

Jacob and the Law of Life (Continued)

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the heavenly order in the Church, governed by the law of Christly increase, and the relationship between authority and subjection.

Scripture: Genesis 28:10, Genesis 31:13, John 1:47, John 14:6, 1 Corinthians 1:20, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Galatians 6:1, Philippians 2:8, Colossians 1:18

Topics: "Church Authority", "Heavenly Order"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the sevenfold operation of life as represented by seven persons in Genesis, focusing on Jacob as a symbol of God's way of life. The sermon emphasizes the importance of the House of God, Bethel, starting from its heavenly side and the heavenly order that governs the Church. It highlights the need for everything to begin and lead to heaven, being of Christ, and the significance of Christ linking heaven with earth. The sermon also delves into the principles of authority and subjection in the Church, showing how authority is reached through subjection, and how heavenly order is governed by the law of Christly increase.

Transcript

Reading: Genesis 28:10-12,19; John 1:47; Genesis 31:13; 35:1,6,7; I Corinthians 1:20; 2:14.

We have been considering the sevenfold operation of life as represented for us in the book of Genesis by seven persons. In our previous meditation, we arrived at the sixth, namely, Jacob, and it is with that which Jacob represents as God's way of life that we shall again be occupied in this meditation.

The House of God, the Church, Bethel, is our particular object in view, and if we take Jacob again as our illustration, we are brought to see that everything, so far as the Church is concerned, must begin from its heavenly side and not its earthly. That is a governing fact in the life of Jacob, and we shall see how that interprets his life.

The Law and Rule of the Heavens

It is significant and impressive that, as Jacob goes on his way at the beginning of his pilgrimage, not only of his pilgrimage on earth but of that spiritual history which was behind all the happenings and events and incidents of his earthly life and walk, the first point at which he stops, though only for a night, is Bethel, and Bethel comes in for the very first time in the Bible as from heaven. This is the first reference to the Church

in the Bible, and it comes in with Jacob; and it comes in as out from heaven, that is, from its heavenly side, and that becomes a law which governs and interprets all the rest of Jacob's career and spiritual pilgrimage. What is instituted at that point is the government of that which is heavenly, and, when that government is introduced by God, you expect that what is merely earthly will, from that moment, come under the condemnation and discipline of God to its destruction, so that the whole may become progressively heavenly according to its origin, its source, its inception. We have to ask this all-inclusive question: Where does everything begin and whither does everything lead? The answer is one. Everything begins in heaven and everything leads to heaven and is consummated in heaven. That is only another way of saying, that everything is of Christ. Everything that has come out of heaven is of Christ and is in Christ. "All things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and in him all things consist (Colossians 1:18-19). Though the corresponding truth is not given, there are plenty of statements which also set forth the fact that He is after all things, and not only before all.

Now that, you see, is symbolically gathered up in Jacob's ladder: something from heaven reaching down on to the earth, with the Lord above it, and the angels of God ascending and descending. Carry that over to John 1 and you see the principle at work in this word: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" (no Jacob!). And then to Nathanael: "Thou shalt see greater things than these... Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." It is Christ who links heaven with earth, and earth with heaven, and in whom all the Divine communications are made to man. It is Christ who fulfils the word "where God revealed Himself unto thee".

The House of God is Christ. But remember, while that is true of Christ personally, what we are made to see as the unveiling of the mystery is that the House of God is Christ corporately expressed in the Church, which is His Body, and it is in Christ corporate, in the Body of which He is the Head, that there is the revelation and the communication of God. It is there in that House of God, the Church, that we have what Jacob called "the gate of heaven". That is God's Bethel.

So, while recognizing that everything has first to be seen from its heavenly standpoint, and as being out from heaven in Christ, we have to see this second thing, that Jacob must be ruled out in order to make room for "Israel". That is to say, all that is of man must be ruled out so as to make way for a Divine order of things in the House of God. Jacob, as Jacob, was impinging upon Divine things, upon the birthright. Yes, it was quite true that in the sovereignty of God Jacob was the chosen one for the birthright, but no Divine election can ever be taken as a one-sided thing. There are always two sides to Divine appointments. One is the sovereign act of choice, the other is the fitting of the elect vessel to come into that for which it is chosen. So, although Jacob may, in the line of Divine sovereignty and election, be the one to whom the birthright is secured, as is also the case with the Church as the antitype, there is another line which Divine sovereignty takes, namely, the clearance from the ground of all that which is Jacob; because it is not Jacob as Jacob who can inherit. It will be "Israel" who will inherit.

