



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

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

Part 1

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**THE REMARKABLE TRANSFORMATION
FROM DEFEAT TO TRIUMPH**

“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2).

When Simon Magos offered Peter money to possess the ability to confer the Holy Spirit, he was summarily reproved for having such mean and unworthy thoughts and ideas as to the person of the Spirit of God. None of us are in danger of meriting such a rebuke. Nevertheless, I think most of us have erred, and perhaps do err, in this respect that our ideas as to the Holy Spirit, our attitude toward Him, are very mean and very inadequate, and fall very far short of the divine reality. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. We want to hurry on and read the rest of the chapter. We want to read, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” But the key and the secret is verse two which you and I hurry over so quickly and so often.

There could be no Romans 8 if there were no ‘law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’. I believe the apostle breathed a sigh of relief when he finished Romans 7. I am sure he did when he finished experiencing it, and when he looked back after those dark, unsatisfactory days of spiritual experience and wrote them down for the benefit of the Lord’s people then and now. When he wrote the sorry history of a despairing struggle to do the will of God, I am sure it was with a sigh of relief that he, as it were, started chapter 8 and emerged out of a realm of disappointment and despair into a blessed, glorious, surpassing experience of triumph and blessing and victory, a full salvation. For that is what it is, an emergence out of a realm of disappointment and despair. Here is the secret of the emergence: the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

All the experience of Romans 8 is to be traced back to that, and that means far more than the mere personal experience of a man enjoying full salvation, though thank God, it did mean that, for when we emerge from that struggle over our own personal need for God’s deliverance, we come

into a much vaster realm than we had ever thought possible.

Until now it has all been so very personal. My sins, and my sin, and so on. Well, it had to be personal. The apostle saw to it that it became personal. All this airy talk about the whole creation, and the world, and the future, and mankind — that is all very well, but the moralists, the religionists and the philosophers are brought by the Spirit of God as well as the logic of the holy convicting power of His Word, down to their own personal condition. Never mind the world, where are you? Never mind the needs of mankind, what about your needs? And so the arrow of conviction makes it a personal matter and those who are so ready to talk about the nations, the world and mankind, find the Lord pointing to them and saying, ‘Who art thou that judgest, oh man? You are the one. You are the sinner.’ And most of us know only too well the experience of feeling as though in the whole world, we were the culpable, guilty, vile, miserable offender, and as though all the light of all the judgments were focussed upon us and our sins, for this had to be and the Lord sees to it that it becomes personal.

And then you go further into the book. Thank God it is also personal in salvation. My sins, my pardon, my justification; and then the whole question of holiness arises and it is not now my sins, but my sin. It is me, and my need for sanctification and, praise God, my experience of sanctification that comes into view. My old life such a shameful thing; my new life so full of promise. And then Romans 7 seems somehow to bring into concentrated expression this full personal exercise of the individual soul. I wonder how many there may be whose life history is found in Romans 7?

It seems to me that the last verse which, in a way, seems strange after the cry of gratitude for deliverance has already gone forth, is a summing up of the whole position. The apostle says, “So then” (Rom. 7:25) This is not the last word, but it is the last word about that condition. So then I, in myself, me, this strange complex being, am serving the law of God with my mind, serving the law of sin with my flesh. Was he a Christian, or was he not a Christian? That is all very important: Christian or non-Christian? In myself that is what I am like. So this is all about myself.

But when you come into Romans 8 you find, first of all, as to myself, there is a glorious deliverance. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free! Hallelujah, thank God for a personal salvation; it has made me free from the law of sin and death. But before we get very far into the chapter, we find that it is not only a question of my being made free, but that the context broadens until we are talking about the whole creation and a glorious emergence from a realm of disappointment and

despair. For me, praise God, but not only for me, but for the whole creation because, the apostle says, the whole creation is groaning.

The groaning of the creation

When you were in Romans 7 you thought you were the only one groaning, and my, weren't you groaning, wanting to be delivered from this body of death, this pathetic, groping, miserable state of sinfulness. How you groaned! You groaned because of sin at the core of your being and it was spoiling your life and you groaned. The apostle says, 'Listen, and look and take heed. The whole creation is groaning. There is sin at the heart of creation as well as in your heart. And this is the explanation.'

You can read all your volumes on history, the rising and falling of empires, the waxing and waning of dynasties, all the concentrated misery of the human race through the ages, not of the human race only but of the whole physical creation, and in one simple sentence you can get an explanation of it all. The law of sin and death is at the heart of it. There is something wrong. The whole creation is groaning and, thank God, if the groaning sinner of Romans 7 emerges into the glorying saint of Romans 8, the apostle says that is just a little foretaste or earnest of the fact that the whole groaning creation shall also emerge into Romans 8. In the widest, vastest, realms of God's creation, there shall go forth the same note of praise and relief: "I thank my God through Christ Jesus", it shall be delivered. The groaning turns to praise, and the secret is what we are going to talk about.

The secret is "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus". That is the secret of the deliverance. How this triumphant saint sings his doxology, praising and blessing the Lord! The darkness has passed; the light has come; everything is altered. Life is just one glorious experience of bliss, not because for him the world is different, but because in a sense, it does not matter what happens to the world; the secret is in himself by the Holy Spirit. In himself naturally he has the law of sin and death, but now in his very being, by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, he has all the blessing, all the glory, all the triumph, all the love, of which this chapter speaks.

The cosmic application

Now I want you to try and think of Romans 8 not only in these personal terms, but in what I might call cosmic terms, in terms which affect

the whole creation, and I am obliged to keep to the scriptural word. I cannot say, 'the universe', because that means everything, and we know there is that in this universe which does not wait in hope of the glory of God and will never see it. And so I keep to this term, creation.

