

# The Spirit of Christ's Character

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, committed to securing Christ's place in this world and filling all things with Christ.*

**Scripture:** Luke 4:18, John 16:13, Acts 1:5, Acts 2:4, Romans 8:9, Galatians 4:6, Ephesians 4:4, Philippians 1:19, Hebrews 2:10, Revelation 21:6

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Christ Exaltation"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches about the inseparable connection between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, emphasizing that the Holy Spirit is particularly the Spirit of Christ in this dispensation. He highlights the importance of securing Christ's place in the universe and in the hearts of believers, emphasizing that the Holy Spirit's primary work is to glorify and exalt Jesus. The sermon delves into the significance of being filled with the Spirit, stressing that this filling is intended to fill all things with Christ, and the real meaning of being filled with the Spirit is to be transformed into the image of Christ.

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## Transcript

"John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1:5).

"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4).

"There is one body, and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4).

The Holy Spirit is, of course, the Spirit of God, but in this dispensation He is particularly the Spirit of Christ. The very title 'Christ' (which is simply the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew 'Messiah') means 'Anointed'. The Lord Jesus said that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him, because the Lord had anointed Him (Luke 4:18). And thus it is that He has become known to us as the Christ. The Holy Spirit and Jesus have, as it were, united, combined; they are two Persons, but you cannot separate them. They are like the figure of the oil upon the man: they have become joined together. The Holy Spirit, then, who, in the old dispensation, was in the general sense the Spirit of God, is in this dispensation particularly the Spirit of Christ.

The Holy Spirit Inseparable From Christ

You have only to turn over the pages of your New Testament to see how often that connection is brought out. "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal. 4:6). "The Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7); "the Spirit of the Christ" (Rom. 8:9b). The Holy Spirit was given to the Son for His mission in and throughout this dispensation. Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit for the particular work that He had been chosen by the Father to do, and especially in this dispensation. That work, that mission, did not end when He left this earth. There is a very true sense in which it may be said that when He left this earth it only began - not, of course, altogether; but, in a fuller way, a much fuller way, He began His real mission when He ascended to the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens. It is an impressive thing to note how the Holy Spirit is always related to Jesus.

The preaching, at the beginning, was undoubtedly in the power of the Holy Spirit. They were filled with the Spirit, and then they were immediately constrained to proclaim the good news (Acts 2:4,14). There is no doubt that they preached by the Holy Spirit - that it was the Holy Spirit who was inspiring the preaching. What did they preach? It was just all about the Lord Jesus: they were preaching about Him; the Holy Spirit inspired them to proclaim Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit was in those mighty acts that we find strewn throughout the early record. The 'Acts' were truly the acts of the Holy Spirit. Many were the forms of His activity - and not only in the miracles that were performed. An apostle essays to take his way in a certain direction, and the record says: "The Spirit of Jesus suffered them not" - "the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not" (16:7). The same apostle, writing to a church, said that he was counting upon their "supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19). And that supply was for the accomplishment of his mission.

The Holy Spirit was in and behind all the teaching, fulfilling the promise of the Lord Jesus: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). The truth that we have in the New Testament is wholly Spirit-provided truth; and it all relates to the Lord Jesus. The conformity of believers to the image of the Son of God is the work of the Holy Spirit: He is the transforming and conforming Spirit, and His model is Christ. The Holy Spirit is wholly and utterly committed to the Lord Jesus. We may say that the many-sided but inclusive work of the Holy Spirit is, first and foremost, to secure the place of the Lord Jesus wherever He can.

#### Securing Christ's Place in this World

We need to remember that. We must not put it in other ways; we must not think of it in other terms. 'The Holy Spirit will do this and that', we say. Yes, He will: but - 'this and that', and perhaps a hundred or a thousand other things and aspects, are all related to one thing; they are not things in themselves. We must emphasize this here very strongly. The Holy Spirit may give light; the Holy Spirit may give leading; the Holy Spirit may do many many 'things': but we must remember that everything that the Holy Spirit does is included in one object, it is all to one end. That object is, primarily, to secure Christ's place in this universe - to secure the place of the Lord Jesus in men, in this world.

