

**“THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT
OF LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS”**

by

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A series of addresses retained in their spoken form.

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Chapter 1

ADAM AND THE LAW OF LIFE

Reading: Genesis 3:1-7; 22-24; Romans 8:1-2.

The longer one lives and the more one thinks about things, the surer one becomes that the supreme issue which governs everything between God and man is that of life. Our Scripture says here that life is a law, and it further says that that life is in the hands of the Holy Spirit - "the law of the Spirit of life...".

A law is a fixed and established principle. It has potentialities. It means that, if you are adjusted to it and governed by it, certain results are inevitable; that the potentialities which it contains will most surely find expression when that law is established. So that, what we have here is, that the mark of things being of God the Holy Spirit is life. If anything is of God the Holy Spirit, it will live; its chief characteristic will be life. That is a law, an established principle. What is according to God lives, having God's own life in it, and that is, as a principle, a rule of guidance. It is a principle for the direction of the people of God.

But there is another thing we must notice at the outset. This is that, in the matter of life as a fixed principle, the life is in Christ Jesus: "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Upon that fact, the Scriptures are more than emphatic, that all that is of God is in Christ Jesus; and inasmuch as the mark of all that is of God is life, then life is in Christ Jesus and in Him alone.

The Expression of Life in Christ Sevenfold

Our object, then, is to investigate life and to note life in its components, or how the law of life works out from its beginning to its consummation, and we shall see, as the Lord enables and leads, that the components of life are sevenfold. They are like the colours of light led out by the prism, and Christ Jesus is the prism. We come to see what life is in its manifold expression, what the law of life is in its sevenfold expression, in Christ Jesus. To know life, we must know Him, we must understand Him. To know Him truly is to know life. Thus, in keeping with this whole truth, it becomes the work of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of life, to reveal Christ Jesus, to make Him known, to lead us into Him as the life. But this making known and this leading into Him is a matter of spiritual education, and it may be spread over a whole life-time. I think it is because of this that we have certain expressions in the Word of God which would indicate that while in the commencement of a true life in God we both enter into life and the life enters into us, we are also called upon to take other actions as we go on, in relation to life. Even the people of God are from time to time called upon, as Moses called upon the children of Israel, to choose life. There are certain crises in our spiritual experience when it becomes a necessity to deliberately choose life. Two ways are there before us, and we have to repudiate one quite positively and as positively choose the other. Then again we are exhorted to lay hold on life. Further there are those scriptures which indicate that life is still future, that we have not yet attained, that life lies on before us. We have to go on unto life, we have to inherit eternal life, and that is because the knowledge of Christ is progressive, ever growing. It is an education, and it reaches from the moment of our receiving God's free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus to no set future moment, but on, ever on, into the hereafter, when we may still be eating of "the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." This life has no end, is never exhausted, and its furthest bound is never reached. But we are concerned with this little span here on the earth, which constitutes our time for education in respect of the law

of the Spirit of life, the law of life, and that education is in connection with this sevenfold expression of that law. We have said that it is Christ Jesus.

Now, Christ Jesus bounds all time as life, and whenever God takes in hand to reach His end, it is always, and all along, by means of what Christ is. That is to say, God always moves toward His end by bringing out some further component of Christ as life, something more of what His Son is, and progress therefore toward fullness of life is by means of ever fresh discoveries of what Christ is. God never moves toward His end apart from Christ. Whatever He uses is something that is Christ in its essence, and so, by means of Christ, He brings on toward the consummation of His Purpose.

We move, then, on to very familiar ground in the book of Genesis. Genesis is comprehensive of the whole ground of death and life, and its comprehensiveness in those matters is gathered up into seven persons, each of whom brings Christ into view in some specific aspect of life. Each aspect of life as brought out in each of these seven persons is a part of the whole law of life, and the whole law of life is comprehended in these seven persons in this sevenfold way. The seven are from Adam to Joseph.

The Intention of God in Adam

We must note at the outset that Adam and Christ stand right at the beginning to govern all the ages. We are told that Adam was a figure of Him that was to come. Adam was a shadow, so to speak. Somewhere, with the eternal light shining from behind, stood Christ Jesus, and there the reality and the shadow stood looking right down all the ages, to govern all the ages as to God's thought.

The law of life in Christ Jesus is represented by the "tree of life" in the book of Genesis. Adam was intended to show forth the way of life. If Adam had not chosen another way, instead of God's intended way for him, Adam would have shown how life works, how the law of life operates, and how, by the operation of that law, God reaches His end; ever and always by a living way, the way of life through the operation of a fixed principle. But Adam failed: he who was to be the representation, yes, and the embodiment, of that law and that way of life failed, and he now stands to represent the way of death. But Christ, known to us now as the last Adam, stepped in, and He Himself is the embodiment of that law of life. He sets forth the way of life. He accomplishes what Adam failed to accomplish and reaches God's end by the pathway of life.

Now, having stated all that is preliminary, we begin with Adam as the first of the sevenfold expression of the law of life; but of course we have to consider Adam now in the opposite direction and learn what life is, and what the law of life is, by a contemplation of how the opposite operates in his case. We shall be led to the positive through the negative, to the true by way of the false.

In order to understand the beginning of life or of death, we must perceive the nature of the temptations of Adam and of Christ; for, if one thing is true in these temptations, it is that the whole question of life and death, death and life, was bound up in them, nothing less than that. So we must for a few minutes consider these temptations anew. We consider the temptation of Adam in order to understand the temptation of Christ.

Satan's Approach to Man

Firstly, there is the form of the tempter and the temptation. In Genesis 3 we see exactly where and why Eve and Adam fell. It is very simple on the face of it.

Perhaps that is its chief strength and subtlety. The occasion was something apparently good. Satan's temptations and seductions are usually presented in a form which makes the object in view something to be desired for good. Always remember that. I doubt whether Satan has ever yet tempted or seduced an individual by letting that individual know the dire consequences of falling. He always pursues exactly the opposite course, and brings the temptation and the seduction in a form which would appeal to the human judgment as something to be desired for good. The trouble is always that man only sees the THING: Christ saw Satan; and when the temptation came as something suggested, presented as being desirable for good, Christ saw through it and behind it, and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Now, I hardly think it necessary to press that, and to say to you that if ever Satan is going to seek to mislead you, ensnare you, seduce you, carry you away from the way of life, he will invariably do it by bringing up a good proposition, a thing which to your own human judgment is a good thing. It is a very clear and significant implication that, whenever we want to have our own way, we always give a very good argument for it. That is to say, we always bring up something that is good to throw into the balances with it. I say that is significant. Never yet has a man or woman gone wrong without having a good reason for going wrong, that is, from the human standpoint. Always an argument follows, and that gives the whole thing away.

Now, we know that the temptation was first made to the faculty of acquisitiveness, the power to acquire. In this case, it was to acquire knowledge. Now, beloved, to know is not evil in itself, although, of course, it would have been better for man had he never known certain things, or had a certain kind of knowledge. But I do not think that this matter hangs primarily upon the kind of knowledge that was possessed. It started with a desire to know, the appeal was to that power to acquire, to have, to possess; and here it was to possess knowledge. But, while knowledge in itself is not evil, there were hidden elements here in this case. What lay behind this instance was the motive to possess; that is, to possess so as to be no longer dependent upon, or subject to God. The design was to effect a change of position, to have another position. That is what lay behind this temptation. It was a direct blow at man's dependence upon God, man's subjection to God; or, to put it the other way, it was a direct blow at God's position.

The Impugning of God's Character

Then there was something further, a hidden insinuation, and that in respect of two things. Firstly, there was an insinuation regarding God's love. Buried right deep down in this temptation there was a calling into question the love of God. The implication was that God, who professed to love, to be so solicitous for the good of His creatures, was really withholding the best and the highest and the fullest, was really holding their lives in a straightness which need not be, and which was arbitrary. Really God was not love, for a God who does that is not love. Now, I am not saying that all this was recognized, but I am saying that the whole of the Scriptures as well as of human history bears it out. Satan's first basic, subtle, diabolical assault is always upon the love of God, and he never gives up that assault. You and I will never on this earth be in the place where we are altogether immune from the possibility of being tempted about that. Do you tell me that God is love? Look at this and that and that! What does it spell but limitation, and your having less than you could have and ought to have?

Then it was an insinuation as to God's veracity; that is, as to whether God is true, whether God can really be trusted. "Hath God said...?" Now you see what happens. In the hour of temptation, God's goodness is always impugned, and God's truth is always brought into question, and all other tokens of His love, His

veracity, are always obscured. The obvious answer to anybody alive and awake was, Oh no! look, look everywhere; everywhere there are evidences and tokens of God's love: I have plenty of proof of the love of God if I like to contemplate it, if I like to sit down and think about it and weigh things up. But how many of you have ever done that in the hour of trial, and found your escape that way? Is it not true that, in the hour of trial, of temptation, of stress, of assault, all the blessings that have ever been are obscured? Somehow or other, a mist is spread over them, a fog bank, a smoke screen, and you only see your present adversity and the difficulty of the moment. You are obsessed with a question about God and His love and His faithfulness, His truth. I believe that this is why Jesus, in the final revelation, is called "Faithful and True" (Revelation 19:11). It is the great title of triumph in man; the triumph in man over all this work of Satan which raises for ever and aye the question as to God's love and God's truth. His title has as its foundation all that lies behind such words as these: "I am he that liveth; I became dead." But wait a moment: listen to this cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That is the hour of temptation, the hour of darkness for Him. How did He emerge from it? Not as one who has entertained and nursed Satan's suggestion as to the breakdown of God's love and the failure of God's faithfulness, but victor over the sum of his suggestions and insinuations in an hour such as you and I will never know. He comes forth and becomes the embodiment of those features, faithful and true.

The Real Object in View

Well, here is this double insinuation, blinding to all the mercies and all the goodness of God. Then you see this further hidden thing. It was Satan's subtle, hidden way of putting God out of His place and getting into that place himself. It is very clear when you think about it. That is exactly what happened. God was deposed and Satan put in His place, and that is exactly what Satan was after. You see, he came in, as he usually does, with what was a question about God, and then, found an ear open, a listening ear - oh the peril, the disaster, of an ear inclined to Satan, a parleying with Satan! Christ Jesus never did it. Finding an ear open to his question, he swiftly moved, and followed up that small advantage with a statement which was a lie, a positive lie: "Ye shall not surely die." He is trying to get down to the convictions now, to drive home the superficial advantage, to register something deeper down. "Ye shall not surely die." That, again, is not left, but is followed at once with something else, a truth in a wrong position. "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof... ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Perfectly true! Did not God say later on, "The man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." But that truth was in its wrong position, and the terrible, the dire consequences were not revealed. The fact of knowing is not the point, but the becoming possessed of knowledge by a way that is contrary to God, knowing in a way which puts you apart from God, which alienates from God and alienates God from us. It is knowing at the instigation of Satan with a subtle, hidden intention to make independent of God; and when once man has become independent of God, Satan has secured his end: He is in the place of God.

Now, beloved, this is the way of death, and it is all summed up in one word: the way of death is a way that turns from God to self and to independence; independence of judgment, independence of desire, and independence of will. Hence "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"; mind, heart, will. Independence of God is the way of death; having a mind of our own, having a judgment of our own, holding to our own position, clinging to our own conclusions. Oh what a realm that opens up! It opens up the whole question of the sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus in respect of the Church, which is His Body, and forbids individual members of that spiritual Body to be in any way in independence. It touches, of

course, much more than that. The way of death is Adam's way, toward self in the matter of judgment, toward self in the matter of desire, toward self in the matter of will.

Christ the Exemplar of the Way of Life

Now, this brings us to Christ, to see life working in the last Adam in the opposite position to that of the first Adam, to see the way that He took. Oh, always remember Satan's object in temptation. It was true in the case of the Son of God and it is true in the case of every one of us. We must get right down to the thing that Satan is after. I feel that a very great deal of our explanation and exposition of the temptations of the Lord Jesus has not gone far enough. It has stopped short of the ultimate point, and, while it may be helpful, it misses the mark. We must recognize that the all-governing object in Satan's tempting of the Lord Jesus was death, nothing less than that. He was out for His life. He was out to make it impossible for Him to be the life of men. He was out, so to speak, to stop the stream of life at its very spring. The temptations always had in view the question of life. Satan was out for death. That is why he is described in the Word as "him that had the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14); something that he is wielding against the sons of God. But see Christ's way. His way was ever from self and from independence to the Father, to God. One of the sublime things to be noted in His life is that; how always, without hesitation or reservation, He turned from self to the Father, from any proposed line of independence to dependence upon the Father. Nothing out from Himself was His life attitude. It was a fixed thing with Him: no consulting of self, no consideration for self, no self-arguments, no self-desires, no self-will; but ever with Him it was, "not my will, but thine..."; "I am come to do thy will"; "I delight to do thy will, O my God": utterly away from self and from independence to God. You see, that lies right at the heart of the temptations at the beginning of His ministry. The temptation was to act of Himself, out from Himself, independently of God, but He brought the issue back every time to the one point: God has made known His mind in the matter: God has expressed Himself in this connection: it is written, it is written, it is written. God is the final court of appeal in every matter, not my convenience, not my comfort, not my advancement, not my good, not my self-realization, not my purpose; not even my life, nothing but the Father.

Conformity to Christ, beloved, is the supreme factor in the law of life in Christ. That is the law of life in Christ - always away from self and our own souls unto God; away from our own reasoning, our own desiring, our own willing. That is conformity to the image of God's Son. That is very practical. When we speak of being foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, we may perhaps think that this is some secret, hidden, imperceptible thing which is taking place under the hand of the Holy Spirit without our knowledge, but that is not the truth. That conformity to the image of God's Son comes in along the line of definite choice, deliberate choice. It comes through following the law which governed the Son of God - ever away from self to God, away from all independence of mind and heart and will to Him. And God presses the test in a very practical way.

This, then, is "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." What is this first aspect of the law of the Spirit of life as brought out in Adam and in Christ? It is a law of an initial, a full, a continuous and a final subjection to the Lord. That is the way of life. Satan says that is the way of curtailment, the way of limitation, the way of losing things: God says that is the way of life. Satan's way proved a way of death and the life was cut off and held in reserve for such as would take the way of life, or who would establish God's fixed principle of life. He is Lord, He is sovereign. It is established beyond question or doubt or argument. God is love and God is true.

Move one hair's breadth from that and you move from life. Hold to that whatever it means and you go through into life.

Chapter 2

ABEL AND THE LAW OF LIFE

Reading: Genesis 4:3-6, 8-10; 1 John 3:12; John 7:44; Acts 7:52; John 4:23; Romans 8:2.

In our previous meditation we were drawn to take account of the sevenfold working of the law of life. We spoke of the Lord Jesus as the prism of life, in and through whom life is broken up into its components, in whom we are able to see the working of life. Yet, as we contemplate, the figure changes, and that of a seven-branched candlestick or lampstand looms into view, and we see that it has one central root and stem, and out from it, as part of it, on either side go the six branches. In our previous meditation, which was upon the law of the Spirit of life as brought out first of all in Adam, we have the central root and stem which includes all the others, out from which all grow or radiate, to which all come back; for the beginning of things is very comprehensive, and what we shall see as we go on is that each of these remaining aspects of the law of life is but an outgrowth or outworking of what we have comprehensively and inclusively in Adam. I say that because of the unity of the whole, the oneness of all the parts. This oneness is a very remarkable and a very wonderful thing. How all of a piece this matter of life is! You never really get into anything that is fragmentary, detached or unrelated. You can never deal with any one aspect as though it were something in itself. One thing leads to another and that other leads you back again, so that all the time you are dealing with the same thing and yet growing. That may not be quite clear to your comprehension now, but you will see what we mean as we go on.

What Cain and Abel Represent

We come to the second of these outworkings of the law of life in Christ, brought to us in the second of the seven personal representations of the Old Testament, or of the book of Genesis, and we have now before us Cain and Abel. Here we see the law or principle of life manifesting itself in a contrast and a conflict. Where there is life - and you understand that I am not speaking of ordinary human life, I am speaking of Divine life, spiritual life, that unique and peculiar life which Christ is and which is Christ where that life is, this antagonism will inevitably come to light. It always is the case, and you can neither avoid the clash nor suppress it without doing despite to the life. Immediately the life of God is found anywhere, an antagonism manifests itself, conflict begins.

Here, then, we find that life; and we are speaking now in the realm of types. Life was found along Abel's line and death was found along Cain's line, and we have to investigate the difference. What was the difference? Let us look at Cain very carefully.

