



*the
Golden
Candlestick*

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

Part 2

**T. Austin-Sparks
C.J.B. Harrison**

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Application

Now, how does this apply to us? I have made these remarks about getting out, and I think it is incumbent upon me, therefore, to continue upon this line. What really is represented to us by what Abraham did? I think it may mean, with many of us, the severing of earthly ties which have had real value but which are now holding us to earth. But that is something which we must leave with the Lord. That is not the immediate lesson of Abraham's move. Abraham's move speaks to us, not of handing in our resignation anywhere, or leaving anything, but of getting clear from this earth in spirit. 'Get out', the Lord says. What He meant, and what He means to us is, 'Get lifted up to another realm.' You may not move geographically; you may live and remain just where you are. In fact, you must do that until any movement that you make is an expression of a spiritual removal. You only hinder what the Lord is trying to do with you when you precipitate movement in this sphere, as it were, horizontal movement out of one place into another, looking about to try and be like Abraham. You have missed the point. This getting out is a getting up and away and that is a costly thing; it is really costly. We have sometimes been very distressed that the Lord has not raised up — as we had expected — local assemblies on a large scale, to express His mind. I do not pretend to know why He has not, but one of the dangers which might have arisen if He had would be that if people saw something a bit more scriptural, a bit more according to what they felt was the Lord and corresponded to the Lord's will, it would be to them but one more thing on this earth. They would be very glad to move out of the particular situations that they are in, which are unsatisfactory, to new ones that are much more satisfactory; but it would be a move on an earth level, and they would not be any different in themselves. Abraham not only went to another country; he became another man, and that is far more important. He did not set up an Ur in Palestine; he hadn't an inch of territory to call his own; he became a heavenly man. 'A pilgrim and a stranger', is what the Bible calls him and others in Hebrews 11. What the law of the Spirit is working towards in every life that is yielded to Him is to reach this goal by means of leading us to the cross, that it might do its work of severance from things as they are on the earth; what we are, and what we have as people down here.

This may sound interesting, but it is so much easier to talk about it

than to experience it. When we are in the hands of the Spirit it is not merely a crisis for us, as expressed in the life of Abraham; it is a lifelong law; the law of the Spirit of life. If you take the position with the Lord that you want heavenly, and not earthly, glory, the Lord, the devil, and sometimes the Lord's people will see to it that that matter is pressed home to you and it becomes a question: is it what you are, or who you are that matters, after all? And we all find how quick we are to respond, and how resentful we are at anything that sets us aside, that does not recognise us, that fails to give us our place. This work will go on all the time, if we are going on to glory, when this principle of being nothing and having nothing here on the earth is pressed in, deeper and ever deeper. If there is one thing I want the Lord to say, more than another, it is this, that the cross is not merely an initial experience but opens the way for the fulness of the Spirit in our lives. True as that may be, it is only half the truth. The cross is an abiding rule and principle, which the Spirit is all the time bringing us back to, and is all the time calling for our surrender and acceptance, in that respect. Spiritual growth is not one great crisis of acceptance of the cross in a more or less theoretical and imaginary way; spiritual growth is the daily taking up of the cross, the daily acceptance of the Lord's Word saying, 'Nothing here, Abraham; you have got nothing here; you are nobody and you have nothing.' And all the time Abraham said, 'I do not care; I have the God of glory. I have nothing here, but I have everything.' Why, we can hear the apostle Paul speaking! It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

How we need the Holy Spirit to help us cooperate with Him in this matter to remember that every painful experience, every humiliation, every difficulty, everything that goes against the grain, is not just the difficulty of things, and it is not because the Lord does not love us. It is the Lord once again saying, 'If you will take this cross, I have the other side of it — a new resurrection morning for you. There is fulness of life and power and glory this way.' You say, 'I do not like this way.' No, it would not be the cross if we liked it; or, rather, you would not be you if you liked the cross. Our nature and the cross are incompatible. We do not like it, and if we begin to look at it as merely that which threatens our lives and challenges our desires, we shall never get on with the Lord. I am afraid that some are not moving on with the Lord for that very reason. Oh, you would have other explanations, and yet you know that in six months, a year, two years or more you have not grown spiritually; you do not count more for the Lord than before; you are, perhaps, further away from the Lord. Why

is this? You have believed on Him; the Spirit is in you; He is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. You can quite sincerely say that you have not wandered away into sin, that you have not disobeyed the Lord in that sense, and yet you know, and it may be that others watching you and praying for you know, that yours is not a satisfactory spiritual life. The river may have got to the ankles, but it seems to get shallower again, rather than otherwise. It does not show any signs of flowing on to that full flood. Well, may not this be the reason? In some one matter that may be very clear to you, or perhaps in some little points that you could not recollect if you tried, the Lord has brought you up against this law of the spirit, this law of the cross, or, as I prefer to call it, this law of resurrection. You know that resurrection can only come after death, and there is only one death that can lead us to resurrection, and that is the death of the cross. This may be because of some matter — it may be very small — in some attitude or outlook in life, in the things of the Lord or the people of the Lord, or some challenge of the Lord which has hurt or annoyed you, and you have said no, and you have felt right in saying no.

When the God of glory withdrew from Ur and the light of a new day dawned, if Abraham had stopped to reason, as the men of Ur reasoned, to think and feel as they all felt and thought around him, he would have said, 'No, it is better here; I am not going.' But he kept his eyes on the glory, and stopped his ears and closed his eyes to everything else; and so he came out. But you have not, because you have taken your eyes off the glory and have said, 'Why should I?' and you have had a thousand arguments as to the position you hold and you can justify the way you have taken. Perhaps you can, but is it the way of the Spirit? Is it leading you on to greater fulness in the Spirit? Well no, you know it is not. Well then, the God of glory says there is only one way through for you, and that is to accept the cross, to change your position, to stop arguing. Maybe you have a critical attitude towards the people of God, the testimony of the Lord, and because you have seen real or imaginary faults you have held aloof, and you have held your position and chosen your way. The cross says to you, "You have got to relinquish that position; you have got to capitulate on that matter and you have got to say 'Yes' to the Lord." It is the law of the Spirit of life, and the unsatisfactory spiritual state of a multitude of the people of God today can be traced back to this fact, not that they are in surroundings or associations that are unscriptural or unspiritual but that they themselves have said no to the Lord when He has called them to follow Him in spirit, saying, 'Get thee out'.