Our way of speaking may often mislead us. We would say: The work of the Holy Spirit is to save souls. Yes, quite - but why? just to have them saved? No; in order that the Lord Jesus may have His place. Those souls are to be the 'residences' of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit may instruct believers and build them up - for what purpose? Just that they should be mature Christians? Not at all; but so that the Lord Jesus shall have a larger place. No matter what the Holy Spirit does, He has one all-inclusive object and end - the glorifying of the Lord Jesus: that is, the giving of the Lord Jesus His place, and then filling all

things with Christ. Do not think of the 'being filled with the Spirit', of the 'fulness of the Spirit', in any other way than this. The Holy Spirit's filling is intended to be a filling of all things with Christ.

### The Real Meaning of Being 'Filled With the Spirit'

We can get these ideas - 'Oh, to be filled with the Spirit!' Then, what will happen? 'Well', we think, 'we shall have such a good time; we shall have ecstasies, enjoyment; there will be power in our life' - all these things. We think about being 'filled with the Spirit' as a wonderful idea! But do remember that the 'filling with the Spirit' is in line with that eternal thought and purpose of God, that the Son shall "fill all things" (Eph. 4:10). You can have these experiences, and these ecstasies, and these emotions, and all these things, and yet - and yet - be sadly lacking in the Lord Jesus! You can have all the teaching and the truth, and yet the measure of the Lord Jesus Himself can be so small.

It is terribly sad to go about the world and meet Christians who would lay down their life for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit - 'I believe in the Holy Ghost' - the Person of the Holy Spirit, and so on, and yet in whom you do not meet the Lord - you meet them: you come up against something that is 'themselves'. You are hurt by 'them'. It can be like that. No: Simply, but essentially, the Holy Spirit is committed to one end, and one end only - to fill all things with Christ. And if you want to know what it means when it says: "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" - you can see by the effect. They simply talked about the Lord Jesus: they preached Christ. Everywhere they went, it was Christ; they were bringing Christ with them wherever they went. As far as they were allowed, as far as consent was given and openness of heart was provided, they so to speak 'filled' people with Christ, filled companies with Christ, and filled places with Christ. That was the work of the Holy Spirit.

And, with that end in view, the Holy Spirit is always seeking a transformation in believers. Naturally, we are not a bit like Christ, and naturally we do not give very much place to Him; and so the work of the Holy Spirit is to transform us into His image. It is Christ, only Christ - "the beginning and the end" (Rev. 21:6).

### The Character of Christ

Now, in that connection, the great governing truth is that the foundation of the work of Christ, of the work of the Holy Spirit, is the nature of Christ. The measure of Christ is the measure of the Spirit. You cannot have more of the Holy Spirit than you have of Christ. And it is a question of the character of Christ. These two things are often so painfully overlooked. The presence and work of the Holy Spirit is detached from Christly character, and is thought of as something in itself. The Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Spirit, the works of the Spirit, working for the Lord - they are often just things in themselves, in the thoughtless mentality of so many. But the Holy Spirit is not thoughtless about this - far from it. The Holy Spirit only commits Himself to the Christ - let us be quite clear about that. He will not commit Himself to you or to me, to any institution or 'thing'; He only commits Himself to Christ. And it is according to the degree of Christ that the Holy Spirit commits Himself: that is, according to the measure of the character of Christ that He finds.

For the whole Bible comes down powerfully and mightily upon that truth. In all the types and figures in the Old Testament relating to the Holy Spirit - the anointing oil, and so on - you will find, if you look more closely, that the symbols are always subject to certain Divine provisions and prescriptions. Take the oil, for instance: that oil shall not come upon man's flesh (Ex. 30:32). The anointing requires garments that cover man's flesh; God requires the fulfilment of certain conditions before that anointing oil can be applied. We could extend our consideration of the symbolism further afield. But when you understand, you see that

that prescription of God - whether it be the garments, or whatever else may be required by God as the condition for the coming of the oil upon that person - is something related to the character of Christ.

