

# Isaac and the Law of Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

---

*The law of life is a directive law that works out in sonship, and is obtained through a begetting by the Holy Ghost.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 17:19, John 1:12, John 3:6, John 14:26, Romans 8:2, Romans 8:14, Galatians 4:5, Hebrews 12:5, Hebrews 12:11

**Topics:** "Sonship", "Sanctification"

---

## Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the sevenfold law of life as seen in Romans 8:2, emphasizing that life works out in seven different ways when allowed to govern us, resulting in inevitable expressions of sanctification. The sermon delves into the concept of sonship as the fruit of faith, highlighting the importance of being led by the Spirit of God and embracing the Spirit of adoption. The narrative of Isaac is used to illustrate how sonship is wholly the fruit of a divine begetting, emphasizing that becoming a child of God is beyond the power of nature and can only be achieved through the begetting by the Holy Ghost.

---

## Transcript

"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:22-23. R.V.)

Our particular passage in these meditations, namely, Romans 8:2, follows immediately upon these verses we have read, because that which comes in between these two passages is a parenthesis.

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

We have come to the fifth expression of the sevenfold law of life. The law of life is one; that is, life is a law, but that life and that law work out in seven different ways. The whole life requires all these seven. All these seven go to make up the one life, and what we find is this, that when that life is received and is given its own course in us, finding us compliant with it, then by its own law it works out in these seven ways. These seven things are inevitable outworkings of that life because it is a law. We have said, and we know quite well, that if a law is established and accepted and recognized, then it works out in a certain way. That outworking is perfectly spontaneous, perfectly natural: we might say it is automatic. So life just works out in certain ways when it is established and obeyed; and we shall find that this Divine life, if allowed to govern us, will spontaneously and quite naturally result in seven things, for these are all components of

life, they are the sevenfold expression of life. You see, the Christian life is resolved into a very simple proposition, after all. You have not got to understand all this to be a Christian. But once a person becomes a Christian, certain things begin to happen, and then it is of very great value to understand what it is that is happening, because that is to understand what God is doing, what God is after. But the things happen, if the Spirit of life in us is unchecked, unhindered, if we go on with the Lord.

### Sonship as the Fruit of Faith

We have dealt with four of these spontaneous expressions of life, and we come now to the fifth, namely, Isaac. I am going to ask you just to look at one or two other New Testament scriptures. Turning back to Romans 8 let us link together verses 2 and 14.

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Romans 8:14-17.)

You see the link all the way along is the Spirit: the Spirit of life: led by the Spirit: the Spirit of adoption: the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit; but all in relation to a special thing. We will see that presently.

Let us turn straightway to the letter to the Galatians, chapter 4:5-7.

"That he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son then an heir of God through Christ."

That is almost a precise repetition of the passage in Romans 8: "the Spirit of adoption" - "that we might receive the adoption of sons".

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My Son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? ... Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" (Hebrews 12:5-7,9.)

It is not difficult to get our connection with life, the outworking of life. Here we find that life works out along the line of sonship. In all these passages sonship is brought into view in connection with life, and the Spirit as the Spirit of life. We are led to that by the Old Testament type and illustration, Isaac, the fifth of these personal types.

A great statement about Isaac is found in Gen. 17:19.

"And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him."

God there positively and for ever settles the question of what Isaac stands for in the Divine economy. In our previous meditation, in speaking of the fourth expression of life as represented by Abraham, we were seeing life working out through faith, faith as an aspect of the law of life.

Now, when we come to Isaac, we have sonship as the fruit of faith. Faith is not an end in itself, faith works out to sonship; for Abraham's faith at its supreme point secured Isaac beyond the reach of death, beyond the range of loss, of time, on resurrection ground. Now, we come to take up that sonship, to look into it, to investigate its nature, its character, for here life is brought to us in terms of sonship.