I think the apostle was speaking more specifically of the literal physical creation, but that would mean an empty world. It will be a full world of redeemed ones. But think of Romans 8 in world terms, in cosmic dimensions — what a wonderful world it will be! You come down the list: liberty, peace, life, righteousness, wisdom, led by the spirit of God, the favour and smile of heaven, pleasing God; God — pleased with the whole world, the glory, the hope, "all things working together for good", the triumph, the absence of all the shadows, no condemnation in this world, no separation, the love of God known and enjoyed. This will not be for a passing period, but for ever. Not only height, nor depth, nor things present, nor things to come, can ever change this state of absolute bliss and glory. Well, thank the Lord that is a better prospect than you read in the newspapers, though they try and work up a little optimism in them sometimes. It is true, Paul says, the creation has been subjected to vanity: corruption, frustration, and misery, but God has done that in hope.

So poor struggling, miserable, despairing saint in Romans 7, there is hope, there is a different kind of life which perhaps to you seems unattainable, but it is all so simple. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" leads you right in, and so poor struggling creation, groaning and despairing, God's word for you is not despair, but hope, and the way in, as we have said concerning individuals, is the way of the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus". What do I mean by that?

Well, just look at the groaning again. The creation is groaning (8:22), but we see in verse 26, the Spirit Himself is groaning. We go back to verse 23 and we find that the redeemed saints are groaning. What is this? What is the creation waiting for? Well, waiting for the day when Romans 8 shall dawn. Yes, but what is coincident with that day, indeed more than coincident with it; what is the effective cause of it? What is this inarticulate groaning of the creation tending towards? It is written down here: the manifestation of the sons of God. What are we groaning for? Exactly the same thing described in another way — the adoption. So the whole creation waits for the consummation in the saints of that which is takes place when the "law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" begins to operate in us.

Romans 8 then tells us, not merely of the experience of full salvation, but tells us also of the meaning of full salvation and this is precisely where

we need to ask the Lord to give us light. The experience, if only personal, blessed as that may be, is failing of its purpose if it is not tending toward the divine end which God has in view and that end is something big, much bigger than your or my experience of full salvation. That end is as large as God's creation. That end is in vast worldwide terms, and this poor saved sinner, struggling along to learn the secret of the victory, when he does emerge, finds that he has not only learned the secret of victory but he has been brought into the secret of divine purpose for the whole creation.

Well, you say, he is still groaning. He groaned in Romans 7; he is still groaning in Romans 8, but it is a very different kind of groaning. There is no spirit, it is said, with groanings which cannot be uttered. Well the groanings in Romans 7 could be uttered alright. Paul knew how to utter them and so do I and so do you! The pity of it is that the children of God spend the best part of their days still groaning with groanings that can be uttered and that ought to have been left behind long ago. These are the groanings of corruption.

But when we turn to Romans 8, what does it say about this groaning world? It is groaning, travailing together in pain. This is a different kind of pain and suffering. The pain, the suffering, the groaning of corruption is one thing, but the groaning and the pain of birth, of production, is a very different thing. Surely the Spirit's groaning, and the church's groaning, are now not for themselves, not for sin, not the pangs of dissolution, but birth pangs, longing, aching, towards a great and glorious deliverance which shall be well worth the pain. This is not like the Romans 7 man groaning, that is a shameful thing. It is unproductive and, in many cases, if not always, it is unnecessary. But this is the ardent, urgent, reaching out in the midst of a glorious experience of the Lord for the full development and consummation of the manifestation in glory, of what God means by deliverance, and God means something big, as big as creation.

That brings us to a very practical challenge. When you groan, when you pray, when you long and desire, when you are freed from preoccupation, and your heart spontaneously turns to thanks and praise, to words which express heart-longings, are they the groanings of Romans 7? Are they the groanings and longings about your own personal state and need, or are they the Spirit's unutterable desires for the manifestation of the glory of Christ? Put it this way, have you found the secret of personal deliverance which has set you free to devote yourself to the deliverance of the whole creation, 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'. When that is reached, when that day dawns and that glory is seen, of course the

world will be a wonderful world because Christ will fill all things. But Christ will only fill all things because, having begun at the heart, He has filled a people with Himself.

And the creation has been waiting a long time, waiting in hope. It is an amazing picture which the apostle paints, daring almost beyond what we feel would be right to utter. While sinful men care nothing for the purpose of God, and while even saved men so often are careless or indifferent as to the great goal of salvation; while there is apathy and indifference everywhere, yet the whole creation goes on longing and groaning for that day. One thing is certain, that when the apostle speaks of the Spirit making intercession for the saints, he is not thinking in these little petty terms that so often preoccupy us in prayer. He is thinking of the great goal of redemption and these intercessions are groanings which cannot be uttered, that that day may be realised, and the only way of its hastening and of its accomplishment, is that the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” should find full expression in those who are the Lord’s. That is the secret right at the heart of things. The Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, is God’s executive whenever a new creation is being brought into view.

The new creation

You don’t need me to remind you of the opening verses of the Bible when that creation, alas so soon to be marred, was in view and came to its appointed beginning. The first thing said about it all was that “the Spirit of God breathed upon the face of the waters” and then judgment had to fall, and after the flood another creation, though in many senses the same, but we may say, a new creation emerged from the flood. You will remember that Noah’s attitude towards it was governed by the dove, and where the dove was at home. Of course the raven was at home in the old creation, but the dove was not at home there. It was not until the new creation emerged from the waters of judgment and when the dove was at home there that Noah opened the ark and they came out. Well, sin was in that creation; the waters of judgment had not purged it after all, and the old creation continued until the blessed person of the Son of God appeared and brought in a new creation, new, not only in time but also in character. New, because different, and this time incorruptible, for when He came forth it was a new creation and the words that were spoken of Him from the very beginning of the process of incarnation, were that this one was begotten of the Holy Spirit. “How can this thing be”, asked Mary and the

answer was the Holy Spirit — a new creation by the Holy Spirit, and now in Christ.

