

# *THE TWO TREES:*

## *The Way of Life versus the Religion of Death*

by Ron Kangas

**B**ecause the one true and living God is a God of life, the first and basic attribute of God is life.<sup>1</sup> According to the divine revelation in the Scriptures, the life of God—eternal, uncreated, indestructible, ever-existing, and self-existing—is *the life* (1 John 5:11-12), and for this reason John declares, “The life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (1:2). This life is the content of God, His being, and the flowing out of God, the impartation of Himself as life to all who believe into the Son of God (Rev. 22:1; John 3:15-16). The kingdom of the God of life is a realm of life, and only by receiving the divine life through regeneration can we enter into the life-kingdom of God (vv. 3, 5, 15). Since God is a God of life and since God is triune, the Divine Trinity is a trinity of life. The Father has life in Himself, and “He gave to the Son to also have life in Himself” (5:26); the Son, who is life (11:25; 14:6), came that we might have life abundantly (10:10); and the Spirit is the Spirit of life, the life-giving Spirit (Rom. 8:2; 1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:6). This Triune God of life intends to dispense Himself as life into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated tripartite people (Rom. 8:6, 10-11), and in this dispensing of Himself He is the fountain of life, the fountain of living waters (Psa. 36:9; Jer. 2:13; John 4:14). The eternal purpose of God to be expressed and represented corporately in and through humanity is fulfilled by the life of God, for it is only through the divine life that the people of God can be built up organically to express Him and represent Him (Gen. 1:26). Just as Jesus was an individual vessel of the embodiment of life and for the manifestation of the divine life (John 1:4, 14), so the church, the Body of Christ, is a corporate vessel of the embodiment and expression of this life (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:18). For this, the Lord Jesus “nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). Under the shining of this light, we received, as a gracious gift from God, “repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). Now as members of the Body of Christ, we may participate in the new testament, apostolic ministry to minister life to others for the building up of the Body of Christ to consummate the city of life, New Jerusalem (2 Cor. 4:10-12; Eph. 4:16; Rev. 21:2; 22:1-2, 14). This is the glorious revelation in the Word of God concerning the life of God.

Sadly, even tragically, this revelation stands in sharp contrast with the situation that prevails today in the religious system of degraded Christianity. The words *degraded Christianity* are here applied not to persons but to the organizations of Christianity as they exist in a condition of serious departure and deviation from the standard of the divine revelation. An example of departure is the common, virtually universal, notion that the Father’s house with its many abodes unveiled by the Lord Jesus in John 14 refers either to heaven or to dwelling places (even “mansions”) in heaven and not, as the Lord intended, to the house of God, the church of the living God, the Body of Christ.

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An example of deviation is the clergy-laity system in its various forms, ranging from the hierarchy in Roman Catholicism to the pastoral system in Protestantism. Central to our consideration, however, is the systematized and institutionalized departure in Christianity from the Triune God of life and His unique way of life to what should rightfully be called “the ways of death.” “There is a way which seems right to a man,” Proverbs 14:12 warns us, “but the end of it is the ways of death.” By caring for what they assume to be right, believers in droves are falling into a condition of spiritual death. This brings us to a crucial realization: Christianity today is a religion of death—a religion about which Christ, the Head of the church, can say, “You have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead” (Rev. 3:1). Such a charge is, of course, extremely serious, yet it is made with much sobriety and deliberation. God’s way is life; the way common in religious Christianity is death; and God’s people must choose which way they will take—life or death. The words of Moses reverberate: “I have set before you life and death...therefore choose life” (Deut. 30:19).

If we would choose life, experience God as the God of life, participate in the fulfillment of His purpose by the divine life, and preach the gospel and serve the Lord in the way of life, we must have a clear view and thorough understanding of the two trees—the tree of life and the tree of death (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). This requires that we consider the significance of the tree of life and of the tree of death, the two trees as two sources, the principles of the two trees, the two trees as two laws, the two trees as producing two kingdoms, the two trees as two lines with two consummations, the believers’ access to the tree of life through Christ’s redemption, the requirement that believers make a radical change in their living in order to live according to the tree of life for the fulfillment of God’s purpose, the warfare between life and death, the tree of life as Christ’s reward to the overcomers during the millennium, and the tree of life as our eternal portion in the New Jerusalem.

#### **The Significance of the Tree of life**

Genesis 2:9 speaks concerning the two trees. “Out of the ground Jehovah God caused to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, as well as the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Here we see that the tree of life is “good for food.” Verses 16 and 17 go on to say, “Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may eat freely, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of it you shall not eat.” Here we see that God was concerned about man’s eating and that His intention was that man would eat of the tree of life. Since Adam, by virtue of God’s creation, had already become “a living soul” (v. 7) and possessed the life of a creature, the life associated with the tree of life must refer to another kind of life. This life is the life of God, the eternal, uncreated, divine life. This life, according to the significance of the figure of the tree of life here, was embodied in a tree that was “good for food” (v. 4). Therefore, as a spiritual symbol, the tree of life signifies God in Christ as life to human beings in the form of food. The astounding revelation here is that God desires to feed us with Himself as food by dispensing Himself into us as our life and our life supply. Before we attempt to serve God or worship Him, we need to eat Him. This is God’s desire and our need.

