

## The Law of the Spirit

by Ray C. Stedman

The book of Esther is the most up-to-date book in the Bible. The story comes to us out of the dusty, long distant past, but it finds a modern counterpart in each of our lives, for every Christian is a walking book of Esther. The same characters are involved, the same struggle goes on, the same defeat threatens, the same victory is possible. This is the story of your life. As such, it becomes of fascinating, perennial interest to us.

Perhaps the most pitiable figure that appears in the book is King Ahasuerus. He is so powerful in the kingdom that nothing is done without his consent, but he is *so* naive and ingenuous as far as knowing what is going on is concerned. He is *so* easily trapped by the cunning Haman into a decision which threatens to wreck his kingdom. As we have seen, this king is *you* – your will which rules over the capital city of your body and influences an empire of broad expanse touching all those who are close to you. The will, the emotions, and the mind make up the human soul, and this is the king in the book of Esther.

Haman, the evil prime minister, is *the flesh*, the Adamic principle of evil which, apart from the revelation of the Bible, we would never know exists. We find this Adamic principle continually deluding us, deceiving us (as Haman deceived the king), into self-effort, self-praise, self-pity, self-admiration, self-centeredness of every kind.

Deliverance can come to us only by the reintroduction into man of a new spirit portrayed by Esther the queen, who in turn is under the control of the Holy Spirit, the person of Mordecai in the book of Esther.

We have traced this story of deliverance to the point where the king's eyes have at last been opened. He now sees the true nature of Haman, and the deception which Haman sought to perpetrate upon him has now been unveiled. The king sees now that his enemy is the one he once thought to be his friend. He struggles with what is necessary, but eventually he resolves to treat Haman exactly as he deserves. He determines to hang Haman upon the very gallows that Haman had erected for Mordecai.

This recognition of the true nature of Haman is the first step toward freeing the kingdom from that which threatens its ultimate destruction, just as the first step in achieving victory in my life comes

- the moment I stop justifying and excusing my faults and failures,
  - and stop shutting my eyes to them,
  - and passing them off as something else,
- and resolve to hang them on the tree where God put them when Jesus Christ died.

That is the beginning of victory in my life, and yours.

In Chapter 8 of Esther we trace the steps that follow this decision. It opens with a transfer of power, and, therefore, **A New Authority**:

**On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai come before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her; and the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman. {Est 8:1-2 RSV}**

This is the magic moment, full of possibilities. In your life, this is the moment when, consciously and deliberately, you reject the authority of self-interest in your affairs and yield to the Holy Spirit the right to sovereign direction of your life and all your concerns. Since the task of the Holy Spirit is to make real in our lives the person of Jesus Christ, this could also be called the moment we first, consciously and with permanent intent, yield to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. You may have been a Christian for many years and yet have never seen clearly before that he has the right to total authority over every area of your life. Most Christians begin their Christian life intending to yield the major decisions to the control of God, or perhaps certain special areas which are obviously the concern of all, but there are private areas we reserve to ourselves, in which we will tolerate no intrusion on the part of God. But, strangely enough, those are the very areas he wants to intrude into and to talk to us about. The reality of this is translated into our experience the moment we become ready to reject the flesh, (self-interest) as the controlling factor of our life and become ready to give the Spirit of God his rightful position as the prime minister of our kingdom.

This is often called, in terms of human experience, *a second work of grace* or perhaps it is given the term *full sanctification*, or *the baptism of the Holy Spirit* or some other such term indicating a new beginning, a new advance in life. This has given rise to much confusion and misunderstanding in the apprehension of spiritual life truth. We look at this as though it were a new thing, a new and formerly unknown principle, as though the Spirit of

God were only now entering the life. But you can see that Mordecai has been in the book right from the beginning. It is only at this moment that he is brought before the king, the soul becomes conscious now of the need for submission to the authority of the Holy Spirit. But Mordecai has been there all along. He is not brought into the kingdom, he is brought before the king.

This is not, then, *a baptism of the Holy Spirit*. That takes place at the beginning the Christian life, is never repeated, and is continually the basis from which God works in our lives. But this is what the New Testament calls *the filling of the Spirit*, that is, the moment when the Spirit is granted his rightful authority in the life. It may need to be repeated many times over in many areas of the life that is not yet submitted. We fail to realize how much of our life is still unsubmitted to the control of God, and it is the grace of God to bring us into experiences that reveal to us these unsubmitted areas. When that occurs we may have another experience like this, so it is possible to have hundreds of fillings of the Spirit. Each time there is an advance in the total surrender of the life to the control of the Spirit of God.