Let us note this other thing which is both important and interesting, that it is in a particular way with Jacob that the "house" comes in. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, and they are always called "the seed of Abraham". But you never read of the "house of Abraham," although he was the father. Then, although God again and again announces Himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," you never read of the "house of Isaac": but you do read of the "house of Israel". So all that goes back to Jacob.

Now I think you see the significance of this. Israel represents that which is heavenly and Divine, which has supplanted that which is earthly and of man. Jacob typifies the earthly. You know that in the days when

Israel was out of the way, when there was spiritual declension, the Lord addressed Israel as "Jacob," but when according to His mind as "Israel". That is the heavenly side. So really the House of God comes in, not with Jacob as Jacob, but with Israel; the same man, but now translated to heaven, so to speak, now the heavenly man. "Behold an Israelite in whom is no guile" (no Jacob). I think that was a tremendous commendation of Nathanael. The Lord, who knows all things, was able to say, There is a truly spiritual man, a man with a spiritual insight and judgment and appreciation of things. There is no "Jacob" there. I think that is what He meant.

Well, I think that is enough for the principle. The House of God is that which demands the setting aside of all that is according to man and the bringing in of that which is according to God, that which is heavenly.

Heavenliness Part of a Divine Order

Then we find that heavenliness is not just some abstract sort of thing, but that it comes in as part of an order of things, a heavenly order; an ordered life, an ordered relationship, everything according to a heavenly order. What it is necessary for us to see next is what a perfect Divine order would be. I suggest that to you as something to meditate upon, to contemplate.

You see, beloved, so very much now is corrective, because of disruption and disorder. There was a beautiful Divine order at the outset, an order in every realm, in every direction. Everything was in its place, in its right relatedness, functioning in perfect order; no friction, no contradiction, no unrest, no strain, everything full of rest. God declared it to be very good. If God says that, then, in the light of His standard of things, such an order must be very good, for His standard is so much higher than ours. To have a certain measure of order, without friction and contradiction, strain and stress, makes us feel we have something very good; but oh, how much higher is His standard! When God says of a thing, "It is very good." it really must be good.

But then disruption came in. Everything became disordered and the harmony in God's universe was destroyed. There is strain, there is conflict, there is no more rest, and since that time things have continued to be governed by this element of disorder and disruption, and the Divine order has never been recovered in the world. Disorder is everywhere. Disruption is everywhere, in everything. It is in the elements. It is in humanity. It is in all relationships. It is everywhere. And now, so far as God is concerned, all is on a corrective line because of that disruption.

First of all, the disorder, the disruption, is in man himself. Man is no longer a harmony, a unit; he is all in disorder. Then the disorder is found in man's relatedness. All the relationships of man are disordered and upset. Then it is in the world that man has made. Man has made this world and set up the present order; which is disorder from God's standpoint. Everywhere in this world there is disorder. I need not stay to show how true it is. Everywhere in this world we find what is not God, and what God did not mean. The order has gone and is no longer seen.

So now, when we come to the first letter to the Corinthians, the first thing that is introduced is the world; and the second thing is man, natural man; whilst the third thing is the relationships or related life of man. Then you recognize that the whole of that first letter to the Corinthians is a corrective letter. It touches the world, it touches man, it touches man's relationships; it is all corrective. Then what has it inclusively to do with? Its concern is with the Church, which is Christ's Body. Is Christ divided? is a question it will put to us; and as directly it will answer that in Christ there is no schism, no disorder. So you move on through the letter and you find that a true spiritual apprehension of the Church according to God's mind will see the

correction of all the disorders that have come in through Adam: and these are dealt with in the letter one by one.

