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Hindrances to Fullness of Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

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While it is true that every spiritual blessing is a gift of grace and not something to be merited, it is equally true that no blessing is entered into without a real challenge, demanding a genuine and honest proof that we mean business with God. The history of Israel's entering into the inheritance of the land covenanted to them is a great illustration of how spiritual fullness is withstood by foes of many kinds. The New Testament is one continuous revelation of how spiritual fullness for the Lord's people is withstood. It is an education to read the Word with this in mind and to recognize the many forms which this obstructing and frustrating activity takes. Both outside and inside of the Church, and often inside believers themselves, the enemy of spiritual fullness is shown to have his ground of vantage. The fact is, beloved of God, that only "men of violence" will really secure the Kingdom (Matt. 11:12), and this violence will often have to be done to some of our own positions, mentalities, prejudices, fears, reservations, antipathies, etc. We may settle it once for all that for the fullness of the Lord's life and blessing we must be on the Lord's ground. This is a law which will apply to many particular matters.

Christian Fellowship

For instance, there is the matter of our relationship to, and fellowship with, all other children of God. Fellowship with the Lord's people is an established law of spiritual fullness, and there can be no fullness apart from it. This question of Christian fellowship will have to be taken in both hands and settled finally. We shall - if we are going to have an "open heaven" - have to sit right down with this matter and do some honest and energetic thinking and deciding. What is the Lord's ground in this matter? It is absolutely nothing other, more, nor less, than Christ Himself and our common sharing of His life through new birth and utter yieldedness to Him as our Sovereign Head and Lord! Get down on to any other ground and we forsake the place of fullness. If we get on to the ground of a

teaching, an interpretation, a particular and specific doctrine, or even emphasis, as something in itself, we at once set up standards or draw lines between ourselves and others, and even unconsciously we divide and give out an implication of division.

Or again; if we get on the ground of a denomination, a sect, a mission, a society, a "movement", or anything crystallized as to an association of the Lord's people, with an enterprise binding together those concerned - though it may be for the Lord - we open the door to every divisive thing, and we close it to fulness. On the one hand we very soon become governed by false and unsound judgments. Jealousies and rivalries can never see the light of day if the one concern is the Lord. They are born of concern for a thing. "Sheep stealing" is a common charge that needs to be looked at again in the light of Christ. *Whose* sheep are they? Are they His, or are they the property of a certain Christian enterprise or society? Unto what have they been "stolen"? Have they moved in a certain direction because they have found a larger measure of Christ there, or is it because they have *really* been enticed to swell the ranks of something less of Christ?

Are we really only too anxious to let "our" converts or members go, if they are going after the Lord? Do we want to keep some *thing* together? Is the essence of division in the leaving of one association or connection because a greater measure of spiritual life has been found in other directions? Some thing exists which fails continually to meet spiritual need. That which does meet the hunger and longing of years comes along and from the old dead and barren connections the hungry move to the spiritual provision. Instead of Christians being glad if a genuine spiritual move takes place, the cry is not long in being heard: "Dividing the Lord's people." Are we sure that behind much of this sort of thing there are not vested interests, sentimentalities, men's traditions, or *our own* fears?

There is all the difference between the course represented above and the divisions between the Lord's people on the basis of doctrinal hair-splitting, or on the ground of technicalities in procedure, to say nothing of adherence to personalities, however much they may have been instruments of blessing. Anything that draws a line of fellowship narrower than the mutual love of the Holy Spirit is a departure from the Lord's ground of fullness of life. We are thinking of spiritual relationship and fellowship, not of public or "official" co-operation with what is unscriptural in doctrine and practice.

If the children of God will only make Christ their ground of fellowship, so much that hinders spiritual fullness and accounts for the present weakness, limitation, and defeat will be ruled out, and the great hinderer will be despoiled of his ground.

Then there is another direction in which this law of fullness operates and in which some serious adjustment is necessary. It is that of leaving room for

The Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.

It was on this very matter that the book of "The Acts" was founded. The Lord Jesus enunciated the law when He said to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth... so is every one that is born of the Spirit." On the day of Pentecost there was "a sound as of a mighty rushing wind." Have you ever been in a really mighty rushing wind? The thing about a real windstorm is that it takes the government out of all other hands and proceeds to do as it chooses without reference or deference to conventions, traditions, common acceptances, inclinations, or fixed ideas. While it lasts, it is sovereign. That is how it was then; but there were those who were offended, shocked, scandalized, and who said in effect that such a way could never be of God. A little later Peter himself came flat up against this basic law of the Spirit and had a controversy with the Lord. The Lord showed him that a way of enlargement (although he did not see at the moment that that was what it was) lay in the

direction of transcending or even violating all his traditions and established religious rules. The Lord knew that for Peter to go in unto the Gentiles would be like a most orthodox and conservative Jew being asked to eat unclean meat - "all manner of four-footed beasts, and creeping things... and fowls of the heaven" - even apparently to take a place superior to Moses and Leviticus 11; but He asked him to do it. Peter said, "Not so, Lord", a contradiction in terms; but the Lord insisted, and Peter, in explaining himself to those who suspected him, said, "Who was I that I could withstand God?" Now what we have here is that, over against the sovereignty of the Spirit, was the fixed tradition of Peter in the one case, and the same in the case of those at Jerusalem who "contended with him" for doing what he did. On a later occasion Peter fell into the same old traditional snare and Paul had to contend with him very strongly about it. The point is that the Lord was making for spiritual increase, but an obstacle encountered was this unpreparedness to leave room for the sovereignty of the Spirit. If a child or servant of God in his or her secret walk and history with God is led to move in a way that is not according to the recognized and established system, but new and different, and seemingly in violation of all the accepted and fixed conventions or associations, there is all too often a repetition of what took place in Jerusalem; a suspicion, a contention, and an opposition.

Now, dear friends, look here: we have got to take ourselves honestly in hand over this or we may be found to be "withstanding God" and "limiting the Holy One". Read the Gospels and the Acts again, and ask the question as you proceed, "How can *this*, and *that*, and *that* be interpreted or construed as doing violence to an accepted and long established Divine order?" You will not get far before you are in the company of those who opposed Christ at every step, and of the Judaizers who pursued Paul across the world with the one object of making his ministry impossible. They were very jealous and zealous for the divinely established order - as they believed it to be. Do you not recognize that every movement of God down the ages has been in conflict with something that men believed to be the Divine order, and those concerned have been regarded as doing the Devil's work? It was so with Christ, and it was so with the apostles. It has been so again and again when God has moved to enlarge His people by ignoring their fixed framework of custom. It is so easy to use thoughtless and misapplied slogans, or apply fragments of Scripture wrongly (such as, "By their fruits ye shall know them"). Very often such damaging dagger-thrusts are only because of a failure to give the Lord room and right to take some of His children by a way that is new, unusual, or very strange. Philip leaves a center and scene of great revival activity; he is suddenly missed, and is - for a time - isolated to one man in a desert. But it was under the sovereignty of the Spirit, and we must wait until the whole story is written years afterward before we pass judgment and say that Philip went wrong. So we see that for all enlargement and increase we must leave room for God to do *new* things, strange things, things that we cannot understand for the moment. We only put ourselves outside of His intention to enlarge spiritually if we bind Him to our own fixed judgments.

"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth" was a popular prejudice from which a good man did not altogether keep free, and it fell upon One no less than the Lord Himself.