We say this and preach it, not in an earthly way, but from a spiritual, heavenly attitude — Get out of yourself, get out of things as men see them, get out of this position of being tied down to earth and belonging to earth; get out of it! What will God give you? On the one hand, you can say God will give you nothing, as he gave Abraham nothing; on the other hand, you can say God will give you everything. Abraham has become the heir, and through his seed the inheritance has been realised. The blessings of Abraham are for those who obey the law of the Spirit, which is the law of the cross. Well, this is the beginning. I have not hurried, because we are not trying to finish a particular set message, but to allow the Lord to speak.

The cross had many applications to Abraham. Leaving Ur was only the beginning. Abraham thought it was quite enough. He did not want any more; nor do we. But it will never end until we reach the glory, because it is a law of the spiritual life; it must be. And so they came into the land, and, no doubt, in many lesser ways Abraham was all the time learning this lesson and proving the Lord.

The cross in the matter of Isaac

But then the narrative focuses on to the more concentrated expression of the principle, in the matter of the son that God promised to him, and Abraham had to learn that the cross not only slew in him any personal ability to serve the Lord, but also any natural capacity for producing what God wanted and what God has promised. There was this matter of the son arising, of Isaac. That was the will of God for Abraham. It was the promise; and yet we are told that for ten long years Abraham waited in vain. God did nothing. Well, that was the cross all the time. God did nothing because he was seeking to impress on Abraham that when He did it, it was going to be all of Him, and if Abraham was under any misapprehension as to his ability to do the Lord's work, he had to realise this, learn his lesson and be disillusioned. I wonder whether, perhaps, the time had almost come, for ten years is the time of testing and as is so often the case, God's great thing was just round the corner. Anyhow, Abraham could not wait, and neither can any of us, for if there is one common mark of the natural man that seems to be found in us all, it is that the natural man cannot wait for God; he must do something.

To go back to that matter that I have spoken of — the disappointment that God did not raise up in many places a local expression of His will, as

we had hoped — I wonder whether, in quite a few instances, the reason has not been that some ‘Abraham’ has gone out in the will of God, that that might be realised, and then could not wait for God to do it. At any rate, that is what happened in Abraham’s case; he could not wait any longer. And then Sarah comes into the story, and she has a solution to offer, and Egypt is near at hand, providing a means for the realisation. And the result of that attempt to help God out of His difficulty provided God with one of the greatest difficulties that He has ever had in this world. And that is what we do when we try and help the Lord.

We must not imagine that the birth of Ishmael was some moral lapse upon Abraham’s part. It was nothing of the kind. It was nothing that, humanly, he had any reason to be ashamed of, even as before God, in the circumstances in which he lived. There was no shame attached to the birth of Ishmael, except this greatest shame to a man who would be spiritual, that he has got in the Lord’s way, that he has not waited for the Lord to do the thing absolutely and altogether. He listened to Sarah which he should not have done. Now, that is not saying anything wrong about Sarah. She is one of the most honoured women in the Bible. She is the only woman whose age is mentioned when she died; that, at least, is a peculiar position! There is nothing to be said against Sarah, nor against a man listening to his wife; there is a lot to be said for it. But the spiritual meaning is that Abraham listened and responded to that which was expressing natural ideas and emotions, and was not the voice of God. Because his was the responsibility, as Adam’s had been in his day, he should have refused to accept that advice. It was very natural; it was done with the best of intentions. Sarah really wanted to be helpful to Abraham; and there is always somebody who really wants to be helpful to you. They come along and say, ‘You have waited too long. Look! I will show you what to do, and you can reach the Lord’s end.’ This business of waiting for the Lord is very unpractical. ‘Be a practical Christian and help the Lord a little’ — that is the advice that Abraham got, and he fell into the trap. So do we so often, alas! And then Ishmael came. God would never accept Ishmael. It is seen as time goes on that Abraham is fond of Ishmael. You know there are some things which we do in the flesh and we are glad when the Lord says, ‘Turn this out.’ We want to get rid of it. We realise that Ishmael was a blunder, and if the Lord will despatch it and its mother as far as possible we shall be thankful. There are expressions of the natural life that are like that, but this is something far more spiritual and deep than that; Abraham loved Ishmael. It was a grievous thing to Abraham when the suggestion

arose that Ishmael should leave the home. And when, on the very verge of the appearance of Isaac, Abraham was communing with the Lord and had had the promise renewed to him once again, after thirteen years, you find him saying, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" — 'I wish you would accept Ishmael!' The Lord never would. That was a great sorrow to Abraham, and it may be a sorrow to us who have tried to help the Lord. It is not a blunder in our opinion, but something very dear that has been produced. We say, 'Lord, if only you would accept this; if only this could have your blessing. But the Lord says 'No.' 'But Lord, it was done after prayer; it was done with the best of intentions; it was done because the promise had to be realised.' But the Lord still says 'No.' 'Well, Lord, there is nothing else possible now. It was impossible thirteen years ago; it is far more impossible now.' The Lord says, 'Never mind what you think about possible or impossible. Will you let go of your doubts and questions and abandon all your efforts and trust Me?'

The word is recorded and written again and again by the apostle Paul, (and there seems to come a sense of awe over him as he writes); it is one of the most wonderful things in history: "Abraham believed God." His own body was as good as dead. The whole situation spoke of death; but God said 'No', and He said, 'I want you to take action, to do something which will express, once and for all, that this whole Ishmael principle is repudiated by you.' And the Lord brought in the institution, the ordinance, of circumcision, and it was at the time when Abraham believed God. You cannot believe God and have something of the flesh in which you are still trusting. That circumcision meant the cutting off of a whole order of things, a whole life which can never fulfil the law of God; and so he did it. So strangely earthbound is man that the very thing which was to be the mark of the repudiation of all earthliness became, in the hands of the Judaizers, the hallmark of religion. That is how deceitful the human heart is. It turns the very things that were meant to lift us up to heaven and it makes them bind us down to earth. Baptism can do the same thing, in our day, as circumcision did in Abraham's day.

