

## Soul and Spirit

by Ray C. Stedman

We have come to a very dramatic moment in the story of Esther. The plot has moved rapidly. The story is that of a king in ancient Persia, an historical figure, who married a beautiful Jewish girl named Esther who had been raised by her cousin, Mordecai. The two were captives, taken from the city of Jerusalem and brought over into the kingdom of Persia. In the court of this king was a very slimy character named Haman who becomes the Prime Minister of the kingdom. An immediate antagonism develops between Haman and Mordecai, the cousin of Esther. Haman suggests to the king a very fiendish plan to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom, little dreaming that Esther, the queen, is herself a Jewess. Mordecai becomes aware of the plot and prevails upon Queen Esther to brave the disfavor of the king by going to him without invitation, to plead the cause of her people.

The whole story becomes of fascinating interest and meaning to us when we discover that this is not merely a story of the ancient past, but is also a divinely inspired, magnificently accurate portrayal of what is going on in our own lives at this very moment. You, as a living soul, are a king over a kingdom; the kingdom, the empire, is your life. If you are a Christian your spirit was made alive in Jesus Christ. This is the queen that has come into your

life. Mordecai, in this story, is a figure of the Holy Spirit moving to preserve in your kingdom the fruit of the Spirit, the people of Mordecai. And slyly at work in your mind at this very moment is Haman – that which the Bible calls *the flesh* – the self-life, the ego; cunning, subtle, deceptive, tricking us into believing that the only way we will ever get what we want is by choosing our own way and ignoring the life of Jesus Christ within us.

This is the whole aim of the flesh in the life of a believer. The devil well knows that if he can get a Christian to operate out of the flesh, his total ministry is utterly worthless as far as God is concerned. This is the major struggle, the major battle of the Christian life, and it's going on right in our own lives at this very moment. How up-to-date this book of Esther is! You may act as religious as you like when the occasion requires, but if at home, or in business, or when you are on vacation, or when you are angry, you act from the choice of the flesh, you are rendered utterly useless to God. If the devil can get you to act on the principle upon which the world continually acts, "Me for me, and the devil take the hind-most," he has won his battle.

We left Esther standing outside the palace door wondering if she will be received by the king, afraid to enter.

We pick up the story at the opening of Chapter 5 to read of **The King's Delight**:

**On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, opposite the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne inside the palace opposite the entrance to the palace; and when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she found favor in his sight and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the top of the scepter. And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." {Est 5:1-3 RSV}**

We must pause for a moment here to note the difference between the soul and the spirit of man, as pictured for us in the functions of the king and the queen in this story:

Most of us are not aware of any difference at all between the soul and spirit. We do not usually distinguish between the two; but the greatest mystery to man is man himself. We've solved some remarkable mysteries in this scientific age, but the greatest mystery of all is our own nature. We don't understand ourselves. All we really know is that somehow we, whoever we are, are living down inside of these bodies. We know someone is there. Even babies know this.

I've often told of how my little three year old daughter climbed up on my chest while I was lying in bed one morning. She was trying to waken me, pinching me and poking me, but I refused to open my eyes. Finally, she sat on my chest, and reaching down, pried open one of my eyelids. She leaned over and said, "Are you in there, daddy?" I realized then that even a baby is conscious of the fact there is more to a man than a body.

What we may not know is that this inner being is divided into two parts:

1. Psychology recognizes that we have a conscious part of our life, which the Bible calls the soul. It embraces the mind (our ability to reason, with all its marvelous possibilities), and the emotions (our ability to feel), and the will (our power to choose). The mind and emotions both continually operate upon the will to affect

it. On this conscious level, we spend most of our life. The soul, heading up in the will, is the king, before whom all options must appear and by whom all decisions are made.

2. We also have an unconscious part to our lives, the subconscious. In the Bible this is the spirit, a deeper, hidden part. In the non-Christian this area of life is darkened, confused, uncertain. The conscience is a function of the spirit, and yet conscience can be very wrong. I read of a cannibal who suffered from a very bad conscience because he had not killed as many people as his father had. Thus, conscience can be terribly misguided. When, as a non-Christian, we sought guidance from our inner life, the power within, the inner man, we found we were frequently misled, torn between confusing choices, left uncertain and bewildered. A modern song describes this condition very well – *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered!*

Into the darkened life of ours came the light of Jesus Christ. We received him as our Lord, and he began to assert the authority of his Lordship over our lives. We were born again. The spirit within us was made alive by the entrance of Jesus Christ. Read of this in Ephesians 2. Our spirit then became a place of glory and beauty, fully under the control of the Holy Spirit who dwelt within. The glory and light of God once again filled our vessel, and the guidance we then received from our human spirit, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, was true, realistic, morally upright and clear.

