

The Law of the Spirit of Life

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"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2).

I think it is fairly generally recognized that the seventh chapter of Romans, or that section of the letter which is marked off as the seventh chapter, is a parenthesis. It is something just put in as a kind of aside to deal with a peculiar situation. The straightforward narrative passes immediately from the last clause in chapter 6 to the first clause in chapter 8. The last clause in chapter 6 is *"the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"*. Then chapter 8:1. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus ... for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ ..."* — you see the continuity of thought and principle.

Now this other preliminary word. When we come to chapter 8 and what is set before us there, chapter 6 is taken for granted, that is, what is in chapter 8 has no meaning or value for anyone who does not know chapter 6. Chapter 6 sees us as by nature crucified with Christ, buried with Christ, sees the natural man put away. That has to be the position to make all that is in chapter 8 possible. So we may assume that as we go forward in this meditation, and yet it is very necessary to keep it in our minds all the time otherwise we shall be in confusion, that is we shall not know why it is that this does not work out as we expect it to. Well, the explanation of any questions and contradictions about Romans 8 will more than likely be found in chapter 6.

Having said that, there is one further preliminary word. Chapter 8 represents an emergence. The man who has been in the position up to chapter 6, and because of that position taken into the death of Christ and the burial of Christ, now in chapter 8 emerges on new ground. He emerges, as you will see in glancing at the chapter, from a condemnation because of sin to righteousness. He emerges from bondage to the law to freedom; he emerges from death into life, he emerges from ignorance into knowledge. I am keeping close to the text if you care to follow, for these things are just the content of chapter 8. He emerges from the flesh to the Spirit; he emerges from self to Christ, and there are various other things there out of which he emerges, into which he comes through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Now, all this is set to the account of this remarkable phrase, *"the law of the Spirit of life"*. Here you have a mighty and an all-inclusive power contained and set forth in a brief clause. The law of the Spirit of life. Three wonderful words — law, Spirit, life. We will just spend a little time with those three words.

Law

A law is a fixed principle. It means that, given certain conditions, a certain result will inevitably follow; given certain conditions, something is bound to happen. That is the meaning of law. It is a fixed principle. There are laws in every realm, and to understand the laws of any realm means to know exactly what will happen or take place if certain things are allowed, if certain things have their way. Our whole physical life is governed by laws, and we know quite well that these laws have inevitable results. You know quite well if you stop breathing, you will die. That is a law, a fixed law, and you cannot get out of it. No one can get over that, you can look at the laws of your own physical life, your health, and so on, and know perfectly well that certain conditions are the inevitable result of certain other things. Law governs it. So in nature everywhere; so in God's universe throughout. All is governed by law, and you are never able to sidestep law or get away from it. You cannot outwit law; law holds. The explanation of everything is that there is a law behind it.

Well now, here is law — the law of the Spirit of life. Many of the aspects of the working of law are seen here in this very part of the Word. Take for instance this, the great significance of “if”. Oh, what a big force “if” has in the New Testament! What a tremendous amount hangs upon that little peg, “if”! And you get a good deal in chapter 8 of the letter to the Romans. If you are in Christ, then there is no condemnation — that is the law. The law of being in Christ is that there is no condemnation. If you are in condemnation, then it raises the whole question as to whether you are in Christ. If you are in Christ, then the very law that governs being in Christ means that there is no condemnation.

If the Spirit is in you, then you are a son. The law of sonship is the indwelling Spirit of God’s Son. The two things go together. If — then. It is governed by a law. Sonship is governed by the indwelling Holy Spirit. If you are a son, then you are led by the Spirit. It is a law of sonship. *“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”*. The law governs.

You work on. If you are in Christ, there is no condemnation. If the Spirit is in you, you are a son. If the Spirit is in you and you are a son, then you are led by the Spirit. If again *“the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you”*. If the Spirit is in you, then the mortal body is quickened by the Spirit — resurrection life.

You see the working of a law — it is a law, something established. Of course I know that there is this extra thing always to be borne in mind, that faith is the active element in making these things good. Faith is the clutch in this whole system. If you are a motorist, you know what an important thing a clutch is in a car. You may have the most perfect Rolls-Royce engine without a flaw, capable of generating an immense amount of energy and you may have the most beautiful body, and you may get your engine going and your car all ready for the journey, but if you do not bring your power or energy into active relation to your body then it is all in vain as far as getting anywhere is concerned. You have got to let in your clutch by which you unite your power with your vehicle, and faith is the clutch. There is the power and all the virtue and energy of the Holy Spirit. Here are we as represented by the body. Faith is to bring these two things together always. If we leave the clutch out, the power is there right enough and we are here right enough, but the transmission has not been brought to operate in our need. That is enough for the moment on faith.