We can be superficial about Cain and come to conclusions which, while they may be quite right and true, are inadequate. Let us be quite fair, quite precise about Cain. Cain did not ignore God, nor was he one who was outwardly opposed to God. Cain recognized God; he acknowledged Him to be the object of worship. Cain brought to God, as an act of worship, the best that he knew and the best that he had. I say the best that he knew, not the best that he could have known. In this realm, what Cain brought was good and was costly. Until we recognize that, and put it like that, we are not on the way to understanding the difference between death and life. It is of no use our painting what we would call the way of death all in black or dark colours and thinking of the way of death as necessarily being that which is marked by the most atrocious outrages against God. We must

not suppose that, to be in the way of death, it is necessary to be openly and positively antagonistic to God, or to ignore God, or to refuse some practical acknowledgment of God. It is not necessary that these things should obtain in order to be in the way of death. The way of death is something deeper than that, something very much deeper than that, and we shall see that this is so as we go on.

You see, Cain brought the fruit of his natural life, and that is all there is to it. When you have said that, if you understand it, you have got near the heart of the thing.

In Abel's case, his attitude was that we must die to live. We have nothing that is acceptable to bring to God, only a life to be repudiated. Abel recognized sin and saw that the sinful soul must be poured out unto death, not offered to God, neither it nor its works or fruits. You see, on the Cain side, the soul seeks to be accepted on the ground of what it deems to be its own good. On the Abel side, the soul seeks to die to itself.

Christ Jesus and the Jews

Now, we carry that over immediately to Christ Jesus and the Jews. You notice that we read of the Jews in John's Gospel in the exact terms used about Cain - a terrible thing. But the point that we and all the Lord's people need to grasp is this, that we are not necessarily dealing with what we call the ungodly, as standing in the place of Cain, and the godly, in the truest sense, as standing in the place of Abel. We are in a much narrower compass of things than that. There is an Israel after the flesh and there is an Israel after the Spirit.

So we turn to Christ and the Jews in His day. The Jews worshipped and they murdered, a terrible combination. Their worship, which in its realm was very devout, and costly in a way, was nevertheless but an outward thing. It is not necessary for me to call to your remembrance various passages which passed through the Lord's lips about that. "Ye make clean the outside of the platter": "They make broad their phylacteries": "You make long prayers": they delighted "to be seen of men to fast"; and so on. It was outward. Their worship was their own glory and works. As they worshipped they drew attention to themselves, and made their very worship an occasion of self-glorification. It was all a matter of forms, into which they threw themselves maybe very heartily, but by which none the less they sought to gain benefits for themselves. Even worship was toward themselves all the time, not really toward God, but for their own favour and good. It had nothing to do with the heart of God. God's satisfaction was not the one and only consideration.

Now, look at the Lord Jesus, who stands always in opposition to the Jews, and they to Him. The opposition is found, not in the outward at all, but deeper down. He worshipped; but He worshipped by a life wholly yielded to God. But more, He worshipped by a life governed by the very nature of God. By that I mean that God's nature was the thing which characterized His worship. God is holy, God is righteous, God is altogether without mixture; He is pure. God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all, no suspicion or suggestion of darkness, cloudiness, or lack of transparency. It was what God was, what God is, that governed the worship of the Lord Jesus. That is to say, He saw that it was not possible to worship God in truth, unless you recognized what God was, what God is, and forever abandoned anything and everything that was not like God. You could not come on to God's ground to worship God and bring there something unlike God, something contrary to God. You must worship God in truth. There is so much that is false, so much that is a lie, so much that is a contradiction, so much that is

untrue and unreal and make-believe about human nature, and you must part with it all if you are going to be a true worshipper, and recognize that here you cannot play with God, cannot deceive God, cannot have fellowship with God while there is anything like that about you. You are governed entirely by the consideration of what God is. To do otherwise is like coming into the presence of an extremely sensitive person and just saying or doing those things which create agony to that sensitive person. If you are a musician, a musical person - I do not mean if you played music! - if you were a musical person, if you had a high, keen sense of music, and anyone came into your presence and strummed and struck constant discords, you know what agony it would be. You would go hot and cold. If you knew a certain person to be keenly, acutely strung to true music, and you were not in any special way musical, it would be the last thing that you would do, if you had good sense, to attempt to play in the presence of such a one. I remember a man who played the violin fairly well and he went to hear someone who played the violin very well. He came to me after and said, I am going to put my foot through my violin: I will never play again. If that man heard me play, it would drive him mad! You see what I am getting at. The point is that this is how the Lord Jesus was attuned to God, and the thing which weighed with him was the nature of God. What does God require of a worshipper? Does He want certain forms? His worship was by a life laid down as a testimony against sin. Remember that! The death of the Lord Jesus has various aspects, but this is a very vital one. It was a laying down of His life as a testimony against sin.

It would be impossible for there to be any fellowship with God while there was sin: and there was sin. What are you going to do with regard to it? You cannot clean up sin. It must die. But, seeing that sin is not some abstract thing, but that man is become sin, then to deal with human nature, from which you cannot pluck out or eradicate something called sin, you have to bring in another human nature in which there is no sin. What is to happen to us then? Not to have sin plucked out, but to die and to have Christ come in our place. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I, but Christ." Well, His worship was by a life laid down as a testimony against sin.

You see the working of that in Abel. Of course, Abel did not lay down his life. That is where the type falls short, but the principle is the same. The death of Abel was a testimony against sin - "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth..."

Now, you see this conflict and the conflict is perfectly clear. There is a Cain line of death, full of worship, full of acknowledgment of God, full of gifts to God, full of splendid things in its own realm, and there is Abel's line of life. This latter works out in an offering, not of things, but of self, and that upon an altar. The creature must die.

The Sphere of the Conflict

(1) The Warfare is Between Two Kingdoms

Now we can get very quickly to our point. This conflict operates in two realms. Firstly, it operates in the realm where there is that which is of God and that which is of Satan. We all know that. That is the simplest and most obvious realm of the operation of this antagonism. I mean, it is the realm where every born again child of God moves immediately they receive this life. We all know that immediately we become the Lord's and are filled with His joy, and then go back to our business or our sphere of life in this world, expecting that everybody is going to be very pleased and to respond to this, we find instead that, without so much as breathing a word about it, suspicious looks are cast in our direction and the atmosphere is full of something. You never have to say a word - it is there. More

often than not, the moving about of a child of God in this world draws out into the very atmosphere an antagonism, a conflict, without any words being spoken. It is not imagination, it is there, and the more strong the soul-life on the other side, the quicker the discerning of that which is in us; the more shrewd is the arrival at a conclusion that there is something, and the more definite the antagonism. I mean that simple, artless people, while they do not understand you and cannot go with you, they do not give out to you what comes out from those other people of a strong soul-life. We know that realm of the outward, where the antagonism becomes manifestly between what is of Satan and what is of God. I need not follow that, it is known so well.

(2) Man Himself the Real Battle Ground

But there is this other realm, where in an inward way conflict arises between that which is of God and that which is of self. The point is this, that the realm, the real realm, of this battle is man himself. That is where the battle really rages most fiercely. Most of us come very quickly to recognize the difference in the outward realm, where the conflict is between us and those who are not for God, and we accept it. But when this thing gets inside, it is far more difficult to deal with. When it arises within us, it is very difficult to accept it, because we do not understand it. We find the conflict within ourselves and that conflict has been precipitated by the very presence of life in us. It is the outworking of the law of life in Christ Jesus. It may be comforting in one respect to know it is that. So often, when the thing becomes acute, the tempter gives his own interpretation to it and would have us believe that everything is wrong and that there is nothing of God there at all; whereas the fact is, it is because there is that which is of God that the conflict has arisen within, and we ourselves have become the battlefield. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: for these are contrary the one to the other" (Galatians 5:17). But what is it, what are the two things that are in conflict? Now a very elementary and superficial answer would be, of course, that it is the flesh and the Spirit, the old man and the new man. That is quite true, but it is not an adequate answer. It really does not get right to the heart of this thing, and I do want that you should see the core of this matter. It is most important. For want of discernment in this matter, many of the Lord's people are rendered helpless, impotent, bewildered. You see, beloved, the real battle is between soul and spirit.

Now, you cannot simply say soul is flesh, soul is old Adam. That is not true in the full sense. You have to be careful. If you say that, then you are going to embark upon a line of killing the soul and you must not do that. The soul itself is not a wrong thing. It is not wrong to have a soul. The Lord tells us that the soul has to be won. "In your patience ye shall win your souls" (Luke 21:19). "We are not of them that shrink back unto perdition; but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:39). And yet the conflict is here between soul and spirit. From this you may recognize the nature of the Fall, as being a violation of spirit by soul. In our previous meditation we noted the attack upon man's soul, that is, upon his reason, desire and will, and we saw how man's reason, desire and will were taken out of their place and made to exercise and function independently of God. Man has a spirit, and by his spirit he was put into communication with God, who is Spirit. He knew God, not through his soul: in that unfallen state, he had not to come to reasoned conclusions about the will of God; he had not to sit down and reason out what God wanted. In his unfallen state, he perceived, he sensed, he intuitively knew, and that is why conscience arose and smote him, because conscience is not a faculty of the soul, but a faculty of the spirit. Well, man disregarded the organ of communion with God when he disregarded God as the final court of appeal on all matters and, acting on the ground of his own soul, violated his spirit. Then that conflict arose in man which has gone on ever since.

He is a house divided against itself, which cannot stand, and you have these two sides as in the one, soul and spirit. By nature he is essentially now a soul man. In the New Testament, unfortunately, he is called "the natural man," but everybody knows the word there is "soulical" man; man who is governed and actuated by soul, that is, by his own self-reasoning, his own self-discerning, his own self-willing. That is the type of man he is, and over against him in the New Testament you have placed the spiritual man, "he that is spiritual." Thus there arises the conflict between these two "men" as in the one, the conflict between soul and spirit, spirit and soul; what is of God, God's thought, as against our thought; God's reasoning, if we may use that word, or God's reason as over against our reasoning; God's will as over against our will; God's feelings, affections, desires, as over against our feelings, affections and desires. These two things now come in, not into the unregenerate man, but into the regenerate man. We are not talking now of the man out of Christ, we are talking of the carnal man. The carnal man is the Christian in whom there is flesh, and who is actuated by it.

Now, you see, the soul is the place where the flesh resides, for flesh in its spiritual sense (not the physical sense) is an evil thing. It is self-willed, self-guided, actuated by Satan. That is flesh. It is that which lusteth against the Spirit, and you know how much the New Testament says about flesh as an evil thing. It is resident in the natural soul. The spirit reborn in new birth becomes the vessel for the indwelling of that which is of God.

Now, this conflict is set up. You say, I know it all too well, although perhaps I should never have analysed and explained it like that; but I know it! We do know it! But the trouble is that so many have not got past that. They are still in it. We have not yet come to the point but I might as well say right away that it is not God's will that this conflict should go on in perpetuity throughout our spiritual life, that we should always be in this conflict. We shall speak of that another time.

Divine Life Demands a Walk After the Spirit

Here we have to sum up what we have been saying in a phrase or two. The aspect of the basic matter with which we are dealing here is that the law of life demands a course in the spirit, and not in the flesh or in our own soul. It demands a heavenly union with God in our spirit, and not the soulical religious life according to our ideas. That is the difference between Cain and Abel. Oh yes, Cain was a religious man, Cain was a worshipping man, Cain brought what, in its realm, was good, precious, costly. Cain, in his way, was devout in his acknowledgment that God is to be worshipped, but his understanding was darkened, and so is the understanding of our souls. We, by nature, do not know God's thoughts. "The natural (or soulical) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: ... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Thus Cain, with all his devoutness and all his worship and his religion and his acknowledgment of God, was still in the darkness of a darkened understanding: his judgment was all out, his ideas were all wrong, he was missing the mark and nothing got through above the altar. God had not respect unto Cain's offering. The Jews stood in that position, and, to prove it, the Jews murdered, even as Cain murdered. To prove it, challenge the worship of the soul-worshippers, of the religious people who are not spiritual, and you will find something flare up. They cannot bear to have it interfered with, challenged or touched. To a true worshipper, to one who worships in spirit and in truth, you can say or do what you will, and you will find no spirit of murder rising up, or anything akin to it. Like Abel, such a one will lay down his life, even at the hands of the worshippers, the religious. That is the difference here between the soul and the spirit.

Now, I said before that we are in a very much narrower circle than that which embraces believers and the ungodly. Beloved, life, that which gets through and goes on, that which is the seal and mark of God, of what is of God and what is acceptable to God; life is along the line of the spirit. Death, though it may have all the outward semblance, forms, worship, acknowledgment of God, religion, is none the less death. It does not get through: it does not go through. Oh, you say, surely you are speaking out in a very wide realm of things? We know what you are thinking about, of the merely religious people who go to church and say formal prayers. I am not! There is an application no doubt that can be made to them from such words, but that is not what I am thinking about. I am not dividing these things up so utterly and finally as to put them into pigeon-holes. I am saying that there are overlappings of these things in most believers, and therefore there is a limitation of life. Why is it that missionaries can come back from mission fields after twenty-five or thirty years' service, and say, The whole thing has broken down, the promises of God have become dust and ashes to me! Let us be quite frank. They are doing it. Some are known to us. Why is it? There comes a point where, because of the unreality and because things do not work, do not go through, do not reach Divine ends, so many just come to an impasse and have questions, and justifiable questions, about the reality of things. Why? Now, I am leaving out certain other things. I know all about physical and nervous breakdowns, depressions, melancholia, and all those things which come in sometimes to becloud. I am not talking about that. I am speaking about that realm where what is spiritual is not working out, where there is no seal of God that is adequate. For the much pouring out, the much giving, the much doing, no spiritual life is really to be seen as the fruit of it. The absence of life! Oh, it is possible, beloved, for us to be under the hand of God in chastening and disciplining, where we see no fruit of our labours, no results of our work, and where everything, so far as our senses are concerned, our souls, is hidden, darkened, obscured, and yet all the time for life to be working in the power of resurrection both in us and through us, and for others to be getting the benefit of it, though we neither see nor sense it. That is one thing, but that is not what I am talking about. I am talking about absence of life, where things are dead spiritually. What is the trouble? Well, the answer is in Cain and Abel. The explanation is here in the difference between soul and spirit. The soul is not a wrong thing, but for it to govern is another matter. If that which is of soul gets the upper hand, then it is self getting the upper hand, and the works are out from ourselves, the energies and activities of our own souls, and not the energies of God through our spirits.

In saying such things, do not let anyone think for a moment that, when you live on the level of the spirit, where all things are to be out from God and nothing out from yourself, there is never going to be anything doing. A lot of people think there are going to be no works, no activities at all. The only difference is in the kind of activities. You do not do less, you do other. It is different, but the end sees much greater gain than all the self-propagated activities for God. In the hidden depths everything must be toward God, not toward self. We do not know how deeply rooted in our own souls is that self. We discover something of it when we can no longer do, when God puts His hand upon us and says, Stop doing for a month or two, and puts us out of action. Then we discover how great a measure of self-gratification was in our doing, and, with its cessation, we are no longer gratified. We have lost our gratification, and we have nothing in its place, and what the Lord is seeking to do is to take away our gratification with things and doings, and for Himself to be our gratification; that, whether we do or do not do, even if there is nothing that we can do, we have the Lord and are satisfied. I am perfectly certain that is the crux of the whole matter. It is what the Lord is to us, not what our work is to us; not what anything is to us which has its seat or spring in our own souls. We have the Lord and we are satisfied. I wonder if there is one

of us who has absolutely got there? No, we have still to have patience unto the winning of our souls. These souls have still to be brought over in ever fuller degrees to where God is their only gratification. Through many, many bitter tears we may come there, but when we do come there, the tears will be wiped away. You see, the tears are associated with getting somewhere. They are never there when you arrive. The little girl who said, If God is going to wipe away all tears, He will have to have a very big handkerchief, had a wrong idea as to how tears are wiped away. Tears have to do with processes and the wiping away is simply the result of arriving. They pass away. "In your patience ye shall win your souls."

The Necessity for Enlightenment

But the understanding must be enlightened - "having the eyes of your heart enlightened" - the understanding must be enlightened, so that instead of Cain's way, which is a way in the soul, where even in its devotion to God, even in its acknowledgment of God, the soul yet draws everything to itself, there may be a life which is in the spirit. Cain would not have admitted it was so. No soulical life would admit that it was drawing everything to itself. It is the most difficult thing for anybody to accept that, yet that is the nature of the soul. The spirit is just the opposite. The spirit is always toward God; the renewed spirit, that is. The Lord Jesus poured out His soul unto death; He committed His spirit to God.