We share that blessed life but why do we share it? What is the divine end and aim in calling us to share it? Well, it is literally and in the largest terms, a new creation. That is God's end: the earth. Oh, not another world; it is such a muddle. That is why people want to die because this world is such a muddle and this life such a problem, and the best thing to do is to get out of it all and go somewhere better. This is a human way of bettering yourself but it is not God's way. God says that this same world, "this earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord". This is the hope that I set before you, not to shuffle out of your responsibilities and difficulties, but to see My mighty hand transforming everything. "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea", and the final presentation of things shall be a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells all righteousness. The secret will be exactly the same. The Spirit of life is the secret.

But how is the Spirit of God approaching this task? Well, we have read that. How can the world know the transforming power of the Spirit of God? Well, we have read that. A day, a moment, when the poor, convicted sinner of Romans 3, the poor, struggling saint of Romans 7, not one, but vast numbers of them, emerge out of their sin into Christ, out of the struggles of trying to please Christ, into the glorious liberty of a living Christ, then they shall all be transformed into His likeness. This is the manifestation of the sons of God: the adoption unto sonship. That is the secret.

Now, you think of it as it is, both a challenge and an inspiration to you. Is this not something worth living for? Does not this altogether enoble and dignify life for us? The thought not merely of finding for ourselves a blessing (there are plenty of blessings in Christ), but not merely that, but of being at the very heart of that which is the supreme blessing to the whole universe? That is what the Lord saved you and me for. We should realise that there is an eternal purpose and that the secret of this purpose, comprehensive and yet simple, is the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus". He should have His full opportunity in our lives and then He will see to it all. It is His responsibility. He will do it, but He needs me; He needs the church redeemed by precious blood to reach that goal and that day. And that means that we need to be made aware, to be instructed as to the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" and then to be obedient to that law and that Spirit.

THE INWARD SPIRIT OF LIFE

Reading: Romans 8:14-16,26,29.

“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2).

That, we said, is the secret of the remarkable transformation in the experience of a man who in the first place is groaning, miserable, defeated, whose life is frustrated, who wants the will of God but cannot attain to it, and the man who is having a glorious time in spite of living in a world that hates him, that all the time threatens to ruin him, but who knows that his way is to be a triumphant one with the end being glory. This is the law of the Spirit of life, and we are told that the secret of it all is a relationship with God, but that is not just some power committed to him. We often use the comparison of the filling of the empty vessels with oil, which is, from one aspect, a true expression of the power of God. But it is a very inadequate comparison to express what is happening to this man in Romans 8. He is not just being filled up with a power; he has by the Spirit come into a relationship. For him the Spirit is for him supremely the Spirit of life, and so we read together, “The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God”. That is the secret and so the apostle says, “if children then heirs”. The inheritance will be ours if we are children and if we grow up to come of age. And so that is what we are waiting for — our adoption. I do hope that when you read “adoption” you do not think in terms of poor little homeless orphans being taken into a family and told to call somebody Father and Mother who are not their father and mother. That is not what Scripture means by adoption; it is very far from it.

The adoption for which we are waiting is the coming of age, the public recognition of those who are truly born in the family. And that is why we have said the secret is this: the law of the Spirit of *life* in Christ Jesus, not merely that He is the living Spirit, although I think that sometimes needs to be said. Some of the Lord’s people think of the Spirit

as some abstract power like electricity, or some other such power, forgetting that He is a Person with His own distinct personality within the Godhead just as distinct as the Father and the Son. The apostle is not only saying that, but also that the Spirit is the effectual, vital link between ourselves and God in Christ, so the law that is in us is not merely the law of the Spirit in general but it is the law of the Spirit of *life* in Christ Jesus. When we have Him we are true born children. Thank God for the great grace that has made us children of God. How greatly has the Father loved us. The child has all the potentialities of the Father's desires and purpose in him, but God's great concern is whether the child will grow up, reach maturity, come of age, and be able to enter into the inheritance. Whatever you may think about it and however the church may neglect it, the apostle says this is a matter of vital importance. We may all be happy and joyful because we are children of God. We may proclaim, 'Thank God we are born, let us go and see how many others can be born.' Yet the apostle says, if we don't get beyond that, he would have us know that here in this world we are in the presence of a great cosmic yearning and longing, not just that men might be born, but that they might grow up and that the day of adoption, the day of the manifestation of the sons of God (not the children of God) might come. Of course, they are children of God; you cannot be a son without being a child; you have got to begin by being a child. I have no doubt that if we know nothing else of Romans 8, we do know this that "the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God". If you do not know it, it could happen now if you look to Him. And so we must be children to be sons.

Growing to maturity

The question arises as to the possibility of being a child and never being a son. May I put it this way, that the great purpose that God has in our being born again, that for which He is yearning, that burden of unutterable prayer for the saints which is with the Spirit is all to this end, that the day may arrive when the grown-up, come-of-age, mature sons of God are recognised by Him so that He may call the whole universe to take its relationship with Christ as centre because Christ is now the firstborn among many brethren. The law of the Spirit of life is all the time pressing to that. The life will reach that end if it is given its way. And so the question arises in the church of God, not as to whether the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is in the church, or is in the individuals (that is not the

question; if we are born again that is a fact) but as to why the Spirit cannot reach His goal. It is because of the law of the Spirit of life.