We will put that in another way, and perhaps a little, more simply. Where the Church, the Body of Christ is spiritually expressed according to God's mind, nothing of the disruption and disorder that came in through Adam has any place; it is ruled out. The world is ruled out. The natural man is ruled out. This disorder in human relationships is ruled out. The Church represents a perfect Divine order, and that makes demands upon all who claim to be in it and we find one fundamental demand right here at the beginning of this corrective letter: "I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The one fundamental and all-inclusive demand made upon these who claim to be of the Church, which is Christ's Body, is that, through the Cross of the Lord Jesus by which the world is crucified, and by which the natural man is crucified, and by which all that is disruptive in human relationships is crucified, only Christ shall be known, only Christ shall be recognized; for here we touch the mystery of the very nature of the Church. It is Christ from heaven, nothing of this world, Christ corporately expressed. It is a Christ according to God's mind as the heavenly Man, and not according to man here. It is Christ as the embodiment of a heavenly order. I dislike the word system, and I very often use it in its bad sense, but it can be used in a right and good sense, and, if you will bear with it, I would say that Christ is the embodiment of a heavenly system; and when we come into the Church, which is His Body, we come into a heavenly system of things, a Divine order. So that the sphere of this perfect, Divine order is the Church, the Body of Christ, which is called "the Christ". Now, that leads us to some practical applications of the general truth.

The Increase of Christ the One Object of the Divine Order

The first is, that order, this Divine heavenly order in the Church, is governed by the law of Christly increase.

Whatever obtains in God's appointment, only obtains with one object in view, namely, the increase of Christ. Everything that God has ordained as a part of the heavenly order in the Church is ordained with that end in view. With much that is meant by an expression to which I am about to refer, I will not stay, and certainly not for purposes of criticism; but, by way of illustration, we sometimes hear the phrase used of certain men that they have "taken Orders". By that we understand them to have entered into a certain ecclesiastical realm, or that they are "priests in Holy Orders". Now, my point is this, that when it comes to the heavenly order of the Church, all ministries, all appointments, all positions, all relationships exist solely for the increase of Christ. That is the thing which governs all. No one has any position or ministry which is merely official. What is position in the Church from the heavenly standpoint? What is ministry in the Church from the heavenly standpoint? What is the significance that attaches to all the relationships of the Lord's people? They are all, by Divine intention, for the increase of Christ. I suppose that we will accept that, so far as the special ministries are concerned. Yet that might need examination. Such as exercise those special ministries are not there to give addresses or to preach sermons. In the heavenly order, there is no ministration of any kind which does not mean a ministration of Christ to the increase of Christ, so that the Church becomes more fully Christ in expression, and any ministry that does not, or that cannot, lead to that is not in the heavenly order. Office in the Church is something wholly other than that which is merely ecclesiastical, by vote or appointment. The thing which governs any office or position in the Church, as according to the heavenly order, is that this one and that one have something of Christ to give, have that which represents an increase of Christ; for the Church is Christ in corporate expression.

Are you aspiring to office, to position in the Church? I will tell you how to get there. Aspire to have a measure of Christ more than your brethren. The Holy Spirit will see that, in a Spirit-governed church, you have a place and a ministry. That is the law which governs position in the Church. It is not that the Church votes with a show of hands as to who the officers shall be. The Holy Ghost singles out men who have something more of Christ than the average to bring the Church up into a fuller measure of Christ.

What, then, of all the members of the Body? The same law governs. You may put all the responsibility on to such as may minister the Word, and say, It is their business to bring Christ to us, to build us up in Christ. Well, they will point you the way, they will minister to you the Word of God in life. But then, your very membership in the Body of Christ involves you under this very same law, that you personally are also committed to be a joint of supply in the Body. You are committed to the work of the mutual building up of the Body and the increase of Christ. Our very partaking of Christ, our being members of His Body is governed by this, that we are a contributing factor in the increase of Christ. We have to get away from this "pulpit and pew" conception of things and have an entirely new mentality. The Church builds itself up by its mutual ministration, and such building up is through an increase of Christ. Beloved, let me emphasize that and underline it. Take hold of it if you forget everything else, that your being in the Church, which is His Body, means that your being there implies an increase of Christ. It must be that. Is there something more of Christ there because you are there? That is the law which governs. Do stir yourselves up to this. Recognize your personal and individual responsibility. The Church is Christ in His corporate expression; you are the Church. How much of Christ is represented by you for the general increase and building up of His people? The law which governs everything in the Church; ministry, position, relationships, is the law of the increase of Christ.

Now, I have used the word "relationships". Yes, you see how far from being merely technical and ecclesiastical and official and legal all this is, and how it resolves itself into one thing, namely, life. When you get the Church according to the heavenly thought of God, according to the heavenly order, governed by this law of the increase of Christ, then you have life; not ecclesiastical systems and orders, but life. It is the way of life. It is the course of the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We will come at this question of relationship from a fresh position, or by a fresh proposition.