### God's Sons are Wholly the Fruit of a Divine Begetting

The first thing that we find when we approach a consideration of Isaac is this - and it is made so very definite and clear: it seems that the Holy Spirit has really made it His very serious business to keep this fact ever in view; it is made clear in the Old Testament story, and it is brought out in the New Testament more than once and made very emphatic - that Isaac was an impossibility on any natural ground. Oh how God applied Himself to see that was established! The announcement of Isaac itself came at a time when nature could offer nothing toward the realization of the promise. But then, even after the announcement and the promise, God went away and left the matter in abeyance, as it were, for a considerable time, and every moment and every day of that time was putting the whole matter more and more beyond human hope. So that, when at last Isaac was born, he was something which could not be accounted for in all the realm of natural fruitfulness. He was, in very truth, something wholly and utterly of God: he was not the fruit of nature. That is the point to begin with. Now, put it how you will, call it what you will; call it becoming a Christian, becoming a child of God, being saved, call it what you will, the reality that answers to that is altogether beyond the power of nature; you cannot by any resource outside of God Himself become a child of God. I know how elementary that is, and yet perhaps it needs to be said. There is no work that we can do, no fruit that we can provide, nothing possible to all our effort and energy which can bring this about; no struggle, no striving, no wrestling, no crying; nothing of nature can bring it about. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and the meaning of that in the Bible is not that it is that which is born of the body is flesh. It is something more than that: flesh here means natural ability. Therefore you can never reason, or argue, or talk, or persuade, or cajole, or coerce a soul into being a child of God. When you have settled your last argument, when you have broken down every bit of intellectual contradiction, when all the walls of reserve and coldness have been overthrown, and when the human will has been overthrown either by argument or by appeal and under that persuasion, that emotion, that impact, a person has taken a step and decided to become a Christian, such a one may be no nearer to being a Christian than he was before, when all those walls were up. That is not the way. This thing is out from God, and nothing can produce sonship but a begetting by the Holy Ghost. Multitudes of people are in a false position because that fact has not been recognized. They bear the title of Christian because of an assent to certain propositions, because of an emotion, because of a decision which they themselves have made under persuasion or influence.

This is but the following out of what we have been saying about Cain, the worshipper who murdered, whose soul-life went out to God with its own best works, best fruit, best everything, believing that it could get through. It never did. Multitudes of people like that are working on that basis, and thinking they are accepted and children of God. Oh for a mighty undeceiving: and yet what a terrible thing it would be! If all those assumed conversions should be disclosed to be only assumed and not real! We have really to get at the meaning and nature of sonship. We have to know what it is, and you begin by this negative affirmation that sonship is not the fruit of nature. God has put it beyond the power of nature to produce it, as He put

Isaac beyond the power of nature altogether. That is where you begin: altogether of God, and only of God.

Well, what is sonship. The human spirit becomes the vessel of a Divine seed, the vessel in which something that is of God Himself is begotten, and the presence of that something constitutes the one in whom the deposit is a different kind of being from all other beings in God's universe. You are, because of some secret, hidden mystery about you, something right at the very center of your being; because of the presence of that, you are something other than all other species of creation. God has begotten His Son in the human spirit. There is that within the child of God upon which the eye of God rests as something belonging to Himself, which has come out from Him and is part of Him, and His eye is upon that as upon a cherished child.

#### The Law of the Spirit of Life a Directive Law

Now, that is deep truth about everyone who is a child of God, and that makes everything possible for God and for us. Everything is bound up with the residence of that in our human spirit. Sonship has commenced, been introduced into the centre of our being, and where that is true, where that is an actuality, "the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God," that there is that which is the sonship of God in us. That is the natural expression of life, and that becomes a living reality. I expect most of you can bear that out. I mean, you can bear it out, not as a single fact or witness, but by many evidences; the evidences of life and of death in your procedure, the evidences of life and death in your conversation, in the things you say, in your thoughts, your judgments, the evidences of life or death in your doings, your ways. It is a regulating law, this law of life, working out in sonship.

What does it mean? How simple, after all, the Christian life is when once you grasp this key. It means, beloved, that Jesus, the Son of God, is living over again His life in us. Watch Him on earth and you will see what He says and what He does not say, what He does and what He does not do; for what He does not say and do is as significant as what He says and does. You will see where He goes and where He does not go. You will see when He goes to a certain place and when He refrains from going to a certain place. You will see a Divinely governed life, in word, in movement, in act, marvelously governed; and He is living that over again in us. We are not by far a perfect expression of it, because we, for one thing, may not be sensitive enough nor quick enough to understand what the Spirit says in our hearts. We have not got an ear that is trained and attuned, simply because we listen to so much else. We are not quick enough in response and obedience, and therefore there is not a perfect expression of Christ; but nevertheless the basic fact is there, and we know it. It is an educative thing, a directive thing. We all know it. Oh, what a history we have of this checking up! Moreover this experience is progressive, for as we go on, we find more and more is checked up. That which for a time seemed to be untouched - not because God agreed with it, but because He was bringing us on and could not deal with everything at once - now comes under His eye, and we can no longer do what we once were able to do.