The whole point of miracles and manifestations of the power of the Lord in the early church. The whole point of them was to make people know that heaven was come upon them, and the very meaning of them was to lift them out of earth. The whole point of them in our day seems to be to bend man back to earth, to keep the glory of the Lord away, instead of lifting man up to glory. It is the tragedy of the human heart that will turn anything, the holiest or the best thing, from heaven to earth, if it can.

Well, Isaac was born, and in Isaac all the promises of God found realisation. It is not the end of the story, but it is the end of our consideration of it. Once more, do not go away thinking about Abraham. Let the Lord apply the lesson to you and to me. How ready we are to try and help the Lord to do His work, to provide for the Lord that which will meet His end. Indeed, the law of the Spirit is all the time, through all our lives, bringing us back to the place where we know we can do nothing, and where we accept the fact that we can do nothing. Instead of rebelling, resisting, striving, we must take up the position that Abraham took up, that God is the God of resurrection and that if the cross, through Jesus Christ, smites me and places me in an impossible position, in which all His promises and all the vision I have received seem most impossible, well, it is up to Him to get me out of that difficulty. But it is up to me to yield to Him. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, not the law of the spirit of death, thank God! It takes us from death, because death is the way through to life.

May the Lord lead us there, for His Name's sake.

CHAPTER 4

THE EXALTED LORD

Reading: Joshua 5:13-15; 6:12-20; Rom. 8:22

To some the Holy Spirit in the life may seem a difficult and almost unacceptable experience. To others it may seem important and desirable, and yet marked by a good deal of strain and perplexity and effort. To the apostle Paul it meant Romans 8, and if you know your Bible at all there is no need to say any more. Triumph all the way, blessing and glory. No more groaning, complaining, striving or worrying. In all these things, whatever these things may be, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. That is the life in the Spirit, and together we have been seeing that once the Spirit of God is within us the full realisation of the glory of God depends upon Him having His own way. That is not a capricious way, nor is it a way that need be unduly mysterious to us, for it is a way of

a law, and we have been looking at the threefold law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus which provides us with the key to His having His full way, and bringing glory into us and bringing us to glory. The first of those laws, we said, was resurrection, the cross working in us the death of Christ that the life also of Jesus might be enjoyed by us and manifested in us. The second is, to use the language of Ezekiel, the throne. It is the exaltation of Christ. The Holy Spirit always leads us towards the great fact that Jesus Christ has ascended to the highest heaven and is enthroned. Of course, these laws interrelate, the resurrection and the ascension join together. The apostles only heard about the Holy Spirit before the resurrection. After that the Lord could make it seem more than a matter of promise, and He breathed upon them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit." They were coming a lot nearer, so near that He could describe that symbolic act in terms of history by telling them "not many days hence"; not yet, but the resurrection had assured it. Then He ascended up on high to the throne which provided the occasion for that great fulness which we think of at Pentecost or Whitsun, the great day when the Holy Spirit came in fulness to the church.

Life is always dependent upon those two facts. When Nicodemus came to the Lord Jesus the Lord told him that he needed to be born again. Nicodemus had not come to discuss his own personal soul's need with Christ. He was not thinking of that; He had come to discuss a far bigger matter, the matter of the divine purpose in the kingdom, but the Lord Jesus unerringly put His finger on the secret. This is the secret of the divine purpose for you, whether your name is Nicodemus, or whatever it is. This is the way to that kingdom of full glory of which the word speaks in promise: "Ye must be born again." It is by the Holy Spirit being in you, born of the Spirit. Now if Nicodemus had taken that word wrongly he would immediately have begun to be exercised inwardly about himself, by trying to be born again. But the Lord Jesus did not finish the discourse with that, although we often do. He went on speaking in language which Nicodemus was well able to understand, Old Testament pictorial language. In the wilderness there were men who, in the purpose of God, were chosen for glory. So far as the divine calling was concerned they were meant to be in the kingdom, and yet there they were, lying around and groaning in death and agonies. Sin had done its work; the curse was in them. What hope of the glory of God? What hope of survival even, let alone of the realisation of the divine purpose?' Well might they also cry, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of

death?” Well might they cry also, “I thank my God through Jesus Christ”, for the cry went forth, ‘Look not at yourself, not at one another, not at man at all, look on the serpent lifted up’, and as soon as they looked they lived. What is the relationship between the objective vision of a serpent lifted up and the inward experience of life? Well, it is a picture of how the Spirit comes into our hearts and how we are born again. You are never born again by trying to be born again. The law of the Spirit, from the first moment and right through to the end, operates in the measure in which I look, not at myself to see if I am alive, or to see if I am growing spiritually or if I am a little better than I was last week. That will soon produce the law of sin and death. I in myself am back in Romans 7 as soon as I come down on to that ground. No, not what I am at all, but the lifted-up Son of God. In the first place lifted up to die, for the serpent spoke of the crucified Christ, but we know it is the crucified one who is on the throne. The Lamb is in the midst of the throne.

And so what I was saying in the previous chapter merges into this message. It is according to the crucified, risen, and now exalted Lord and in relation to Him that the Spirit works. And so while it is necessary to talk about ourselves in order to allow the Lord to search us, the Holy Spirit is free to do His work and will do it in the measure in which we do not pay undue attention to ourselves, but cooperate with Him by looking away unto Jesus. Look through the book of the Acts to find the secret of that great day. You do not find that Peter and the others said, ‘Men and brethren, this is the result of ten days of prayer. We have been praying — that is why this has happened.’ They did not say, ‘Men and brethren, we have studied the word of God, and we have realised and understood all the theories and doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and that is why this has happened.’ No, they had a simpler explanation than that: Jesus Christ is on the throne — that is why this has happened. God has highly exalted Him. This same Jesus whom ye crucified God has made Him both Lord and Christ. And so if we gather together to study the Lord’s Word from time to time, to seek to gain new light upon the truths concerning the Holy Spirit, we never will fall into this danger of imagining that when we know all about it we shall have it, for that is an error. When we know *Him* we shall have the Holy Spirit, and in the measure in which we increase in the knowledge of *Him*, so shall we find the Spirit continuing His blessed work in us.

