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"The Flame of a Sword"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"He placed at the East of the Garden... the flame of a sword which turned every way..." Genesis 3:24.

A glance at the context will show that this deliberate act of God was a precautionary measure against fallen Adam and his race as now "flesh," attempting or assaying to touch or appropriate that which symbolises the holy Divine Life of the ages. Ultimately it points to Christ as the Life, The Way of Life, and The Source of Life. Trees are always symbols of men, and man is always the symbol of representation.

The principle here so early established is then clearly that for "flesh" or man in his "flesh" to presume into the realm of what is wholly and utterly of God is to be cut down. This is not only true when the flesh would advance directly in proud self-sufficiency, or in ignorant and immodest presumption, but this "flame of a sword turned every way." Every kind and direction of the advance of the flesh is met in the same way. Who shall ever tabulate or define the ways of fleshly activity and projectings of itself in relation to that which is of God?

The Scriptures, however, give a great number of instances; too many for our consideration here, but we may note some as typical and suggestive. Let us first, albeit, realise that the Scriptures establish abiding principles by powerful and drastic methods, and if at a post-scripture age (that is, after the canon of Scripture is closed as to content), the Lord does not invariably come out in the same flaming expression or form, the principle remains, and there is no departure from what He has laid down in His Word.

It would be well if we recognised the great law of "Holiness unto the Lord"; consecration to God; and upon what this law rests. The two great factors in this relationship to God are

The Blood and The Spirit.

Where these are the holiness of God appertains and is involved. That which had its being in virtue of these is touched by the flesh at its peril. Hence in the great symbolic system of the Old Testament the most scrupulous care is taken that nothing which is a type or suggestion of flesh shall ever appear uncovered before God or in relation to His things.

Egypt, which means fleshly strength in the realm of will often came into *assertive* relation to what was of God, but never without judgment. Pharaoh represents the "I will" of God's adversary, and as that eventually reaches out its hand to take hold of what had been consecrated by the Blood of the Lamb and had come under the regime of the "Pillar" - the Spirit - it is smashed with a terrible judgment; through entrapping and confusion and overwhelming. The flame of the sword came round *that way*.

This fleshly will is not all at once eradicated from the servants of God. It limits the Lord and brings much suffering upon them often through many years of their lives. So often the best and greatest work is accomplished through them in a comparatively brief period when the "Natural force" in Spiritual things is abated, and they had learnt that only God can do His own work (in the Old Testament natural force in God's servants, i.e., preservation of faculties and health, is only a *type* of spiritual energy. See Moses, Caleb etc.). Eventually it will have to be recognised that the Lord has not been working sympathetically with the self-strength of the will of His servants, however good may have been their motive and object. If the Lord Jesus is an example of anything, He is more than anything else an example of dependence. The staves of His journey were very long and can be clearly seen. His serenity and confidence, His tranquility and possession are the issue of a life lived in secret with His Father, to Whom He is seen to resort continually. "Nothing of myself" is a watchword of His.

One of the most damaging things in the realm of God's work; a thing which eventually leads to shame and confusion and much sorrow is

Natural Soul Force

projected by strong-willed, determined, aggressive Christians, who have not come to a spiritual state where they are able to discriminate between stubborn indomitableness, and personal determination and resolution, and which is altogether another thing - spiritual grace in endurance, perseverance, Divine in-strengthening.

The Lord has often to break the former to make place for the latter. Do not talk about Paul's wonderful will to go through. Let Paul talk to you about the Lord's wonderful grace to continue.

Whenever a man or a woman really recognising the truth that Calvary means the end of "I" commits himself or herself to the Lord to work it out, the flame of the sword will come round to the point where that "flesh" would seek to enter into the realm where the first Adam no longer has any standing.

The features of a personal strength of will are hardness, coldness, death, resentment of interference, suspicion of rivals, intolerance of obstructers, detachment, independence, secretiveness, heat, etc. While spiritual strength is always marked by love, warmth, life, fellowship, openness, confidence, and trust in the Lord.

If the Lord at any time of old desired to refer to and give an illustration of His exceeding great power, He brought Israel's deliverance from Egypt and Pharaoh to mind. Egypt was the great world-power, and Egypt held out against God to the last ounce. But what was the instrument of the overthrow of this power? It was the Lamb and its shed blood. At the end, in the Revelation, the dragon, the whole power of Satan is overthrown by the Lamb. The Lamb is the synonym for weakness and yieldingness. If the weakness of God can do this mighty destruction, what can His strength not do?

Paul says of Christ that "He was crucified through weakness," and, he adds, "we also are weak with Him." Yes, but he also says, "by the Cross he triumphed." Triumphed through weakness!

One of the the most difficult lessons that the Lord's children have to learn is how to

Let Go to God.

Even in a matter that is right and in the purpose of God there has to be the lessons which Abraham had to learn through Isaac. It is not in our personal clinging to a God-given *thing*, whether it be a promise or a possession, but faith's restful and fear-free holding on to the Lord Himself. If we had a thing from the Lord Himself we can rest assured that what He gives He will not take again without some larger purpose in view; and on the other hand, none can take from us what He has determined for us. But there are many dangers which arise from our own will in relation to a Divine gift or purpose.

The first is of making that thing ours instead of holding it in and for the Lord. This leads to fierceness and personal uprisings. Then jealousy will not be long in showing its ugly head, and jealousy with its twin - suspicion - soon destroy fellowship and spontaneity of communion. Does not jealousy declare most loudly the fact of personal possession, personal interest? If we realised how privileged we are to have even a very small part in the things of God, and how it is all of His Grace, surely we should be very grateful that we could just have the remotest connection with Him.

Then further, when we hold things received or as promised or believed to be for us as only unto the Lord, in restful trust, we make it possible for the Lord to save us from being mistaken in the matter. It is not an unusual thing for a child of God to come to see that a thing which he or she most strongly believed to be God's will or way for them was not so, and it had to be surrendered. If there was any personal element of will in it the experience has proved terrible, and has left works of bitterness and mistrust. Yet once again, a strong personal mind and will in relation to things of God too often makes us a law unto ourselves. That is, we get into an attitude which implies that we *only* know the will of God in the matter. We do not trust that others also may be led of the Lord in this thing, and so the corporateness of guidance so necessary to the house of God is destroyed or paralysed.

It is true that when a thing is really of God, in His will, by gift or by promise, and we begin to try and work it, realise it, use it, make it effectual by our own strength, or wisdom, then it seems to harden and become dead. Then through a battle in which all sorts of questions, fears, heats and chills are mixed up, we have to come to the place where we say, "Well Lord, if this thing is from You, I trust You to realise it; if it is not, then I let it go." That is victory! The Lord's way is clear! "The good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God" is only known when we - our bodies - have come unto the altar. Let us be sure that what we believe to be a strong faith-stand and fight for something which we are convinced is of God, is not fraught with those baneful elements which spring from a natural determination, and a constitutional or temperamental dislike for letting go or giving in. It depends

on whether we let go in unbelief or weakness, or whether it is *faith's glorious victory of letting go to God*.