It is thus foreshown that the Holy Spirit is only given to the Lord Jesus. And He will only be given to the Lord Jesus. And He will only be given to you and me in proportion to the measure in which the Lord Jesus has His place. Do we seek more of the Spirit - a greater fulness of the Spirit? Very well, then: we are asking for the Holy Spirit to displace us, and all that is of us; and we are going to have a bad time. We think that, if only we get filled with the Spirit, we are going to have a wonderful time of ecstasy! Well, that may be one side of it, but - make no mistake - it may be that we shall have to be taken through the fire and through the mill to come there. It depends on how much resistance there is to Christ. The clearer the way, the more selfless the motive, the quicker it can be done. The principle is that these two things go together: the work of the Holy Spirit and the character of Christ. We shall not get away from that. The character of Christ is the foundation of the work of the Holy Spirit.

"The World Knew Him Not"

That, of course, brings us face to face with the fact that Christ is of an altogether different order from what we are. When He was here, He was a stranger. It is written: "The world knew him not" (John 1:10); and that, while of course it applies specifically to His Deity, applies also to His unique humanity. The world did not know Him, in the sense that it could not understand His mentality, His ways, His standards - they were different. It did not understand that by which His course and conduct were governed: the world does not do things like that! For one thing, the world does not act on principle - the world acts on policy. Anyone who does not do that, in some way or other, is a strange person, from another world! Jesus absolutely refused, from beginning to end, to be governed by what is politic.

No, the world knew Him not; He is a special and different kind of person, a different order of being from what we are.

That was the real explanation of what a difficult time He had in this world. He was differently constituted. He was, in fact, a Holy Spirit-constituted Being: both in His birth - He was begotten of the Holy Ghost - and by anointing in His mission. And, being so different in His constitution, upon that basis He was tested and perfected, in a contrary world. If you grasp the significance of that, it will explain very much. You see, when you and I are born anew, we are born of the Holy Spirit, begotten of God, and in the deepest reality of our being there is a difference of constitution. If that is not true of someone who bears the name of 'Christian', he is not a Christian. A Christian 'born anew' has another constitution introduced in the innermost part of his being. It may be in an elementary form, as in babyhood, but it is something altogether different. It is the difference of what Christ is from all other people.

Now then, the whole of our life under the Holy Spirit is the testing and the trying of that 'other constitution' in a contrary world. As 'born anew' believers, we are now in a world that is contrary to our nature, contrary to our constitution; and that constitutes our difficulty, our suffering, our trial, our testing. But it is the basis of our perfecting. As we know, anything in creation that does not become subjected to adverse forces never acquires stamina or endurance. Hothouse plants cannot stand up to anything - you have got to nurse them all the time! Anything that you protect from adversity will suffer - suffer terribly, it will never come to that which can abide, that can stand up under test. The law of God is that stamina, endurance, strength, maturity - the power of abiding - come out of testing and trying and adversity.

'Made Perfect Through Sufferings'

It surely explains why the Lord allows the winds to blow so fiercely and so cold against His Church, against His people. What is the Lord doing? Well, here is His own Son in this world, with another constitution, being tested, tried, and perfected by the very difference between His own constitution and the world in which He was placed. He was 'made perfect through sufferings' (Heb. 2:10), and the sufferings were of this kind: the conflict of two constitutions - that in the world and that in Himself. It is an awful thing to live in this world with a heavenly constitution, such as you and I are supposed to have; and it ought to become more and more awful. If we can settle down, become happy and at ease, in this world, we have abandoned the very constitution of Heaven. If it is true that we are finding it more and more difficult to endure this world, as being what it is, that is a good sign.