Thus made alive in resurrection power by the life of Jesus Christ, our human spirit becomes the means through which the Holy Spirit seeks to influence and repossess the soul – our mind, emotions, and will. For this reason, it becomes very difficult in certain Scripture passages to distinguish between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. The translators frequently have a problem to determine whether to spell the word *spirit* with a capital letter or a small letter. It really doesn't make much difference, because the renewed spirit of man is fully subject to the control of the Holy Spirit, so that the two are working together constantly.

This soul within us, the king, has the power to reject the pleadings of the Spirit if he chooses. How beautifully this is portrayed in Esther. She is

reluctant to come before the king for he has the power to deny her if he pleases. So in our lives the will is supreme, and everything that ultimately becomes a part of us must pass the judgment of the soul, the will.

Again, it is interesting how even babies know this. I remember at the time when our daughter was at the toddler stage. She ruled as a queen in our household. If we approached her and held out our arms to suggest we would like to hold her to feed her or do something else for her, she looked at us with icy disdain for a moment. Then, if she decided she wanted what we offered, she regally held out one arm like a scepter and we knew we were accepted; but if she was not in the mood, she turned her head away, and there was nothing left for us to do but to slink off and wait for a more opportune moment. This is the power of the will and even babies know it and sense it. It was designed by God to this very end. Even God does not coerce the human will, but woos it and wins its consent.

When Esther comes before the king, he is greatly struck with her beauty. To use a modern expression, she “knocked his eye out!” Overwhelmed by her loveliness and moved by emotion, he is ready immediately to grant her desire. Note, she comes on the third day, dressed in royal robes of authority and power. Throughout Scripture the third day is always the day of resurrection. Esther had been for three days and three nights fasting as though dead, and now, on the third day, she appears before the king, a beautiful picture of the resurrection life of our Lord Jesus, and the fact that the Spirit of God always approaches us on the basis of a risen life.

Have you discovered that when the Lord wants you to surrender your will on any particular point, he doesn't hound you, he doesn't punish you, he doesn't thunder at you? He simply comes in freshness and beauty, and, when you are melted by grace, you are ready to say, “anything you want, Lord Jesus, anywhere you say, anyway you please.”

A friend told me of driving down the highway one day, and before him he saw a large truck, a moving van, and on the rear of the truck was a sign which read, “Any load, Any time, Any distance, Any place.” He said, “You know, that struck me as exactly what my heart says when I see the

beauty of Jesus Christ, and I sense the glory of his presence in my life. My heart responds, ‘Lord Jesus, any load, any distance, any time, any place.’”

So here, Esther has come in her beauty and glory and the king is ready immediately to grant her desire.

But now, very strangely, we read of **Esther's Delay:**

**And Esther said, “If it please the king, let the king and Haman come this day to a dinner that I have prepared for the king.” Then said the king, “Bring Haman quickly, that we may do as Esther desires.” So the king and Haman came to the dinner that Esther had prepared. And as they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, “What is your petition? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” But Esther said, “My petition and my request is: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the dinner which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.” {Est 5:4-8 RSV}**

Why does Esther keep putting off telling the king her request? She has him right where she wants him and there seems no good reason for delay. He's in a good mood, eager to grant her anything she wants. She could have asked for a mink coat if she had wanted it! He is ready to yield on any point, ready to dedicate himself to the fullest degree possible. Why, then, this delay?

Have you ever experienced this in your relationship with the Lord? Have you ever come to the place where, captivated by the beauty of Christ and sensing something of the glory and joy he brings, you have, with complete sincerity and honesty, dedicated yourself anew to him. Perhaps you have gone forward in a meeting, or have raised your hand, or knelt in the secrecy of your own room and given yourself anew to Christ. Then you waited for God to act and nothing happened. He does nothing about it! Perhaps you dedicated yourself to go to the mission field, or to enter a new line of endeavor, and then nothing happens – no doors open. You

ask, "Why the delay? I've yielded, I'm ready, here am I, Lord, send me!" But nothing is done. How do you explain it?

There are two reasons suggested in this account: The first is, God is never content with a decision that is based on emotions alone. We need to recognize this. We have seen that Haman can move the king as easily as Esther can. If decisions are to be based on emotions only, they will continuously shift back and forth whichever way the wind blows. This is precisely the story of many Christians. But God is not content with this. So when a moment of surrender or dedication occurs, God frequently delays action in order to give us time to think the matter through and allow our understanding to catch up with our faith.