The Divine Features of Authority and Subjection

There are two main aspects of the Church, the Body of Christ. The first of these is authority and the second is subjection. These are the two things which mainly govern the Church as principles.

Now, Jacob, when he supplanted his brother with his wit and cunning and guile, was after authority, the place of supremacy. He, as the younger, was seeking to get ascendancy over his brother. Well, God had ordained that, and Jacob need not have used any cunning or wit whatsoever. God would have seen to that had Jacob trusted Him. Nevertheless, it was this that was in his heart, to get authority, pre-eminence. What he had to learn in the course of twenty years was that authority is reached by the way of subjection; and for Jacob, prince in Bethel, the House of God, those two things go together - authority and subjection. You cannot and you must not separate these two. God has joined these two together. Authority is by subjection; subjection leads to authority. I believe moreover that God has chosen a very beautiful way of setting that forth.

God originated it (as Paul tells us in the great Church letter, Ephesians,) right at the beginning in the Garden - "Male and female made he them": husband and wife; the man and the woman. Have you ever

recognized that to be pre-eminently a Church principle. If you trace that to heaven, to the mind and the heart of God, you will find He has the Church in view; Christ and the Church, His members: the Husband, the wife; the Bridegroom, the bride. The relationship, this human relationship of husband and wife, is seen therefore, in the mind of God, to have to do with a much bigger thing than that which is merely personal, individual, as amongst men on the earth. It is but the setting forth, or it is intended to be the setting forth of a great sublime conception of Christ and the Church, and the two governing laws of Christ and the Church are authority and subjection. How will the Church come to reign? By subjection to Christ. How did Christ, the Head, come to reign? By subjection to the Father. Authority and subjection are inseparable. It is a dual law, established in heaven. These two things, male and female, are both very sacred in God's sight, and neither of them must be the other. If so, you have upset the Divine, heavenly order. They are there to represent something very holy, something very sacred.

If you look more closely, you will see that both these features are to be found in the very person of Christ Himself. Oh yes, how much we owe to the subjection of Christ to the Father! What do we owe? Well, to this, on the one side, we owe all the revelation of God in Him. By His subjection to the Father, the revelation of God in Him came forth. "The Son can do nothing out from himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19). Subjection to the Father meant that He saw what the Father was doing and did the works of the Father. In the works of Christ we see the works of God, we see what God is like; we see God's mind, God's thought, God's desire.

It is to His subjection that we owe the revelation of Divine love. The Father's will was that He should lay down His life, and the laying down of that life was an expression of the Father's heart for us. He laid down His life for our sins that He might redeem us unto God. All the love of God is brought to us by the subjection of the Lord Jesus. Remember that.

Then, what fruitfulness has sprung from His subjection. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die...." Is not that subjection? What is the opposite of that? I refuse to die, I refuse to give up my life, I refuse to let go my soul; I cling and cleave to myself, to my own. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die (that is, if it surrenders itself, if it lets go its own life, if it denies its own rights) it bringeth forth much fruit." This is immediately succeeded by the statement, "He that loveth his life (his soul) shall lose it; and he that hateth his life (his soul) in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:24-25). That again, in a word, is subjection.

Follow the matter through with this word: "He became obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Obedient - that is subjection. That is the female side, that which is represented by the woman. What we owe to it!

Yes, but then there is the other side. Oh, the power, the mighty power, that we find in Christ! Oh, the life, the positive, risen life that we have in Christ! Oh, the deliverance that is ours through the mighty deliverer, Christ! Oh, the keeping power that is to us-ward because of the Cross! That is the side of authority. The side of subjection is His love for us; the side of authority is His defence of us. The side of subjection is His tender compassion, His merciful kindness to His own. His authority is the coming forth of His power against the enemies of His own. That is the man and the woman.

