

LIVING BY THE LAW OF LIFE
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Scripture Reading: Romans 8:1-2

¹There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

That the Christian Life is not lived by will-power is a lesson many believers are exceedingly slow to learn. Consciously or unconsciously they depend on their own strength of will in order to maintain the standard which they believe to be the Christian standard.

The man who is presented to us in Romans_7 was one who drew upon his will-power in order to live a triumphant life. His will was set to do the will of God. He was bent on doing good and shunning evil; but he was under a serious misapprehension. He thought that to shun evil and to do good was a matter of determination. He had not seen that doing evil is the natural outworking of the one law and doing good is the natural outworking of another law; therefore human effort to please God is futile.

Many Christians, like the man in Romans_7, are intent on pleasing God and, like him, are amazed that, despite their fixed desire to please Him, they constantly do things they know must grieve Him. They can say as he said: "Not what I would that do I practice; but what I hate, that I do." Oh, if only they could realize that will-power is not the power for Christian living!

Brothers and Sisters, perhaps some of you are unaware that you are trying to live the Christian life by drawing on your own resources. Let me ask you: When you meet a difficulty do you not pull yourself together in order to overcome it? Do you not keep a firm hold on yourself lest you act in any way that is unbecoming to a child of God? Are you not all the time exercising care lest you lower the Christian standard? Oh! do not misunderstand me; I am not advocating carelessness. There is need for strict discipline in the Christian life; but this constant effort to be a good Christian is too strenuous a business. It is like trying to make water flow uphill; and it just won't work. The trouble is, we are trying to DO certain things in order to BE a certain kind of person. We have reversed the order. A Christian should ACT as a Christian because he IS a Christian. The right kind of Life spontaneously produces the right kind of behavior.

Oh, how some of us exert ourselves to refrain from eating what we full well know is not good for us! How we have to exercise our wills lest we look at things we know our eyes ought not to see! How we have to restrain ourselves lest words escape us that we know should not be uttered! How tightly we have to control ourselves lest our feet tread forbidden paths! Do you not see where the trouble lies? We are trying all the time to counter the tendencies of our natural life. Little wonder that the strain is too much for us!

When we talk in our native tongue we simply open our lips and say what we want to say. It is when we speak in a language we are trying to acquire that we have to put forth deliberate effort and study our words carefully so that we convey to others that thing we want to say. When we live on the land we

live in our natural sphere, which imposes no strain upon us; but if we transfer to the water, we have to exert ourselves in order to maintain an existence.

If anyone has to depend on his will-power to live according to the Christian standard, there are two possible explanations of the trouble. Either that one has never been born again and does not therefore possess the divine life; or else, having been born again and having become possessor of the divine life, he does not believe in the new life he has come to possess. He does not realize the incalculable potentialities of that life and therefore does not draw upon it; consequently, weakness and breakdown are inevitable.

The disillusioned Christian pictured for us in Romans_7 became so distressed by repeated failure that the cry was wrung from his heart: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" The cry was answered, and he explains how deliverance came: "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). What had the Lord done for him? Nothing now. No new gift had been bestowed upon him; what had taken place was an opening of the eyes to see what had already been imparted. He had come to realize the power of the life he already possessed, and that realization had set him free. Note that he uses the past tense when he speaks of his emancipation. He is no longer hoping for release; his release is an accomplished fact; and it became his glad experience when it dawned upon him that with the impartation of divine life a divine law had been imparted that vastly transcended the law of sin and death. He saw that there was no need of effort on his part to produce Christian conduct, for he possessed the life of Christ, and life that in its very nature cannot but issue in Christian conduct.

Oh! that the truth might come home to us that, if we are in Christ we are in a sphere where a law operates which did not operate in the sphere of the natural life where we lived before we came to Christ. We need not now fear that if we loosen our grip upon ourselves we shall succumb to the law of gravity. We are apt to reason that even when we have exercised the utmost care, watching all our words and all our acts lest we dishonor the Lord, we have fallen again and again; then surely nothing short of dire defeat would result if we ceased to use our will-power. If only we realized the power of the law of the Spirit of life that is within us, we would relinquish our hold at once and trust the effective working of that law.

May God open our eyes to see that not a soul who relies on his own will-power to overcome sin and death will ever triumph, for sin and death are governed by a law too powerful for natural man to contend with. Praise God! He has not only given us a new life; He has with that new life given us a new law which meets the law of sin and death and invariably transcends it.

Before we came to Christ we were dead in trespasses and sins. Our trouble then was not only sin and death, but the law that operates in the realm of sin and death. When we sinned we did not need to make up our minds to sin; we did not need to exert the slightest effort, because there was a law operating in that sphere which caused us to sin. God has solved our problem by Committing His own life to us that is an eternally triumphant life. To triumph over sin and death is a law of His life; His life can do no other than triumph. There never has been and never will be an exception to that law. When you recognize the fact that a law operates in connection with the divine life, so that it always triumphs over the law of sin and death, you will then loosen your grip on your own life and fearlessly abandon yourself to that other life. The law of sin and death will continue to operate, but the transcendent law of life will continuously deliver you from its thralldom.