That touches a new field of contemplation. The soul-life as such must come under, the spirit-life must come up. In so far as the soul-life governs, there is death. There may be a lot of emotion, a lot of sensation, a lot of pleasing, a lot of activity, but the end is death. Inasmuch as the spiritual life governs, the life of the spirit, there is life, and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" is the law of life.

Now, do not bother about the technique, about the way in which this word has been expressed in its details, but ask the Lord to enable you to grasp the conclusion. As one in whom the life is, I am made aware of two things. It is an inevitable result of the life that the conflict within arises. I have, further, to know the nature of that conflict, and, when my understanding is enlightened, I see that it is the conflict between myself on the soul side and myself on the spirit side. It is a conflict between my own soul and what is of God in me. That is a house divided against itself: it cannot stand. It must sooner or later crash, and we are seeing the crash of such divided houses all around. That is not God's thought. There is a way out. We shall see later, if the Lord wills, what that is, but here we recognize the fact. Let us seek the Lord that we may walk in the Spirit, walk by the Spirit, have our life in God and not in things, and not out from ourselves; for this natural life is a false life and it deceives because it is deceived. But His life is true, and He is true who is the life. Because He is life, He is also the light. Because He is the light, He is the life.

Let us ask the Lord to make the meaning of this clear.

Chapter 3

NOAH AND THE LAW OF LIFE

As we move on in these meditations, there are two other passages of the Word of a basic character which I want to bring to you. One is in 1 Peter 3:20-21.

"... once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Without taking it away from its context, which is vital to our present consideration, I want just to underline the last part of that passage: "the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ".

Then we will turn back to most familiar words in Romans 6:3-8.

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him."

The Basis of a Good Conscience

We now pass to the third of the characters used by God to explain the working of the law of life, namely, Noah. We have seen that not one of these can be taken as detached or unrelated or separate from any other or from the rest. They all overlap, grow into one another and grow out of one another. We find ourselves really in a chain, a chain of seven links; and the links in the chain of the course of death are clearly seen as you take up this book. "The eyes of them both were opened" (Genesis 3:7); that is the first link in the chain. The second link is this: "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord" (Genesis 4:16). The third link quickly follows: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:5, 13). Now you see in that seventh verse of chapter 3 exactly what has happened. It is said that the eyes of them both were opened. It means that conscience came into being, and an evil conscience at that. Up to that time, conscience had not been the ruling faculty. Perhaps they had been altogether unconscious of having a conscience, but now conscience has come to life, and because it is an evil conscience they acted as they did and hid themselves. That has come in with Adam, and what we have to see is that the mischief that came in with Adam has to be remedied; there has to be deliverance from an evil conscience and the answer of a good conscience toward God.

The Adam race in itself is entirely unable to give that answer of a good conscience. No matter how conscience works in the natural man, it always betrays condemnation; for in the natural man conscience usually works either to accuse or excuse, and both alike represent condemnation. Conscience being evil,

and man being unable to give the answer of a good conscience toward God, means that, so far as God is concerned, man is dead, dead to God. The answer of a good conscience toward God demands that we should be on living ground, a ground of life, altogether other ground than that of nature: so in 1 Peter 3:21, it is the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, it is to this that Noah brings us. Here we have the question of life bound up with the answer of a good conscience toward God by resurrection; for life and a good conscience go together, or a good conscience toward God and life go together. In like manner, an evil conscience and death go together.

Just look back one step in our meditation to Abel. There in Abel the matter is related to the death side of the Cross. As we contemplated Abel and his sacrifice, we saw that Abel's discernment and conclusion was that, rather than being able to bring anything as the fruit of nature for God's satisfaction subsequent to Adam's disobedience, the only way of life is through death: the creature must die, the soul must be poured out unto death, not bring its works, its fruits, its good, as did Cain. So Abel represents the death side of the Cross, where the soul is poured out unto death.

Now, while we look out upon a state of universal death as we come to Noah and death is very much in view, nevertheless it is the positive side that governs in Noah's case. It is very important that we should recognize that. It is not the death side which is supreme in the case of Noah, despite a universal overwhelming. It is the life side that governs in Noah's case, the positive side.

Let us mark again what Peter says.

"The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

That is the positive side, you see; the life side. All this brings something into view, namely, resurrection, life; and resurrection, life, is only possible when there has been a repudiation of the natural or soul-life of the old Adam. That is one side of Noah's testimony. God always finally acts on the positive line. While He says terrible things - "The end of all flesh is come before me... I will destroy them with the earth" - God never intended that should be the end. God is acting on the positive line. He will re-act to secure something that does answer to His original thought. He is not abandoning His thought and saying, I can never do as I intended; man has rendered it impossible for me to accomplish what I had set my heart upon: I am defeated, I am in a hopeless state, I will wipe it all out and try again. It is never thus with God. And to whatever He has to resort to clear the ground, He is but clearing ground for something else; He is acting and re-acting with the positive always in view. Otherwise God is defeated again and again and again. He is as a hopeless, helpless God making futile attempts through history, and the greatest failure that this universe has ever seen was the death of Jesus Christ! But we know that the death of the Lord Jesus was the greatest triumph of God that this universe has ever seen. It has cleared the ground for a new creation. God is always acting on the positive line. But you can never come to the positive, you can never come to the life, until there has been the repudiation of that which God has repudiated, and God has repudiated the natural life, the soul-life of man as the governing thing. Why is that? Well, as we have seen before, it is because, since Adam's transgression and fall, the natural or soul-life of man is a false life. This is made very manifest in Cain.

The Natural Soul-Life a False Life

We must re-emphasize here something that was said in our previous meditation. You have in Cain a very religious man; a man who, along his line, is a very devout man, recognizing and acknowledging God as the object of worship. As he looked over the result of his labours in those fruits of the field and of the trees, he probably picked out the best, he selected the most perfect, he made up a sacrifice that answered to his highest judgment as to what was worthy of God. We will do him credit for that, and I think it is most likely that is exactly what he did do. He brought the best he could lay hand upon, and sought to worship God by that means, and sought life along that line. But, you see, his soul was darkened, and that action of the soul, that energy, that motion, that life of the soul, that natural life, was a false life. It misled him, it deceived him, it caused him to proceed in a way which brought him up against a blank wall where God was concerned, with no opening, no way through. It was the leading of a false, deceived life, and that is so with this natural life of ours. It is a false life, it is a deceived life, and it deceives us even in worship. We may become almost ecstatic in worship, we may become tremendously emotional in worship; there may be something that looks like veritable agony in worship, and I have seen it. I have entered cathedrals and churches in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean at the feast of Corpus Christi and at other times, and I have seen people spread on the ground in what looked like an agony, when the host was elevated, groaning and almost perspiring. Half an hour afterwards out in the street, they were using knives to one another in a quarrel. You see, it is a false life, a deceived life. That, of course, is an extreme expression of it, but you can see the same thing in more modified forms. Sincerity is not necessarily reality: we have to discriminate. We may mean well: so did Cain; but he murdered. This life of ours is a deceived life and it will deceive us even in worshipping, and get us nowhere.

Even in what we call service to God, it may be our own zest, our own zeal, our own enthusiasm, our own energy, putting ourselves into it, and not that energy and vitality of the Spirit of God by which alone God is served. Now, I am not saying that, when the Holy Spirit gets hold of us, we do not put ourselves into things, but I modify that word "ourselves". It is true that, if the Holy Ghost gets hold of us, He will use us up. The Lord requires that, whatsoever our hands find to do, we should do it with our might. The Lord demands that we shall serve Him with all our strength, all our mind, all our heart. Yes, but the Holy Spirit must be in charge to direct, to instigate, to govern, or all is in vain, and we are deceived in trying to serve the Lord and it comes to nothing. The question is, Where is the spring of this - in ourselves, or in Him? Is it of God or simply our own judgment as to what is for God? Now, this is where understanding needs enlightenment, and where things have to be put into their right place. This natural life does not get through to God, and therefore can never lead to spiritual maturity. Strange, is it not, that some of those who are most energetically engaged and thoroughly using their energies in work for God still remain so spiritually small in their knowledge of God? This soul of ours never will get us through to spiritual maturity, to a real and true knowledge of God: and that is the test of everything - growth in the knowledge of the Lord. It is not a question at the last of how much I have done, how sincere or earnest I have been: the thing which matters in the long run is, In what measure do I know the Lord, how much have I grown in the knowledge of the Lord, how has my spiritual intelligence increased? That is the thing that matters; and that is a matter of life, Divine life.

The flood was the verdict upon the course of Cain. The second link in the chain is, as we have said, "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod." Then what happened? He instituted a civilization. You mark what is there recorded. You find cities, trades, arts, industries, all coming out

from Cain, all the various aspects of human life. Cain built a civilization, produced a world after his own kind; a natural life, soul-life, soul-world; that which was not out from God but out from himself, and the flood was God's verdict upon the course of Cain, that world of natural glory, of man's fruitfulness apart from God. So the law of life is seen operating, not along that line - that is the way of death - but along another line, through the flood and out on the other side upon resurrection ground.

The Importance of a True and Settled Position

Now, if we at any time leave the ground of resurrection, which pre-supposes the repudiation of our natural life, then life is at once arrested and death takes advantage. We have to settle it once for all that we have done with nature and nature's ground as the ground of our hope, our confidence, our reliance, our expectation. Yet how long drawn out is that awful conflict with our own natures to get that issue! Have we any expectation whatsoever in nature? Of course, as one familiar with the doctrine, you will say, No, certainly not! we see that it is unfruitful, unprofitable, and we can have no expectation there. Then why be miserable because you cannot find any good in yourself? It means that you are expecting something from yourself. Take that ground and you take the ground of death. If you take the ground of resurrection, it implies that you have once for all given up all expectation of any good coming out of yourself. Oh, to get that settled, and settled with reference to the Devil; because, you see, this not only constitutes for us an outstanding point of conflict, but it is also Satan's ground. Every link in this chain, every aspect of the working of this law of life, is a reversing of the work of Satan. If he brought out the soul into a false place of domination, then the soul has to be poured out that his ground may be taken away.

You have heard of the farmer who was always having trouble with his spiritual life because Satan was always coming to him and telling him that he was not forgiven and not a true believer in Christ, that he was not truly saved. Almost every day he went down under that accusation until life became intolerable. One day, unable to go on any longer because of this accusation and the misery of getting down under it, he sat down and faced the thing out. He put some questions to himself with the Word of God before him. He said, Have I accepted that? Do I believe that? Of course I do with all my heart. Then God says that I am forgiven. God says "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." So he went out into the field where Satan had met him so often and took a stake, and drove it deep into the earth, and said, That settles it once for all! Then he went on with his ploughing. He got to the other side and Satan came back and tried to tempt him again. Look here, Mr. Satan, he said, you come along with me. You see that stake? You know why I drove that stake in there: I drove it in to settle this business once for all. God has said it and I believe and accept it. That is an end of it!

Do not parley with Satan. Point to an established fact and stay there. Keep to your fact. If you move off resurrection ground and what it implies, it is death. Stay there, with its implication that you have repudiated the life of nature as having any possible hope, and you have seen Christ as the hope, the sure hope, the only hope. Maintain that position, and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes free from the law of sin and death. That is how the law of life operates, on resurrection ground. There is no good conscience on any other ground, as that farmer well discovered when he moved over on to Satan's side and accepted what he had to say.

Noah forever stands to testify against the vanity, the emptiness, the unfruitfulness of a natural life, and his is a practical testimony. He testified to the vanity of natural life by building an ark in order to get out of it. That, for Noah, was the way of life - out of the life of nature. The law of life in Christ Jesus supposes that, in spirit, we are out of nature: otherwise that law is not a law for us; it has no meaning for us, it does not operate where we are concerned. It supposes that we are out of the life of nature and in Christ Jesus.

Noah a Witness Against a Lost Discrimination

Now, to examine Noah a little more closely. One of the pronounced features in Noah's day was the loss of distinctiveness between things clean and things unclean. There is that mysterious statement in Genesis 6:2: "The sons of God saw the daughters of men... and took them wives of all which they chose." The last clause is very suggestive - "as THEY chose". Refraining deliberately from going into explanations of the first part of the statement, let us take what lies on the surface. Here are those who are on God's line. We will just leave it at that. There are those who are on God's line and those who are not on God's line, the sons of God and the daughters of men, and there is an inter-mixture, a loss of distinction, a loss of discrimination between what is of God and what is not of God, and a bringing of those two things together and making them one. That is the meaning of marriage. But what was it that led to that? "As they chose." You see, here you have the soul in action, desiring and choosing, without a perception of what is of God and what is not of God. You see the principle. Will you just isolate that little bit, and hold it and think about it? The soul in action; desiring, that is the soul on its emotional side; choosing, that is the soul on its volitional side; desiring and choosing without discrimination as to what is of God and what is not of God. That is exactly the manner of the natural life, exactly what is exemplified in Cain. The life of nature mixes things up and has no power to perceive or discern what is of God and what is not of God: it brings the two together. That today is the tragedy of Christianity, the tragedy of what is called "the Church", the tragedy of the work of the Lord. These things have become all mixed up. That which is of God has been brought under the hand of man, and man is putting himself into the things of God. All this is the mixture of soul with the things of God.

Now, that was a pronounced feature of things in Noah's day, and if there is one thing which is abhorrent to God, it is mixture. God has shown Himself in His Word to be opposed to mixture. With God, there is light and there is darkness, there is death and there is life. When God reaches His end, the river of the water of life is crystal clear, and no murkiness is to be seen. The new Jerusalem, the Holy City, is as clear as jasper, transparent. All this is after God. "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all." God is utter and God hates confusion. He is not the God of confusion, He cannot bear mixture. God is always saying in effect, One thing or the other! "Because thou art... neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:16). God is nauseated by mixture, and that is what obtained there, natural life mixing up with Divine things. That brings the Deluge, judgment, that is the way of death. The law of the Spirit of life demands utterness or it cannot operate. Life moves along the line of what is absolutely distinct, unmistakable, clear, as of God. It cannot countenance mixture.

You see here, the deception of this life brought about the judgment of God. What is deception? Well, it works in many ways; but, so far as the soul is concerned, it can work in this way, that it is a determined adherence to one's own opinions on any subject, which means we are unwilling to subject those opinions to any court but the court of our own judgment. The thing begins with us and it ends with us. It is tied up with ourselves and we are not prepared to have any other judgment

on the matter. You may take it that, if anybody is like that, they are most deceived.

Noah's Testimony Essentially Implies Resurrection

Now, we must close. There are two things to be noted about Noah. It says that he was a just man and that he walked with God. Well, as a just man, he took up what was true of Abel. Abel had witness borne concerning himself that he was righteous; and, walking with God, he took up what was true of Enoch: Enoch walked with God. Both of these things carry you at once on to resurrection ground and show what Noah stands for. If, as is said, he is a just man, whence is his righteousness? Why, only on the ground of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We are justified by His life, that is, His resurrection life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's own act of attestation that all sin and guilt has been dealt with and put away, and that is the ground on which we are justified. It is through His righteousness, a righteousness given us of God. That is life, walking with God. Who can walk with God? No one can walk with God who is not on resurrection ground, who is not righteous before God in that sense.

So we might go on increasing this emphasis in many ways, that what Noah stands for is the positive side, resurrection, and that the law of the Spirit of life operates on resurrection ground. That means that all other ground of natural life has been left and in Christ we have come out. You see, Noah was all those years occupied with that which spoke of being outside of things here; for Noah was building that ark all through those years. He was every day hammering home this fact: I am not in this, I am going out, I am repudiating this! The hour is coming when what is true of me spiritually will take place literally. That is also our position. We too are out spiritually, and we await the hour when what is true of us spiritually will become literally true; we shall go out. But Christ is out, and resurrection life means that we are out of what is here; out of nature, and out of this world, and out of ourselves. Noah with his ark ever bears that testimony - out, always out.

But, even so, it required a lot of patience to be spiritually out and yet to be environed by all that state of things, pestered by it, worried by it, pressed by the life of nature. "In your patience ye shall win your souls." That is the way of life.

Let me emphasize again that this means to be on resurrection ground. That is why we read Romans 6:3-8. It is "out" through death. Link Romans 6 with 1 Peter 3:21 - Through water saved on to resurrection ground: planted in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Eight souls (eight, the resurrection number) were saved through water: "the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us... the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." It is quite possible for everyone of us to have a perfectly good conscience. A happy state to be in! Have you a good conscience? Are you under accusation, under condemnation? Are you fretting and worrying about the badness of your own heart? That means that you have not the answer of a good conscience to God. What is the matter? You are still looking for something from nature, from yourself. You had better give it up, as that is the only way out; repudiate it. Tell yourself and tell the Devil once for all that in you, that is, in your flesh, dwelleth no good thing, and you never expect to find anything. The Devil knows it, and yet he is trying to get you on an impossible quest for something he knows you will never find, and that is how he worries you. Then why not come on to the Lord's ground and out-manoeuvre him? Drive in your stake. Let us settle it that we can never expect to find any good in ourselves. All our good is in another, even our Lord Jesus. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The Lord explain all that this means.

