

## **"In the Spirit" (I)**

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice ... and ... I saw" (Rev. 1:10,12).*

*"And he came in the Spirit into the temple ... and blessed God, and said, Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord, according to thy word, in peace; for mine eyes have seen ..." (Luke 2:27-30).*

*"But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you" (Rom. 8:9).*

### **Providing God with a Way**

You will find this little phrase "in the Spirit" very frequently used in Scripture, and almost invariably it is connected with something that is about to happen, something is going to happen, something from heaven, something of God, a new revelation or some fresh stage in the revelation, some mighty work God is about to do and, in connection with that, a showing or a doing from heaven, it is said of the one immediately concerned standing in relation to God for the people of God who are to come into the meaning of that divine movement, it is said of such that he was "in the Spirit".

You know how true that was in the case of John, *"I was in the Spirit ... I heard ... I saw."* And John said that on several occasions, if you care to look through the Revelation, *"I was in the Spirit and I saw."* Of Ezekiel how often that was said. He in the Spirit was shown, was taken, was lifted up. And what a day that was when Simeon who had waited so long and had perhaps almost given up hope, feeling that the long delay would go beyond his swiftly closing days, but one morning he felt something different. Yes, he would have gone into the temple perhaps as usual. As he had gone into the temple almost countless times through a long life he would have done it again, but that morning (he perhaps could not explain it) but he felt drawn, he felt something pending, he felt he was in a different realm from the usual, and he came into the temple in the Spirit. An ordinary day was changed into a very extraordinary day when he came in in the Spirit.

So it is perfectly clear that while, from the side of God, something may be going to happen, may be intended, may be purposed, something tremendous, something revolutionary, something that has never been before, there is the other side where those concerned either to receive or to be the channels of that work or revelation of God, where they are concerned, there is a need. It will not just happen unless they are in the Spirit, God's mighty things wait for a state, depend upon a state, where His people are concerned. They have to be, as truly as ever John or Ezekiel or Simeon or the Lord Jesus Himself, of Whom the same thing is said, just as true of us as it was of them, *"in the Spirit"*.

Now of course, in the case of these, something transpired which may not transpire again. And I think this being in the Spirit had a fuller meaning in their case at those particular times than the ordinary being in the Spirit (if it is possible to be in the Spirit ordinarily). John was carried away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and shown the holy city, new Jerusalem. John was in the Spirit and saw all that which he has given to us in the Revelation. So with Ezekiel, so with Simeon, in that particular connection.

But the little passage in the letter to the Romans, as one among many in the New Testament, puts us into this thing, *"Ye are ... in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you."* Ye are in the Spirit. Let me say again, everything that God has revealed, that God would do, requires that those concerned shall be in that stated called "in the

Spirit". What does it mean? Well, simply and briefly, it means that we are just detached in consciousness from ourselves and our fears and this world, and are awake, alive, to God. We are attuned to God, we have come right into line with God in Spirit, so alive to God, that He Who is Spirit can communicate to our spirits. But what a lot hangs upon this being in the Spirit! Revelation, coming to know, being made intelligent as to the mind and purpose of God, the way of God. Our spiritual growth depends upon this. We are not going to grow except as we live in the Spirit.

### **Made Children of God by the Indwelling Spirit**

May I say here, before we go further, that this is the basic thing which happens, making a difference between a Christian, a true child of God, and any other one. The first thing about the born anew child of God is this new consciousness of the inward government of the Spirit of God. You are not God's, you are not the Lord's, unless the Spirit of God dwells in you. And from that moment that indwelling Spirit ought to begin to govern our consciousness so that we have an entirely new intelligence. You discriminate between people very often on the matter of intelligence. You say, he is not very intelligent or he is a very intelligent child. What do you mean? One who has taken note, who is aware, who is all alive and who is 'up to things', who knows; not all the time having to be told and outwardly directed and corrected; they know. That is the basic characteristic of a true child of God, and the growth of that intelligence is the mark of spiritual growth.