When I was still a young, growing Christian, I wanted to be a surgeon. Even as a little boy in the early grades of school I would sit at my desk and manipulate my fingers so my knuckles would be supple enough to tie knots. I haunted every hospital I could get to and read everything on medicine I could. I learned the parts of the body, the nerves and the muscles, while still in high school. Then quietly, I don't know quite how or when, I began to realize that God was moving in a different direction and that he was suggesting to me that I consider entering the ministry. At first I resented this, and fought against it, resisting the insistent plea of the Spirit. But when the Spirit is after someone, he never gives up. Finally, in a moment of surrender and dedication, overwhelmed with the joy of what Christ meant to me, in my own room alone, I said to him, "All right, Lord, I'll be a minister, if that is what you want." But then, nothing happened! I expected an invitation the next day to preach at some prominent church, but it never came. I waited, and went on, doing the things that were before me to do. When I left the city of Chicago, I went to Denver, and, from there, after a year or so, I went out to Honolulu after the war began. While the war was on, I was engaged in teaching Bible classes in bomb shelters, but still nothing was moving, no doors opened. It wasn't until the war ended, and I was discharged from the service, that the Lord opened the door for me to go to seminary and enter into training for the ministry. But I discovered that when I did go, when the door did open, I was much more ready for it. I realized so much

more of what was involved in the ministry, and felt that I was able to appropriate much more of the value of seminary because I knew what the battle was about.

So God knows the king needs time to base his decision on more than the warmth of his love alone. He needs to understand certain facts, and in the next chapter we will see how those facts are made clear to him.

This all points up the essential truth that all growth in grace requires that emotion must lead on to knowledge. Faith leads out first, but if our understanding doesn't catch up, faith soon begins to fail. "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free," {cf, John 8:32}.

I once heard a pastor, who had become involved in the movement which seeks a restoration of the gifts of the Spirit, tell how he had spoken in tongues. He was asked whether he understood what he was saying. His answer was, "Praise God! No!" And he seemed pleased that he did not understand what he had been saying in tongues. As I listened I thought of a verse in First Corinthians, Verse 14, where the Apostle Paul deals with this touchy subject of tongues. Paul says, "If any man speak in a tongue, let him pray that he may interpret," {cf, 1 Cor 14:13}. Why? "Because," he says, "if I pray in the Spirit my mind is unfruitful," {cf, 1 Cor 14:14}. What then? "I will pray with the Spirit but I will pray with the mind also," {cf, 1 Cor 14:15}. It is necessary for one to understand ultimately what God is doing. God often leads us out in a step of faith based upon emotion, but then our understanding must catch up with our faith or something has gone wrong.

There is a second reason for this delay which appears in this last section which we'll call **Haman's Delusion:**

**And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Nevertheless Haman restrained himself, and went home; and he sent and fetched his friends and his wife Zeresh. And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which**

**the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and the servants of the king. And Haman added, “Even Queen Esther let no one come with the king to the banquet she prepared but myself. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. Yet all this does me no good, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.” Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it; then go merrily with the king to the dinner.” This counsel pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made. {Est 5:9-14 RSV}**

God’s delay, we see here, gives opportunity for the flesh to grow puffed up with a sense of its own importance and thus to drop its subtlety and act in such an open and arrogant way that it even surprises and shocks us and we see how rotten, how subtle, how evil the flesh is. Then we begin to judge it as an enemy. Proverbs says, “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall,” {Prov 16:18 KJV}. What amazing skill the Holy Spirit displays in tricking our sinful hearts into some open display that shocks us, catches us up short, and makes us realize what is going on in our hearts. This is a very hopeful moment for us because, of course, the problem has been there all along.

Haman goes out walking on air after this experience with the queen. It looks to him as though he has won the king and the queen both to his side. As he comes out his spirit is jubilant. The only thing that sticks in his craw is that outside the gate he sees Mordecai who will not bow and scrape before him. “The flesh lusts against the spirit” {cf, Gal 5:17 KJV}, and the only relief Haman can find is to indulge in an orgy of self-praise.

**Nevertheless Haman restrained himself, and went home; and he sent and fetched his friends and his wife Zeresh. And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and the servants of the king. {Est 5:10-11 RSV}**

There is nothing that soothes our wounded egos more than sympathetic listeners to the tale of our own prowess. Have you discovered that? You know – “I said to him... and he said to me... and I said back to him... and I really told him...” and so on. And it is really amazing what we get proud over. Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches and the number of his sons (of all things), and the promotions with which the king had honored him.

Listen to two men discussing their automobiles. One of them will say, “Man! I’ve got a hot number! That car of mine can go 80 miles an hour in 30 seconds from a dead stop, and I can outrun anything on the road.” The other fellow comes back in kind, and both seem very personally involved. Why is this? What we do is to secretly, subconsciously, appropriate the virtues of our automobiles to ourselves. We identify with them. We like speedy, powerful, fast cars because it gives us a sense of power. Oddly enough, when anything goes wrong it is always the automobile or the manufacturer that is at fault. We have a lemon! We promptly dissociate ourselves from it. What a revelation of the human heart!

