

Adam and the Law of Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the law of life as embodied in Christ, contrasting it with Adam's failure and the implications of temptation and independence from God.

Scripture: Genesis 3:1

Topics: "Life in Christ", "Spiritual Education"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of life as the central issue between God and humanity, illustrating that true life is governed by the 'law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.' He contrasts Adam's failure to embody this law with Christ's perfect representation of it, highlighting that while Adam chose independence leading to death, Christ exemplified dependence on God, thus offering the way of life. Sparks explains that understanding life requires a deep knowledge of Christ, who is the embodiment of this law, and that spiritual education in this truth is a lifelong journey. He urges believers to actively choose life and remain in a state of continuous subjection to God, as this is the pathway to true fulfillment and eternal life.

Transcript

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

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

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

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

The Expression of Life in Christ Sevenfold

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

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

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

The Intention of God in Adam

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

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

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

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

Satan's Approach to Man

Firstly, there is the form of the tempter and the temptation. In Genesis 3 we see exactly where and why Eve and Adam fell. It is very simple on the face of it. Perhaps that is its chief strength and subtlety. The occasion was something apparently good. Satan's temptations and seductions are usually presented in a form which makes the object in view something to be desired for good. Always remember that. I doubt whether Satan has ever yet tempted or seduced an individual by letting that individual know the dire consequences of falling. He always pursues exactly the opposite course, and brings the temptation and the seduction in a form which would appeal to the human judgment as something to be desired for good. The trouble is always that man only sees the THING: Christ saw Satan; and when the temptation came as something suggested, presented as being desirable for good, Christ saw through it and behind it, and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Now, I hardly think it necessary to press that, and to say to you that if ever Satan is going to seek to mislead you, ensnare you, seduce you, carry you away from the way of life, he will invariably do it by bringing up a good proposition, a thing which to your own human judgment is a good thing. It is a very clear and significant implication that, whenever we want to have our own way, we always give a very good argument for it. That is to say, we always bring up something that is good to throw into the balances with it. I say that is significant. Never yet has a man or woman gone wrong without having a good reason for going wrong, that is, from the human standpoint. Always an argument follows, and that gives the whole thing away.

Now, we know that the temptation was first made to the faculty of acquisitiveness, the power to acquire. In this case, it was to acquire knowledge. Now, beloved, to know is not evil in itself, although, of course, it would have been better for man had he never known certain things, or had a certain kind of knowledge. But I do not think that this matter hangs primarily upon the kind of knowledge that was possessed. It started with a desire to know, the appeal was to that power to acquire, to have, to possess; and here it was to possess knowledge. But, while knowledge in itself is not evil, there were hidden elements here in

this case. What lay behind this instance was the motive to possess; that is, to possess so as to be no longer dependent upon, or subject to God. The design was to effect a change of position, to have another position. That is what lay behind this temptation. It was a direct blow at man's dependence upon God, man's subjection to God; or, to put it the other way, it was a direct blow at God's position.

The Impugning of God's Character

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

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

The Real Object in View

Well, here is this double insinuation, blinding to all the mercies and all the goodness of God. Then you see this further hidden thing. It was Satan's subtle, hidden way of putting God out of His place and getting into that place himself. It is very clear when you think about it. That is exactly what happened. God was deposed and Satan put in His place, and that is exactly what Satan was after. You see, he came in, as he usually does, with what was a question about God, and then, found an ear open, a listening ear - oh the peril, the disaster, of an ear inclined to Satan, a parleying with Satan! Christ Jesus never did it. Finding an

ear open to his question, he swiftly moved, and followed up that small advantage with a statement which was a lie, a positive lie: "Ye shall not surely die." He is trying to get down to the convictions now, to drive home the superficial advantage, to register something deeper down. "Ye shall not surely die." That, again, is not left, but is followed at once with something else, a truth in a wrong position. "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof... ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Perfectly true! Did not God say later on, "The man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." But that truth was in its wrong position, and the terrible, the dire consequences were not revealed. The fact of knowing is not the point, but the becoming possessed of knowledge by a way that is contrary to God, knowing in a way which puts you apart from God, which alienates from God and alienates God from us. It is knowing at the instigation of Satan with a subtle, hidden intention to make independent of God; and when once man has become independent of God, Satan has secured his end: He is in the place of God.

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

Christ the Exemplar of the Way of Life

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

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

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

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