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Experience of Spirits

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Experience of Spirits

When a sunset, baby's smile, or any other event suddenly seems to lift us beyond ourselves, we usually think of God. When we have struggles making decisions that involve our values, we might recognize the influence of different spirits upon us, towards and away from God. Spirituality involves not only the consolations that arise when we have contact with God, but also the personal experiences of being attracted and repulsed by various thoughts that come to our minds. There is only one God, but we have experiences of diverse spirits.

Spirit is a positive word, connoting God-like qualities and experiences within us, while spirits conveys an indifferent meaning, allowing for both positive and negative thoughts that influence us as helpful or hurtful. God, being love, grants us freedom to choose as a necessary condition for us to love in return. All of our significant decisions involve some aspect of love, for God, for others, even for our selves. In making our decisions, we experience internal influences towards and away from loving behavior, towards and away from union with others. Our struggle is spiritual, affected as we are by different spirits.

The weather, cold or warm, dry or wet, surely influences our behavior, but does not force us to act in any particular way. We would be foolish not to notice the weather in making decisions about what to wear or whether or not to go outside. A spirit of selfishness might suggest withholding from others a bit of information so that we could appear superior to them, while a spirit of generosity might bring to mind the thought of sharing the information we have, and of achieving a sense of equality with others. The thoughts that come into our minds do not impel us to act, but we do well to notice the different directions they suggest, and to make decisions that are in accord with our values.

Weather is external to us, while our mental processes and affections are internal. Rain is not personal, though we might find it welcome at one time and unwelcome at another. Suggestions that come into our minds are quite personal, though not of our own making; we do not create every thought that enters our minds, but we do notice them. We attend to weather reports so we can decide whether or not to hold a back yard barbecue. We pay attention to the movements of the spirits within us so that we can determine what actions we will or will not take so that they might be in keeping with who we are.

Though we can speak of many kinds of spirits, such as a spirit of love or of kindness, a spirit of hate or of meanness, a spirit of gentleness or

of power, they all move in only one of two directions: towards or away from our purpose in life, towards or away from our relationship with God. They are two radically opposed and different spirits. One is of God and one is not of God. There are not two equal spirits, though our experiences of being at times pushed or pulled, attracted or repelled by the thoughts that come to us can seem like an evenly matched battle. God's goodness does not have an equal and opposite evil. We, who experience the struggle to choose what is better rather than what is worse for us and for others, have the final "say." We decide what we will or will not do, say, or believe.

Our freedom to choose seems often to be diminished by the back-and-forth movements in our hearts and minds when we experience a variety of thoughts with their attendant feelings. Though we might need some time and reflection in order to sort through our experiences of spirits, we have some very powerful resources to help us.

Nothing can force us away from God. If we have difficulty sensing which the better of two options is, we can ask the One Spirit of God to inspire and enlighten us. When we can almost hear the argument in our minds between two possible directions, we can seek to recognize which of them seems to represent our best interests, to be our advocate, and which seems to be bullying and uncaring about our ultimate welfare, like and enemy. We follow the advice of friends we trust, we do not accept the suggestions of enemies.

Experiences of spirits reveal two sides of one coin. The "back" side, if we notice the negativity of some thoughts, indicates by their opposition, the better option. Those thoughts and accompanying feelings that we can recognize as drawing us towards God indicate our best interests. Heads we win. Tails we win too, since all we have to do is turn it over. We have all to gain and nothing to lose by taking time to reflect upon our experiences of spirits.