That, then, is what happened to the Lord Jesus. He was of a different order, and His suffering came along the line of testing and trying by reason of the foreign and uncongenial constitution in the midst of which He had to live. His own heavenly constitution had to triumph over the other that was all about Him and pressing upon Him: and thus He was made perfect, through suffering. There is no other way for you and for me. In the end, if we abide faithful, if we do not let go, if we do not 'cast away our confidence' (Heb. 10:35, A.V.), if our faith does not give way because of the difficulty and hardness of this spiritual conflict, we shall emerge a 'full-grown man' spiritually; the stature will increase 'unto the stature of Christ' (Eph. 4:13). That is the history of the Church; that is the history of believers.

#### The Conflict of Two Natures

Now, where does the Holy Spirit come in in this? Well, the Holy Spirit came from Heaven when that question had been fully answered in the Lord Jesus. I will put it in this way. There was, as it were, a question all the time through the earthly life of the Lord Jesus. In reality, of course, there was no doubt - but there was a question. A battle was going on; and when there is a battle, there is always a question as to the issue. The question was whether this that was of Heaven was going to gain the ascendancy, or whether the ascendancy was going to the earthly thing, under Satan's power. It was a big battle on this question. A heavenly Kingdom was opposed to an earthly kingdom, the Kingdom of God opposed to the kingdom of Satan - this was the conflict; and it all focused upon and centred on the soul of this one Man. Right to the end, to the last moment on the Cross, the battle raged, as to who was going to prevail; which side was going to win. The whole question was: Is the heavenly nature going to triumph over this evil nature outside?

That question was fully and finally answered when He reached Heaven. His being "received up" (Acts 1:2) - for that is the right way to speak of the ascension: being 'received', accorded a 'reception' in Heaven - means that the question is finally answered. The Heavenly Man has triumphed in His constitution, in a world that, in its constitution, is so utterly different. The question is answered, the whole thing is settled, and, when that is settled, the Holy Spirit comes. What does He come to do? He comes to bring into believers the very nature, the heavenly nature, of that Man - and then the battle starts up again!

That is the battle that you and I are in. After all, it is not a battle of outward things, it is a battle of spiritual things. The battle may take many forms, and involve many things, people, situations and circumstances; but, after all, it focuses upon our spirit, upon our heavenly life, upon our heavenly constitution. That is the centre of it all; that is the battle-ground. Are we going to yield to the Devil - is his constitution going to get the upper hand, in that irritability, in that bad temper, in that loss of good faith, and so on? Or is this other - faith in God, the love of the Spirit, the patience of Jesus Christ - is this going to triumph? That is the form of the battle. The Holy Spirit has come to bring into us another constitution, and then so to work as to

develop us completely according to that new constitution, until we too are perfected in Christ.

This comes back, all the time, to the measure of Christ, does it not? There is no substitute for the Holy Spirit. To put anything in His place is to open the door at once to that whole terrible change that came about so early in the history of the Church. It began even before the apostles had gone - the bringing in of substitutes for the Holy Spirit. There they are: the crystallization of Christianity into an earthly, man-made system; the composing of 'creeds' of Christian doctrine, to become the legal forms of government; clericalism, organization, forms, vestments, orders, and so on - they all came in so early. They were all substitutes for the Holy Spirit; they all represented a moving away from the spiritual to the ecclesiastical, the sacramental. The result? A vitiated, emasculated Church, a changed Christianity, which cannot stand up to the forces that are at work in this universe. The world triumphed - and the Devil laughs.

### The Spirit of Truth

Now, we are talking about what the Holy Spirit is. We have said that He is, inclusively, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of the Christ; and we have said, further, that that means the character of Christ. Let us, therefore, now look at the character of Christ, as taken up by the Holy Spirit in His own nature, and therefore in His own work.