I must add this, that, while not seeking to give any doctrine on the matter as to whether this indwelling of the Spirit is something subsequent to new birth, I do not believe that there is anything in the New Testament at all that says that it is. That is that we receive the Spirit indwelling necessarily, essentially, at some later time. It happens as to greater fulnesses or fuller marks, but it can be at the beginning. With many of us, we have gone on for years and not had this aliveness to God, this intelligence, this sense of God inwardly governing, and then something has happened. We know what happened, what was necessary to make for that happening, and we came out, as it were, from a sleep and woke up. It was not our new birth, but we did wake up, and from that time we have had an aliveness to God which we never had before. Do not resolve that into a doctrine of second blessing and so on. It is unnecessary, it can be at the beginning. Much depends upon the apprehension of the work of Christ. That is a larger matter. But whether at your new birth you knew this or do not know it yet, as a Christian you believe that you are the Lord's, let me say that this is a thing which ought to be. And you will not make very much progress and grow very much until it is so, that you really know the Lord the Spirit in your heart governing and telling you, not in words but in ways very much stronger than words, what and what is not according to the mind of the Lord. Then to walk in the Spirit is something more than to have that intelligence, it is to obey that intelligence and adjust.

### **The Condition for Our Own Spiritual Growth**

This is a matter which is going to govern our conduct. Oh, how often we gather and are conscious of the presence of the Lord and the word of the Lord, and then, less than five minutes after a gathering is over, we are talking about anything. We are right away, something is lost, something goes out, and if we are spiritually sensitive and alive to the Lord, we have a bad time, a miserable, wretched time because we allowed ourselves to be caught away in that kind of talk and conversation and we have dissipated the Spirit. If we have a bad time like this, that is exactly as it ought to be so long as we adjust and say, 'That is not going to happen again.' It is a matter of walking in the Spirit, adjustment to spiritual consciousness and intelligence. It is the way of growth. I have spoken about conversation. It applies to anything in the matter of life and conduct. We do or we go. We are not going to be governed by written laws any longer. We are going to be governed by the Spirit Who wrote the laws and is now not quoting Scripture at us necessarily, but making us feel the weight of Scripture, the meaning of Scripture, and

afterwards, when we check up, we find the Scripture that governs our bad time. The Holy Spirit has Scripture for everything that He says in us.

These are just pointers, firstly, a state necessary to what God is intending to do, what is going to happen. This applies to every gathering; if the Lord is going to say something it is going to be made possible because He has a people in the Spirit for it. I wonder what you say when you bow your head when you come into a gathering. I am not questioning but that it is a true lifting of heart to the Lord. Billy Bray said that the men came in and took off their hats and read "Somebody's Cork Bowler Hat", and the ladies looked down to see how their shoes looked — and that was their prayer in going into church. His point was that it was not a real touch with God; it is simply a suggestion that when we come we should seek to be in the Spirit, and that our first act in coming together should be that seeking the Lord very much that we should be attuned to His intention.

### **The Enemy's Opposition**

Seeing how vital this is, how much hangs upon it, there will always be everything that can be against it. I am sure many of you will bear me out when I say that the one great work of the enemy is to get us out of the Spirit when the Lord is going to do something, to make us say, I was not in the Spirit for it, or to feel not in the Spirit. Sometimes we use another word — 'mood', not in the mood. Well, it is the wrong word, it is not in ourselves at all, it is in the Spirit. And the enemy has a very shrewd knowledge of anything that is at least possible of the Lord; if he does not know what the Lord is going to say and do, he has a long experience of these things and he can at least put two and two together. He senses the movements of God. He is always seeking to anticipate. He has a Herod when Christ is born. He always has his preparation to counter something of the Lord, and so it may be days ahead of something of the Lord that is coming, and the enemy tries to get us out of the Spirit, all upset, annoyed, worried, distracted and cast down so that when the time comes we are not in the Spirit. Something has got to happen with us before the Lord can say or do what He desires. It is so real that it really does call for a terrible battle. It is so real in ourselves; it is wicked, it is simply evil. We could not find words strong enough to express this sense of diabolical wickedness in the atmosphere, it seems to get inside of us, to get us upset. We blame somebody, anything, and then the hour comes and we are out of the Spirit, and nothing but a tremendous battle will get us through. I say this to make you aware of the meaning of these things. We can put it down to circumstances, we can put it down to people. But let us remember that back of these things more often than not the enemy is trying to prevent us from being in the Spirit at the crucial moment.