Chapter 4

ABRAHAM AND THE LAW OF LIFE

Reading: Romans 8:2; Galatians 2:19-20.

The next aspect of the sevenfold law of life is represented by Abraham. We are introduced to Abraham at the end of the eleventh chapter of Genesis.

In speaking of that aspect of the law of life represented by Noah, we were considering the necessity for being on resurrection ground, which implies that the whole ground of nature has been repudiated and for us lies on the other side of a flood, a baptism of death. We now regard ourselves, therefore, as being on resurrection ground, and, being there, we join hands with Abraham and let him lead us on and tell us what the next thing is in the outworking of life.

Life in Christ a Life of Faith

Here, in a word, we shall find the law of life is bound up with faith. When we reach resurrection ground as through Noah, we are inevitably on faith ground. It is well that we should recognize that at once. It is very nice to contemplate resurrection life: everybody will give some response to that idea; we shall not have any controversy or difficulty in accepting that. But let it be understood that resurrection ground carries with it inevitably and inseparably a life of faith. You can know nothing of life only along the line of faith, and it is along the pathway of faith that life increases. These two go together; the one issues from the other.

Our last emphasis in our meditation on Noah was upon the little word "out". Noah's testimony, in building the ark, was to his being out of that realm of things. He was securing an exodus, a means, a way of getting out. By his building of the ark, he was declaring, in effect, I am not in this, I am out of this! So you are not surprised that the first word about Abraham is that the Lord said, "Get thee out". It is all of a piece.

But coming out on to resurrection ground means coming out on to faith ground. Noah typifies resurrection and Abraham faith. "Get thee out"! The life itself is a faith life. I do not mean by that the manner of life, but the very life itself is a faith life, and the faith which is the faith of the Son of God is life. Of course, that is not a profound utterance. You have but to reverse it to see how simple and elementary that is. Whatever is not of faith is always of the nature of death. Doubt is death, unbelief is death, lack of trust is death, and all things that are in that category. Questions, controversies, anything that is short of simple faith brings us to a standstill, brings under arrest. It is death. So then, the law of life in Abraham is seen operating along the line of faith, which faith worked deeper and deeper, producing life in ever increasing measure. These two things go together. The deeper the faith the stronger the life. Similarly the greater measure of life implies the deeper faith.

Here again we note that we are reversing Adam's evil. In all these cases, Abel and Noah and Abraham and all the others, God is working backward. He is reversing Adam's evil. When you come to Abraham, you see in him God's triumph over that basic sin of unbelief. These are figures pointing on to the true. In Christ Jesus all were gathered up, not in a figurative or representative way, but in a living, actual way, and Satan's triumph in Adam's deception and fall was completely reversed, completely undone; for Christ was manifested to destroy the works of the Devil. But even here it means, you see, the works of the Devil

are being destroyed in something more than a merely figurative way. God is reversing the course of things and undoing Adam's mischief, correcting things.

Now, we must look at Abraham and sum up this life in two or three comprehensive words. I am not going to attempt to cover Abraham's whole life, not even in outline, but we can take out some of the main factors in this life of faith.

The Gift of Life is Both from God and Wholly for God

In the first place, it was a matter of going out with God alone. That is what I see to be God's meaning in what we speak of as "the call of Abraham". "The Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house" (Genesis 12:1). Thy country, thy kindred, thy father's house! In the sovereignty of God, Abraham was taken up to be the vessel of life; that is, in type, in figure. That life, the life of which we are speaking, is God's alone, and it must be lived wholly unto God. It cannot be taken hold of and used in any other relationship. It refuses so to be used. The life of God refuses to be brought into relationship with any other thing than God. Immediately it is so brought over, or immediately there is any attempt to bring it into another relationship, it stops, and the vessel in which it dwells comes to a standstill. That is exactly what happened with Abraham. God said, "Get thee out of thy country": but He also said, "from thy kindred and from thy father's house". It was inclusive, comprehensive, full and final. Abraham took the first step of faith and not the second and third. He took kindred and father's house with him and did not get very far. He came to a standstill, and there he remained until the rest of the Divine requirement had been brought about, or at least a large part of it. Then Abraham moved on: but even so he did not move completely into the Divine thought, as we shall see presently. I think you see the point.

This divine life which is in the child of God by new birth is God's life and God's life alone, and it cannot be related to anything else. It will not work with anything else. It only works in relation to God; God's thought, God's mind, God's will, and if that life is going to carry us right through to God's full end, then it has to be wholly unto God, and there all other relationships have to be set back. It must not be brought into other relationships. You see, this life is not just an abstract thing. It is in Christ Jesus and it is in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, we cannot separate these; we cannot separate the life from the Person, from the Divine Person. Christ is the life, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life. So when we are dealing with the life, we are dealing with the Holy Spirit and we are dealing with Christ Jesus, and that means that this life, which is the very essence of God, has its own characteristics, its own forms, its own meanings, its own standards, its own objects. It has its own mentality, its own reasons, its own ways. It is something which has a way of its own, and a meaning of its own, and a mind of its own, and there is not another like it. It takes its course. All other ways, all other mentalities are other indeed, altogether other, and there is no correspondence between them. When God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways"; that there is the difference as of the space between heaven and earth between your ways and thoughts and Mine, it is only another way of saying, My life is something altogether different from yours in its mentality, its judgment, its reasonings, its characteristics, its nature; different in everything, altogether other.

Well, what is the effect of that? It means that it cannot coexist or have fellowship with anything that is of nature. It cannot have any companionship with this other life of ours, with this nature of ours. The natural life cannot be a friend of the Divine life and the Divine life cannot be a friend of the natural life. They are in

two different worlds. The natural life, the soul-life of man has Satanic elements related to it, and the Divine life has Divine elements related to it, and these are two different kingdoms altogether. Now, this is a fixed principle, that this Divine life demands its own direction and its own relationships. This Divine life demands what is of God wholly, and I see in "thy country, thy kindred, thy father's house" those things which suggest natural relationships and influences, and God cannot allow that in the presence of His life in us. Paul said, "When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me... immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:16). That would have been human influence, natural influence, in relation to the things of God, and that is the principle here. So far as nature is concerned, this life with God has to be completely independent.

Now, of course, I have to be careful in saying that, because we say so much about the evil of independence. You see, I am talking in another realm altogether and I want to make that clear. First of all, anything that is in the nature of independence spiritually is wrong; I mean as amongst the Lord's people. It is a violation of the corporate law of God, which is also a law of life. Again, I am not speaking of the influence of what is spiritual. We need spiritual influences, relationships, and help from one another, and there must be no independence in that matter, no independence in the matter of what is of God in others. There are those who say, 'I must walk with God, I must know God for myself: I can take nothing from anyone else, I can submit my convictions to no one; I go on alone with the Lord in my solitary assurance and conviction.' That may be a very wrong thing. While we must know the Lord for ourselves, very often the Lord will make Himself known to us through others who are also walking with Him. A wrong kind of independence in these things works to the contrary and we may be utterly in deception because we will not walk spiritually with others and our aloneness not be an aloneness with God. It is a conviction that it is so, but it is an entire deception. That is one thing; but what I am talking about now is the influence of nature, not the influence of spiritual people and spiritual things which are of God. We need those influences and help and fellowship to go right through to God's end. But when it is a matter of natural elements coming in - and they may be many; sentiment, the natural affection of others seeking to influence us, and so on - when natural elements come in to divert us from what we know to be the will of God; elements, that is, not born of a knowledge of God, not born of a close walk with God, so as to be the counsel of God to us through others, then the life of faith demands that all these shall be fully and finally set aside, and that we live, so far as our spiritual life is concerned, unto God, wholly unto God. That was the first test with Abraham and the first application of the law of life in his case. Would he go out with God alone, despite all natural influences? Would he respond to God's movement in his own heart without allowing natural considerations to influence him?

For a long time that was only partial in Abraham's case and therefore the purpose of God was lying under arrest and he was only partially moving in the Divine purpose. In the first place, he took his father with him and that brought him to a standstill, and not until his father died was there a further release as to God's purpose. His life was retarded so long as natural kinship remained to influence him. But all this has to be applied inwardly as well as outwardly. I am not just speaking of our relations, our families. True, it may be there that natural influences are brought to bear on us, but it is much more than that. There is within us a kinship, a relatedness to this earth, to nature. There is that in us which is always taking counsel with the flesh; fleshly judgments, fleshly reasonings, the working and influence of the natural mind, and we have to put it back and cut it off. All that is of the life of nature must stand back when we come on to resurrection ground to know life, because that life is essentially a faith life.

The Proving of the Heart

Now, the second thing in Abraham was the question of ambition as to the things of God here on earth. This will find us out. At length Abraham moved on. Natural influences, so far as relationships were concerned, were lessened, and he moved on and came into the land; the promised land, the fulfilment of great expectations, the thing for which he let everything else go, the thing for which he had launched out in faith. He came into the land, the object of his expectation and his new ambition, and what did he find? A land full of that which was very contrary to God's mind, and a mighty famine in the land, and no one to offer him even a plot. He had not so much as a foothold in it. I suggest to you that such an experience is a fairly good test of our ambitions. What do we expect when we go on with God, when we come right out for God? What have we in view? Well, the answer to that question will decide whether, in relation to God, we have ambitions for something on the earth. Do you get the point? You see, it is so possible to swing over your natural ambitions to spiritual aims. It is the same thing still at work and the only difference is the direction or sphere. You can be as ambitious in the work of God as you can be in the world, and it is the same natural ambition. It is the ambitiousness of nature. You desire - what do you desire? To see something, to have something, to be in something? Ambition for success: yes, once it was in the world, now the same ambition transferred to other things. If that were true in Abraham's case, what a test! It was a test of ambition. He got nothing, no not so much as a foothold in the land. He had to move to and fro, dwelling in tents. There was no immediate, seen response to his faith so far as that land was concerned. Under that test, he broke down; he went down into Egypt. What did his going down into Egypt imply? Some expectations! He had expected something different at the hands of God. He had to be taught that this life is a life of faith, and the more deeply inwrought that life is, the less shall we see to gratify nature, even in the things of God.

You see, it is very often to the children, the kindergarten, the elementary stages of faith, where there is not the capacity to take very much strain, that God has to give quick results and manifest signs. The marks of maturity are usually the withdrawing of outward manifestations and signs, the demand to walk with God alone for God's own sake. It is a mark of graduation in the school of God that He can withdraw outward things. It shows that we have passed the test, as to whether we are ambitious in this life.

Well, Abraham in the first test, the first application of that truth, failed, but he blessedly learned his lesson. We must always give the Lord's servants full credit for every bit of spiritual gain. In the very next thing - and it is remarkable that the two incidents follow one upon the other - you see a marvellous and glorious triumph in that same realm. In Chapter 12 you have recorded Abraham's going down to Egypt, and that being for him the way of death, and not the way of life. Ambition proved to be the way of death. This is immediately followed in the succeeding chapter by the quarrel between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of Lot for pastures and waters. Abraham came to Lot about the matter and said, in effect, Do not let us quarrel; for what is there to quarrel about? (Are we wanting something for ourselves? - that is the purport of his words). Now Lot, look all round, lift up your eyes, survey the land: see the very best of the land and take your choice of it. Just leave me what you like, leave me the rest: you take your choice. If you decide to go in this direction or that, then I will readily take the other. Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the Plain of Jordan, well watered and fruitful, and chose it: and they separated themselves the one from the other. On Abraham's part it is a triumph over ambition. Immediately God comes in and says, "Lift up now thine eyes... all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth..."

There lies the way of life, after all. The way of earthly acquisition, ambition, gratification, of having something here, became the way of death for Lot. Abraham let go, so far as this world was concerned, let go for God, and God came in.

So Lot was separated from Abraham. What has happened? Is this the end of that kinship that has all this time been a cause of limitation? It looks like it. In the day that it happens, in the day when this natural influence is cut off, God comes in with a new range of life. It is a true principle. It is a mark of going on when we can come to the place where it is true before God that we have let go all the prosperity and success even of Christian work and Christian ministry as men would count it. To be able to let go the great opportunities and the great advantages that may be had amongst Christian people, and the prizes that can be grasped, and to say, It is all right, the Lord knows; it is for Him to give or withhold: I am not going to make a line for those prizes: I am not going to allow those things to influence my walk with God: ambition is not going to dictate my course, is a sure sign of growth. It may not seem here on earth to mean very big things; wide open doors and all that, but somehow you may take it that there is life there, spiritual influence there, something that is counting there. In the end it will have counted. But this does sometimes first of all necessitate that conflict with ambition where all those suggestions and influences have to be laid low, and we come to the place where we see the way of life is to go on with God though it costs us everything. The law of the Spirit of life works in that way.

The Divine Use of Delay and Apparent Contradiction

Now, in the third place, we see in Abraham's case life working along what is apparently the way of death in two senses, namely, the Divine way of delay and of contradiction. God promised Abraham a son, and, having made the promise, went away and left the matter there for years; the delayed fulfilment of promises serving to drive faith in God deeper down and to prepare the way for something so transcendently more of God in Abraham's life. The longer the delay, the more the realization of a hope must be of God, and the less and less possible is it of man. That is the thought. God does work in that way, whether we like it or not. Whether we cherish the thought or not, it is true. When God is really working according to the law of life, we have to be brought into this realm of faith where even the promises of God seem to be suspended and have no immediate fulfilment. God is going to be true. God will be no man's debtor. There will never be any balance against God in the end. We may settle that. God will come up to all that can be rightly and truly expected of Him, and there will be at last, even if it be at long last, an overwhelming justification of God and attestation of His faithfulness. We are all permitted to take an attitude such as this: Lord, when I stand before You at long last, You have to be clear of any ground I could lay to Your account of having failed my trust. It is essential to God that He should be in that position. His very nature and character requires that, in that day, those who have trusted in Him shall be able to say, Lord, You have not failed in one thing, but You have done even more than I had a right to expect, even a right in Christ to expect. God will come up to that mark, but, in order to deepen the life, to strengthen the life, to produce Godlikeness, to destroy the power of death and the work of Satan, and to reverse the mischief of Adam, God has to extend us in the matter of faith even over His promises. He does it. It is a mark of growth, of maturity. Such then is the Divine ministry of delay.

Then, further, we have the Divine ministry of contradiction. The son was given at last: but what then - "Take now thy son... and offer him..." A contradiction; God giving and taking, promising fulfilment and then seeming to wipe it all out with a stroke. Well, what does it mean? What lies behind this? I think, beloved, that the

heart of things here is that God is always wooing to Himself, that the heart may be for Him and not for things. Even if the promises in their fulfilment are delayed, God is seeking to draw the heart to the place where it is Himself, rather than what He does for us, that is its quest. If there is that ministry of contradiction, its purpose is to woo us from things to Himself.

God, All in All

Well now, you have summed up the whole aspect of this law of life. What is the law of the Spirit of life? How and where does it operate? On this ground, that, from start to finish, it is the Lord Himself being everything. That is the heart of the matter: the Lord Himself everything. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." Get thee out - out from ambitions as to things here on earth even in relation to God. Get thee out of things, as things which God can do and God can give. Out to where? To God Himself. And do you recognize the issue - oh, wonderful thing! - "Abraham my friend." My friend! What a lot lies behind that! All letting go for God, being wholly for God, letting God have His way, trusting God where even God seems to be denying and contradicting Himself, issues in our coming right into the heart of God. My friend! Is that life? Is that the way of life? For that to be said of any of us at last, in the way in which it was said of Abraham, surely would be life? Surely it is something to be coveted more than anything else? If ever we reach that place, we shall say, This is life indeed! This is worth everything! Yes, life is on the basis of friendship with God.

What is friendship with God? Well, it is, what we have said: not friendship with the world; not friendship with our own natural life, its influences and considerations; not friendship even with ambitions, projects and achievements in the things of God; not friendship with what God can do for us, but God Himself. That is all. That being so, it means that, if the Lord delays or contradicts, we nevertheless trust. You see, friendship is the blotting out of all enmity. It came in from Satan through Adam, and was blotted out in Abraham. What does that mean? Blotted out by faith. Faith will destroy enmity, root and crop. It is progressive, of course. Abraham had to live a whole lifetime in this way, but he came out as God's friend.