The Holy Spirit was called by the Lord Jesus: "the Spirit of truth" (John 16:13). Now, there is a very large place given by God in the Word to 'truth', He is very jealous over the truth. He is Himself the God of Truth (cf. Is. 65:16). He desires "truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6). He holds lies in abomination (Prov. 12:22). He has consigned all liars to the lake of fire, says the Word (Rev. 21:8). He excludes from the New Jerusalem everything that makes a lie (Rev. 22:15). Jesus calls Himself the Truth - "I am... the truth" (John 14:6); and "The faithful and true witness" (Rev. 3:14). On the other hand, Satan is called by Him "a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8:44c).

### Man a False, Deceived Creature

Now, note this. When the lie entered in, the whole structure of creation collapsed. Satan injected a lie into man; man accepted it, received it. The result was the collapse of the entire structure of creation, and man himself became and remains a falsehood. He is not the man that God made him or intended him to be: he is a deceived creature; in the very constitution and nature of man as he is there is a lie. He is a misrepresentation of the man that God spoke of when He said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). There is a lie in the work of man, and in all his works. He hopes and believes and works and tries, and in the end it comes to vanity - it is all in vain; disappointment awaits him at the end of all his works and all his strivings. He thinks and argues that he is free - but he is a prisoner. He thinks and believes that he knows; he proves to be a fool. He thinks that he can do, and he does many great and seemingly wonderful things: but all his doings lead to greater problems to be solved; and the greatest problem of all is satisfaction, is rest, is joy, is peace.

No; man is building, not on rock, but on sand. His world is run by lies. This may seem a terrible thing to say, but how rare in this world is downright honesty! What a welter of misrepresentation and deception, pretence and appearance, mixture and exaggeration, has to be drawn into the running of this world. Is it not true? Many a well-meaning man, who in his own soul revolts against it, will tell you that, if you are proposing to be honest, absolutely honest, you will find it impossible to be successful in a world like this. And the lie has got into religion. Our Lord's indictment of the Pharisees and the Scribes was: 'Hypocrites' - playactors, pretenders! And therefore, because the race is shot through and through with a lying

deception, it cannot stand. A false world is bound to collapse. If there is anything in 'Christianity' that is not absolutely true, 'according to God' (Rom. 8:27b; cf. 15:5b), it will go to pieces. Anything that has in it an element of untruth, has within itself the seeds of its own ruin. The Holy Spirit, therefore, is called 'the Spirit of Truth'. Jesus is 'the Truth'. Eternal values, the values which are eternal, are those which are absolutely true according to the standards of God. The value of the Gospel is that it is the 'truth' of the Gospel (Col. 1:5). The eternal certainty of Christ is that He is 'the Truth'.

Now this is a very challenging thing. It separates and discriminates - not always between the black lie and the transparent truth - but between the beautiful lie, the soulish lie, the sentimental lie, the formal lie, the religious lie, and that which is 'according to God'. John the Baptist said about the Lord Jesus that He would 'lay the axe to the root', and that His 'fan was in His hand, and He would thoroughly cleanse His threshing-floor' (Matt. 3:10,12). What is the axe? What is the winnowing fan? It is the truth!

Thus it was that, as He spoke to the woman of Samaria, He looked on the temple on Mount Gerizim, and He looked, with His mind's eye, on the temple in Jerusalem; and then, to the woman who thought that one or the other - especially this one in Samaria, to which she was attached - was the truth, the true thing, He said: "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father... The hour cometh... when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth... God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:21,23,24). He is discriminating between the formal, the traditional, the historical - if you like, the symbolic, at best - and the real, the true. And He is saying: 'Only that which is spiritual, after the very essence of the Divine nature, is true. Therefore this temple and that temple will collapse - not one stone will be left upon another. They are not the truth.' The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth.