Now, notice also that though Haman, the old prime minister, slimy, cunning, and cruel is now gone (i.e., the old man has been put to death on the tree), the "house of Haman" is still around: "On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews," {Est 8:1a RSV}. These are the sons of Haman and his family. The king gives the right to handle them to Esther who immediately turns it over to Mordecai as the only one with the wisdom and the knowledge to handle such a thorny matter properly.

You can recognize this in your own experience, if you are a Christian. You may come to the place where you know the truth about *the flesh*, and believe that Christ's death has judged it within you, nevertheless, you discover evidence of the flesh still affecting you. Though the old man indeed has been hanged upon the tree, yet he still has, through the house of Haman, the ability to influence you, distract you, tempt you, and even defeat you. The answer to this is not to try to repress these influences by your will power. The king here makes no effort to try to overcome the house of Haman. He says, "It is your problem, Esther." And she in turn

says to {Mordecai}, the Holy Spirit, “It is your problem. You handle this matter.” This is exactly what the New Testament tells us to do. We are to realize that our defense against the intrusion of the flesh into our thinking is not our will power, our determination not to permit these things, but it is rather a quiet resting back upon the power of the Holy Spirit to meet this whenever it appears and a dependence upon him to do so.

Not only is the house of Haman still around, but there is that pesky edict that Haman tricked the king into signing which still threatens the kingdom. What is to be about this? That is the problem before us in this second section, where we see **An Old Threat**:

**Then Esther spoke again to the king; she fell at his feet and besought him with tears to avert the evil design of Haman the Agagite and the plot which he had devised against the Jews. And the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, Esther rose and stood before the king. And she said, “If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king. For how can I endure to see the calamity that is coming to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?” Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he would lay hands on the Jews. And you may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king’s ring; for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king’s ring cannot be revoked.” {Est 8:3-8 RSV}**

Here is the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be altered, mentioned earlier in the book. In terms of your experience and mine, this is what in Romans is called *the law of sin and death*. It cannot be altered nor revoked. It is this that baffles the Apostle Paul as he describes his experience

in Romans 7, “I do not understand my own action for I do not do what I want and I do the very thing that I hate. I can will what is right but I cannot do it.” {cf, Rom 7:18-20}.

Have you experienced this?

Have you come to the place in your Christian growth where you have known this baffling, mocking defeat even after you thought you had learned the cause of your problem?

- You have learned the evil of the flesh.
- You no longer try to protect it in your life.
- You know and you gladly admit that temper, impatience, resentment, self-righteousness, and pride are from the flesh.
- You know they are your enemy and not your friend, and you have stopped defending them and justifying them.

You know now they are dear old Haman, a traitor, an enemy. Now you really want to do the right thing.

- You hang the flesh, from which they come, on the cross.
- You recognize it for what it is and reject it.
- You expect now to be free from its effects and to do the right thing, but you find you can’t.
- The harder you try, the oftener you fail.

You consecrate yourself, commit yourself anew. Perhaps there is a service at the church when you go forward, or raise your hand, or bow your head as you resolve anew to do better. You know what the problem is, you want to do right, but still nothing seems to go right. There is nothing wrong with your will, but you are still helpless.

This is the problem of Romans 7. When you have experienced it, you have found what Esther describes here and what the Apostle Paul describes: “I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members,” {Rom 7:23 RSV}. Here is the law of the Medes and Persians which altereth not. “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” {Rom 7:24 RSV}. That is the cry of Esther as she comes before the king the second time. “Oh, wretched woman that I am, who will deliver me and my

people from this law of sin and death that has once been uttered in the king's name and cannot be revoked?"

The king is helpless! He can only reply to her, "I can do nothing. The matter is in your hands and Mordecai's. What has been written by the king's hand and sealed by the king's seal cannot be revoked." In Galatians we read, "He that sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption," {cf, Gal 6:8}. This is an inevitable and irrevocable law. There is no way to escape the results of decisions made under the rule of self. They bear unavoidable consequences. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth he shall also reap. If you sow to the flesh, you shall of the flesh reap corruption," {cf, Gal 6:7}. The law of the Medes and the Persians which altereth not, {Dan 6:8, 6:12 KJV}. We all know the tragic harvest of it in terms of habits that cannot be broken and circumstances that cannot be avoided.