May I illustrate? I remember quite well how, in early days of preaching, I used to cite a great deal of secular literature to illustrate my point. I would bring out the poets and many other secular writers - oh, wonderful illustrations of my point to get it home! Well, the Lord let that go on for a time, but I do know there came a time in my spiritual life when I tried to give a bit of Browning in a sermon, and the whole thing went flat. My sermon was gone, and it was as though I had to start preaching over again; but I could not. I learned a lesson. All right, no more of that! Sometimes there was the inclination to drop back, but I registered the same awful sinking sense inside and knew that I had touched death. I remember how true that was in relation to the late war. Some of us were in the thick of things in that war, and we saw a great

deal. We had to deal with conditions right on the spot. Well, afterwards when I came home, I would sometimes take something out of the war to carry home a point in a sermon. But I discovered that God was not in it, and whenever I touched that war in relation to the things of God, spiritual things, I registered that same terrible sense of death within, and I came definitely to the conclusion, that God did not want me to mix that war up with heavenly things, but that I was to leave it alone. Well, I had to let go. It was the working of the law of life. No one ever said to me, You must not do it; it is best not to refer to such matters. No, the Spirit of life in me witnessed against that, and told me, in effect, 'That is death. If you want life, if you want your message to go on in life, if you want to get through to God's end, leave all such matter out. That was never born out from God, and only that which is born from God accomplishes God's purpose and gets back to God. Therefore rule out all the other.' I say this law of the Spirit of life is a directive law.

If only we have life and that life is allowed to have its way, we are going to reach God's full end. It is not an abstract thing, it is a Divine Person resident within; Christ, who is the life, governing from within by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of life. Thus we see that, in the very outworking, in the very process, in the very exercise of this life how altogether other it is. It will not cohabit with other things.

Isaac and Ishmael

Now to come to Isaac. You remember Abraham tried to help the Lord to realize His intentions. He recognized how impossible this purpose of God was on any natural basis, and then his faith failed and we know the painful story of Ishmael - Abraham trying to help God out, trying to realize Divine ends along natural lines. Ishmael came in. What is he? The fruit of nature. Isaac came in, the fruit of God. These two are found in the one house. Two things result, but I leave the one for a moment and go on to the other.

The hour and the day came when the word of the Lord to Abraham was this: "Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." Have you got that? That which is born of the flesh cannot inherit with that which is born of the Spirit. That which is born of the Spirit has a Divine inheritance which the flesh cannot come into. This, which is of God, is altogether other than that and cannot share its substance with that. One must go.

Now, you come back to the other thing. Unless you do as God has bidden, what will happen? Ishmael will oust Isaac; because it says that Ishmael laughed at Isaac, mocked Isaac, sought to make Isaac's life a misery, all with the object of putting Isaac out and having Isaac's place. That is the flesh always; it is over against the Spirit. Give the fruit of nature any place, and it will very soon oust what is of God. The two cannot cohabit, the two cannot be co-heirs. It is quite true that this natural life always laughs at the spiritual, because the spiritual is always so altogether other. I suppose I had better follow that right up at once.

Go over to the Lord Jesus again. There were numerous things that the Lord Jesus literally could not do. I mean, by reason of His relationship to, and dependence upon, God, He could not. He Himself said so. "The Son can do nothing out from himself." "The words that I speak, I speak not out from myself." The Lord Jesus had to draw everything from the Father. "What thing soever he (the Father) doeth, these the Son also doeth," but none other things than these. So He had to wait upon the Father before He could make an utterance. He had to wait upon the Father before He could do a work. He had to wait upon the Father before He could go to any given place. "Go ye up unto the feast: I go not up yet unto this feast...." That is the present registration of His being bound. He has not got the witness that liberates Him and directs Him to go up to that feast. Yet it says, "But when his brethren were gone up unto the feast, then

went he also up, not openly, but as it were in secret." Was that a subterfuge, a trick, to get rid of people whose company He did not want, not wanting to go with them, wanting to go alone? We cannot talk like that. We have to find a holier explanation than that. The explanation is that He had not yet got through from the Father that the Father wanted Him to go, and He had to conclude it was not the Father's will, at any rate at that time; but when they were gone up it came through, He was released in spirit, the Spirit of sonship got the witness that it was all right, the way was clear that He should go up and He went. The point is that the Lord Jesus is limited altogether by His relationship to the Father, His voluntary dependence, the law of life that everything must come from God and nothing out from self. That is the law.

You try and live on that level and see if the natural man does not laugh and mock. Mark how they question you. What are you going to do? I do not know! Where are you going? I do not know! When are you going? I do not know! I shall go when the Lord tells me I can, when the Lord bears witness to me, when I am released of the Lord. Put this spiritual language in any form you like: what does the natural man say to that? He laughs, he mocks you. Not only is that true from outside, but you find that inside yourself. Very often you are inclined to call yourself a fool, and to question yourself - Why do I not do this? Then you have to stay - Why do I not do it? Because I cannot. Why not! Well, it would be doing it myself. The Lord is not doing that, I am not conscious that the Lord is doing that. That is the language, the consciousness of sonship. That is the way of life.

