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The Gift of the Spirit to a Redeemed Creation

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Acts 8:4-6,12,14-17,25.

Gal. 3:13-14: "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us... that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*"

You notice that both of the passages brought together have to do with receiving the Holy Spirit, and there is something here which I feel to be of very special significance. In the first passage - Acts 8, we have the first reference to receiving the Holy Spirit along the line of particular and definite action on the part of the Lord's servants. On two earlier occasions people are said to have received the Spirit, that is, on the day of Pentecost and then there in the house of Cornelius the Spirit fell upon all who were assembled together. In both cases it was quite spontaneous. We know why, of course - that it marked the new dispensation of the advent of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost to the Jews, and the counterpart and complement of that to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, so it had to be spontaneous. But from that time onwards, it was connected with a definite testimony by the servants of God, and it is just taken for granted; no explanation is given.

Here you have Samaria turning to the Lord on the preaching of Philip, and certain apostles are sent down from Jerusalem with the object that these believers might receive the Holy Spirit. They arrived; they did not explain things as far as the record goes. It simply says that here were people who had believed and been baptized and these apostles prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost, and when they laid their hands upon them and prayed for them, the Holy Spirit did come upon them, they did receive the Holy Spirit.

The Race Under a Curse

The explanation of it all is given to us in this other passage in the letter to the Galatians, and it is very impressive and significant. I do want you to take special account of this. Here we have, in a very small compass of words, a matter of tremendous range, far-reaching significance. It says here - "*Christ redeemed us from the curse... having become a curse for us*", or, literally, in our stead, in our place, "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith". What is happening? Is it not quite clear that, when God created man, He intended him to be a Holy Spirit indwelt being, that He intended the creation, the race, to be a God-indwelt race? What God intended was that at some point He would become inward in that creation which He brought into being; that creation would be to Him a temple, a sanctuary, a house, a dwelling-place. He would not just dwell amongst men, but He would dwell in men. It may be, I think it most likely that that was, the meaning of the probation of the first Adam: first testing, the test of his faith in God, his obedience to God through faith in God. He was put on probation. The issue was to be one thing or the other. If his faith and obedience triumphed and he proved faithful to God under the testing on the probation, the issue would have been God, by His Spirit, coming to dwell in him that he should be a God-indwelt being. If he proved unfaithful and disobedient, he would miss that; it would never be as God intended it. Well, he proved unfaithful and disobedient and missed the divine intention, and the curse came upon that race and upon that creation, which curse made it perfectly impossible for that race to be God-indwelt; it closed the door to that possibility, it ruled out the divine intention. The race lies under a curse, and God cannot dwell in it.

Christ Made a Curse for Us

Now, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse... having become a curse for us*." He took the curse which rested upon that creation and bore it in all its consequences, divine judgment and divine abandonment, in the cross suffered all the result of the curse, and put the curse out of the way that we might receive the Spirit, getting rid of the thing that stood in the way of God's original intention so that the new creation in Christ immediately comes into line with the first thought of God, to be God-indwelt, Spirit-indwelt, Holy Spirit-indwelt. "*That...*" - upon that little word "that" hangs so much. He became a curse for us *that*, in order that, we might receive the Spirit.

What is the object of receiving the Spirit? That takes you back to the thought and intention of God in the creation, that it should be a God-indwelt race by the Holy Spirit, and so Christ simply comes and removes the thing that has got in the way and opens the door for this original thought of God.

And here in the new creation in Samaria immediately those people take their place with Christ in His death and burial - that is the cross, the curse. The people in Samaria are simply saying, "We lie under that curse, but Christ has taken it for us, in our stead; we recognize and acknowledge that that curse was our curse, not His, and so His dying and being buried is as ourselves, to remove out of the way that which prevented God from having what He originally intended". And so they were baptized, and being baptized is a testimony to the fact that something lying under a curse is put out of the way, buried forever, removed out of God's sight, and then comes out on to new ground. With that done, the heavens are opened, the Spirit has a way. God can realize what He originally intended.