Just here is revealed one of the basic weaknesses of evil. This is why there is no reason for a believer to ever grow fearful over the presence of evil in the world. Jesus Christ says, “When these things begin to come to pass (the world seems to be falling apart, men’s hearts are failing them for fear), lift up your heads and rejoice,” {cf, Luke 21:28}. This is why communism will never conquer the earth. It is already destroying itself. The seeds of self-destruction are built into every process of evil in the world today. This is why,

Though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
God is the ruler yet.

All that comes from our human nature, this Haman nature within us, is self-centered and feeds on pride, and pride always blinds. And when men become blind they are helpless, and stumble into folly.

- When I give way to pride, when I allow Haman to rule my life, I become blind and stumble on into some stupid, foolish action to my own detriment.

- When I'm tricked into some egotistic action or word, I become vain, arrogant, swaggering – and vulnerable!
- When explosions come in our lives we try to justify them as caused by our circumstances. We want to point to some outward thing that is to blame, not anything in us.

A friend told me of a nurse who was working in a hospital and something that occurred in her round of duties when angered her, and she exploded and poured out abuse upon a patient. Her supervisor happened to hear her and called her in and said, "I didn't realize you were this kind of a person." "Oh!" she said, "this wasn't really me. It was simply that I was under pressure for the moment and what he said to me triggered my reaction, but I'm not really like this." And the supervisor said, "Look, if you were carrying a glass full of water down the hall and I bumped your arm, what would slop out?" "Why," she said, "whatever is in the glass – water." He said, "Exactly, the bump only can reveal what is in the glass already!"

That is what the Lord Jesus meant when he said, "It is not that which goes into a man which defiles him, it is that which comes out; for out of the heart proceeds murders, adulteries, fornications, etc." {cf, Matt 15:11}. These hateful things are down inside, and as long as we refuse to admit their presence (our Haman) there is no possibility of victory in our lives. The kindest thing God can do is to allow us to be in some circumstance which so puffs us up in pride that we act in some way that shocks us. Then we begin to see what is really inside, and can deal with it according to the program he had designed.

In the Gospel accounts, the Lord Jesus is continually stripping the false pretenses from men and showing them exactly as they are. Read the stories of his dealing with the Pharisees and you see this is a repeated pattern all the way through. Those religious, perfectly moral, self-righteous Pharisees would come to him with a question obviously contrived and worked over very carefully, and always designed to show him the wrong and them in the right. They would carefully word it to anticipate all possible answers so they could make him look bad. In each instance he would allow them to state their case, crawl out on a limb, and then his answer

would be so unexpected, so keenly perceptive that he would leave them chagrined, all their deceitfulness exposed, naked before the eyes of the crowd. They hated him for it. They would gather in little groups to whisper and begin to plot his death. Our Lord knew this was going on and the whole story of the gospels is a story of how he continually exposed them and drove them to the place where they did the deed which ultimately exposed them – his crucifixion.

So it is with Haman here. "Yet all this does me no good," he says, "so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate." And then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made." As we have seen, this is not a gallows to hang men on; this is a misinterpretation of the word. It is really a tall pole erected to nail a man on, he is to be impaled upon this stick. "And in the morning, tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it, and then go merrily with the king to dinner." This counsel pleased Haman and he had the gallows made.

This is God's revelation to us that there is that in each of us which would very willingly put Jesus Christ to death again if we could. Have you found that true?

Our most hopeful moment comes when we recognize it is there, stop defending it, and begin to treat it as God would direct.

- Have you learned to recognize Haman within? – even when he comes smiling and bowing and dripping with solicitude for you?
- When you have been relieved from all jobs in which you think you are indispensable and no one even notices that you are not working anymore, what do you do? How do you feel?
- What does Haman say to you then, when you have been slighted, and self-pity comes and you want to go aside and lick your wounds and feel sorry for yourself? What do you call that? That's Haman!
- When your patience wears thin and your temper inevitably explodes and you say something you wish you hadn't – that's Haman!

This is the thing that put Jesus Christ on the cross, and that would do it again if it had the chance. This is our enemy.

God, in grace, drives us to the place where we learn what we are like. When we begin to see it in realistic, honest terms, recognizing it for what it is, then he has a proposal, and a plan for taking care of it. Our plan will never work. His will.

In Chapter 6 that plan is revealed to us.

**Prayer:**

Our Father, we do pray that what was shown us about our own hearts we may

honestly recognize and that we may not seek then to solve the problem ourselves, but begin to appropriate all that marvelous plan of deliverance which you have made available to us through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Lord, we thank you for him this morning, for him who offers to, and is quite capable of defeating this Haman within us and setting us free from the bondage of ourselves. We pray for understanding hearts and a willingness to walk in obedience to you and your revealed Word. In Jesus' name, Amen.