And we are in the way of this life, which is the way of this faith, and I do trust that we are steadily and surely moving beyond the place where there is enmity. Is there any enmity in our hearts to God? Are we disappointed with God? Are we sore about God? Is there some tinge of bitterness, is there some reserve? Is there aught of that kind? We know quite well that is working death in us if it is there. That is not life. The only way is to let that life work in accordance with its own law of faith. Why are we disappointed? Why are we feeling sore? Are we quite sure it is because the Lord has not proved Himself to be what we expected? Are we quite sure it is that? Are we quite sure that it is not because things have not gone as we wanted them to go, that ambition is disappointed? Are we quite sure? If only things had worked out as we desired them to work out, how pleased with God we should be! How readily we should say, God is faithful, God is true; we love the Lord! But now things are not working out, things are not easy: things are hard, things are going against us. It is because of the things we are feeling bad. I believe, beloved, if we come to the place where our objective is the Lord, where He is our goal; where it is true that "My goal is God Himself, not joy nor peace, nor even blessing, but Himself my God," we are in the way of life. But it is the creeping in of these other considerations and influences from our natural life that spoil it all. You see that this issue is a very clear one.

For us, the way of life demands that we shall get before the Lord again, and say, 'Lord, though all my earthly prospects fade, though all my ambitions are disappointed, it is You I want. You are my ambition, my goal. If I have You, these other things will count for much less.' I believe that, as we can get there - and not many of us have got a long way on that road - but as we can get there, we find the secret of life, of joy, of release. I am not so sure that we shall not find that God is able to give back the prizes here, the Isaacs. He withdraws them that we may turn from them to Himself, and when He has us for Himself, He may give something here. He may give blessing here on this earth; but let us remember that His desire is to have us for Himself for His own sake, and, as we fall into line, life is found there. It is the way of life. The law of life demands that everything should be for the Lord, without any other influence or consideration - the Lord Himself.

Chapter 5

ISAAC AND THE LAW OF LIFE

"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life *in* Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:22-23. R.V.)

Our particular passage in these meditations, namely, Romans 8:2, follows immediately upon these verses we have read, because that which comes in between these two passages is a parenthesis.

"The law of the Spirit of life *in* Christ Jesus."

We have come to the fifth expression of the sevenfold law of life. The law of life is one; that is, life is a law, but that life and that law work out in seven different ways. The whole life requires all these seven. All these seven go to make up the one life, and what we find is this, that when that life is received and is given its own course in us, finding us compliant with it, then by its own law it works out in these seven ways. These seven things are inevitable outworkings of that life because it is a law. We have said, and we know quite well, that if a law is established and accepted and recognized, then it works out in a certain way. That outworking is perfectly spontaneous, perfectly natural: we might say it is automatic. So life just works out in certain ways when it is established and obeyed; and we shall find that this Divine life, if allowed to govern us, will spontaneously and quite naturally result in seven things, for these are all components of life, they are the sevenfold expression of life. You see, the Christian life is resolved into a very simple proposition, after all. You have not got to understand all this to be a Christian. But once a person becomes a Christian, certain things begin to happen, and then it is of very great value to understand what it is that is happening, because that is to understand what God is doing, what God is after. But the things happen, if the Spirit of life in us is unchecked, unhindered, if we go on with the Lord.

Sonship as the Fruit of Faith

We have dealt with four of these spontaneous expressions of life, and we come now to the fifth, namely, Isaac. I am going to ask you just to look at one or two other New Testament scriptures. Turning back to Romans 8 let us link together verses 2 and 14.

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Romans 8:14-17)

You see the link all the way along is the Spirit: the Spirit of life: led by the Spirit: the Spirit of adoption: the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit; but all in relation to a special thing. We will see that presently.

Let us turn straightway to the letter to the Galatians, chapter 4:5-7.

"That he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son then an heir of God through Christ."

That is almost a precise repetition of the passage in Romans 8: "the Spirit of adoption" - "that we might receive the adoption of sons".

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My Son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? ... Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" (Hebrews 12:5-7, 9.)

It is not difficult to get our connection with life, the outworking of life. Here we find that life works out along the line of sonship. In all these passages sonship is brought into view in connection with life, and the Spirit as the Spirit of life. We are led to that by the Old Testament type and illustration, Isaac, the fifth of these personal types.

A great statement about Isaac is found in Genesis 17:19.

"And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him."

God there positively and for ever settles the question of what Isaac stands for in the Divine economy. In our previous meditation, in speaking of the fourth expression of life as represented by Abraham, we were seeing life working out through faith, faith as an aspect of the law of life.

Now, when we come to Isaac, we have sonship as the fruit of faith. Faith is not an end in itself, faith works out to sonship; for Abraham's faith at its supreme point secured Isaac beyond the reach of death, beyond the range of loss, of time, on resurrection ground. Now, we come to take up that sonship, to look into it, to investigate its nature, its character, for here life is brought to us in terms of sonship.

God's Sons are Wholly the Fruit of a Divine Begetting

The first thing that we find when we approach a consideration of Isaac is this - and it is made so very definite and clear: it seems that the Holy Spirit has really made it His very serious business to keep this fact ever in view; it is made clear in the Old Testament story, and it is brought out in the New Testament more than once and made very emphatic - that Isaac was an impossibility on any natural ground. Oh how God applied Himself to see that was established! The announcement of Isaac itself came at a time when nature could offer nothing toward the realization of the promise. But then, even after the announcement and the promise, God went away and left the matter in abeyance, as it were, for a considerable time, and every moment and every day of that time was putting the whole matter more and more beyond human hope. So that, when at last Isaac was born, he was something which could not be accounted for in all the realm of natural fruitfulness. He was, in very truth, something wholly and utterly of God: he was not the fruit of nature. That is the point to begin with. Now, put it how

you will, call it what you will; call it becoming a Christian, becoming a child of God, being saved, call it what you will, the reality that answers to that is altogether beyond the power of nature; you cannot by any resource outside of God Himself become a child of God. I know how elementary that is, and yet perhaps it needs to be said. There is no work that we can do, no fruit that we can provide, nothing possible to all our effort and energy which can bring this about; no struggle, no striving, no wrestling, no crying; nothing of nature can bring it about. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and the meaning of that in the Bible is not that it is that which is born of the body is flesh. It is something more than that: flesh here means natural ability. Therefore you can never reason, or argue, or talk, or persuade, or cajole, or coerce a soul into being a child of God. When you have settled your last argument, when you have broken down every bit of intellectual contradiction, when all the walls of reserve and coldness have been overthrown, and when the human will has been overthrown either by argument or by appeal and under that persuasion, that emotion, that impact, a person has taken a step and decided to become a Christian, such a one may be no nearer to being a Christian than he was before, when all those walls were up. That is not the way. This thing is out from God, and nothing can produce sonship but a begetting by the Holy Ghost. Multitudes of people are in a false position because that fact has not been recognized. They bear the title of Christian because of an assent to certain propositions, because of an emotion, because of a decision which they themselves have made under persuasion or influence.

This is but the following out of what we have been saying about Cain, the worshipper who murdered, whose soul-life went out to God with its own best works, best fruit, best everything, believing that it could get through. It never did. Multitudes of people like that are working on that basis, and thinking they are accepted and children of God. Oh for a mighty undeceiving: and yet what a terrible thing it would be! If all those assumed conversions should be disclosed to be only assumed and not real! We have really to get at the meaning and nature of sonship. We have to know what it is, and you begin by this negative affirmation that sonship is not the fruit of nature. God has put it beyond the power of nature to produce it, as He put Isaac beyond the power of nature altogether. That is where you begin: altogether of God, and only of God.

Well, what is sonship. The human spirit becomes the vessel of a Divine seed, the vessel in which something that is of God Himself is begotten, and the presence of that something constitutes the one in whom the deposit is a different kind of being from all other beings in God's universe. You are, because of some secret, hidden mystery about you, something right at the very centre of your being; because of the presence of that, you are something other than all other species of creation. God has begotten His Son in the human spirit. There is that within the child of God upon which the eye of God rests as something belonging to Himself, which has come out from Him and is part of Him, and His eye is upon that as upon a cherished child.

The Law of the Spirit of Life a Directive Law

Now, that is deep truth about everyone who is a child of God, and that makes everything possible for God and for us. Everything is bound up with the residence of that in our human spirit. Sonship has commenced, been introduced into the centre of our being, and where that is true, where that is an actuality, "the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God," that there is that which is the sonship of God in us. That is the natural expression of life, and that becomes a living reality. I expect most of you can bear that out. I mean, you can bear it out, not as a single fact or witness, but by many evidences; the evidences of life and of death in your procedure, the evidences of life and death

in your conversation, in the things you say, in your thoughts, your judgments, the evidences of life or death in your doings, your ways. It is a regulating law, this law of life, working out in sonship.

What does it mean? How simple, after all, the Christian life is when once you grasp this key. It means, beloved, that Jesus, the Son of God, is living over again His life in us. Watch Him on earth and you will see what He says and what He does not say, what He does and what He does not do; for what He does not say and do is as significant as what He says and does. You will see where He goes and where He does not go. You will see when He goes to a certain place and when He refrains from going to a certain place. You will see a Divinely governed life, in word, in movement, in act, marvellously governed; and He is living that over again in us. We are not by far a perfect expression of it, because we, for one thing, may not be sensitive enough nor quick enough to understand what the Spirit says in our hearts. We have not got an ear that is trained and attuned, simply because we listen to so much else. We are not quick enough in response and obedience, and therefore there is not a perfect expression of Christ; but nevertheless the basic fact is there, and we know it. It is an educative thing, a directive thing. We all know it. Oh, what a history we have of this checking up! Moreover this experience is progressive, for as we go on, we find more and more is checked up. That which for a time seemed to be untouched - not because God agreed with it, but because He was bringing us on and could not deal with everything at once - now comes under His eye, and we can no longer do what we once were able to do.

May I illustrate? I remember quite well how, in early days of preaching, I used to cite a great deal of secular literature to illustrate my point. I would bring out the poets and many other secular writers - oh, wonderful illustrations of my point to get it home! Well, the Lord let that go on for a time, but I do know there came a time in my spiritual life when I tried to give a bit of Browning in a sermon, and the whole thing went flat. My sermon was gone, and it was as though I had to start preaching over again; but I could not. I learned a lesson. All right, no more of that! Sometimes there was the inclination to drop back, but I registered the same awful sinking sense inside and knew that I had touched death. I remember how true that was in relation to the late war. Some of us were in the thick of things in that war, and we saw a great deal. We had to deal with conditions right on the spot. Well, afterwards when I came home, I would sometimes take something out of the war to carry home a point in a sermon. But I discovered that God was not in it, and whenever I touched that war in relation to the things of God, spiritual things, I registered that same terrible sense of death within, and I came definitely to the conclusion, that God did not want me to mix that war up with heavenly things, but that I was to leave it alone. Well, I had to let go. It was the working of the law of life. No one ever said to me, You must not do it; it is best not to refer to such matters. No, the Spirit of life in me witnessed against that, and told me, in effect, 'That is death. If you want life, if you want your message to go on in life, if you want to get through to God's end, leave all such matter out. That was never born out from God, and only that which is born from God accomplishes God's purpose and gets back to God. Therefore rule out all the other.' I say this law of the Spirit of life is a directive law.

If only we have life and that life is allowed to have its way, we are going to reach God's full end. It is not an abstract thing, it is a Divine Person resident within; Christ, who is the life, governing from within by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of life. Thus we see that, in the very outworking, in the very process, in the very exercise of this life how altogether other it is. It will not cohabit with other things.

Isaac and Ishmael

Now to come to Isaac. You remember Abraham tried to help the Lord to realize His intentions. He recognized how impossible this purpose of God was on any natural basis, and then his faith failed and we know the painful story of Ishmael - Abraham trying to help God out, trying to realize Divine ends along natural lines. Ishmael came in. What is he? The fruit of nature. Isaac came in, the fruit of God. These two are found in the one house. Two things result, but I leave the one for a moment and go on to the other.

The hour and the day came when the word of the Lord to Abraham was this: "Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." Have you got that? That which is born of the flesh cannot inherit with that which is born of the Spirit. That which is born of the Spirit has a Divine inheritance which the flesh cannot come into. This, which is of God, is altogether other than that and cannot share its substance with that. One must go.

Now, you come back to the other thing. Unless you do as God has bidden, what will happen? Ishmael will oust Isaac; because it says that Ishmael laughed at Isaac, mocked Isaac, sought to make Isaac's life a misery, all with the object of putting Isaac out and having Isaac's place. That is the flesh always; it is over against the Spirit. Give the fruit of nature any place, and it will very soon oust what is of God. The two cannot cohabit, the two cannot be co-heirs. It is quite true that this natural life always laughs at the spiritual, because the spiritual is always so altogether other. I suppose I had better follow that right up at once.

Go over to the Lord Jesus again. There were numerous things that the Lord Jesus literally could not do. I mean, by reason of His relationship to, and dependence upon, God, He could not. He Himself said so. "The Son can do nothing out from himself." "The words that I speak, I speak not out from myself." The Lord Jesus had to draw everything from the Father. "What thing soever he (the Father) doeth, these the Son also doeth," but none other things than these. So He had to wait upon the Father before He could make an utterance. He had to wait upon the Father before He could go to any given place. "Go ye up unto the feast: I go not up yet unto this feast...." That is the present registration of His being bound. He has not got the witness that liberates Him and directs Him to go up to that feast. Yet it says, "But when his brethren were gone up unto the feast, then went he also up, not openly, but as it were in secret." Was that a subterfuge, a trick, to get rid of people whose company He did not want, not wanting to go with them, wanting to go alone? We cannot talk like that. We have to find a holier explanation than that. The explanation is that He had not yet got through from the Father that the Father wanted Him to go, and He had to conclude it was not the Father's will, at any rate at that time; but when they were gone up it came through, He was released in spirit, the Spirit of sonship got the witness that it was all right, the way was clear that He should go up and He went. The point is that the Lord Jesus is limited altogether by His relationship to the Father, His voluntary dependence, the law of life that everything must come from God and nothing out from self. That is the law.

You try and live on that level and see if the natural man does not laugh and mock. Mark how they question you. What are you going to do? I do not know! Where are you going? I do not know! When are you going? I do not know! I shall go when the Lord tells me I can, when the Lord bears witness to me, when I am released of the Lord. Put this spiritual language in any form you like: what does the natural man say to that? He laughs, he mocks you. Not only is that true from

outside, but you find that inside yourself. Very often you are inclined to call yourself a fool, and to question yourself - Why do I not do this? Then you have to stay - Why do I not do it? Because I cannot. Why not! Well, it would be doing it myself. The Lord is not doing that, I am not conscious that the Lord is doing that. That is the language, the consciousness of sonship. That is the way of life.

So Ishmael mocks Isaac, as the natural life laughs at the spiritual, and tries all the time to get the upper hand and to oust that which is of God. That is sonship working out. Of course, if you are not a son, you do not know anything about this, but if you are a son, you know something at least of what I am talking about, and you can tell right away whether you are a son. This language is not strange to sons; it is perfectly intelligent, at any rate up to a certain point.

Sonship is gathered up in fullness in the Person of the Lord Jesus, and His whole life is an exhibition, an exposition, of sonship, of what it means spiritually. Then, when that sonship has been perfected by Him as Man, in the humanity which He took upon Him, the Spirit of God's Son comes and takes up residence in the newborn child of God and begins to live out that perfect sonship of the Son of God. "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." If the Spirit of sonship is ruling in our hearts, we shall know what we may do and what we may not do, how we may talk and how we may not talk. Believe me, beloved, if the Spirit of sonship is ruling in our hearts, there will never be the slightest contradiction between our conduct, or our course of things, and what is written in God's Word. We shall find that what is in God's Word spontaneously becomes expressed in our lives. We do not, in the first place, take God's Word and try, by outward application, to conform to it. By the indwelling Spirit we are conformed to the image of God's Son, and that simply means conformed to the revelation God has given, whether it be in the Person or in the Word, for there is no contradiction. Sonship demands that. If, between our conduct, our course, our way, and anything in the Word of God, there is contradiction, something has happened to injure the life, to check the Spirit of sonship: somewhere we have got out of the way and ours is not a way through, is not a living way. It may seem to us to be right, but "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man and the end thereof are the ways of death." Oh, the Spirit of sonship is an illuminating and enlightening thing to keep us in the way of life.