The Promise of the Spirit

Then there is this further thought. We can clearly see from the New Testament and from our own spiritual experience that even if Adam had not failed and lost the indwelling Spirit, but had received the Holy Spirit, that would not have been the completion of the work. It was only really a point at which something new, divine, came in, and from which point a whole new divine possibility opened up. That for us means this - receiving the Holy Spirit does not mean that we are at once at the end of

the journey and everything is finished and complete and perfect. It means that we have started on a way which was altogether impossible before. Now there are possibilities which were not there before, now there are capacities which were not there before, there are now powers which were not there before. Now we have spiritual faculties which we did not have before. A whole new spiritual creation has been brought about somewhere deep down in us which can grow and grow and grow according to the things of God, and none of that was possible until the Holy Spirit came within. "*That we might receive the promise of the Spirit*". That was God's thought, desire, *promise* from the beginning.

That is very simple, but I think I know it is very important. I am quite sure that one of the things that accounts for slow spiritual growth and progress, for a great deal of spiritual ignorance and weakness, is the fact that either the Holy Spirit has not got the way that He wants and needs, and the way has got to be made in the application of that death of Christ to an old creation condition in us, or else we are not making enough of the Holy Spirit, we are not giving sufficient importance to the Holy Spirit. It is quite clear that for all the divine intention and purpose in the creation, the Holy Spirit is essential, indispensable. Nothing is possible without the Holy Spirit.

For instance, the very matter of knowing the things of God. "*The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*" (1 Cor. 2:11). You and I do not know the things of God. We may know a lot about the things of God, but that is quite another thing. To have in ourselves real spiritual knowledge of God and His things - that is not possible to the natural man. Only the Holy Spirit has the knowledge of the things of God, so we cannot know, only as the Holy Spirit indwells and teaches. Only the Holy Spirit knows the way of God and unless He is in us, we shall not go that way. He has to urge us and direct us, instruct us in that way. For everything in the purpose of God unto the great final fulness, the Holy Spirit is absolutely indispensable.

These two things go together: first, that side which means all the ground of death, of the curse, of the old creation, has to be put away to give the Holy Spirit an open door, and then we have got to make a great deal of the Holy Spirit all the time in our own instruction and guidance, illumination and direction, empowerment, in the development of spiritual faculties and capacities for the things of God. And that is why they went down and prayed for them that they should receive the Holy Spirit. They will not get anywhere until they do receive the Spirit. They have gone so far; there they will stay unless this other takes place.

It may raise questions with you about receiving the Spirit. I am not discussing those questions. I am not saying any one thing is the hallmark of our receiving the Holy Spirit. I am saying the Holy Spirit is indispensable to the new creation in reaching the object of its existence. So Paul says to the Colossians - "*...this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*". "*...That upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith*". "This mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory", that is only saying in other words the same thing, for God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - are one. Christ in you is only in you by His Spirit. He personally is in heaven. He is in us by His Spirit, but the Holy Spirit is Christ in such oneness that you cannot divide between them. "Christ in you, the hope of glory". In other words, the hope of glory is the Holy Spirit being within and having His way: the only hope of glory.

But the creation was intended for glory, we were chosen unto glory, God intended from eternity to glorify the creation and to glorify the creation by His own presence in it. The figure at the end of the Bible is just that: "*I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God*" (Rev. 21:10-11). That is the figure. It is this new creation with God within, having the

glory of God. That is the end - a glorified humanity, glorified by the presence of God in fulness. That is the end. "*Christ in you,*" the hope of that, and the only hope of that, or, in other words, the Holy Spirit within as the Spirit of Christ. "*That we might receive the promise of the Spirit*".

There is the curse and the curse has got to be done away, and we see it done away in Christ crucified, but we have to take our place alongside Christ crucified and say, "His curse was my curse, His judgment was my judgment, His death was my death, His burial was my burial. I accept that and testify to that in my baptism". Then, that being accepted in all its spiritual meaning, opens the way for a life indwelt by and governed by the Spirit to realize all that God ever intended this humanity to come to - His glory by the Holy Spirit's life within and government of the life. The baptism is that side which declares that the way is clear. Let us pray that all that the way is cleared for shall be realized in a life that is filled and governed by the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God.