Now we are going on to talk of matters that relate particularly to the Christian, but I would be lacking in my responsibility if I did not mention

at this point that you know whether you are thanking God through Jesus Christ, or whether you are saying, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?” You know; none of us know. You can have a smile on your face and be cheerful while you are inwardly groaning about your sin, but you know in your own heart whether you are thanking God for Jesus Christ or whether, like those Israelites in the wilderness, you have been bitten by the serpent. You too are constitutionally unable to do the will of God, for you are in yourself, as we all are, wanting it perhaps, but not doing it. Well, if this is your state I have only one word to say to you, but if you can receive it, it will be everything. The only word that a poor stammering, unprepared local preacher could say, when a young man called Spurgeon, went into a Methodist church one Sunday morning, was, “Look unto Me and be ye saved.” Look to the Lord crucified for your sins, raised for your justification, look to Him. You won’t have to bring about the new birth, it will happen, and you too may go on with us in this life which we veritably believe will find us in the very throne to which our Lord has gone before for us. That is the purpose of God in convicting you of your sin, in bringing you here and making you concerned about spiritual things; not only to relieve your conscience but that one day the exalted Christ in the throne of God, when He has His redeemed with Him, shall also have you and me.

The exaltation of Christ

Now we turn more specifically to this matter of the Spirit’s law concerning the exaltation of Christ, for these great matters are not merely the prelude to the experience or merely the condition of knowing the Spirit: they are the constant abiding laws of the Spirit. We begin at the cross, although the Spirit will see to it that we keep to the cross all the way to glory. We begin with the exalted Christ, recognising and bowing to His Lordship, but if we want to go on we shall find that the Holy Spirit will keep us checked up all the time on this matter. It is a law, and it is a law that we have to obey in order to provide Him with the cooperation that He needs. When we were considering the cross and resurrection and the need for faith, we had before us as a great exemplar, a living type, Abraham, a man of the Spirit. Now we have another man, most notably a man of the Spirit, and it is Joshua. I think perhaps Joshua may help us to understand how it is that the Holy Spirit will always keep us to this law, the law of the risen Christ. As the cross and resurrection demand faith,

illustrated by Abraham, so the exaltation and ascendant position in the throne of the Lord Jesus requires submission. That is our side; not of course without faith's submission, the obedience of faith.

Where do we find Joshua begins, so far as the word of God is concerned? You remember after Israel emerged from Egypt and began their life with God, one or two incidents took place, and then in a place called Rephidim they had their first battle. Amalek came out to fight them, and you will equally remember that the secret in that struggle was not the skill, the effort or the endurance of those who were in the plain, but the sustained hands of Moses, who in the mount held up his hands to God in faith. We have often been helped in intercession and prayer by realising that the conflict among people and things that are visible is really decided in the invisible realm of the unseen. The experience at Rephidim was not meant to teach Moses a lesson, though we can learn the lesson, it was meant to teach *Joshua* a lesson. Joshua now appears as the one placed at the head of the fighting host in the plain. When in the end the victory was won, the enemy defeated, the Lord said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in a book and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua" (Ex. 17:14). He is the man that needs to learn the lesson. He learns that his conflict, his struggle here in the realm of things seen is really decided in the realm of the unseen. Thank God, though Moses may get tired, we have an untiring Intercessor at the right hand of God. Write it in a book, the Lord says, let Joshua learn this lesson; it is the first lesson and it is fundamental. Joshua is the man of the Spirit. Joshua is the man who sets before us the life in the energies of the power of God. This is a law of the Spirit. The Spirit is working mightily in the man down here on earth because up there in the glory the authority of God is sustained by His chosen Representative. Actually, it did not depend upon Joshua's apprehension of the fact, but on the fact itself. In our case the fact does not change. The battle with him ebbed and flowed in the measure in which the hands were upheld or flagged.

With us there is no flagging in the glory, but the battle down here depends upon our faith's apprehension of that. We have a deeper lesson to learn than Joshua. Our lesson is this: not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord depends upon the exalted Christ. The more we see Him, keep Him well in view, the more we shall be like Joshua, conquering in the name of the Lord. The Lordship of Christ is a law of the Spirit. We have to keep that in view, not as a mere matter of doctrine, but as a practical exercise of faith. You may be grappling with a foe. Joshua, you may be struggling, striving and thinking that

it depends upon you, when really it does not depend upon you at all, but upon the Man in the mountain. We, too, may struggle and grapple because we forget that the Lord is there. We spiritually take our eyes off Him, and then for us it is as though the hands flagged; then we find we are getting the worst of it. There are many servants of the Lord who have had great experiences of the power of the Spirit who come up against situations which are too much for them, and they are getting the worst of it. They wonder why the Lord is not with them. Why is this too much for them? Why haven't they the power they used to have? Because they have their eyes on the conflict or on themselves or even on the Holy Spirit when they should have their eyes on the risen, exalted Christ. He is the secret.

Examples in the Old Testament

Well, we must look briefly at these Old Testament stories. There came another experience to Joshua which is of great importance. You know we have a wonderful sense of the Lordship of the Lord and the tremendous position and authority that that gives to us. We grasp something of the secret of the risen Christ in His power and authority, and then so often we are betrayed into an attitude of mind which makes us feel we have something in ourselves, as though we were somebody. One of the lessons that Joshua had to learn, which the Spirit will take good care that we learn, is that this ascendancy is all of grace. When God was providing such wonderful things for His people while Moses was in the mount — those very people brought out of Egypt and treated so graciously, the object of such love on the part of God — sinned grievously. They sinned against the light, they sinned against love (and there is no greater sin than that) and they knew they had sinned. Moses came down to them and challenged them about their sin and had to tell them that they could go on with their journey. God would lead them into the land, but it would have to be by the hand of an angel; He would not go with them; and conviction came to their hearts. They had sinned away the love of God. They had grieved away the very presence of the Lord, and they were in very great distress. The pillar of cloud had been with them, but now the Lord said no more. They had been led and guided, but the Lord said no more. The Lord said I will send an angel, but *I* am not going to be with you.