Yieldedness the Mark of Sonship - the Spirit of the Lamb

We will close with one reference to that outstanding episode in Isaac's life when his father, Abraham, by the command of God, took him on that journey to Mount Moriah to offer him as an offering unto the Lord. I think this is one of the most beautiful unveilings of what Isaac stands for. "My father... Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." God has His eye on Isaac: Isaac is chosen of God; Isaac is to satisfy God in this matter. What is in view is something that is for God, for God's pleasure, for God's satisfaction. Isaac is in that line. The moment comes when Isaac is apprised of the fact that he is the offering. Suddenly perhaps, or on the way, nearing the altar, Abraham apprises him: My son, the Lord has made you the offering. Then the moment comes when Isaac is bound. Let no one think that Isaac was a little, helpless child at this time. He was a grown youth. His father was a very old man, and had Isaac chosen to rebel, naturally speaking, Abraham would not have stood a chance. Isaac could easily have set his father at defiance. But you have no sign or suggestion of anything like that. This young man, in the strength of youth, lets himself be bound and laid upon that altar, and allows that knife to be raised and virtually plunged into him, allows himself to be slain; for, so far as his will was concerned, it was accepted. In spirit it was an accomplished end; there was no resistance. So we have to say

that in Isaac we find expressed the offering up of himself in a perfect yieldedness to the pleasure of God. That is sonship.

Here, beloved, a wonderful subjection of soul or self-life is manifested, a wonderful subjection of soul-life, self-life, to the pleasure of God. Listen to One who said, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself"; and the One who so spake turned to His disciples and said, "He that saveth his soul-life shall lose it; he that loseth his soul-life for my sake shall find it." That is Isaac. That is sonship. Oh, sonship, what a yielding thing it is, what a submissive thing it is, what a lamb-like thing it is! "God shall provide Himself a lamb."

Would you know whether sonship is increasing in your case, whether there is a development of the Son of God in you? Your yieldedness, your decreasing resentment, resistance, self-will, decreasing bitterness under trial, will afford you proof of it. The lessening of the uprising of self in assertiveness, in self-interest, self-preservation, self-justification, self-pity, every form of self, the decrease of all this is the evidence of sonship; subjection under the hand of God, even though the trials may come through His own children, through an Abraham. Your slaying may come at the hands of one who is no enemy of God. Under adversity, under trial, under slaying, under cutting, under the knife, for there to be no repining, no kicking, no reasoning, but yieldedness to the hand of God, this is sonship. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him" (Hebrews 12:5). "God dealeth with you as with sons." "Shall we not be in subjection to the Father of our spirits" - and die? No, never! that is not God's end: "and live"! Oh, under the chastening hand of God, we never expect to survive. Surely it is the end! No! - "and live"! God will see to that. It is the way of sonship. It is the way of life. I am content to leave it there for the time being. Life will spontaneously work out along the line of sonship and sonship is that.

Chapter 6

JACOB AND THE LAW OF LIFE

Reading: Genesis 28:16-17, 19; 31:13; 35:1, 6-7; 29:15-18; Colossians 1:24.

We come now to the sixth of these operations of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and we are brought to Jacob. We come to see the working of the law of life in another and still more advanced aspect; for you will have recognized that each of these steps is in advance of the other. We are moving forward, we are reaching unto God's end, we have the goal in view. Fullness of life is before us, and we reach the fullness by these successive steps, each of which brings us nearer the end and, with itself, increases the fullness. So we have to see what this further advance in the matter of life is as represented by Jacob.

There are three things which stand out more clearly than others in the case of Jacob. The first is the birthright, the second is Bethel or the House of God, and the third is service. These three are really one in essence, or three phases of one thing. The birthright is the blessing; the chief blessing, the highest blessing, the first blessing. The House of God, or, using the New Testament designation, the Church of God, is that which takes the supreme blessing, and that blessing means pre-eminence. You notice how it worked out with Jacob, what the birthright meant to him. It was not only that he got a form of words from his father which represented a blessing, not only that he got certain things, but that blessing brought him into the first place, so that the elder served the younger; it gave him pre-eminence. The House of God, the Church, which is Christ's Body, is elected to that. "Jacob have I chosen"; "Jacob have I loved". The service is ever related to the House of God. We have, then, three aspects of one thing.

The Foundation of Service

Now we are going to begin with the third aspect. I suppose, when we contemplate Jacob, the thing about him which strikes us very forcibly is his intensely active nature; active in mind, in brain, in wit; active in will, active in transaction, in execution; active as one ever alert, ever on the move, ever watching for an opportunity, an occasion. His life is indeed a life of activity, and withal he has his eye upon high things; yes, upon Divine things. If this were not so, then we could find no saving feature in Jacob. It was his perception of the transcendent value of Divine things which gave him his place and upon which God was able to work, in so far as there is anything in a man which forms the basis of Divine activity. That birthright - he understood the nature of it, the range of it. He knew what it meant, he knew whither it would lead him. He had a sense of the value of Divine things which his brother, Esau, did not possess. When he came to Bethel and had his dream and awoke in the morning, he did not merely say, Well, I have been dreaming. He said, "Surely God is in this place.... How awful is this place"; and he turned a dream into a very practical expression and set up a pillar and anointed it and called the name of that place Bethel, the House of God.

If you move on with Jacob, despite all that you may deplore, you will find that the big steps in his life are all marked by some perception of Divine things, some spiritual discernment. He is in heart in the right direction. His thoughts were right; the trouble was with his mind and his will. The end was a right one, but the way by which he sought to reach it was all wrong. If you analyse Jacob in this way, you will not be long before you arrive at his signification in this matter of life and death. You will remember that, although he had secured the title to the blessing by his wit, by his cunning - yes, but do not overlook the fact of his spiritual perception - he never came into the blessing until that which he had

employed to secure the title to it had been thoroughly dealt with and brought to an end. It is one thing to be in the way of the blessing, to have a heart in the direction of God's purpose and highest will, but, between the perception of its value and our stepping into the way of it, and our reaching it, there may be a great deal to be got rid of. We may discover that there has to be a great working of death before there can be the life which is bound up with that which we have seen. We have seen, we have reached out for it, we have striven after it, we have laid ourselves out with all our human resources to achieve it; but we never do. Something has to be done in us before we come to that which in itself is God's will for us, and it is the "Jacob" in us that has to be dealt with, so that we come to the "Israel" position. That self-energy, that wit, that self-resource in relation to Divine things has to be slain, and we have to come to the place where it is perfectly clear to us, where we know it as we know nothing else, that God's end is reached by God's strength alone, that the resources for the accomplishment of Divine purposes are not in us, but only in Him.

Now, then, you can see what arises at once as the operation of the law of life, the first law of service, for it is that which the activity and the energy of Jacob represents; work, service, doing, and all with Divine things in view. The first law of service is subjection. If anything is patent in the case of Jacob, it is this. On the one hand, he is the man who stands out more than any other as the man of action, the man of activity and the man of service. He served Laban for two periods of seven years. It took quite a bit out of his life, that service. He is a man who is ever doing, active from the beginning of his story. Yet, as clear, as obvious as that is the other thing, that subjection was the lesson Jacob had to learn. That is as simple to grasp as anything in the Bible. The great crisis of his life upon which everything turned as to Divine purposes was that hour in which he came finally to take his place of subjection under the touch of the finger of God, and it was not until that had happened that he could go back and dwell at Bethel.

Service Inseparable From the House of God

You see, these two things went together. The Lord said, "Arise and go to Bethel and dwell there". Jacob had never been able to dwell in Bethel. He had made a fleeting visit to Bethel and Bethel had become an established fact. Bethel was there, the House of God was there, but Jacob could not dwell there; because no one can dwell in the House of God until they have come to the place of subjection. So he went on to learn the lesson which is basic to the House of God, and then God said, "Arise and go to Bethel and dwell there". He had to meet that crisis, where self-strength was exhausted and broken and he was weak; but where God became his strength - a prince with God. It was thus he was rendered suitable for God's House. You see how all of a piece this is. The House of God is the object and sphere of Divine service.

Now, if ever I have said a thing which is true, that is such a thing. I am going to challenge you on that: I defy you to show me and prove from the Scriptures that there is any service to God which is not related to His House. All service to God is bound up with, and inseparable from, His House. The Old Testament is full of it; the New Testament is emphatic. The Church, which is Christ's Body, is the object and sphere of all the service of God's people and there is no service apart therefrom. Oh, that the Lord's people had kept the object of service in view. They have so much service which is not consciously related to the House of God. You may be called to serve the Lord especially along the line of soul-winning, but you must remember that such service relates to the House of God. If you make it something in itself, you are going to dwarf it, to limit it, and to deprive it of all that it is intended to come to. Oh the tragedy of great evangelistic efforts that do not issue in the full purpose of God! Souls are saved and left; and they are put

into Gospel missions, which are in no sense local churches as seen in the New Testament, and after twenty or thirty, or even fifty years in these Gospel missions, you will find these saints knowing nothing more than that they are saved. They were saved so many years ago and beyond that point they have not progressed an inch. There are multitudes of these missions all over the world. They are delightful; you meet saved souls rejoicing in salvation: but there is a tragedy. "Oh, I was saved under Moody all those years ago, and I am still rejoicing in the Lord today." That is typical of the position of many and, when that testimony has been given, it represents all that these can say. It is very good, of course, to know the Lord as your Saviour and to be rejoicing in salvation; I am taking nothing from that. But that is something which has been made an end in itself; it has never gone further. Why is this? Because the Church was never brought into view. I am not speaking now of "going to church," of congregations in certain places called "churches". You know of what I am speaking, of God's full thought about the House of God, the Church, which is the Body of Christ, with all that means as revealed especially through Paul, the great unveiled mystery of Christ's spiritual Body and its eternal destiny in the purposes of God. All service, in God's thought, must be consciously related to the Church, to the House of God.

You may be used and blessed in just moving round comforting and cheering saints and doing all sorts of kindly things for the Lord's children. Are you quite sure that is leading to real spiritual increase, the increase of Christ, leading on to God's end. It may be a help, it may be a blessing, but what about the real building up of the House of God? In our comforting, consoling, helping ministry, we have to be able to impart spiritual increase, not just to help lame dogs over stiles. There has to be a goal to which it is all moving, namely, the House of God.

Whatever may be the form of ministry or of service, all service, from God's standpoint, is related to the House of God, and that is what is made so clear in the case of Jacob. What is service, after all? A little child, in all good intention, all innocence, may do lots of things to help mother, and mother of course is very patient, mother does not punish the child. She knows quite well the child means well, and really means to help: but poor mother! At times you hear mother saying, "Of course, she means to help me, but she little knows how much work she makes for me, what a lot I have to clear up after her, and really how little help it is after all." That is all right for children. When we really consider the question of service, how do we resolve it? Surely we would say that service in truth, in reality, is that which realizes the end we have in view, and we say to all those who so contribute, Now you are really helping, now we are getting somewhere!

What has God in view? Upon what is His heart set? It is His Church. The Lord Jesus loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. That is why we have read the passage about Rachel, and we will come again to that in a minute. It is real service to secure the Church. Yes, the Church is His Body, and real service to God is that which secures the Church and secures God's full thought in the Church. That is true service to God; not a hundred and one other things unrelated and nice and good and kind, but never really reaching God's end, not really serving the purpose of His heart. So far as God is concerned, it is in that way that life operates.

The law of the Spirit of life operates when we come actively into line with God's end, God's purpose, God's thoughts, and they are all concerning His Church. You see, we saw Abraham's faith issuing in sonship in Isaac, and now in Jacob sonship is taken up and carried on, and in Jacob we see the true spirit of sonship in service which can never be truly satisfied with less than a Church after the Spirit.

The Lesson of Leah and Rachel

Now, that brings us to Leah and Rachel. Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and then Laban deceived him and gave him Leah. Leah was not the object of Jacob's heart, and he could not be satisfied with Leah. He might have been. There were pleasant things about Leah. Leah was tender of eye. Evidently it was something calculated in a certain realm to appeal to a gentleman! something attractive about her: and there were other things too. Leah, without any difficulty, provided Jacob with a family, and Rachel was unable to do that. Jacob might have said, Well, Leah is not so bad: Leah is not what I wanted, but there are good things about Leah; I will settle down and be satisfied. But no, Leah was not the object of his spirit, his heart, his inner man, and he could not be content with anything less than that, and he said, "I will serve thee yet another seven years for Rachel". He doubled his labour and went the second mile in order to have a wife after his spirit.

Now, the spirit of sonship, true sonship, can never be satisfied with anything less than that which is of the Spirit - of the heart, of course, in the type, Jacob; but speaking in New Testament language, after the Spirit. Leah might have been, for Jacob, a wife after the soul, after nature, but Rachel was something more than that, as she proved to be. Oh, I think there is a wonderful lesson bound up with Rachel and Leah. The true service of sonship will stop short at nothing less than that which is wholly of the Spirit.

The Lord Jesus, the true Son and Servant of Jehovah, in whom is the true spirit of sonship, and in whom is the true spirit of the servant, can never be satisfied with a Church that is merely outward and formal and natural, however many good points there may be in it. When He looked at the seven churches in Asia, He was able to say, as Jacob could have said of Leah, Yes, some very good points, some very nice things. But, like Jacob, He further said, in effect, I cannot be satisfied with that: that does not answer to My heart, that is not after My Spirit; it is not for that that I have laboured and travailed. It is something more that I need really to satisfy my deepest and innermost sense of what is adequate, what is right, what is according to God's thought. Thus the good has to be subordinated for the best. The spirit of service is always set upon God's full thought as to the Church, the wife, the bride, and can never be satisfied with anything less. Sonship works in that way. I do not know how it comes about other than like that. I am quite sure that if some of us were to have a little conference on this matter, and say, Now, how is it that we came to be so concerned for God's full thought as to the Church? as we talked it over we should have to say, Well, it was not because we heard a series of addresses on the nature of the Church, nor because we found something in the Bible about it, but somehow, somewhere in our hearts there came to life a sense of Divine concern in this matter. It is a thing of the Spirit, and we have had to labour hard amidst much adversity, enough adversity, enough opposition, enough suspicion to have quenched anything less than something begotten of God. Long since we would have abandoned this matter because of the difficulty of the way, had it not been of God in us, had we not realized that we were not holding it but that it was holding us. We had not taken up something, but God had taken us up in this matter, and what could we do? Can we, in view of the cost, the suffering, can we be content with things as they are among the Lord's people? No, a thousand times! We must labour on.

I believe, beloved, that is the spirit of sonship, the spirit of service. The deeper God's work is in us, the more we shall travail for the Church, the less shall we find ourselves able to settle down with any contentment with things as they are amongst the Lord's people. So Rachel was the result of suffering, the suffering of the Spirit.

But then, Rachel could not do what Leah could do. We have said the family, with Leah, was quite a spontaneous, easy thing, but it was far otherwise with Rachel. What a disappointment, after all! Naturally speaking, there was no fruit possible. But oh the wonder of this sovereignty of God! How often the sovereignty of God is represented in the Scriptures by natural things, and this particular thing so frequently. We note it in the case of Sarah, the case of Hannah, and others, and here with Rachel. Well, Rachel does have children eventually, but they are the result of a Divine intervention. They are of God in a special sense, by the act of God. You see how strictly God keeps to His principles; that real service, real sonship service, can never be fruitful out from nature. The natural life can provide no spiritual fruit, no fruit unto God. It is only that which comes out from God which is really spiritual fruit, the fruit of spiritual service. You remember what Paul said in his letter to the Galatians: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). The Galatians were the Lord's children, and Paul might have said, Well, you are the Lord's children, you are saved, it is all right. I am sorry that there are these unhappy things that mar your walk. I would rather they were not there; but still you belong to the Lord and so it is all right. Oh no! That would be too much like Leah, that is too easy. There is need of something more, and for that something more of the Spirit (and that is the key note, as you notice, to the letter to the Galatians) Paul says, "... I am again in travail till Christ be fully formed in you." That is God's thought for His people. So again, we find Paul, this great Israelite in the fullest, highest sense, saying, "I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24). That is service, that is sonship, - His sufferings in me for His Church.

A Summary of the Practical Issues

That is the way of life, that is the operation of the law of life. It is simply, and not by any means exhaustively, stated. God's fullness is going to be expressed in the Church, therefore God's satisfaction is centred in the Church. All real service to God is that which relates to the securing of what is most precious to God, namely, the Church, and all service to God begins with subjection, and subjection is a thing which is seen in the House of God. That is where God establishes the law of subjection. I have to be as subject in the House of God as any other member of the House of God. It is not the subjection of one and another more than of others, but in the House of God we have to find our place in subjection. I can no more act independently as a minister in the House of God than any member of the House of God. We shall find our life as we learn to be subject. In so far as it is not true that we are in subjection in the House of God, we are not in the way of life, we are in the way of death. It is the first law of service.