What can be done? The answer follows in this next section, **A New Law**:

**The king's secretaries were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and an edict was written according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews to the satraps and the governors and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language. The writing was in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's ring, and letters were sent by mounted couriers riding on swift horses that were used in the king's service, bred from the royal stud. By these the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to slay, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, with their children and women, and to plunder their goods, upon one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. A copy of what was written was to be issued as a decree in every province, and by proc-**

**lamation to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to avenge themselves upon their enemies. So the couriers, mounted on their swift horses that were used in the king's service, rode out in haste, urged by the king's command; and the decree was issued in Susa the capital. {Est 8:9-14 RSV}**

What is Mordecai's answer to this problem, this threat that hangs like the sword of Damocles over the kingdom? He cannot cancel out the old law. This is impossible. But there is one thing he can do. He can issue a new law which, with the king's consent, would affect the farthest bounds of the kingdom and would turn the threatened defeat into victory. And this is exactly what our Mordecai, the Holy Spirit, has done!

Paul says in the opening words of the eighth chapter of Romans, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death," {Rom 8:2 RSV}. A new law, a new edict, has gone into effect. "It is no longer I that live," he says, "but Christ liveth in me," {cf, Gal 2:20a KJV}. The law of his life in me is able to counteract the effects of sin and death. It is no longer I that work, but it is he who works through me and so I live his life. It is still I who live it, but "I live it by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me," {Gal 2:20b KJV}.

And when I count on his indwelling life to work through me step by step, he turns even my failures into victories! That is what he is saying.

"Your sorrow shall be turned into joy" {John 16:20}, the Lord Jesus said to his disciples before he went to the cross. Notice he did not say, "Your sorrows shall be replaced by joy." He said that the thing that causes you sorrow shall itself be translated, transmuted, turned into joy. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus turns adversity into adventure, and affliction into praise. It does not always change the circumstances. But it uses them, overpowers them, reverses their effect. The strange thing is that it works best in weakness and in defeat.

This is what Paul discovered when that thorn in the flesh, that raw, grinding, nerve-destroying thing kept eating away at him. We don't know what it was – something in the flesh that bothered him like a thorn continually pricking him in the side. He

prayed three times that it might be taken away, but the answer came, "My strength is made perfect in weakness, my grace is sufficient for thee," {cf, 2 Cor 12:9 KJV}. So the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets you free from the law of sin and death. There need be no defeat for your spirit. There need be no discouragement, no terrible crushing sense of despair even though the circumstances remain unchanged, his indwelling life in you is sufficient to meet everything that comes.

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, working in a shepherd lad named David, took hold of the very situation that was causing despair and pessimism in the camp of Israel and turned the very threat itself, Goliath the giant, into triumph for Israel. David's faith in an indwelling, all-adequate God was the only new factor added to that situation. Gloom and despair had spread like a cancer throughout the whole camp of Israel and one man, a mighty man of towering stature and strength, was holding the entire army of God immobile and helpless. Then David came along saying, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that dares defy the armies of the living God?" {cf, 1 Sam 17:26}. Though his sight, like the others, is fixed upon Goliath, his faith was fastened upon a living God who was able to meet every circumstance no matter what it was, when it came, or how it occurred. And he said, "In the face of those resources, who is this?" That quiet faith worked the miracle by which the very one who threatened became the ground of victory, triumph, and blessing.

Some time back a friend who is also a surgeon told of how he went out with an associate of his, a non-Christian, to visit an old man who was living in a trailer by himself and who was in a pitiful condition. This doctor said he knew this man would not live much longer for he was riddled with cancer. It was all over his body, knobs of it breaking out on his scalp, his tissues riddled with disease. The two doctors came into the wretched trailer and found him asleep. They woke him and said, "How is it going?" The old man looked up, and with a smile he said, "All is well." As they left the trailer, the non-Christian associate said to my friend, "What does he mean, all is well? How could he say that? Doesn't he know he is dying with cancer? Doesn't he know there is no hope at all for him?" And my friend said, "Yes, he

knows." And he explained to him the reason for his cheerful spirit. There is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, overcoming the law of sin and death which brings despair and defeat.

It is similar to the way the law of aerodynamics uses the law of gravity to make a plane fly. During my travels by plane, and before I board the jet, I do not go to my wife and say, "Look dear, I am going aboard this airplane, but I promise you that all the way to my destination I will try my best to hold that plane up and see that it flies. I will sit in the seat and hold onto the arms and give my whole attention to this problem. All the way there I will struggle to keep the plane flying." No, if I said that, she wouldn't let me go!

I know that the law of gravity continually pulls on a plane and I have never become so confident in the dynamics of flight that I have made the mistake of thinking that it has stopped working. I have never, in the middle of a flight, gone to the door and said, "I am tired of riding, I think I will get out and walk." If I did, I would have discovered that the law of gravity is still in effect. I would have demonstrated it very conclusively.