So Ishmael mocks Isaac, as the natural life laughs at the spiritual, and tries all the time to get the upper hand and to oust that which is of God. That is sonship working out. Of course, if you are not a son, you do not know anything about this, but if you are a son, you know something at least of what I am talking about, and you can tell right away whether you are a son. This language is not strange to sons; it is perfectly intelligent, at any rate up to a certain point.

Sonship is gathered up in fullness in the Person of the Lord Jesus, and His whole life is an exhibition, an exposition, of sonship, of what it means spiritually. Then, when that sonship has been perfected by Him as Man, in the humanity which He took upon Him, the Spirit of God's Son comes and takes up residence in the new-born child of God and begins to live out that perfect sonship of the Son of God. "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." If the Spirit of sonship is ruling in our hearts, we shall know what we may do and what we may not do, how we may talk and how we may not talk. Believe me, beloved, if the Spirit of sonship is ruling in our hearts, there will never be the slightest contradiction between our conduct, or our course of things, and what is written in God's Word. We shall find that what is in God's Word spontaneously becomes expressed in our lives. We do not, in the first place, take God's Word and try, by outward application, to conform to it. By the indwelling Spirit we are conformed to the image of God's Son, and that simply means conformed to the revelation God has given, whether it be in the Person or in the Word, for there is no contradiction. Sonship demands that. If, between our conduct, our course, our way, and anything in the Word of God, there is contradiction, something has happened to injure the life, to check the Spirit of sonship: somewhere we have got out of the way and ours is not a way through, is not a living way. It may seem to us to be right, but "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man and the end thereof are the ways of death." Oh, the Spirit of sonship is an illuminating and enlightening thing to keep us in the way of life.

Yieldedness the Mark of Sonship - the Spirit of the Lamb

We will close with one reference to that outstanding episode in Isaac's life when his father, Abraham, by the command of God, took him on that journey to Mount Moriah to offer him as an offering unto the Lord. I

think this is one of the most beautiful unveilings of what Isaac stands for. "My father... Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." God has His eye on Isaac: Isaac is chosen of God; Isaac is to satisfy God in this matter. What is in view is something that is for God, for God's pleasure, for God's satisfaction. Isaac is in that line. The moment comes when Isaac is apprised of the fact that he is the offering. Suddenly perhaps, or on the way, nearing the altar, Abraham apprises him: My son, the Lord has made you the offering. Then the moment comes when Isaac is bound. Let no one think that Isaac was a little, helpless child at this time. He was a grown youth. His father was a very old man, and had Isaac chosen to rebel, naturally speaking, Abraham would not have stood a chance. Isaac could easily have set his father at defiance. But you have no sign or suggestion of anything like that. This young man, in the strength of youth, lets himself be bound and laid upon that altar, and allows that knife to be raised and virtually plunged into him, allows himself to be slain; for, so far as his will was concerned, it was accepted. In spirit it was an accomplished end; there was no resistance. So we have to say that in Isaac we find expressed the offering up of himself in a perfect yieldedness to the pleasure of God. That is sonship.

Here, beloved, a wonderful subjection of soul or self-life is manifested, a wonderful subjection of soul-life, self-life, to the pleasure of God. Listen to One who said, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself"; and the One who so spake turned to His disciples and said, "He that saveth his soul-life shall lose it; he that loseth his soul-life for my sake shall find it." That is Isaac. That is sonship. Oh, sonship, what a yielding thing it is, what a submissive thing it is, what a lamb-like thing it is! "God shall provide Himself a lamb."

Would you know whether sonship is increasing in your case, whether there is a development of the Son of God in you? Your yieldedness, your decreasing resentment, resistance, self-will, decreasing bitterness under trial, will afford you proof of it. The lessening of the uprising of self in assertiveness, in self-interest, self-preservation, self-justification, self-pity, every form of self, the decrease of all this is the evidence of sonship; subjection under the hand of God, even though the trials may come through His own children, through an Abraham. Your slaying may come at the hands of one who is no enemy of God. Under adversity, under trial, under slaying, under cutting, under the knife, for there to be no repining, no kicking, no reasoning, but yieldedness to the hand of God, this is sonship. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him" (Heb. 12:5). "God dealeth with you as with sons." "Shall we not be in subjection to the Father of our spirits" - and die? No, never! that is not God's end: "and live"! Oh, under the chastening hand of God, we never expect to survive. Surely it is the end! No! - "and live"! God will see to that. It is the way of sonship. It is the way of life. I am content to leave it there for the time being. Life will spontaneously work out along the line of sonship and sonship is that.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/isaac-and-the-law-of-life/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**