Herein is the importance of the Church as locally expressed. One of the things for which a local assembly serves God is to be a sphere in which its members can learn to be subject to the Lord. Very often you know that subjection to the Lord in the Church becomes a very practical thing, and a very testing thing.

I have indicated things, that is all. That is the way of life. The blessing is there. Yes, this is the House of God, this is the gate of heaven. "Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel"; because there God revealed Himself unto him. That is life, the gate of heaven where God reveals Himself. The Lord open our understanding.

Chapter 7

JACOB AND THE LAW OF LIFE (CONTINUED)

Reading: Genesis 28:10-12, 19; John 1:47; Genesis 31:13; 35:1, 6-7; 1 Corinthians 1:20; 2:14.

We have been considering the sevenfold operation of life as represented for us in the book of Genesis by seven persons. In our previous meditation, we arrived at the sixth, namely, Jacob, and it is with that which Jacob represents as God's way of life that we shall again be occupied in this meditation.

The House of God, the Church, Bethel, is our particular object in view, and if we take Jacob again as our illustration, we are brought to see that everything, so far as the Church is concerned, must begin from its heavenly side and not its earthly. That is a governing fact in the life of Jacob, and we shall see how that interprets his life.

The Law and Rule of the Heavens

It is significant and impressive that, as Jacob goes on his way at the beginning of his pilgrimage, not only of his pilgrimage on earth but of that spiritual history which was behind all the happenings and events and incidents of his earthly life and walk, the first point at which he stops, though only for a night, is Bethel, and Bethel comes in for the very first time in the Bible as from heaven. This is the first reference to the Church in the Bible, and it comes in with Jacob; and it comes in as out from heaven, that is, from its heavenly side, and that becomes a law which governs and interprets all the rest of Jacob's career and spiritual pilgrimage. What is instituted at that point is the government of that which is heavenly, and, when that government is introduced by God, you expect that what is merely earthly will, from that moment, come under the condemnation and discipline of God to its destruction, so that the whole may become progressively heavenly according to its origin, its source, its inception. We have to ask this all-inclusive question: Where does everything begin and whither does everything lead? The answer is one. Everything begins in heaven and everything leads to heaven and is consummated in heaven. That is only another way of saying, that everything is of Christ. Everything that has come out of heaven is of Christ and is in Christ. "All things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and in him all things consist (Colossians 1:18-19). Though the corresponding truth is not given, there are plenty of statements which also set forth the fact that He is after all things, and not only before all.

Now that, you see, is symbolically gathered up in Jacob's ladder: something from heaven reaching down on to the earth, with the Lord above it, and the angels of God ascending and descending. Carry that over to John 1 and you see the principle at work in this word: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" (no Jacob!). And then to Nathanael: "Thou shalt see greater things than these... Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." It is Christ who links heaven with earth, and earth with heaven, and in whom all the Divine communications are made to man. It is Christ who fulfils the word "where God revealed Himself unto thee".

The House of God is Christ. But remember, while that is true of Christ personally, what we are made to see as the unveiling of the mystery is that the House of God is Christ corporately expressed in the Church, which is His Body, and it is in Christ corporate, in the Body of which He is the Head, that there is the revelation and

the communication of God. It is there in that House of God, the Church, that we have what Jacob called "the gate of heaven". That is God's Bethel.

So, while recognizing that everything has first to be seen from its heavenly standpoint, and as being out from heaven in Christ, we have to see this second thing, that Jacob must be ruled out in order to make room for "Israel". That is to say, all that is of man must be ruled out so as to make way for a Divine order of things in the House of God. Jacob, as Jacob, was impinging upon Divine things, upon the birthright. Yes, it was quite true that in the sovereignty of God Jacob was the chosen one for the birthright, but no Divine election can ever be taken as a one-sided thing. There are always two sides to Divine appointments. One is the sovereign act of choice, the other is the fitting of the elect vessel to come into that for which it is chosen. So, although Jacob may, in the line of Divine sovereignty and election, be the one to whom the birthright is secured, as is also the case with the Church as the antitype, there is another line which Divine sovereignty takes, namely, the clearance from the ground of all that which is Jacob; because it is not Jacob as Jacob who can inherit. It will be "Israel" who will inherit.

Let us note this other thing which is both important and interesting, that it is in a particular way with Jacob that the "house" comes in. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, and they are always called "the seed of Abraham". But you never read of the "house of Abraham," although he was the father. Then, although God again and again announces Himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," you never read of the "house of Isaac": but you do read of the "house of Israel". So all that goes back to Jacob.

Now I think you see the significance of this. Israel represents that which is heavenly and Divine, which has supplanted that which is earthly and of man. Jacob typifies the earthly. You know that in the days when Israel was out of the way, when there was spiritual declension, the Lord addressed Israel as "Jacob," but when according to His mind as "Israel". That is the heavenly side. So really the House of God comes in, not with Jacob as Jacob, but with Israel; the same man, but now translated to heaven, so to speak, now the heavenly man. "Behold an Israelite in whom is no guile" (no Jacob). I think that was a tremendous commendation of Nathanael. The Lord, who knows all things, was able to say, There is a truly spiritual man, a man with a spiritual insight and judgment and appreciation of things. There is no "Jacob" there. I think that is what He meant.

Well, I think that is enough for the principle. The House of God is that which demands the setting aside of all that is according to man and the bringing in of that which is according to God, that which is heavenly.

Heavenliness Part of a Divine Order

Then we find that heavenliness is not just some abstract sort of thing, but that it comes in as part of an order of things, a heavenly order; an ordered life, an ordered relationship, everything according to a heavenly order. What it is necessary for us to see next is what a perfect Divine order would be. I suggest that to you as something to meditate upon, to contemplate.

You see, beloved, so very much now is corrective, because of disruption and disorder. There was a beautiful Divine order at the outset, an order in every realm, in every direction. Everything was in its place, in its right relatedness, functioning in perfect order; no friction, no contradiction, no unrest, no strain, everything full of rest. God declared it to be very good. If God says that, then, in the light of His standard of things, such an order must be very good, for His

standard is so much higher than ours. To have a certain measure of order, without friction and contradiction, strain and stress, makes us feel we have something very good; but oh, how much higher is His standard! When God says of a thing, "It is very good." it really must be good.

But then disruption came in. Everything became disordered and the harmony in God's universe was destroyed. There is strain, there is conflict, there is no more rest, and since that time things have continued to be governed by this element of disorder and disruption, and the Divine order has never been recovered in the world. Disorder is everywhere. Disruption is everywhere, in everything. It is in the elements. It is in humanity. It is in all relationships. It is everywhere. And now, so far as God is concerned, all is on a corrective line because of that disruption.

First of all, the disorder, the disruption, is in man himself. Man is no longer a harmony, a unit; he is all in disorder. Then the disorder is found in man's relatedness. All the relationships of man are disordered and upset. Then it is in the world that man has made. Man has made this world and set up the present order; which is disorder from God's standpoint. Everywhere in this world there is disorder. I need not stay to show how true it is. Everywhere in this world we find what is not God, and what God did not mean. The order has gone and is no longer seen.

So now, when we come to the first letter to the Corinthians, the first thing that is introduced is the world; and the second thing is man, natural man; whilst the third thing is the relationships or related life of man. Then you recognize that the whole of that first letter to the Corinthians is a corrective letter. It touches the world, it touches man, it touches man's relationships; it is all corrective. Then what has it inclusively to do with? Its concern is with the Church, which is Christ's Body. Is Christ divided? is a question it will put to us; and as directly it will answer that in Christ there is no schism, no disorder. So you move on through the letter and you find that a true spiritual apprehension of the Church according to God's mind will see the correction of all the disorders that have come in through Adam: and these are dealt with in the letter one by one.

We will put that in another way, and perhaps a little, more simply. Where the Church, the Body of Christ is spiritually expressed according to God's mind, nothing of the disruption and disorder that came in through Adam has any place; it is ruled out. The world is ruled out. The natural man is ruled out. This disorder in human relationships is ruled out. The Church represents a perfect Divine order, and that makes demands upon all who claim to be in it and we find one fundamental demand right here at the beginning of this corrective letter: "I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The one fundamental and all-inclusive demand made upon these who claim to be of the Church, which is Christ's Body, is that, through the Cross of the Lord Jesus by which the world is crucified, and by which the natural man is crucified, and by which all that is disruptive in human relationships is crucified, only Christ shall be known, only Christ shall be recognized; for here we touch the mystery of the very nature of the Church. It is Christ from heaven, nothing of this world, Christ corporately expressed. It is a Christ according to God's mind as the heavenly Man, and not according to man here. It is Christ as the embodiment of a heavenly order. I dislike the word system, and I very often use it in its bad sense, but it can be used in a right and good sense, and, if you will bear with it, I would say that Christ is the embodiment of a heavenly system; and when we come into the Church, which is His Body, we come into a heavenly system of things, a Divine order. So that the sphere of this perfect, Divine order is the Church, the Body of

Christ, which is called "the Christ". Now, that leads us to some practical applications of the general truth.

The Increase of Christ the One Object of the Divine Order

The first is, *that order, this Divine heavenly order in the Church, is governed by the law of Christly increase.*

Whatever obtains in God's appointment, only obtains with one object in view, namely, the increase of Christ. Everything that God has ordained as a part of the heavenly order in the Church is ordained with that end in view. With much that is meant by an expression to which I am about to refer, I will not stay, and certainly not for purposes of criticism; but, by way of illustration, we sometimes hear the phrase used of certain men that they have "taken Orders". By that we understand them to have entered into a certain ecclesiastical realm, or that they are "priests in Holy Orders". Now, my point is this, that when it comes to the heavenly order of the Church, all ministries, all appointments, all positions, all relationships exist solely for the increase of Christ. That is the thing which governs all. No one has any position or ministry which is merely official. What is position in the Church from the heavenly standpoint? What is ministry in the Church from the heavenly standpoint? What is the significance that attaches to all the relationships of the Lord's people? They are all, by Divine intention, for the increase of Christ. I suppose that we will accept that, so far as the special ministries are concerned. Yet that might need examination. Such as exercise those special ministries are not there to give addresses or to preach sermons. In the heavenly order, there is no ministration of any kind which does not mean a ministration of Christ to the increase of Christ, so that the Church becomes more fully Christ in expression, and any ministry that does not, or that cannot, lead to that is not in the heavenly order. Office in the Church is something wholly other than that which is merely ecclesiastical, by vote or appointment. The thing which governs any office or position in the Church, as according to the heavenly order, is that this one and that one have something of Christ to give, have that which represents an increase of Christ; for the Church is Christ in corporate expression.

Are you aspiring to office, to position in the Church? I will tell you how to get there. Aspire to have a measure of Christ more than your brethren. The Holy Spirit will see that, in a Spirit-governed church, you have a place and a ministry. That is the law which governs position in the Church. It is not that the Church votes with a show of hands as to who the officers shall be. The Holy Ghost singles out men who have something more of Christ than the average to bring the Church up into a fuller measure of Christ.

What, then, of all the members of the Body? The same law governs. You may put all the responsibility on to such as may minister the Word, and say, It is their business to bring Christ to us, to build us up in Christ. Well, they will point you the way, they will minister to you the Word of God in life. But then, your very membership in the Body of Christ involves you under this very same law, that you personally are also committed to be a joint of supply in the Body. You are committed to the work of the mutual building up of the Body and the increase of Christ. Our very partaking of Christ, our being members of His Body is governed by this, that we are a contributing factor in the increase of Christ. We have to get away from this "pulpit and pew" conception of things and have an entirely new mentality. The Church builds itself up by its mutual ministration, and such building up is through an increase of Christ. Beloved, let me emphasize that and underline it. Take hold of it if you forget everything else, that your being in the Church, which is His Body, means that your being there implies an increase of Christ. It must be that. Is there something more of Christ there because you are

there? That is the law which governs. Do stir yourselves up to this. Recognize your personal and individual responsibility. The Church is Christ in His corporate expression; you are the Church. How much of Christ is represented by you for the general increase and building up of His people? The law which governs everything in the Church; ministry, position, relationships, is the law of the increase of Christ.

Now, I have used the word "relationships". Yes, you see how far from being merely technical and ecclesiastical and official and legal all this is, and how it resolves itself into one thing, namely, life. When you get the Church according to the heavenly thought of God, according to the heavenly order, governed by this law of the increase of Christ, then you have life; not ecclesiastical systems and orders, but life. It is the way of life. It is the course of the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We will come at this question of relationship from a fresh position, or by a fresh proposition.

The Divine Features of Authority and Subjection

There are two main aspects of the Church, the Body of Christ. The first of these is authority and the second is subjection. These are the two things which mainly govern the Church as principles.

Now, Jacob, when he supplanted his brother with his wit and cunning and guile, was after authority, the place of supremacy. He, as the younger, was seeking to get ascendancy over his brother. Well, God had ordained that, and Jacob need not have used any cunning or wit whatsoever. God would have seen to that had Jacob trusted Him. Nevertheless, it was this that was in his heart, to get authority, pre-eminence. What he had to learn in the course of twenty years was that authority is reached by the way of subjection; and for Jacob, prince in Bethel, the House of God, those two things go together - authority and subjection. You cannot and you must not separate these two. God has joined these two together. Authority is by subjection; subjection leads to authority. I believe moreover that God has chosen a very beautiful way of setting that forth.

God originated it (as Paul tells us in the great Church letter, Ephesians,) right at the beginning in the Garden - "Male and female made he them": husband and wife; the man and the woman. Have you ever recognized that to be pre-eminently a Church principle. If you trace that to heaven, to the mind and the heart of God, you will find He has the Church in view; Christ and the Church, His members: the Husband, the wife; the Bridegroom, the bride. The relationship, this human relationship of husband and wife, is seen therefore, in the mind of God, to have to do with a much bigger thing than that which is merely personal, individual, as amongst men on the earth. It is but the setting forth, or it is intended to be the setting forth of a great sublime conception of Christ and the Church, and the two governing laws of Christ and the Church are authority and subjection. How will the Church come to reign? By subjection to Christ. How did Christ, the Head, come to reign? By subjection to the Father. Authority and subjection are inseparable. It is a dual law, established in heaven. These two things, male and female, are both very sacred in God's sight, and neither of them must be the other. If so, you have upset the Divine, heavenly order. They are there to represent something very holy, something very sacred.

If you look more closely, you will see that both these features are to be found in the very person of Christ Himself. Oh yes, how much we owe to the subjection of Christ to the Father! What do we owe? Well, to this, on the one side, we owe all the revelation of God in Him. By His subjection to the Father, the revelation of God in Him came forth. "The Son can do nothing out from himself, but what he

seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19). Subjection to the Father meant that He saw what the Father was doing and did the works of the Father. In the works of Christ we see the works of God, we see what God is like; we see God's mind, God's thought, God's desire.

It is to His subjection that we owe the revelation of Divine love. The Father's will was that He should lay down His life, and the laying down of that life was an expression of the Father's heart for us. He laid down His life for our sins that He might redeem us unto God. All the love of God is brought to us by the subjection of the Lord Jesus. Remember that.

Then, what fruitfulness has sprung from His subjection. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die...." Is not that subjection? What is the opposite of that? I refuse to die, I refuse to give up my life, I refuse to let go my soul; I cling and cleave to myself, to my own. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die (that is, if it surrenders itself, if it lets go its own life, if it denies its own rights) it bringeth forth much fruit." This is immediately succeeded by the statement, "He that loveth his life (his soul) shall lose it; and he that hateth his life (his soul) in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:24-25). That again, in a word, is subjection.

Follow the matter through with this word: "He became obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Obedient - that is subjection. That is the female side, that which is represented by the woman. What we owe to it!

Yes, but then there is the other side. Oh, the power, the mighty power, that we find in Christ! Oh, the life, the positive, risen life that we have in Christ! Oh, the deliverance that is ours through the mighty deliverer, Christ! Oh, the keeping power that is to us-ward because of the Cross! That is the side of authority. The side of subjection is His love for us; the side of authority is His defence of us. The side of subjection is His tender compassion, His merciful kindness to His own. His authority is the coming forth of His power against the enemies of His own. That is the man and the woman.

