation, was not there until the Lord put it there that is, it was all from heaven. All this purpose, execution, realisation, impact, effectiveness, is because of some incorruptible resource, because there is that 'plus' of energy to draw upon. Thank God for that inexhaustible fountain of spiritual energy! It is a very great reality. You and I need to learn what we have, in the way of resources in Christ, for DOING, for accomplishing and for finishing.

A Practical Life

Now we must come to this very important point. While this is all from God - and it IS all from God, the work and the works, the plan and the procedure, the energy and the accomplishment, and everything in Christ, and for us according to His will; it is all of the LORD - do not let us make this fatal mistake, that we are to wait until the Lord moves us, that we are just to sit down in our armchairs, if you like - literally or metaphorically - and wait until the Spirit stirs us up. What I see about the Lord Jesus is this, that the Holy Spirit moved Him to a great many practical things here on this earth in relation to the needs of others. His was an immensely practical life. He was alive to need, and He was alive to need by the Holy Spirit actuating Him. He was ALIVE to it.

Oh, how much we wait to be told what needs to be done, to have it pointed out to us. And how selective we are. 'Well, that is not spiritual, that is merely temporal, that is secular.' We begin to put things into categories like that, and become - may I use the phrase? - far TOO 'spiritual!' We are up in the clouds somewhere, and men or women governed by the Holy Spirit will never have their feet off this earth. You understand what I mean. We may expand that in the next chapter. But there are Christians who are all the time thinking that a really spiritual life is a life intensely occupied with studying the Scriptures, and with prayer, and with all kinds of spiritual exercises, and any SPIRITUAL work, well, that is all right; but this and that, the menial, the ordinary, the everyday, the things of this life and this earth, no, they belong to another realm.

THEY DO NOT! The Holy Spirit is going to manifest energy for the simplest and for the most difficult tasks down here. The thing does not appeal to our natures at all, that He is for THAT, and in THAT. In these things it can be proved - and He would have it proved - that there is a heavenly resource. Oh, be careful of your selectiveness! Be careful of the dividing between what is called 'spiritual' and something else. I see the Lord Jesus alive to need, and alive by the Holy Spirit to need, not having to be coerced, to be persuaded; 'on the spot', as we would put it; and that is where the testimony is. It is a very practical thing, this testimony of the heavenly life. I am always afraid of using that very phrase 'heavenly', in case people get the idea that somewhere or other we are going to float about on clouds and be out of everything. Not a bit of it! We shall find the Holy Ghost drives us into a wilderness, the Holy Ghost brings us into very practical situations and says, 'Now then, test your resources, test your heavenly resources in that situation, and in that!' We are all the time wanting to come out of business and get into 'spiritual' work, but that is not the way of the Spirit. I believe that really spiritual people are alive to situations and are very practical and active in all manner of things. Much more could be said about that, but no more for the present.

The point is this, when all is said: that in everything, in all sorts of ways, by very many different practical, everyday courses, heaven would insinuate itself, heaven would come in and say, 'Yes, in THIS there is to be the testimony of the Lord Jesus, which is that He has brought life and incorruption to light. In THIS there is something extra to what it is in itself. In THIS there can be a testimony to that other resource that is yours.'

When the Lord Jesus was here, and touching so many of the ordinary things of this life, as we said in our last chapter - a wedding, a funeral, a market-place, a feast that they made for Him - when He came in, something extra always came in with Him. That extra at the marriage of Cana of Galilee; that was no ordinary earthly affair. "This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory" (John 2:11). Something of heaven came in to what otherwise would have been an ordinary affair - that is, viewed from the outside. Perhaps marriages are never ordinary affairs in the case of the people who are concerned! But here was one of a million marriages - yet it was not just 'lost in the crowd'. It was something distinguished; He brought into it His 'plus'.

There is a funeral. Oh, there are many funerals, a daily occurrence, but this was an exceptional funeral. There probably never was a funeral like that one. Jesus came into it, and He brought in something that made all the difference. Then there was that feast that they made for Him. Wherever He was, He touched the situation with something that lived and has gone on and will show its value throughout eternity. This is what the Lord needs, this is the Lord's testimony: that we should be here on this earth, not apart from the everyday things of life, in what we call the 'spiritual' - which really means the 'abstract' - but that here, in this world, heaven should be coming through, something more should be registering; there should be an energy, a vitality, which is more than human, more than natural, which will not just pass when that thing is done, but which will appear again. So it was with Him, so it was with the Apostles, so it was with New Testament Christians. So it is shown to be the mind of God for the Church, and so it should be with you and with me - that we should be here as living embodiments of the fact that there is something all the time coming through which is not of this world, something of heaven that is our resource.

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