First of all then, we recognize that there is a law established, a fixed principle, that, given certain things, certain other things will inevitably follow.

Now we go for a moment to the next word.

The Spirit

“The law of the Spirit”. The law is not an abstract force. It is the Spirit’s law, and the meaning and value of that is that it is in the hands of the Holy Spirit. It is inseparable from a divine Person. We do not seek a law. We note a law, but we seek the divine Person, we seek the Spirit, we seek to yield ourselves to the Spirit and to trust the divine Person. It is the Spirit’s law. That means that the Holy Spirit Himself, with all divine intelligence, all divine understanding, all divine faithfulness and jealousy, holds that law, and energizes it, supports it and causes it to operate wherever the necessary conditions obtain. It is not just a loose law, as it were. It is a divinely used and applied law.

So that the fact is this, that in violating a divine law, we are not just responsible for the violation of an abstract principle, but we find ourselves confronted with God, for every principle is so related to God that the two things are one. Ananias and Sapphira in the

first days of the church thought they could just get round the operation of something that was happening, could circumvent it, could override it, could set it aside. What they discovered was that it was the Holy Ghost with whom they had to do, but the Holy Ghost was holding to a principle, a law, and that principle had to be observed in the light of none else than very God Himself.

This is very important in all matters of spiritual life, that we are not just dealing with abstract principles. I have heard people say sometimes, 'Oh, it is so much principles, principles, principles'. It is all talk about principles! If we take that attitude towards things that are said — 'it is principles' as though it is mere technique — we shall be in grave danger, for the law is in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and to violate a law is to do despite to the Spirit of grace, the Spirit of God, and it is with Him that we have to do. "The law of the Spirit" or the Spirit's law.

Now a word on the third part.

Life

"*The law of the Spirit of life*". That might be made simpler for us if we put it in this way, — the Spirit's law of life. The law — what is it? What is this fixed principle that governs, this which is manifested, expresses itself, shows itself, demonstrates itself when certain conditions are granted and obtain? It is life. The Spirit is the Spirit of life. The law is a law of life in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Now that is the framework. Let us summarize that.

In Christ the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is supreme and absolute. *Everything* depends upon our recognition of and yieldedness to that fact, our recognition that the Holy Spirit is supreme and absolute in Christ and our yieldedness to that. That is where Romans 6 is essential to Romans 8 because it sees all that is of ourselves put aside and it assumes that there is a position where it is not longer I but Christ and there is an utter yieldedness to the supremacy of the Holy Spirit by a recognition of that supremacy. Now *everything* depends upon that. To go over the ground of the "everything" would take a long time.

Take the matter of spiritual growth. When I speak of spiritual growth, I mean increase of spiritual capacity. By nature we have our own measure of capacity, and it is more or less fixed. By nature we never increase capacity beyond a certain point. The matter of spiritual growth or the increase of spiritual capacity is governed by the law of the Spirit of life. Here is a life principle which, if recognized, will produce capacity according to grace and not according to nature. It makes possible an increase which is altogether beyond the possibilities of nature. It is not necessary for us to say about any person that they will never grow, they will never be very much, they will always be very small. To say that is to set aside this law, is to ignore this great fact. The Holy Spirit can produce capacity in any child of God beyond any human possibility. How will He do it? By what principle or law? The law of the Spirit of life. Life determines the measure of growth and capacity, not our natural powers of understanding, judging, appraising, analysing — nothing of that, but the measure of life in us, and that means in its outworking, the measure in which we recognize and yield to the supremacy and absoluteness of the Holy Spirit.

What is true of the individual is true of the local church. Its ability and its growing ability to receive, to understand, and to do, to function, all depends upon its subjection to the Holy Spirit, upon its absolute yieldedness to the Spirit, upon its attitude towards the fact that the Holy Spirit is supreme and absolute, and then the Spirit works by life. That is in the matter of growth.

In the matter of conformity to God's mind, God's thought, God's thought for His church, local and universal, how are we going to be conformed to the thought of God? It will never be by our studying of divine thoughts and getting some kind of presentation of

truth to which we are to conform. It can never be by our response to something that is set before us as from the outside. That may be a help, but that does not get us anywhere, and how sadly true it is that it is possible to have the most comprehensive, far-reaching, inclusive presentation of divine truth, have all that can be said about the church which is His body presented to us, all that can be said about the cross presented to us, and yet for us to remain so altogether other, almost stagnant, making no progress. What is needed? We never come to conformity to divine thoughts that way. That is a ministry to lead to something else. Ministries are never an end in themselves. The ministry of the Word is never an end in itself. The presentation of the truth is never an end in itself, and perhaps our great weakness is that we allow it to be the end.