#### Our Need for Absolute Truth in all Things

It is very, very important that our position should be a true position. You and I need continually to review our position, and say: "Is my position a true one? Is it second-hand? What is it? The position in which I stand - how did I come to it? What is it that puts me in this position? Is it to me so true as to be to me absolutely a matter of life or death?" It should be true like that, so that you cannot give it up, you cannot resign from it, you cannot withdraw from it - it is your very self. To do so would be to commit spiritual suicide. That was how it was with the Lord Jesus. Go through His life again, and hear Him speaking. This Man has not just come to perform something, or to give some teaching, objectively; this Man is the thing! Because it is so real, so true in Him, He is going to that Cross to shed the last drop of His Blood. His position is that - it is Himself.

Our position must be true, or we shall not stand we shall collapse, we shall go to pieces. If there is a lie, we shall disintegrate, as the creation did when the lie entered in. Our life must be true: our conduct must be true; our walk before others must be true; our walk before God must be true. Our life must be true. Mark you, it is going to be an agony for it to be so.

Our testimony and our teaching must be true. Is it truth?

Our fellowship must be true - no feigned love! No pretence at fellowship; no trying to make believe, no merely outward thing. The Holy Ghost will be satisfied with nothing less than 'the truth' in the matter of fellowship. He will say: 'Look here, you are trying to make believe in the matter of fellowship with that person; you are trying to bolster up something; you are trying not to let something collapse: that is not true!' He will take you down deep until it is true.

Our church must be true - it must be the true Church. How much could be said about that!

Our business must be true - we must take this matter of the Holy Spirit into our business. Is your manner of business really true? When you are going to pay for something, are you quite sure that you are paying all that you ought to pay for it? that you are not getting it to your own advantage, that someone is not going to suffer in this transaction? Is that true? Even John the Baptist raised questions like that at the Jordan, about exacting more than should be (Luke 3:12-14). Yes, in business we must be true; we cannot have one order of things in Christianity and another one in the world.

Our spirit must be true. We must never be less than we profess, God help us. We must never be more than we profess - God help us! The Holy Spirit is the 'Spirit of Truth', for that is the character of the Lord Jesus. To be 'filled with the Spirit' is a very, very exacting thing. Ananias and Sapphira tried to 'steal a march' on the Holy Spirit: but oh, no, He is not being taken advantage of like that! We cannot 'hoodwink' the Holy Spirit. This is very solemn. What do you have in mind when you talk about being 'filled with the Spirit'? We hear the command: "Be filled with the Spirit", and we all want to be filled with the Spirit. But we must understand that the Spirit is the character of Jesus Christ. He is the Spirit of Jesus Christ - and especially in this one respect, as the Spirit of Truth.

To be 'filled with the Spirit', therefore, means that everything has got to be true, exact, right, real: no lie, no falsehood, no make-believe, no pretence, no exaggeration, no imitation; everything true, genuine. May God make us like His Son in this! Then the Holy Spirit would do things: through a church like that, through a people like that, and through lives like that. He would do mighty things. When conditions are such, you will not have to try to get things done - He will do them.

That brings us back to the point mentioned in our last study - why things changed at the beginning, when they had been so spontaneous, so mighty, so wonderful. The Holy Spirit was present as the Spirit of Truth, and anything untrue that He came up against was dealt with and not tolerated. Peter's words seem fierce, I know, but he is jealous, with the jealousy of the Holy Spirit, for the truth: he sees that the Church can be wrecked and ruined if there is a lie getting in - "Why hath Satan filled thy heart?" (Acts 5:3).

We began by saying that we are concerned about this matter of a life of fulness and of powerful witness in the world, and troubled because that impact upon the world is not as it was at the beginning. It ought to be the same: the Holy Spirit has not changed. God has not changed. Christ is the same - then what is the trouble? Surely, if it is true that the Holy Spirit commits Himself to the Lord Jesus, then the answer is, once more, that we need more of the Lord Jesus. Which is to say, that we need more of Him in His character. This matter of the Truth is only the beginning - there are many more facets to His character than that; but truth is the foundation of everything.

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