Brothers and Sisters, If you want to understand the law of life, just lift up your eyes and look at the birds of the air. How does it come about that they can soar above the earth? Because there is a law in bird-life that is superior to the law of gravity. If one of these little creatures should die, the law of gravity would cause it to fall to the ground because the law of life had ceased to operate. Do you see the tyranny of the law of death? When life ceased, the law of life ceased to operate, and the downward drag of gravity overmastered the bird. When it was soaring in the sky the law of gravity had not been abolished, but it was rendered ineffective while the law of life operated. A naturally healthy person is not conscious of the law of gravity, but anyone whose vitality is below par begins to come under its power, and the lower a person's vitality, the more the law of gravity asserts itself. When the last trace of life has gone, you try and lift that person and you will know the power of gravity; and if you cease to exert any effort to counter it, the corpse will instantly fall to the ground.

Some people have been Christians for a score of years, or even longer, yet they have never discovered that there is a law governing sin and death and there is a law governing life. They do not yet realize that God's way of deliverance for His children is not to strengthen their wills so that by sheer will-power they can counteract the sinful tendencies of their natural life; He delivers them through the spontaneous operation of a new law within them to transcend the working of their natural life.

Are any Christians of your acquaintance given to wordiness? Have you seen them try to be less verbose? By dint of concentrated attention they manage to be brief for a while; but when they are off guard, before they know where they are a stream of words escapes them. Perhaps you know some quick-tempered Christians too. Let them try to be patient and a tremendous strain is imposed upon them. Thank God! He does not put us under strain, demanding that we try to be what we are not; He gives us a life that is altogether other than our natural lives, and because that life in its nature is not given to excessive talk or quick temper, if we rely upon it, it will express itself spontaneously in restrained speech and restrained temper.

Let us note how the law of the Spirit of life works in our lives. In the first place, it causes us to know what God is requiring of us. No true child of God can plead ignorance of His will, because the law of the Spirit of life within us instructs us continually. As soon as a person is born of God he begins to know what God wants of him. If you are a true believer and you are over talkative, do you mean to say you are not conscious of something within trying to restrain you? O, Brothers and Sisters, it is not possible to have spiritual life and not possess the law of the Spirit of life. If you possess the life of God, then whenever you need to know the will of God, be assured that the knowledge of His will will be imparted to you -- and not in major matters merely, but in things big and little. If only we heed the inner registrations, we shall become spiritually sensitive and shall be instructed on countless matters relating to our everyday conduct. We shall know when we are intruding on other people's privacy; we shall know when our voices are too loud; we shall know when our laughter is out of place; we shall know when our motive in passing a certain remark is impure. Oh! the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus will instruct us in the minutest details of our conduct. A person may have very little education, but if that person receives the life of Christ and subjects himself to the law of the Spirit of life, his conduct will be an ever-increasing manifestation of Christ.

Why is it then that some Christians seem so ignorant where spiritual things are concerned? Not because they have not spiritual life, nor because they have not the law of the Spirit of life; but because they do not live in subjection to the law of the Spirit of life that is within them.

Not only does the operation of this new law within us deliver us from ignorance of the things of God; it operates within us enabling us to love those whom by nature we could not love. For instance, you find a certain brother most trying; you are always meeting difficulties in your relationship with him; the utmost you can do is to be polite to him. But you know perfectly well that that is not good enough, so you make strenuous efforts to conform to the Christian standard. You bring all your will-power to bear on the situation and you pray earnestly about it; yet your attempts at friendliness get you nowhere. The trouble is you are trying to show love to him when you do not actually love him, so you are doomed to failure. But if you simply let the law of the Spirit of Life within you operate, even prayer will be unnecessary, for it is the law of the divine life to love, and the divine life cannot violate the divine law. When you simply trust the working of that law you will find that your problem is solved -- and without any effort on your part, not even the effort of uttering a prayer. And the most wonderful thing about it will be that as you talk to him you will all unconsciously go out in love to him. When the law of the Spirit of life operates we act spontaneously, and often quite unconsciously.

It does not take any effort of will to tell lies, or to covet other people's possessions, or to lose one's temper. We just let go to sin, and the law of sin operates causing us to do what we ought not to do. Praise God! the law of the Spirit of life works no less surely when we let go to the divine life. Conduct that is marked by holiness, righteousness and love is never the result of human effort, but is the fruit of the Spirit and is the natural outworking of the law of the Spirit of life.

May I ask: Are you living a natural Christian life, or are you still straining to be a good Christian? If you are living under strain in your desire to conform to the Christian standard, you have not begun to understand the most elementary lesson of the Christian life. The first lesson you need to learn is that Christian conduct is utterly spontaneous; what is not spontaneous is not Christian conduct.

When we see that the law of the Spirit of life has liberated us from the law of sin and death, all our efforts to act as we think good Christians ought to act will give place to natural Christian living. We shall be delivered from all artificiality in the realm of spiritual things. Our talk will be relieved of the lavish use of spiritual phraseology; our prayers will become simple and free; our acquired mannerisms will give way to unaffected behavior.

May we be enabled by grace to live in simplicity before the Lord, believing that at the time of our new birth a new law of life was implanted which invariable transcends the law of sin and death, so that, as it was formerly natural for us to do the things that grieved the Lord, so it is now natural to us to please Him; natural to us to trust Him; natural to us to serve Him; natural to us to praise and glorify His Name. What a blessed emancipation we shall experience when the law of sin and death ceases to control us and the Law of the Spirit of life takes over!