I remember I was preaching in Pennsylvania once, and I was just closing the message. A man bounced hurriedly up the steps of the church to come into the service. He said to the man keeping the door, 'Is the sermon finished?' The man at the door said, 'No, the speaker is finished. The sermon is just beginning!' That's it! We must always remember that. When the speaker finishes, then we begin. No presentation of truth is an end in itself. It is only a help. Our conformity to divine thought is along this line, the dominance of the Holy Spirit, the fulness of the Spirit, the recognition, acceptance of, and yieldedness to, the Holy Spirit, and then the Holy Spirit operates by the law of life. That means that from within we are conformed, we are changed as from the inward side, an inwardness of things. There is a moving, there is a coming to a recognition of what is wrong and what is right, what must not be and what must be, what adjustments have to be made — oh, that comes up from within, and, unless it is so, all our adjustments will only be making a beautiful piece of machinery without any power, without any light. It can be crystal clear, but as cold as winter. We do not want that; that is useless to God in the long run.

I could go on touching upon many things. There is spiritual growth, increase of capacity. There is the matter of conformity to God's pattern and every other matter is bound up with this — the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. That begins to operate when the position is reached of resurrection union with the Lord Jesus, which carries with it that there has been a death union with the Lord Jesus. Any one or any people who have not really been baptized into His death as to themselves, their own mind, their own judgment, reason, desires, affections, will, choices, ways and preferences, any who have not really been baptized into His death coming to handle things of God, only handle them in death and bring death. There is no life, no power, no unction there. But having been baptized into His death and come forth in resurrection union with the Lord, there the Spirit of life institutes His law, there He puts His law, and it operates.

So with the measure of growth, the measure of conformity and every other matter in the spiritual life, all depends upon this, whether through death union with Christ on the one hand, and life union on the other hand, the Holy Spirit is having full and unhindered place and sway and government. All depends upon the fulness of the Spirit.

I know that these are familiar truths, but oh, how important! Otherwise it is hard work, it is hard grind, it is struggle and effort and heartbreak, but when the Spirit of life is in operation, you have not the mental strain and the nervous strain, all the care and anxiety. Things move, things go on and, when we have said all we can say about divine order and purpose, we are hopeless and helpless until the Spirit moves and the Spirit cannot move until He has got Romans 6 settled on the one hand and Romans 8 on the other hand. Everything depends upon the Holy Spirit and our yieldedness to Him.

So the Holy Spirit works by this inward law, not by the imposing something on us, not by coercion, driving, forcing, not by command, but by life. The Spirit works by life. We can never make things happen — they must happen. We can never drive anyone into anything. They must become alive in that realm. They must live there. The Holy Spirit

then works by a law of life, and that law spontaneously operates when the Holy Spirit has His required conditions.

So the law by which everything is first of all known — and there is no knowing apart from the operation of this law — and then understood and then shaped and finally reached, is the law of life. We only know by life. There is no true knowledge except by life, and then it is living knowledge. We know the difference between true, living knowledge and that knowledge which is cold and dead and which is no real knowledge.

Understanding must be a living thing. Oh the difference between the living thing and an imaginary understanding! Just to illustrate. For about three years I had been talking about "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*". I had been labouring that and hammering it out, what that means — Christ is in you. For three years that was the note. One day a brother came to me with his face wreathed in smiles, beaming, and he said, 'Brother, I have discovered a secret. I have discovered that Christ is in me.' The next time he had opportunity to give a message, he gave a message on "*Christ in you*". He gave the people the message as though they had never heard anything about it! He had got it. If you had read that word to him from the New Testament before — "*Know you not that Christ is in you?*" — he would have said, 'I know that, it is in the Word. I believe that.' That is one kind of knowledge, but here was the other thing. The law of the Spirit of life. And is not that what we need? To turn all the other kind of knowledge into living knowledge where we are in the flow of it, in the flood of it, and then what adjustments are necessary will take place, they will come about, all that is lacking, that needs to be, will be there.

Then my appeal to you is that we should make a fresh quest for the full dominion of the Holy Spirit, the fulness of the Spirit who works by this marvellous law of life to make everything good that is for us in Christ.