That brings us to this whole question of law. The Bible says a lot about it, and Paul especially in this letter Paul wrote a great deal about the law. He not only speaks of the Mosaic law, he often passes from that to the general when he is speaking of works of law. But in almost every case in which law is mentioned in this letter, as elsewhere, the apostle is thinking and writing of what we think of naturally, of an outward, written code of conduct, a form of regulations as to behaviour. He says that however earnestly you study the divine law and resolve to keep it, there is no way to sonship along that path. Mark you, it is not because there is anything lacking in the law; the law is holy, the law is good, and — surprisingly — the law is spiritual. You didn't think the law was spiritual, did you? You thought the law was the opposite of spiritual. The law is spiritual but the law is no good to me because I am carnal. The apostle, in developing that together with the uselessness of the law comes to another phrase in which "law" is used in a different connection. Going through his bitter experience of Romans 7 and explaining about this law of God which is so holy, so high but so unattainable, he says the trouble all the time is that there is in me another law, "I see a different law working in my members" (Rom. 7:23). Now, in this case he uses "law" in a different sense. It is not only different from the law of God and opposed to that, but he is talking now, not of a code, but of a new principle of operation that is working all the time. However many eccentric ideas it may seem to have and however many aspects of its movements may be discovered, it is working according to a fixed set of principles; there is a regularity and inevitability about its working. It is the law of sin, alas, and it is in me! This is not just some vague thing, it has quite definite ways of working, and so he calls it an inward law. Now, of course, there is or there could be a code of conduct, an outward, written law which corresponds to that inward law, which would be very different from that which you read in the Bible. It would, of course, be just the opposite. It would make pretty grim reading to read in writing what I am like; the explanation of the law which governs my conduct: thou shalt worship thyself; thou shalt serve thyself. Instead of God being the centre and love to God being the great regulation, self is the centre and love of self the outstanding statute in that code. But there is, or there could be an outward law which corresponds to this inward principle which is all the time operating in me. I work according to a law (nobody has troubled to write it and I hope they never

will, but it could be written, and after I saw it written I would repudiate it), yet in myself I do it because it works in me. Now you see what we are coming to. The apostle says the secret of the will of God is not in trying to observe that law as written outwardly, but discovering a blessed truth which is the opposite of that law of sin and death, and that is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus; the inward principle of action operating all the time according to fixed and regular ways so that it can be called a law.

The inward law

Now, that was the trouble with men when they saw that in the Person of Jesus Christ. They said, it is not law abiding, it is lawless. That was the trouble when they saw it in the apostle. This is antinomianism. You do not keep the Sabbath, and here is the code as to what you should do; and they could not understand that the life of the Lord Jesus was governed by law. Not the outward law, although it corresponded in His case, and it will in ours in the measure in which the Spirit does govern our lives, but an inward law working all the time according to the divine working. Some tried to find out what that law was. I suppose James, the brother of the Lord, tried. He was a righteous man, but it baffled him, it seemed to him to have no rules about it, and so in the case of the apostles. If you take up the book of the Acts and you try to establish a code of conduct that will explain their every action, you can't do it. It baffles analysis; it baffles any explanation according to principles which we understand, and so they said it is lawless. They did not understand — nor shall we understand unless the Lord shows it to us — that there is an inward law of the Spirit of life. When the Spirit came to the disciples they didn't indulge in a series of disjointed, meaningless or impulsive actions, but they moved according to divine law. They often didn't know the explanation but they did know this, that there was with them a living Lord who was everything, to be obeyed instantly, and that He controlled their lives.

Now that is the way to sonship. How the apostle laboured to show these people, and more particularly to show the Galatians that they could not attain to sonship by studying the Bible or going to meetings, or trying to get it all analysed and worked out, and saying they are going to do this to become a son. You cannot do it like that, but the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sonship and is the secret of growing up. To be ready for that great day He must apply the law to our lives inwardly, the law of the Spirit of

life in Christ Jesus. May I give a warning to those who take it for granted that they are spiritual, and in their immaturity begin to do things and not to do them because they feel the Lord has told them to do something, or the Lord has not told them to do it. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, when we are perfectly spiritual people will so lead us that we shall always do the will of God. But when we are not perfectly spiritual people, the Lord has to use safeguards, not because the Spirit cannot be trusted but because we cannot yet be trusted. Why was the letter to the Corinthians written, with so many injunctions as to conduct, as to behaviour, as to this and that? Should not the Spirit of God have led those men unerringly? Yes, and He would have if they had been spiritual people, but since they were not spiritual people certain things had to be said to them, which had they been spiritual, would have been unnecessary. The pity of it is that so much that is written in the Word is taken and made a new law, and 'You must do it like this, and you must keep every detail of that, and if you do you will be according to God.' And yet, when all the details have been thrashed out and somebody or other has decided what it really means in all the conflicting interpretations, and you are doing it according to what the Book says, somebody comes in among you and says, "My! isn't it dead? Where's the life?" There is no life when you are working on the basis of the law. The law for us is an inward Spirit of life. Nevertheless, when we are not spiritual, (and who of us will claim to be?), the Lord provides safeguards, not laws, but checks upon us. If we were perfectly spiritual people we should obey the Word of God even without reading it; spontaneously we should do the thing. We shouldn't have to say, 'now I ought to do that', but until we reach that stage we must keep to the Bible, not as a basis of favour with God but as a corrective and safeguard to spiritual guidance. If we were perfectly spiritual, we should always do our duty. By that I mean things that are not necessarily written down in so many words in Scripture; but even if they were not our duty in our home or our duty in our work, if we were perfectly spiritual we should do that. The strange thing is that some people claim to be spiritual and in their sense of the Lord's guidance ignore their duties and bring shame to the Name of the Lord by so doing. It is safer to check up your sense of the Spirit's guidance by duty and to give the Lord just that extra means of being sure that, after all, it is the Spirit and not what you think is the Spirit. If we were perfectly spiritual we should find that all our behaviour and our sense of guidance and of the Lord's will would find perfect harmony and corroboration among our fellow members in the church, and