### **In the Spirit in Unfavourable Circumstances**

*"I was in the Spirit ... and I heard ... and I saw."* With these people, all these of whom it is so spoken, things were not by any means propitious. John was in the isle of Patmos, an exile, and John might easily have said, 'Well, this place will not see very much of the Lord, not very much of the Lord here; I need to be somewhere, perhaps among His people, in a better atmosphere than this in order for there to be anything of the Lord.' Ezekiel says, *"I was among the captives by the river Chebar, (and) the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God"* (Ezek. 1:1). Simeon might well have given up in despair. He had gone on so long and nothing had happened; He might have sunk down into his own soul and become very depressed. The Lord Jesus, it says, was *"led up of the Spirit into the wilderness"* (Matt. 4:1). All the situations, the conditions, are against, and we would ask the question, Oh, is it possible to be in the Spirit where I have to live, where my lot is cast, among the people who surround me, in the atmosphere which I have to breathe? I must wait until this phase is past and I get into my real life work or can be in closer touch with the fellowship of the Lord's people; then things will perhaps happen. No! *"I am in the Spirit"* is possible, apparently, anywhere. It is not in the flesh, it is not in the world, it is not in things at all. Let us believe that and take hold of it and be

in the Spirit — in Patmos, in the wilderness, among the captives far away, a despairing scene with their harps upon the willows, saying, *"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"* (Psa. 137:4). *"And I"*, said Ezekiel, *"saw visions of God"*. It is hard, I know, for you to accept that and believe it, but that is just the point. Do believe it. *"I saw in the Spirit"*.

But note — *"if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you"*. Ah, if that is true, anything is possible. *"Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world"* (1 John 4:4). If he is within, He is greater than conditions, greater than the forces of evil, greater than our own souls, *"if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you, ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit."* That is our hope, that is our assurance.

The need of a condition to provide God with a way, a basis. The need of a condition for our own spiritual growth. We shall never grow unless we know what it is to be day by day in the Spirit. The Lord can speak and the Lord can do. Do not wait for a change in your surroundings and circumstances in order that you may come into the knowledge of the greater intentions of God. It has got to be where you are. Remember the great activity of the enemy is always to get us out of the Spirit whatever that may mean to you and to me. We may wake up in the morning out of the Spirit, find everything irritating and troubling and worrying and everything to get us out of the Spirit. Remember the enemy's activity, but remember that it is not just one side, *"I was in the Spirit"*. We can be in the Spirit because the Spirit is in us. There is God's side in us. But do not capitulate. Remember the battle, remember the stand that has to be made. We have to hold on, resist, until the atmosphere breaks, until the thing disperses and is gone, it is very real.

Now for every day and for every gathering, bear this in mind: the enemy will try to get us out of the Spirit. All that the Lord would do and say, so far as we are concerned, depends upon our truly being in the Spirit to hear, to see, to know. You will see what a key this is to everything. You have only to go through the book of Revelation and see what a key it is. In the end, because John was in the Spirit, he saw the final, ultimate consummate triumph of Christ and His Church; he saw all the heavenly forces of evil cast down, deposed. He was in the Spirit to enter into the good. It is not a study of prophecy, it is being *"in the Spirit"*.