Moses interceded for them, as perhaps no man had ever interceded before, with something of the very spirit of Calvary in his prayer, and no doubt the almighty, gracious God, with His eyes already on Calvary,

undertook to forgive His people. They did not have a tabernacle in those days, but Moses used to put a tent outside the camp and go out there and meet with the Lord. The cloud would come down to the tent, and Moses would talk with the Lord. Then it says while they were all mourning and stricken in conscience because of their sin, Moses went up into the tent and all Israel came to watch. The people rose up and every man stood at his tent door watching Moses until he had gone into the tent. What were they looking for? They were looking to see if the cloud would come down, if, after all, God would have mercy upon them, miserable sinners that they were. They did not dare to hope that God would have mercy upon them again, and yet they hoped against hope. Is it possible that there is a depth of mercy that in spite of our sin, God may yet condescend to come? Moses slowly made his way through that great encampment to the tent, and it came to pass when Moses entered into the tent the pillar of cloud descended, and all the people saw the pillar of cloud stand at the door of the tent, and “all the people rose up and worshipped, every man at his tent door” (Ex. 33:9,10).

Probably there had never been worship in the camp of Israel like there was that morning: the worship of pardoned sinners. Now here is the significant part. It says in the next verse, Moses turned again into the camp, but his minister Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tent. All the people worshipped God for His great grace, but they soon forgot about it. However Joshua stayed in the place of grace; Joshua remained in it. Joshua had a continual awareness that this great commission, life and inheritance had almost been forfeited; that they did not deserve it, that there was no good thing in them, but that the God who might well have rejected them had in mercy forgiven them. And this is what made Joshua a man of the Spirit, and men of the Spirit are like that. They do not easily forget the grace of God; they abide in the tent. Joshua stayed in the place where the grace of God in its supreme manifestation had been found. The Lordship of Christ is never that hard, technical, doctrinal thing. You know, you have met it in people who are terribly strong about the authority of the name of the Lord. The Holy Spirit is strong, but when He speaks to our hearts about it, it is always to remind us what undeserving sinners we are. The grace of God is the supreme mark. The throne has a rainbow round it for us. We rejoice in the throne, but we know very well there would be no throne for us if there were no rainbow, and the Spirit will see to it that we are always reminded of that. If our apprehension of the exaltation of Christ is a spiritual one it will never puff

us up. We will never feel what wonderful people we are, how much we know and how much we can do. We shall always feel, as Joshua must have felt in that day, how unspeakable the grace of God is. 'Depth of mercy, can it be, mercy still reserved for me?' Yes, thank God, it can be, and the Holy Spirit will fill our hearts always with His own joy and peace, with the love of the Lord on that basis.

Then we come to the passage which we read together. Joshua is captain of the Lord's host and by now he has had forty years experience. We often think of Moses being prepared for forty long years in the desert for his great task before he met the Lord in the burning bush. Well, that is a true principle. Now Joshua is going to meet the same Lord, after having had forty years of experience. He is a man with a sense of responsibility, with a sense of divine commission, with a sense of a purpose and a ministry, which is very important, but not without its perils. Joshua could only think now in terms of people that were for him or against him. He did not mind if they were against him; even if they had a drawn sword in their hand, he was ready for them. And so he came to this one, "Art thou for us or for our adversaries?" And the answer he got was like a blow between the eyes. 'Is the Lord on my side? Is the Lord going to deliver by me? Here am I taking up the work of the Lord. Here am I with my ministry. Here am I giving myself wholeheartedly to do all His will. I have seen the vision of the inheritance, I am ready to go in and ready to lead others in. Is the Lord with me?' The Lord says, 'No, you are not the leader here, *I am.*' What a blow! Not that Joshua was in a wrong way conceited, but, like us all, he was in danger of losing sight of the ascended Lord. That is a peril of maturity as well as immaturity. The Holy Spirit is not content with the fact that forty years ago Joshua learned a lesson, although it lasted him a lifetime, and He is not content that so many years ago, or even months ago, you learned a lesson. You cannot live on the basis of that lesson. The Holy Spirit brings Joshua back again to that principle. No, Joshua, it is not whether the Lord is with you or not, but it is whether you realise that the Lord is going on, and you can go on with Him. You are not the Captain, He is the Captain. Well, Joshua was a man of the Spirit, so there was no argument, but he fell on the ground and worshipped.

Accepting correction from the Lord

That is all right; that is how I want it to be, but I wonder whether we are so ready to do that when the Lord meets with us. The Lord strikes us a

blow. We realise that unintentionally we have taken too much into our own hands. We are leading on the hosts of the Lord and taking it for granted that the Lord will be with us because we mean well for Him. The Lord stands across our path with a drawn sword in His hand. What is our response? Do we fall on the ground and worship and say, That is all right, that is how we want it? It is the law of spiritual growth. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. You remember how that happened to Peter. It had not been forty years, but quite a few years since his wonderful experience which had emerged from his vision of the exalted Christ at Pentecost. When the issue arose of his going to Caesarea to preach to the Gentiles, he too was smitten to the ground, and the Lord had to say to him, ‘Look here, Peter, I am Lord here, not you. You think you know how to run my church. You think you know how to interpret My word. You think you know all about it. I am Lord here, Peter.’ Peter found it more difficult than Joshua, but he capitulated. He was a man of the Spirit and so he obeyed. He went with an old message with new power to Caesarea. He is Lord of all, not because we saw it at Pentecost, but because it has happened to me, and it has happened to me today. That is when the power of spiritual testimony comes in, when it is up-to-date, when it is living.