particularly among those who in any sense may represent the church. If we were perfectly spiritual, there would be no difficulty, but how many people who claim to be spiritual come into conflict with and contradict the mind of the Lord as found in His church? It is safer to remember that we are not so spiritual as we thought we were and to check up our sense of guidance with the witness in the church as to the will of God; thus, always be ready to support our personal sense of things, for our safety as well as for His glory. These are provisions for the unspiritual if you like to put it like that. Well, let us be humble and confess ourselves unspiritual and make use of the provision, never forgetting that the vital and final truth is that the sons of God are not led by the Word of God, or by the Word spoken, but by the Spirit of God. That is the ultimate truth, and when that ultimate truth is realised it will be found to harmonise with all the others. There is no contradiction with Him. The contradiction is with us because we are unspiritual.

The Spirit of life

The law of the Spirit of *life*. It is more life that is needed and that means that the Spirit who gives life must be more closely and attentively obeyed because He works according to laws. Those who reach sonship are not those who pray and pray, and by virtue of their great praying attain a thing (although we need to pray), but they are those who are all the time sensitive and susceptible and obedient to the laws of the Spirit of God. He will do the rest. He will bring us to sonship. He has in His own hands that great law of manifestation of the sons of God. He is the executor, the executive power, the living personal representative of the risen Christ and in Himself is all the ability and all the life requisite for this great family of sons. Once again let me say it, the Holy Spirit works according to laws although it may not look like it very often, and the way to move with Him to His goal is to go His way and not to try to make Him go our way. And going His way means obeying His laws.

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is an inward thing, an inward matter, an experience of the Spirit which is essentially a matter of life, and life is not on the circumference of the person but at his very heart. The manifestation of life is on the circumference but the root is within.

Now here we trust the Lord may help us because there are so many misconceptions about the Holy Spirit. That which is essential, not only to our full salvation, but to the attaining of the full purpose of our salvation,

is not merely some outward power, energy or ability that the Spirit may place upon us or commit to us, but is a matter of obedience deep in the centre of our being. It is a new life which is different from ours: His life, throne life, kingdom life.

The question arises as to whether Romans 7 answers to the experience of the apostle after his conversion. If it does, surely it is a most striking thing to remember the circumstances of the apostle's initial reception of the Holy Spirit. Marvellous! Who of us has not wished to know what Saul of Tarsus knew when the scales fell from his eyes and he was baptised in the Name of the Lord? A marvellous committal of divine power and wisdom filled and flooded his life. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, there is no doubt about that. Now, if Romans 7 represents something that happened after that day, it means that what Saul of Tarsus knew at the beginning was not the full experience of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus spoken of in Romans 8. In other words, while the Spirit was mightily upon him and with him, he was not yet, in the deep, inward sense, a spiritual man. I am not competent to say whether Romans 7 represents his experience as a Christian, but I do know it represents the experience of many Christians, and therefore it can be the experience of a Christian. And we must not idealise and imagine things which are not true with regard to men filled with the Holy Spirit. We do not know much about the apostle Paul, though we get some hints. But take Peter, a man filled with the Holy Spirit as much as Paul was, and yet you remember there was a moment when Peter behaved very badly, and had to be reproved and humble himself. Do you think that he had sinned and the Holy Spirit had withdrawn His power? I do not; but I think that Peter was not then a spiritual man and in that particular point he did not obey the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and what happened? Why, the same old Peter came out that he thought had been dead for years, dead in the sense of held under the dominion of Christ's death, but still capable of making a return if given the opportunity.

Well, so much for the apostles. Take the Romans themselves. We know nothing of the beginning of the Roman church but we have no reason to think that it was any different from the beginning of the Corinthian church, or the Ephesian church, or from any of the churches of that time. And if you read in Acts, or in the letter to the Corinthians, it is manifest that they began in a flood-tide of the Spirit, such a flood-tide that they were carried along by it and mighty expressions of divine power were found among them. And yet, the apostle wrote Romans 7 to the

Romans and he did not waste time writing to the wrong people. He sought to lead them into Romans 8 which surely suggests he saw that it may be possible to be caught up in a mighty tide of the Spirit in a more outward way and not yet know in a deep inward way the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Now I am not saying that the Spirit was on them but not in them; I am making no distinctions; but I do say it is a dangerous thing for us to presume that a powerful or remarkable experience of the Spirit of God, in and of itself, makes us spiritual people. The Corinthians were having marvellous experiences of the manifestation of the power of the Spirit among them, and were greatly gifted, yet the apostle wrote to them, “Ye are carnal and I cannot write to you as spiritual.” The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is a deep, inward matter. Of course, in our day many of us know nothing of these more sensational manifestations. Many of us know the peril of spiritual gifts; shall I put it this way, the perils of ministry. If at any time the Lord in His great grace can take us up and in some unusual way perhaps express His power through us, the danger is we take it for granted that we are spiritual people. It also works the other way, that sometimes we have a very bad time and think we are not spiritual people, but it has nothing to do with that. But, how perilous it is, because God in His grace endues us with the power of His Spirit for some purpose, for us to take it for granted that we have reached the divine end or are reaching it. There are so many factors that will conspire, factors very often outside of ourselves, such as the very company in which we are, can determine the power or otherwise of our ministry. If ever I am tempted to feel that the Lord is using me, that I am getting on spiritually, sometimes I remember Balaam — and sometimes I remember the ass too. Balaam spoke by the Spirit of the Lord, and yet he was not a spiritual man and God wasn’t pleased with Balaam; but He had a purpose to be fulfilled and a Word to be uttered. So mighty is He and so mighty His Spirit that He could use whom he would. That is a very humbling thought. Oh, surely it is a sign of unspirituality in us all, that the thing we crave for, pray for and delight in is somehow to wield a power, to be gifted with a gift, to feel that we are serving the Lord mightily! It is not that that will take us to the throne. It may take others to the throne and leave us behind; Balaam said wonderful things for Israel and got nothing but judgment for himself. Is not that why the apostle said that he was so careful lest having preached to others, heralded them on to the prize, he himself should be disqualified? A spirit-filled man and yet not a spiritual man; that may sound a contradiction, but I fear it is a possibility.