The Practical Expression of the Divine Features in the Church

Now, that is brought right into the heart of the Church. So you come again to the first Corinthian letter. You know all that is said about man and woman and their respective places in the Church. If this heavenly relatedness for the increase of Christ is established, it will work out to tremendous enrichment and not impoverishment. What is the woman's place in the Church? It is to express that side of Christ which is always the gracious, sympathetic, helpful side. Do you think that the woman is to be suppressed? I do not, and I do not think the Word of God teaches that. It is a matter of order and position unto life, and if I were to put it in quite ordinary, common, everyday, human, language, I should put it like this: Man is there to represent the authority of Christ, but he cannot exercise his authority without subjection. Otherwise what happens? He becomes a lord in the House of God. He does that of which the Apostle speaks, he "lords it over God's heritage". He needs the woman, as representing subjection, to come along and say, "Now, my dear, gently: do not do damage, do not hurt the Lord's interests by that assertiveness, that officiousness. Remember that you need bearing with by the Lord." Do you see the principle of subjection at work? The two cannot be broken asunder, the Lord needs them both; and I believe the Lord has expressed this relationship in the Church to gain, not to loss; to increase, not to impoverishment; that there shall be always maintained according to this principle of the subjection of Christ that tenderness, that gentleness, that care for

susceptibilities which takes the rough edge off government. Oh, we have to govern, to use authority, if we are called to do so, as men who ever remember how much we ourselves are in need of the mercy of God. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Can you hear a woman's voice in that? That is a side of Christ that is necessary to right government.

I am only able to hint really at what this means. What I have all the time in the background of my mind is that all things, relationships and everything else, in the House of God are for the increase of Christ. You dear sisters, do not think that the New Testament anywhere says that you are to be suppressed and ruled out. You have a very essential ministry, as representing something in the House of God which is for the increase of Christ, and those who are on the other side need you and cannot fulfil their ministry without you. It is not good for the man to be alone, said the Lord, and that has a very much deeper meaning than just having human companionship. Put that in the positive way: it would be very good for a man to have a woman if she is the right kind according to God's thought. You must keep the balance.

But neither of these must be the other: otherwise if it is so, you get the heavenly order upset at once. That is why the first letter to the Corinthians is corrective of disorder in every realm. You see, the world is ruled out because it is in disorder. The natural man is ruled out because he is disordered. The relationships which are according to that disordered realm and which have come into the Church, must go out, and heavenly order must come in. I do not believe that anything that Paul said about woman in the Church can rightly be interpreted as meaning that she has no place. I believe it to be just the other way round. But all that he said was to get order where there was disorder. It was a matter of heavenly order. In your right place you can function fully: but you have to be in your right place and keep it: otherwise life goes out. Perhaps I have not satisfied you altogether on these matters, but I am dealing with principles. The law of life operates along the line of a heavenly order.

So then, we are able to see that everything rests upon God's purpose concerning His Son, and everything is governed by the consideration of how His purpose can be realized. The method which is approved of God is that which is most directly calculated to bring about an increase of Christ, and all else is ruled out by God. Order is not technique. It is not arbitrary. It is an embodiment of heavenly principles which are established for the increase of Christ; or, to put that in another way, Order is the way of life when it is the heavenly order. Disorder is the way of death.

Now you understand Jacob's life. He started out with the disorder that inheres in the natural man. He started out with the wisdom and cunning of this world. He was chosen to bring into view the House of God, and service in relation to the House of God - Bethel, and a dwelling in Bethel. Therefore this man must be taken in hand and all that is of the natural man must be got rid of as disorderly, and all the worldly element in him must be destroyed. If there is to be a House of God, it cannot be the house of Jacob; it must be the house of "Israel". That is the spiritual and heavenly side of things.

A Vital Lesson

I wonder how much of this is recognized by you to be of practical value. You may have many questions, but I think it does at least bring before us one thing, that in order to there being movement toward fullness of life in Christ, there must be

a spiritual relatedness of the Lord's people. There must be that fellowship between the members of Christ which provides an opportunity for the increase of Christ in an ordered way. That is a matter which ought to exercise us very much. I am quite sure there are a lot of people who are suffering far more than they need because they are out of relatedness with the Church, the Body of Christ, in a working and practical way. I believe that merely personal, independent, unrelated life and movement of the Lord's people exposes them to great evils. If only there were a bringing in among the Lord's people, there would be a curing of many ills, and deliverance from much unnecessary suffering. The word that was spoken by Haggai still holds good: money is put into a bag with holes; there is dearth, there is barrenness, there is an altogether inadequate result to your spiritual energies. Then as the Lord questions with His people about the cause, His answer to them is, Because of My house. If you have My house as the central, governing object of your life, there will be many blessings where there are no blessings now. There will be life where there is death now; there will be deliverance where there is bondage now; there will be light where there is darkness now; there will be safety where there is deception now. We little realize how much suffering in all of these ways there is today because of independent action and a want of relatedness with the Lord's people. Ask the Lord about that. If it is His mind, and you have exercise with Him about His end, He will most surely show some way in which this can be remedied.

Chapter 8

JOSEPH AND THE LAW OF LIFE

Reading: Romans 8: 2, 17; Philippians 3: 10.

We now come to the last of the seven out-workings of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We have followed the stages of that operation as illustrated for us in men in the book of Genesis, from Adam to Jacob; and now we come to Joseph, the seventh and the last. Joseph gathers up into himself all the preceding six and carries them in himself to the final fullness of life.

Let us ask whether in Joseph's case there was the first thing, namely, everything as unto the Father. You see, it is just on that matter that Joseph is introduced to us. The beginning of the narrative about Joseph is that Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons. Why was this? Because, as you will see manifested very soon after, Joseph had a special concern for the father's interests. He took up that first thing - all as unto the Father.

Did Joseph further take up the matter of spiritual discernment and understanding in respect of what would please the Father? Was not that the cause of the trouble between him and his brethren? His brethren were doing things very contrary to the mind of the father, and Joseph saw and felt how dishonouring this was to the father. He discerned what was wrong with his brethren. There was trouble about it, and he himself sought not to walk thus, but to walk well-pleasing unto the father, in the spirit and not in the flesh.

Then you can clearly see how the resurrection principle was operative in Joseph's case. His life was largely based upon that principle. Did he go into death? Yes, but he knew resurrection. It is a great factor in Joseph's history, the resurrection principle.

As for faith, if ever a man had his faith tested, Joseph did. All through those years in Potiphar's house, in the prison, in the dungeon - oh, how great was the test of faith! The Psalmist says that his soul entered into iron, the word of the Lord tried him. Yes, faith was both called for and tried, and it is wonderful how he trusted God. We see no trace of bitterness, resentment, rebellion; faith is triumphant in Joseph.

Yes, he is a true son. The spirit of sonship is there, in his giving of himself in service for the House of God, as represented by his brethren. He was concerned for his brethren's well-being. He went to see how they fared. He took them bread. The great goal of his life was service to his brethren as is seen later in Egypt.

Well, it is quite clear that Joseph embodied all these former things: and then what? Then he carries them through; through suffering to reigning, through rejection to exaltation, through humiliation to the throne. Oh, beloved, if the life of the Lord Jesus in us has a free way, it will produce all those things. That life will take the way which is all unto the Lord spontaneously. It will take the way of growing spiritual discernment as to what is of the Lord and what is not, and you will never have to say, You must give up this, and not do that. The law of the Spirit of life will teach what is not the mind of the Lord. It will separate us from the world, and we shall find that we are separate. It will not be a case of our having to give up the world, but of the world giving us up: we are out of it, we are strangers in this world. The law of the Spirit of life produces that. Test yourself by this law. If you can be happy, comfortable and satisfied in this world and in your own natural life, then you have serious cause to question whether the

life of the Lord Jesus is in you at all. You will find that, as that life works in you, you will more and more be a stranger here. You will find yourself more and more, in spirit, outside of things, and sometimes you will be subject to the most terrible shocks.

Yes, you realize how far you have moved from that world by going on with God. What a far-removed world it is! That is the working of life. It is going to be like that. It is going to make for difficulties, but that is how it is going to be. The law of the Spirit of life will ever more and more widen the gap between you and the world and this life here on this earth. It is bound to do that. It will inevitably put you outside. Then, of course, when you are in that position, what have you to count upon, what support is there for you but God? He has become your life, your resource. The world's pleasures have receded and He has become your pleasure. For everything you have to look to Him; and that is a life of faith. No longer is your satisfaction here. But life brings it all about, brings you to the place where you discover God as your exceeding great reward, as Abraham did; God, El Shaddai, the mighty pourer-forth of fullness.

The Throne and True Destiny

I must come to Joseph very closely. All this working of life along these various stages, bringing spontaneously these various things to be the realities of the child of God, is all moving toward one destiny, one end. This law of life, given free course in us, is going to bring us to the throne. It is going to issue in the throne, in reigning with Him. But how? Through suffering, through humiliation, through rejection. That is the way of this life to the throne. This is what Joseph sets forth.

The Unique Relation of the Chosen Vessel to God

But notice that Joseph had a very special place in the father's affections. It is as well to establish that before you begin to take up the trials of Joseph. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," and Satan always contends against that. When we are in difficulties, in sufferings, in humiliations, in rejections, there is always a voice at our ear to tell us that the Lord does not love us. So it is as well to notice that Joseph had a very special place in the affections of the father. Why? Well, for the reasons that we have already seen. First of all, he was the result of that double labour. The father had laboured twice over for him. It had been a very costly thing to bring Joseph in; and the Church, which is Christ's Body, is the fruit of the deepest anguish of the Father's heart. God was in the agony of securing the Church. It is the Church of God. What a wonderful statement! So often it is termed the Church or Body of Christ, but here the designation is "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). That is why the Church is dear to Him in a special way. But not only because the Church is the result of His double service or agony or labour is this so, but also because it is the fruit of His Spirit, that which comes out of the travail of His Spirit, that which answers most deeply to His innermost being. It is a wonderful thing. That is how God views the Church. He does not view us as we are in ourselves, but He views us as we are in Christ and will be in eternity. A marvellous thing!

One most astonishing illustration or foreshadowing of that is in the case of the compelled utterance of Balaam over Israel, where Balaam was not allowed to speak his own words, but compelled to speak God's words; when under compulsion which he could not resist, as he looked from the mountain across the valley where Jacob was spread abroad, he said, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob". Look at Jacob, look at the life in the wilderness, look at the rebellion, the murmuring, the turning back in heart to Egypt, the unfaithfulness, and, in face of all that, this astonishing statement right from the very heart of God forced

through the reluctant lips of an unfaithful prophet: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob." What grace!

So the Lord looks upon His Church as the fruit of grace, as the fruit of His travail, and the Church somehow answers to His heart in a way that is difficult for us to express. "Christ loved the church." He loved, and loves the Church, because, in some mysterious way, in the Church He gets what His heart desires. May we be inspired more deeply with the desire that He should have it in us. There, you see, is the placing of Joseph with the father.

The Outworking of True Vision

Then what follows? Suffering, rejection, humiliation! But this is not a contradiction of what we have just said, not a denial of the father's love. That the Lord Jesus went the way of the Cross was no argument against the love of God for Him. Not at all! Why did Joseph suffer? How did Joseph suffer? Well he was hated of his brethren to begin with. He suffered their hatred. Why? Well, there are two sides to that. On the one hand, he suffered because they were carnal; on the other hand, because he stood against that which he perceived to be the way of grief and dishonour to his father. This is a difficult thing to say without incurring misunderstanding: nevertheless it is a true position. That which really goes on according to the law of the Spirit of life, and in which that law is operating, will have spiritual discernment in respect of carnality in even the Lord's children, the Father's family, and, because it has such discernment, will inevitably come to a place where it cannot accept that, but has to repudiate it, has to stand against carnality in the people of God; and immediately you do that, you are ostracized, you are regarded as thinking yourself superior. You are cut off and put out; you are rejected; you are made the object of sneer and reproach; you come into suffering. Carnality hates to be exposed. Well, that is why Joseph suffered, and that is the way of suffering. It is standing for God's best, which ever means standing against that which is less than God's best.

Then, you see, there was this further thing with Joseph. His aspirations were too high. His heart was set upon a throne. He dreamed dreams about a reigning life. These principles are wrapped up in a very human story. The Lord is not one to give Himself to painting artificial pictures. Were we writing this for the sake of bringing out spiritual principles, we should write it very differently. The Lord, for His part, tells the story in very human terms, and He just lets us have all the details of the unfortunate way in which Joseph went to work with his brethren. But, nevertheless, hidden behind this very human story, in which all the defects of this one are seen even while he is standing for the highest thing; hidden behind the human story are principles. Behind those dreams and the telling thereof, there is a principle. The throne is in view as God's intention and purpose for those who will go all the way for Him. The throne is God's destiny for that life which has come out from Himself. It must, if it has its way, come back to its source: it must return to the One from whom it came. The only thing that can come back to God is His own life, that which is of Himself, nothing else. That life has been given to bring us through the sanctifying process of suffering to the throne. That is the destiny of that life, and it was that principle that got Joseph into trouble. Oh, this reigning life, this throne life, this overcoming life, what hostility it provokes - You evidently think you are going to be something special, something better and higher than everyone else! In such terms will men rail at you.

The Animosity of Satan to the Chosen Vessel

I think there is something deeper than that about it. If Joseph was a type of Christ, and there is no doubt that he was, he was destined, like Christ, to come to the throne. But there is someone else who has aspired to that throne, someone else who will make things impossible for the aspirant to that throne, someone else who will stand at nothing to make the life of those called to that throne a life of suffering and agony. I think, lurking in the shadows behind this whole scene, there was ever one who saw what this was illustrating, what this was prefiguring. I think Satan can always discern Christ anywhere, even in a shadow, in a figure; and this was, in a figure and a shadow, God intimating that there was One who was coming to the throne most surely. Satan is against that and he will use all carnal means to make that impossible and to frustrate that: and here were carnal brethren giving Satan just the ground that he required to turn upon this one whose eyes were toward the throne. His aspirations were too high for Satan. If the Church has aspirations like that, according to God's intended purpose, the Church will have a bad time at the hand of Satan, not only directly but through carnal Christians. The greatest obstacle and hindrance and cause of suffering to those who are going right on with God will be carnal Christians. You will suffer more at the hands of the professing Church than you will at the hands of the world, if you mean to go right on with God. This is a suffering way, the way to the throne.

The Spiritual Preparation Wrought by Suffering

But then, you see, God was in the sufferings of Joseph. We see the necessity of the suffering under the sovereign hand of God, as being that which was to prepare him for the throne. We reign if we suffer; but not because of the mere fact of suffering, but because of what the sufferings accomplish in us. The sufferings of Joseph were effecting great things in preparing him for the throne.

He had to learn how to serve, because service is the mark of the throne. When at length he came to the throne, it was to serve his brethren. Let us not think of our eternal destiny as being just a life of idle leisure. The glory of it will be service. "His servants shall serve him." He had to learn service and he learned it in a hard school. Potiphar's house was the school in which Joseph learned to be a servant. His was a very hard and difficult school - a servant down there in the house of an Egyptian; a child of a prince with God, the son of Israel's heart, learning subjection in service in Potiphar's house; emptied of everything in order that he might learn how to reign and how to have fullness without pride. Emptied to be filled; humiliated to be exalted; serving in humiliation in order to serve in exaltation. The sufferings were effecting something. I cannot go over all the sufferings of Joseph, but there they are as the way to the throne.

Joseph represents, then, the true spiritual Church and its destiny, which is, to reign with Christ: and in the meantime its pathway to the reigning position is the pathway of rejection, of suffering, of denial, of humiliation, and that largely at the hands of the carnal elements amongst the people of God, the unspiritual.

Well now, what more can we say? We have reached the end when we have reached the throne. We see the way of life, we see the working out of life.

A True Foundation and its Issue

I think the last thing that I would say by way of repetition and re-emphasis is just this, that, in the first place, we have to make sure that we have received Christ as the life and as our life. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our

Lord." To have received the gift and then, as we go on, to remind ourselves of the exhortation "Lay hold on eternal life"; for the whole thing is so grimly and terribly withstood that at times it would be easy to accept death. I mean that literally. There are times in the life of the Lord's people when Satan offers them death and makes them want to quit this scene, to accept an end of everything, to say, It is all finished! and to begin to ask the Lord to take them out of things altogether because they have come to a place of despair. Sometimes you get there. I do not know whether you understand what I am saying: Satan stands at nothing. He gets them under depression and wants them to accept death. Thus, again and again we have to lay hold on life by an act of faith, and as our attitude is one toward life, one which lays hold on life, one which responds to the law of life, one which goes on with that which is bound up with that life, that life will bring us through all its successive stages of development. That very life in us, which Christ is in us, will prove not only the hope of glory, but the realization of glory in the throne. There is that in you and me which is destined to bring us to the throne if we will let it.

May the Lord teach us how to comply with the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.