The Practical Expression of the Divine Features in the Church

Now, that is brought right into the heart of the Church. So you come again to the first Corinthian letter. You know all that is said about man and woman and their respective places in the Church. If this heavenly relatedness for the increase of Christ is established, it will work out to tremendous enrichment and not impoverishment. What is the woman's place in the Church? It is to express that side of Christ which is always the gracious, sympathetic, helpful side. Do you think that the woman is to be suppressed? I do not, and I do not think the Word of God teaches that. It is a matter of order and position unto life, and if I were to put it in quite ordinary, common, everyday, human, language, I should put it like this: Man is there to represent the authority of Christ, but he cannot exercise his authority without subjection. Otherwise what happens? He becomes a lord in the House of God. He does that of which the Apostle speaks, he "lords it over God's heritage". He needs the woman, as representing subjection, to come along and say, "Now, my dear, gently: do not do damage, do not hurt the Lord's interests by that assertiveness, that officiousness. Remember that you need bearing with by the Lord." Do you see the principle of subjection at work? The two cannot be broken asunder, the Lord needs them both; and I believe the Lord has expressed this relationship in the Church to gain, not to loss; to increase, not to impoverishment; that there shall be always maintained according to this principle of the subjection of Christ that tenderness, that gentleness, that care for susceptibilities which takes the rough edge off government. Oh, we have to govern, to use authority, if we are called to do so, as men who ever remember how much we ourselves are in need of the mercy of God. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Can you hear a woman's voice in that? That is a side of Christ that is necessary to right government.

I am only able to hint really at what this means. What I have all the time in the background of my mind is that all things, relationships and everything else, in the House of God are for the increase of Christ. You dear sisters, do not think that the New Testament anywhere says that you are to be suppressed and ruled out. You have a very essential ministry, as representing something in the House of God which is for the increase of Christ, and those who are on the other side need you and cannot fulfil their ministry without you. It is not good for the man to be alone, said the Lord, and that has a very much deeper meaning than just having human companionship. Put that in the positive way: it would be very good for a man to have a woman if she is the right kind according to God's thought. You must keep the balance.

But neither of these must be the other: otherwise if it is so, you get the heavenly order upset at once. That is why the first letter to the Corinthians is corrective of disorder in every realm. You see, the world is ruled out because it is in disorder. The natural man is ruled out because he is disordered. The relationships which are according to that disordered realm and which have come into the Church, must go out, and heavenly order must come in. I do not believe that anything that Paul said about woman in the Church can rightly be interpreted as meaning that she has no place. I believe it to be just the other way round. But all that he said was to get order where there was disorder. It was a matter of heavenly order. In your right place you can function fully: but you have to be in your right place and keep it: otherwise life goes out. Perhaps I have not satisfied you altogether on these matters, but I am dealing with principles. The law of life operates along the line of a heavenly order.

So then, we are able to see that everything rests upon God's purpose concerning His Son, and everything is governed by the consideration of how His purpose can be realized. The method which is approved of God is that which is most directly calculated to bring about an increase of Christ, and all else is ruled out by God. Order is not technique. It is not arbitrary. It is an embodiment of heavenly principles which are established for the increase of Christ; or, to put that in another way, Order is the way of life when it is the

heavenly order. Disorder is the way of death.

Now you understand Jacob's life. He started out with the disorder that inheres in the natural man. He started out with the wisdom and cunning of this world. He was chosen to bring into view the House of God, and service in relation to the House of God - Bethel, and a dwelling in Bethel. Therefore this man must be taken in hand and all that is of the natural man must be got rid of as disorderly, and all the worldly element in him must be destroyed. If there is to be a House of God, it cannot be the house of Jacob; it must be the house of "Israel". That is the spiritual and heavenly side of things.

A Vital Lesson

I wonder how much of this is recognized by you to be of practical value. You may have many questions, but I think it does at least bring before us one thing, that in order to there being movement toward fullness of life in Christ, there must be a spiritual relatedness of the Lord's people. There must be that fellowship between the members of Christ which provides an opportunity for the increase of Christ in an ordered way. That is a matter which ought to exercise us very much. I am quite sure there are a lot of people who are suffering far more than they need because they are out of relatedness with the Church, the Body of Christ, in a working and practical way. I believe that merely personal, independent, unrelated life and movement of the Lord's people exposes them to great evils. If only there were a bringing in among the Lord's people, there would be a curing of many ills, and deliverance from much unnecessary suffering. The word that was spoken by Haggai still holds good: money is put into a bag with holes; there is dearth, there is barrenness, there is an altogether inadequate result to your spiritual energies. Then as the Lord questions with His people about the cause, His answer to them is, Because of My house. If you have My house as the central, governing object of your life, there will be many blessings where there are no blessings now. There will be life where there is death now; there will be deliverance where there is bondage now; there will be light where there is darkness now; there will be safety where there is deception now. We little realize how much suffering in all of these ways there is today because of independent action and a want of relatedness with the Lord's people. Ask the Lord about that. If it is His mind, and you have exercise with Him about His end, He will most surely show some way in which this can be remedied.

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