May I revert to Romans 7? The apostle says, “I thank my God through Jesus Christ.” It sounds a very incomplete sentence and a very incomplete answer to the question, “Who shall deliver me?” He does not say, ‘I thank my God Jesus Christ delivered me years ago’ — although I think he could have done and it would have been the truth. He does not say, ‘I thank my God Jesus Christ will deliver me.’ The Spirit of God is the eternal Spirit, and His time is today, now, always. And so the apostle Paul says, ‘Whatever you can say of yesterday or tomorrow, I know right now, I thank my God through Jesus Christ. It is an up-to-date, present experience that the risen Lord is so mighty that He can deliver even me by the power of His Spirit working in me.’

“Take thy shoes from off thy feet.” That is exactly what the Lord said to Moses forty years before. Now He says it to Joshua. I do not know what it means except that it called for a positive act of humbling and committal. You see it is all very well for Moses at the bush to say it is the Lord; it is all very well for Joshua to fall on his face and say the Lord is Lord. That is what we do. We go to a meeting, and it is like the burning bush, and we say, ‘I see the Lord is Lord.’ Or it is like the Captain of the Lord’s host with a drawn sword stopping us on the way, and we say, ‘Yes, I see the Lord is Lord’, and we go out and we are just the same as we were

before. Now on each of these occasions the Lord said to Moses and to Joshua, ‘Well, if I am Lord, do something about it; take your shoes off.’ It may only be a symbolic act, but it was an act, and, the trouble with us is that we have aspirations without acts. We want a thing to be, but we do not act upon it. So if this means nothing else, it means that Joshua, recognising the supremacy of the authority of the Captain of the Lord’s host, did something about it and put himself in the way of true obedience.

We understand the challenge, and this is really only the beginning of the message, though for the moment it will have to be the end. The book of Joshua is a book of war, and yet it is a book of the fulness of the Holy Spirit. It is the book of the exalted, almighty Lord, and yet it is a book of conflict. Read the book of the Acts and you get the explanation of that. Yes, get a real vision of the exalted Lord and you find you are in a conflict. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus delivers me from all that inner conflict which is such a disgrace to the name of the Lord, and which mars the testimony of so many Christians. Don’t think of conflict in the realm of Romans 7, that question, ‘Do I love the Lord; am I His or am I not?’ That is not the conflict, that is a disgraceful experience of Romans 7 from which the apostle begged to be delivered once for all, and he found the secret of deliverance through Jesus Christ. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. So do not think you are in the conflict if that is where you are; you are in the mud. The Lord can lift you out. Believe that if you will look away to the risen Lord, that is the secret of victory for you, and it is also the secret of this other victory. Romans 8 is heaven. It is bliss, glory, but not heaven in an armchair; it is heaven in a battle, heaven in your soul, while everything is the opposite round about. “*In* all these things”, not when we get out of all these things. That will be a wonderful day when “in all these things we are more than conquerors.”

The Lordship of the Lord

That is the story of Joshua. Of course, the trouble came when among them there was something which was a contradiction to the Lordship of the Lord. The Lord said concerning Jericho that everything was to be for Him, wholly devoted to Him, but Achan wanted just a little bit for himself. That was a blatant contradiction of the Lordship of the Lord and brought defeat. That was a lie to the Holy Spirit. You remember in Acts that Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. It is always a lie to the Holy Spirit when we dispute the Lordship of the Lord, because He is

always insisting that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Everything is for Him, and as soon as we claim a little bit for ourselves we lie to the Holy Spirit and the victory is turned to defeat. Apart from that with Achan, and when that was purged away, it is one long story of triumph. Jericho was only the beginning of a great experience of what God can do. Now notice about Jericho that they did not have to go round looking for it. It stood right across their pathway. Spiritual conflict is not the exercise of those who have nothing better to do, so they go and look for something to make a spiritual matter for warring or working up a row with the devil. No, that is not spiritual conflict, but if you go on as they went on and face the purpose of God over Jordan, with Christ in view, in full authority, you will find that right across the path is the concentrated expression of Satan's resistance. Later on the Lord explained to Joshua why this was. Only one lot of people made peace with them. The rest never tried to. The Israelites did not have to look for the enemies; the enemies came looking for them, and the Lord meant it like that so that they should be defeated and Israel be victorious. The book is a book of triumph, not because they were clever, but because the Lord fought their battles. Jericho, if it is a concentrated expression of the devil's power, is also a concentrated expression of what God can do. They did nothing but go round and round asserting that the Lord is Lord. There was nothing to show for it, but He is Lord. Nothing seems to be happening, but He is Lord. The Lord in His time will overthrow it. Seven days they went round. One of those must have been a Sabbath, the Jews say the seventh day, for on that day they went round seven times, and the day which speaks of rest from man's labour — no fighting, no effort on their part — was the day on which God put forth His mighty power and overthrew the power of the enemy. Well, what is this Romans 8 business? What is this life like? That is what it is like. You have to go seven days, and you may feel rather a fool while you are doing it, and you may look a fool to other people, but when God's time comes even Jericho falls and you march straight in. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, but you must keep the law, and the law is Christ exalted. He is the leader; bow to Him and take your shoes from off your feet. It was where the battle of Jericho was actually won when Joshua capitulated to the Lord. And your battle will be won, and the church's battle will be won on this basis of the capitulation of men of the Spirit to the absolute Lordship of the Lord.

Conference messages by T. Austin-Sparks concluded

CHRIST, THE WILL OF GOD

C.J.B. Harrison

Reading: Acts 22:6-8,10-15; 26:16.