But a plane operates by a higher law which opposes and yet uses the law of gravity. If it were not for the law of gravity, the law of aerodynamics would not work.

So if it were not for the law of sin and death, there could be no victory in our Christian experience. If we were not continually beset by this temptation to yield to the flesh within, or to despair of circumstances without, there would be nothing to be victorious over, there could be no operation of the law that causes us to move in triumph and victory in the midst of depression and unhappy circumstances.

We will see more of this in Chapter 9, but, even before the event comes off, things begin to get better. There is immediately **A New Outlook**:

**Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a mantle of fine linen and purple, while the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict**

**came, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the people of the country declared themselves Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them. {Est 8:15-17}**

Even before the deliverance actually comes, even before the life is really changed, there is a *tremendous joy* in the realization that victory is possible.

When it breaks upon our defeated hearts that God has made a way out and it works, we know instant joy. Oh, what joy in Susa, Mordecai is honored. The city shouts with gladness. Compare Chapter 8 with Chapter 3 of this book. There it was Haman who sat in the prime minister's seat. It was he who signed the edict that the king sent out and the result was a city in confusion and bewilderment. But now Mordecai is in control and the result is joy and gladness throughout the whole kingdom. I tell you it is a great relief when the truth breaks upon our hearts, our wretched, despairing hearts, that God has made a way out – not a way out of the circumstances necessarily, but a way out of defeat from the circumstances.

I remember well an incident during World War II when I was in the United States Navy serving in Pearl Harbor, and it came my turn to take a watch at night. I was working in the Ships Service Department, the department store for the Navy, and a watch was posted all night long. Four hours on duty. We could read, we could write letters, we could do other things, but we had to be awake and we had to be there. I had the watch from two o'clock to six o'clock during those wee hours when nothing else was happening. I had brought along a couple of books to read. One was "Romans, Verse by Verse" by William R. Newell, and in my reading I came across the verse,

**Sin shall not have dominion over you for you are not under law but under grace. {Rom 6:14 KJV}**

I had read that verse many, many times before, but this time it seemed to strike me as though it were a trip hammer. It leaped at me out of the pages. It took life and came thundering at me. "Sin shall not have dominion over you!" I had been wrestling with problems in my life over which I had

known no victory, and I was almost on the point of despair. It seemed like I could not find a way out, but that sentence came like a blaring trumpet into my heart, filling me with great joy. I did not know how it would work out yet. I did not understand the process by which victory would come into being, but I remember how my faith laid hold of that word. Sin shall not – shall not – shall not – shall not have dominion over you! I walked the floor with my heart overflowing with victorious joy. Here was the pronouncement of the king that those things which made for defeat in my life would utterly be broken, would lie at last in pieces at my feet, and I would be free. Through the ensuing years, the Lord has fulfilled that promise, and those things which held me from victory, held me in bondage and thralldom, are broken and defeated.

But another result is evident, too. Not only joy, but *convicting power*:

**And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them. {Est 8:17b RSV}**

That is, Gentiles became Jews, adopting the principles of the people of God, giving up their paganism and turning unto the only true God.

What answers to this in your life? You know it. When your life becomes perceptibly different, when your reactions to the trials that afflict Christian and non-Christian alike become quite opposite to what the situation seems called for, others are going to be struck by this change and become Christians. When your life can no longer be explained simply in terms of your human personality, when your reaction to a situation is quite contrary to what people have been led to expect by their knowledge of your nature, the question is raised, "What makes him do this? How can he do this? What makes him react this way?" A conviction of truth follows, and this makes for powerful Christian witness.

A man said to me not long ago, "Meeting some of the folks from your church has transformed my conviction of what Christianity is. There is something about them that I can't put my finger upon, but they are obviously different from any other Christians I have ever met." I was encouraged and delighted to hear this.

When there is exhibited in our lives something of the outflowing of the indwelling life of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our reaction to pressure is not the way the world would react, there comes a conviction that God is at work and men prick up their ears and listen, and are changed.

**Prayer:**

Our Father, with what amazing insight this ancient book has led us along the path of our own lives to see ourselves in new light such as we have never seen before. We thank you, Lord, for this way by which the

Spirit of God puts his finger upon the very things that have been wrong in our own lives, afflicting us, enslaving us, bringing us into bondage, and for the glad news that runs through this book as its constant theme that it is the glory and the delight of our living God to set us free. We pray that our intelligence may grasp this, that our faith may lay hold of this, that we may begin to walk in the glorious freedom and liberty of the children of God, set free from ourselves. We thank you for the love that made it possible and the truth that shines from these pages. In Christ's name, Amen.

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