Spiritual gifts

What, then, is the distinctiveness of the experience of the Holy Spirit in this age? It is not miraculous gifts. That was true of the Old Testament age, and I can match what you can give me in the New Testament of manifestations of the Spirit. Do not think the Holy Spirit only began His existence when Christ went up to glory and Pentecost came. The Spirit is eternal as Christ is, as God is. Do not think that the Spirit never came down to earth or was not in men before Christ. And so you go through your Old Testament here and there, with long intervals; nevertheless, you can find all the miracles, all the manifestations. You remember when Moses took the seventy elders up to the Lord they all prophesied, as much as any in Corinth prophesied, and it was a miraculous thing. You remember when Saul, the King, caused a sensation and everybody said, 'What is Saul among the prophets?' Why did they say that? Because something happened to Saul which didn't happen to ordinary men, in a sensational and miraculous way. You have only to turn to the Book of Judges to find mighty deeds being done, and it is specifically stated by the Holy Spirit, 'Look at Samson', and again and again the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and mighty things were done. Would you say that Saul or Samson were spiritual men? No, but the Spirit was mightily upon them.

We are healing, yes, and what is excluded in modern healing, raising from the dead. Spiritual healing always included raising someone from the dead. In the case of the Lord, and of Peter and Paul, they had miraculous powers of healing, which included raising from the dead. But this is not peculiar to the New Testament. There are also Elijah and Elisha, and our Lord Himself mentioned both those men in the synagogue at Capernaum. They were men marked out by God and by mighty wonders done by the Holy Spirit.

And so we could go on praising the Lord. Look at the little cluster of people before Christ came and when He was first born: Elizabeth, Zacharias and Simeon. This is a height of spirituality in a soul moving, stirring way to magnify and praise the Lord. That is not peculiar to this age. Simeon did that and so did Zacharias. Oh then, you say, you must grant me this, the special manifestation of the power of the Spirit is to be a mighty witness of Christ in great conviction. No, not even that. John the Baptist is pre-Pentecost, not typical of this age, and was there ever a greater witness in the power of the Holy Spirit, piercing men's hearts, cutting their consciences, causing them to cry out? There was never one

who could point men to Christ, the Lamb of God, to prepare a way for the Lord as John the Baptist. No, if you are looking for these miraculous manifestations as being typical of this age you have made a big mistake. They are Old Testament experiences. The great feature of Pentecost as Peter explained it was that what had been isolated and temporary and limited in the Old Testament was now to become general. That was the great thing. Instead of just being one, and then years later another, and long delay, and individuals, the promise is now “on them all”. That is what Peter said, “on them all”. Young and old without distinction of age or sex, and no distinction of social condition. While Acts says, ‘My servants and my handmaidens’, Joel, from whom the prophecy was taken, was speaking of servants and slaves and maidservants. Joel said the day will come when the Lord will not make these distinctions. The gift will be for all and the Holy Spirit be free given to all who call upon the Name of the Lord and are saved. That is the great point about Pentecost, in that something new had happened. So it is not in that realm we must seek the specific nature of the Spirit of God in our age.

Spiritual knowledge

Well, there was the Gospel age, and so far as men were concerned the great feature of the Gospel age for the Lord’s people was that they were being instructed and taught by the Spirit. Those with whom we are concerned were disciples. And while reading through the Gospels we are perhaps unduly interested in the miraculous things that happened, I think if you will ponder this you will agree with me that the weight of the effect of the experience of three and a half years of uninterrupted walking with the Lord for those disciples, was the tremendous amount of spiritual knowledge they accumulated, assuming that His miracles were but occasions for more teaching. We cannot regard the particular purpose of the Spirit’s presence in this age as being miraculous manifestations; nor can we regard His presence as being particularly to teach us divine truths about Christ. The disciples were not spiritual men and many of the lessons they were supposed to learn they didn’t learn, but in three and a half years they accumulated a tremendous amount of information about divine things. Many children of God today are quite satisfied with that. That is their idea of the Spirit’s presence in the church: they have the Word and when they know it they are spiritual. Were the disciples spiritual at the end of three and a half years? Not only were they not spiritual but they could not be spiritual, for

the Spirit, in the sense of Acts 2, was not yet given. There was a sense in which they were taught by the Spirit, but it is quite clear from the discourse of our Lord Himself that He regarded them as greatly lacking something in spite of all their teaching. What then were they lacking? In other words, what is the peculiar significance of the purpose of the Spirit's working in our age? It is vital, living relationship with Jesus Christ in an inward way and that could not take place until Pentecost. Pentecost stood for something more than the outward, something more than the mental. It was a deep inward relationship of life with the Lord. They were children of God and by that, potentially sons of God, and so are we. That age has come in and we believers in Christ have that relationship with Him.