It may be that a sentence which was said first of all to Saul of Tarsus is the word that the Lord would say to our hearts at this time. In Acts 22:14 we read, "God has appointed you to know His will." So Paul is a man apprehended to know the will of God. What do we mean by the will of God? Unless the meaning of that very simple statement dawns upon us we shall miss the point of everything. Paul was not apprehended just to be saved, though he was saved. He was not just apprehended for service, though he certainly served. We are told here that the Lord, in taking hold of him, chose him as one who should know a very big thing. He should know the secret of the purpose of God, what it really is that everything is about. Many of us may be doing things that are the will of God quite incidentally. We think the will of God is about this and that and we try to know it. Yes, there is that aspect of it. Paul is not apprehended just to know the will of God for his life, that is, what to do next. Of course, he does need to know the things he is to do, but before Paul ever came into view, before any one of us was brought into existence, God had a great will. God had a central purpose and intention towards which everything is moving. There is some particular thing for which He brought this universe into existence. He brought it in for the will of God, for the realization of something that is nearest to His own heart. God did not do inconsequently all that He has done in this mighty creation. He did not do it just as something that could fill up time. He did all these immense things with a very great purpose in view. Paul was one of those who was taken aside and the veil was removed and God said to him: 'This is the meaning of it all; My purpose is here.' And unless, in some real measure, something of that purpose breaks upon us, we shall be dissatisfied people and shall miss the way of the Lord.

The all-embracing significance of Christ

The Lord wants to show us His will, to move us out of things that are less than the ultimate purpose of God, away from misconceptions and from lesser levels. “God has appointed you to know His will.” And the will of God is a shattering thing. It undoes all the lesser visions, conceptions and imaginations and we see that they are futile, and that the will of God is something quite different. We find here that the will of God, as the meaning of it broke increasingly upon the apostle, was all bound up with the person of the Son of God. “For this end I have appeared unto you ...”. You notice in Acts 26:16, the Lord says: “The things wherein I will appear unto you”; not just the things you shall see, but *the things wherein you shall see Me*. Christ Himself breaks in upon the apostle — the significance of Christ; and what was true of an individual became true for all on the day of Pentecost.

We need to get closer to this. What was the first significance of Pentecost? It was the dawning upon those to whom the Holy Spirit came of the significance of Christ. They discovered who Christ was and what He had done. They realised what was bound up with that Person, and it was that very realisation that brought the tremendous break at Pentecost. The believers there were a people whose eyes had been opened. I am sure that the first effect upon them was not merely one of wonder at the sensational things that were happening. The thing that filled them with amazement was how great Jesus was, how great the work that He had accomplished! He had entirely broken the power of the enemy and all that Satan had done in the human race. What a salvation! They realized that all that sin had done, the cross had undone. All the work of hell had been smashed and now heaven was opened. Was not that enough to thrill people? Pentecost was a mighty breaking in of the significance of Christ. We need to get away from occupation even with the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings Christ into view. The more the Holy Spirit is at work the more Christ will be brought in.

Christ the sole object of divine satisfaction

The Holy Spirit’s work is entirely Christ-conscious and not self-conscious. He is not talking about Himself; He is bringing the Lord Jesus into view. He is showing us the significance of Him. If we want to know what the will of God is, it is a Person. It is not many things; it is Christ.

“This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Wherever He sees something less, there is a lack of real satisfaction.

What a lot of other offerings we bring Him! What a lot of other things are brought up! For instance, all the things we are doing for the Lord. Heaven is scrutinising all that we are doing and seeing how much Christ is in it. How much does it magnify the Son of God? How much of the motive is really Christ, and not something else? How much is Christ enlarged and brought into full view? That is all that interests heaven.

So Paul discovers by that blinding light on the Damascus road that the Person of Christ is the centre of the divine will. And the Holy Spirit — for He is the executive of the purpose of God — is the One who brings in that which God wants. From beginning to end the Holy Spirit is set upon bringing the Son of God into full view.

This touches a vast realm. We are told in Romans 8:19-22 that the whole creation is groaning, yearning and waiting. What for? For the Son of God in the sons of God to come to fulness. The creation is not waiting for there to be more children of God. The creation’s end will never be reached by a multiplication of new births alone. No, you can have any number of new births, any number of babes in Christ, but that in and of itself will not bring final deliverance to the creation. There will be far more impact in a smaller number in whom Christ is fully formed. So the Holy Spirit is pressing all the time for the securing of the full measure of Christ. We will see that there are three stages of His working to that end.

Christ begotten in the believer

First of all there is the begetting of Christ within. Yes, the first work of the Holy Spirit is to beget Christ in the spirit of a man or woman. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Christ formed in the believer

When Christ is there by the new birth you are a child of God. The Holy Spirit has begun to move in the direction of purpose, but how many of the children of God just stop there! The New Testament is so clearly pressing this issue that in the saints the key to everything is not just that Christ is there, but how much of Christ is there? Paul comes to the Galatians and he says: “I am perplexed about you.” Although Christ is in

them, there is no evidence of Christ, there is no character of Christ, there is no impact of Christ. When Paul comes he does not meet Christ but a lot of Christian people. He says, ‘There is something wrong here. Where is the Lord?’ He finds them not very happy among themselves. They are still trying to please the Lord by their own efforts, as though Christ did not exist. So he comes into a tremendous travail and burden that the Christ who is in them shall come to full formation; that there shall be the character, the nature, the likeness of the living Lord reproduced in their lives. And the Holy Spirit’s work is to do that in us. He takes us in hand and brings us into the meaning of the cross of the Lord Jesus in order that we may be diminished and that Christ may be increased. A greater measure of Christ is the meaning of the Holy Spirit’s dealings with us in our lives. He is set upon the purpose of God, not first of all upon giving us a happy time and making us very useful. Those things are incidental. The real question is, how much of Christ is being made actual in our lives?

Sometimes the explanation of the tremendous delay in the fulfilment of our hopes, the tremendous amount of disappointment for those of us who really want to go on with God is just this: that the Lord in His love and mercy is trying to get us away from things which He is not set on, and to bring us to the real issue. He says, ‘My child, what I am trying to do is to get a character into you which will stand the fire. I am putting you into a situation where patience will have to be learned.’ Because patience is Christ — it is not a thing; nothing but the indwelling Lord Himself can be sufficient. And so we are broken and broken in circumstances. Why? Because God is desiring and working to bring into realisation His beloved Son, so that He can say, “I am well pleased.” As God looks into our experience and life, is He well pleased? I do not mean well pleased with our achievement, but well pleased with our attitude which says: ‘Lord, I want to learn Christ. I want more of Christ to be the outcome of what is going on here.’ I believe that when the story is told at the end, so much Christian service and much we thought important is going to drop right away and all that is going to be left is what we really are in Christ, what has happened inside. Many will say in that day: “Lord, Lord, did we not ... by Your name do many mighty works?” (Matt. 7:22). And the Lord will say: “I never knew you”; ‘You were not really set on what I wanted.’ And so in mercy He sometimes breaks right in and stops us from doing things which we thought we were useful to Him. And then what? We begin to find out what we are; not what we have done, but what we *are*. All in heaven, and primarily the Holy Spirit, is set on that one thing — what we are in Christ.