And now you will notice what the goal is which we have described as sonship and adoption and manifestation. The goal is described in verse 29, that we might be "conformed to the image of His Son". Now God deals with realities and when He says "conformed to the image of His Son", He doesn't mean somebody who speaks something like Christ or does something like Christ, but He means the very image of Christ is in him. That is the goal of the Spirit's work so far as we are concerned. It can be on very simple terms, although sometimes very costly ones, which I will state in the simplest way: obedience to the laws of the Spirit. Now that needs a lot of explanation. It is in this that the children of God are lacking, in not knowing what the laws of the Spirit are. While they are enjoying something a great deal of His presence in a personal way, they fail again and again to cooperate with Him, and often obstruct Him in His one declared purpose of bringing the children of God to sonship.

When the church was in a bad way the apostle John, the only survivor of the apostolic band, was specially commissioned by the Lord for a ministry of recovery among them to that end. He wrote his Epistle (which merits a good deal more study than it gets), to that end. He wrote his Gospel, and the great burden of the Gospel and the Epistle is to show us the One in whom the life was resident. I have spoken about the limitations in the Gospel age; I mean in the disciples. But there was One here who in those three and a half years or thirty-three and a half years was working as the Son of God, in whom the Spirit was without measure, whose obedience to the law of the Spirit was instant. John tells us the life was manifested. Eternal life was what they saw in Jesus Christ, yet there was much more that they did not see. That is eternal life and that life is now in the throne and is the key to the liberation and blessing of the whole universe. Christ shall be all and in all. It will be Romans 8 alright, because

of that life! There is nothing arbitrary about it. Neither God nor Satan could, if they would, deny the throne to Jesus Christ because His very character, His very life is the throne life. This life is in His Son, but wonder of wonders, it is in us too! God has given to us eternal life. It is not just something committed to our personal care. No, this life is in His Son. "He that has the Son has the life." May God help us to know that life is governed by law, and if that life is to reach its full development in us, its laws must be obeyed. Sometimes through unwillingness or ignorance the people of God are disobeying the laws of the Spirit of life, and that is delaying the manifestation of the sons of God.

I cannot say anything about those laws at this point, but we can come to the Lord afresh, thanking Him for the infinite possibilities of glory in our relationship to Him. We are children of God destined to be sons, thanking Him that the process of bringing us to glory is all in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Thank God it is not in ours, for we would never get there. But recognising that He needs our cooperation, our obedience, our abstinence from all obstruction, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus will bring us to the liberty of the glory of the sons of God.

THE CRUCIFIED AND RISEN LORD

We noticed in the previous chapter that this is not an outward law of commandments contained in ordinances, but a vital inward principle of action working, not in any haphazard way, but in fixed and regular ways which correspond to a law. We also said that, since we have the Spirit of life in us, He who, having begun a good work, is obliged to perfect it. Our wisdom and our maturity lie in the direction of obedience to the law of the Spirit.

We saw in Ezekiel that when everything lives and it is all glory because the river is in full flood, it is not just something that has happened casually. Ezekiel was taken right to the source and shown that that river has its principles, its laws, and speaking broadly, we may say they are threefold.

There is the altar; that is the explanation of the river. There is the throne. It does not actually say in Ezekiel 47, that the throne is there, but in an earlier chapter, in Ezekiel 43:7, the Lord had said concerning that place: "Son of man, this is the place of my feet." You will recollect that in Revelation, where the great spiritual reality of it all is finally demonstrated, the river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. And then, of course, there is the House. So, when we speak of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus we may, for convenience, include in that law three lesser contributory laws. It is a threefold law: the law of the altar, the law of the throne and the law of the House. When these laws are obeyed, the Spirit will see to it that we reach the day of the manifestation of the sons of God in glory.

The law of the altar

Now I want to talk about the first of them, that which corresponds to the altar. In each of the three we can find an Old Testament character

peculiarly illustrative of the law. This first one, the law of the altar, can be illustrated by Abraham, and I will not call it the law of the altar any more, but call it now the law of resurrection. That includes the cross, because it brings the true issue of the cross into view. Yes, indeed, it is the law of the cross. The Holy Spirit came in His great fulness to the church, and comes to your life and mine on the basis of the cross, but the Holy Spirit also leads to the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ was here on earth as a Man full of the Spirit. The Spirit's direction, the Spirit's law in His life led Him to the cross. It looked as though that was a path of lessening and fading out. He began His ministry with the crowds and the multitudes, the signs and wonders, the popular response of the masses. But the disciples found, to their perplexity, that the course which the Lord Jesus deliberately took during the years of His ministry, led Him steadily, directly, undeviatingly, to the cross, and they thought, 'What a pity!' "Lord, that shall never be to Thee", said Peter; but it was so. Why did the Spirit do that? It was, of course, for your salvation and mine. But why did He do it peculiarly in relation to the Lord Jesus, who was so responsive to His gentle government? He did it because He was seeking enlargement; He was seeking resurrection. Speaking in purely human terms, what comparison could there possibly be between the life that the Lord Jesus, as a Man, was living in those little hamlets and byways of a very small country? (Even when the crowds were round Him, it was all very small and limited.) What comparison could there be between that day and the day in which, in a thousand languages, in every continent, through the ages, God is known through Jesus Christ? Well, there is no comparison. The Lord Jesus, of course, being a Man of the Spirit, knew what the disciples did not know, and He Himself said, "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." He knew it and therefore was prepared to pay the price and so be guided by the Spirit to the cross. For the cross is the law of the Spirit, but not as an end in itself, but rather as a means of new life, fulness of life.

That is the law, and if you read Romans 8, this is exactly what the Holy Spirit does to us and with us. "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (v.12). There is a superficial attitude towards the cross that assumes that, with one recognition of and capitulation to the crucified Lord, everything is settled, and now it is no more cross, but all Spirit — no more death, but just an easy life and glory; that the Spirit leads us away from the cross. Oh no! He begins at the cross, but He is always leading us back to it. It is one of His principles that from that

death there might emerge the true life. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and the life in Christ Jesus for us is always resurrection life.

Abraham is the great type of this law of the Spirit. In the Old Testament it does not say that Abraham was anointed, nor is there any particular reference made to the Holy Spirit in his case, but when we come over to the letter to the Galatians we find that in the thought of God, he is very much associated with the Holy Spirit. Christ is made a curse for us that on us may come the blessing of Abraham, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit, through faith. Abraham speaks to us of the promise. It is a significant word: "the promise of the Spirit". And he speaks to us of faith. For Abraham was a man who came to know, at various stages of his life, the practical power of the cross, and each time his experience of the cross brought him into a very enlarged and full experience of life.

You will remember how he began, how God appeared to him when he lived in Ur, and virtually said to him, 'Abraham, I know who you are and what you are.' We do not know what Abraham was, what position he held, but we may be sure that it was dear to him, just as what we are is always dear to us. God said to him, 'Whatever you are, Abraham, and whatever you have, I want you to leave it; I want that to be finished. Get out!' "Get thee out ...". So the cross, in the first place, as applied by the Holy Spirit, divides and severs us from the position that we hold here on the earth. We are not told in Genesis that there were any evil associations in Ur from which Abraham was to separate himself. Not until the end of the book of Joshua do we hear about the idolatry that was practised in those days. It is not that it is merely a deliverance from evil, a separation from that which is not right, but something far deeper than that. The Holy Spirit impresses upon us that His first law is that the cross has got to cut us clean away from the position that we hold here on the earth; that is a law of the Spirit. "Get thee out ... So Abraham went out". Abraham was prepared to pay the price: to move from what he was and from what he held and had; from what, doubtless, was of value and interest to him; from that which constituted his life. He went a long way and he had a delayed journey, and then, in the end, he came into the land which the Lord had promised him. But, perhaps to his surprise, and to our surprise if we had never read the story before, we would find that God never did what we might have expected Him to do. He took Abraham out of one home, but He did not give him another home. He took him from a great city but gave him no city to come into. He said, "Get thee out ... from your father's house" and your country; to get out of one land, but He gave him no

possession in the other. As Stephen impressed upon his hearers in Acts 7, nothing ever came to Abraham by way of possession, as a result of his coming out of Ur. What does that mean? Well, the letter to the Hebrews will tell us. Abraham learned that he was not to look for a city in Canaan, in Palestine; he was to look for a city in heaven. He was not to look for an exchange of possessions on earth, out of one earthly position into another earthly position. But he was lifted out from the earth and the life that he knew here. The riches and the glory that came to him were not in another earthly realm in another country, but in a realm which does not belong to earth, but belongs to heaven, although he lived and walked down here. That is a law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Now much has been said about Abraham leaving his home, being willing to go at the Lord's call, not knowing where he was going. We can talk about Abraham, and quite enjoy talking about Abraham, but we are not here to talk about Abraham, except as it relates to us. What is this law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus? It is that the first thing that the cross has to do once we belong to the Lord is to slay in us every desire, every craving for security, position and recognition here on earth. That is how it worked with Abraham, and that is how it works with you and me. It is a law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. That makes it sound, perhaps, rather a severe law. Well, in one sense, it was severe for Abraham: the land of his fathers, the associations, the friends, the interests, the position. Ur was no small city, but a very great, highly developed one. For all we know, Abraham may have had a good position in it; doubtless, he would enjoy the amenities and importance of being associated with it. From that point of view, Abraham lost a lot. But, just as in the case of the Lord Jesus, the path that seemed to lead downwards into ever greater limitation was the Spirit's way of bringing him into great fulness and abundance and glory. What a great man in the Scriptures is Abraham! What a tremendous thing that, when the apostle is writing to the Galatians, he can think of no greater description of the blessing, the fulness, the glory of the Holy Spirit, than to describe it as the blessing of Abraham; the promise of the Spirit through faith. And Abraham knew that from the first. The cross may have come to him with a challenge, but when Abraham left Ur, he left it with the light of glory on his face. It was not because the Lord had come to him and said, 'Look here, Abraham, this is a bad place you are in; there is a lot of compromise; there are a lot of unsatisfactory things here; this life is a disappointing life; this life is not right; you must get out of this.' That is often the way we move, and we move from bad to worse on that

basis. That is not the cross. The God of glory appeared unto Abraham, and though the cross struck deeply into his heart at what he had to leave, the glory shone on his face as he turned towards that to which he was going. 'Get thee out; get thee out.'

No doubt they said in Abraham's day, as they have said ever since, 'What a pity Abraham is leaving us!' 'Abraham is getting out; what is he going to belong to now?' And if they get news from Palestine that he has joined another city over there, that is all right. But the news went from bad to worse: 'He does not belong to anything.' 'What has happened to poor Abraham?' What happened to the poor people who stayed in Ur? You don't hear anything more about them; they stayed there. Abraham was a man of faith. He did not just get out for getting out's sake. He got out to go on with the Lord, and it cost him to go on with the Lord. Some of us get out because things get so difficult. Rotten place, Ur! We don't seem able to get on with anybody in Ur. 'I will get out; everybody is difficult, and I think I will get out.' It is just the very opposite. If Abraham had felt like that about Ur, the Lord would probably have said, 'Abraham, you stay there and live for me there; and I will meet you there. That will be your cross.' Abraham did not want to go. It cost him everything to go, and it was the way of faith, the way of the cross, it is true, but also the way of resurrection.

To be continued