The cross is God's great 'NO' to man by nature. It is God saying 'NO' to every one of us. "Man shall not see Me and live" (Ex. 33:20). Christ will see God and live. Christ will come through to God's end, but nothing of man naturally will do so. And we shall come through at the end with just so much of Christ as has been formed in the fire. Nothing else will survive. It is very easy nearly to do the will of God and just to sidestep the issue and do something else. It is very easy not to quite go through the cross but to agree about the cross and, if you like, then go and preach it. But in the end the fire will test every man's work, and all that is not Christ will be proved to be wood, hay and stubble. Nothing is really abiding but the indwelling Lord brought to sonship. And so the Holy Spirit, once we are handed over to the purpose of God, begins to deal with us regarding the formation of Christ and that is the only thing which is worthwhile.

Christ in fulness in the Church

Then by the Holy Spirit there dawned upon Paul a mighty vision, and he saw not only Christ formed in individuals, but he saw Christ in fulness corporately. We can only touch upon it, but the revelation which came to the apostle was of the fulness of Christ embodied in His people; in other words, the purpose of God in Christ and the church. God has one tremendous purpose in our life and that is to form us into one whole throbbing, functioning life that is Christ, and not us at all. The church is not a lot of people, it is Christ. Everyone joined to Him is in the church; and in the measure in which Christ is flowing through the church, it is fulfilling its function. If we are simply expressing our own life, ideas and thoughts, the church is not operating, but all is working contrary to God's purpose.

"He is the head of the body, the church ... that in all things He might have the pre-eminence" (Col. 1:18). God "gave Him to be head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22). The will of God is bound up with our life together in Christ. An independence, a detachment from organic functioning, spiritual life together, is a contradiction of the purpose of God. Every one of us is a little world of iniquity, a little rebellious kingdom that doesn't want God's King. Come into the corporate life with the saints and learn the discipline of it! For example, one person says: 'I think the Lord wants me to do this.' But suppose that in the company there is a lack of response in that direction? Will the little rebellious kingdom nevertheless go off on its own and do that thing? What is the alternative but that the one concerned subjects himself and comes into relationship with the

House of God, to be fitted into the Body in his true function. Thus, and thus only, is Christ magnified.

To learn Christ in the House of God means to let go and submit, which is heartbreak, suffering and disappointment, and then there is wonderful healing. "I am the Lord who heals you." Then there is life, and we begin to discover that, after all, God is right and that we are in the Body *as it pleased Him*. We thought we knew our function in the Body, but the Lord shows that He never called us in that particular direction. Why, the greatest men ever have made mistakes like that. Paul said: "I verily thought ...". That light from heaven that broke in upon him showed him that, after all, the Lord Jesus is the key to everything. Paul later on wrote to the Philippians, "For to me to live is Christ." He had a life history behind him when he said in that same letter: "... that I may know Him ... one thing I do ...".

Christ the divine end for all things

The fulness of God for us is in a Person, the Lord Jesus, and everything that God is doing focuses in His Son. And of course everything that is in the purpose of God relates to that Son. We cannot go into details now, but we can say that the purpose of God is not even redemption as a thing in itself. Salvation is being rescued from a hopeless, ruined condition, and being brought onto the ground of God's purpose. But Israel did not come into that purpose. They were brought out of Egypt in order that they might come into the land where God was everything, but that generation never got there. They came out of Egypt and perished in the wilderness. They never came into the purpose of God. And it may well be asked how many of the people of God ever see the purpose of God or come into it? I do trust that all of us shall really see what God is after, and then like Paul we will respond: "Well Lord, I am after the same thing."

Our little minds fasten on an aspect of divine truth and we think that is everything, and we make a whole scheme of things and a whole line of life and ministry out of it. Take the divine truth of the Holy Spirit and His work and ministry. You can get whole movements about the Holy Spirit, concerned entirely with the evidences and movements of the Holy Spirit. That can never carry the divine seal in a full way. It may have a limited measure of blessing, but how much of the measure of Christ in fulness ever comes in? The truth concerning the Holy Spirit, whose intention is to glorify Christ, has so often been made into a matter of manifestations or

gifts or powers, but in the New Testament all the gifts and powers are quite incidental. They were for a sign unto them that did not believe at the beginning. The essential thing was the glory of Christ in expression through the church.

What can be more blessed than the great truth of our salvation, our being saved from sin and made children of God? Yes, but that is not the purpose of God, that is only the way to the purpose. You can settle down on the ground of evangelism where there is no growth. There is babyhood, but no measure of Christ.

Right up to the end the Lord is saying: "I have chosen you to know My will." Now let each one of us come to the Lord and say, 'Lord, I want to know Your will; I want the purpose of God in my salvation to be fulfilled. I want to know what Your intention is ultimately.' God is working not only in you and me, but He is working in relation to the whole of this universe. His one intention is to bring it to an end that is all Christ, "to sum up all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). And to that end He has given us His Holy Spirit to reveal Christ in our hearts and make Him ever more truly our very life. The church as the fulness of Christ is the first installment of a universe according to Christ.

A man apprehended to know the will of God — to know the purpose of God! Oh, may we see that in all that the Lord is saying to us the object of it all is that we may know Christ; that all this selfhood may be broken down; that all the merely ecstatic and outward may give place for the indwelling Lord to gain ground until we grow up together into Him, who is the Head, even Christ.

To be continued