**T**he greatest need of human beings is to partake of and enjoy God in Christ as the tree of life.<sup>2</sup> We need the tree of life, first, that we might be regenerated by God. This is the need of human beings not only in the fall but also in creation. In other words, even if Adam had not disobeyed God and fallen into sin, he would still have needed to be regenerated by receiving the divine life into his spirit, the human organ, distinct from the soul, created by God for man to contact Him, receive Him, contain Him, and digest Him. The fact that God placed Adam in front of the tree of life and encouraged him to eat of this tree indicates that he did not receive the life of God at the time of creation. Rather, as a creature, man possessed not the uncreated divine life

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but only the created human life. In order to have the life of God, he needed to be not only created by God but also born of God, regenerated.

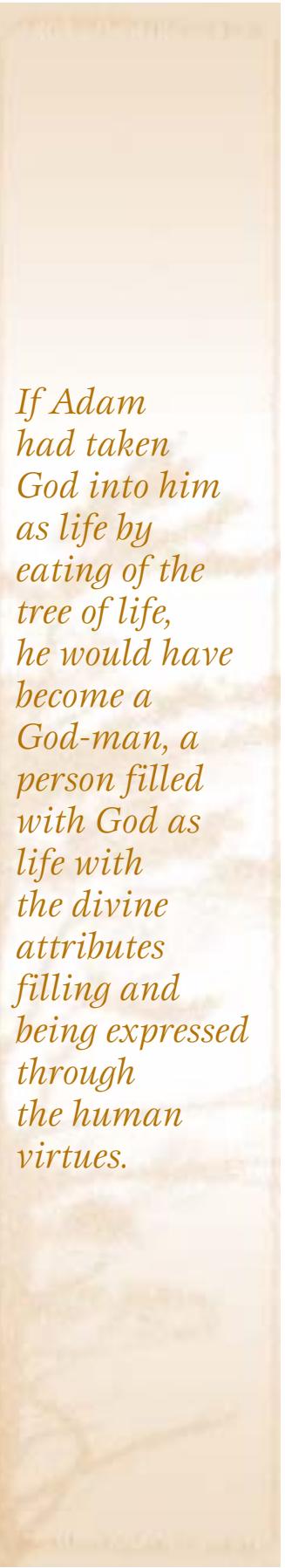
At this juncture we need to point out that human beings need to be regenerated not merely because they are sinful but mainly because they are human and, being human, do not have God's life. The only way to receive the life of God is to be born of God, born of the Spirit in our spirit to become children of God (John 3:6; 1:12-13). To be regenerated, to be born of God, is to receive another life—the divine, eternal, uncreated life of God—in addition to our natural, human, created life. If Adam had eaten of the tree of life, thereby receiving the life of God, he would have been born of God to be not only a creature of God but also a child of God. If he had taken God into him as life by eating of the tree of life, he would have become not only a human being made by God in His image but would have become a God-man, a person filled with God as life with the divine attributes filling and being expressed through the human virtues. This is what God intended, and this is what He eventually will have with His chosen and redeemed people.

The figure of the tree of life in Genesis 2 finds its explanation and fulfillment in the Gospel of John. According to this Gospel, the tree of life, in reality, is Christ Himself. A simple equation demonstrates this: John 1:4 plus John 15:1 equals Christ as the tree of life. John 1:1 and 4 reveal that life is in the Word, who is God Himself. The life in verse 4 is the life signified by the tree of life and the life which is Christ (11:25; 14:6). Clearly, the life is in Christ, and Christ Himself is the life. Christ is also the true vine (15:1), which is a tree. For Christ to be both the life and the tree indicates that He is the tree of life. Furthermore, all the aspects of the all-inclusive Christ revealed in the Gospel of John are the outcome of His being the tree of life (6:48; 8:12; 10:10-11).

John discloses that the believers in Christ experience and enjoy the life of the tree of life by believing into Christ, by eating Christ, and by abiding in Christ. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that everyone who believes into Him may have eternal life" (3:14-15). By believing into Christ, we receive Him (1:12-13), and by receiving Him we receive the life that is in Him (1 John 5:11-12). The initial believing and receiving was at the time of our regeneration, at which time Christ planted Himself into us as the tree of life. Having received Christ as the tree of life, we need to eat of Him as this tree in order to live by Him (John 6:48, 50, 57).

To eat is to contact certain things outside of us and receive them into us, with the result that they are assimilated, are digested, and become our organic constitution. Such an eating entails both dispensing and mingling, for the food is first dispensed into us and then, through the process of digestion, is mingled with us to actually become us. This principle applies to eating Christ as the bread of life (the tree of life in the form of bread). We eat Him, we digest Him, we assimilate Him, and we are constituted with Him to become the same as He is in life, nature, and expression but not, of course, in the Godhead.

According to God's heart's desire and eternal intention, we not only believe in the tree of life and eat of the tree of life, but we are actually grafted into Christ to become parts of the tree of life. He, the true vine, is the tree of life, and we, the branches in the vine, are parts, extensions, of the tree of life. Christ as the tree of life is the embodiment of God as life to us (Col. 2:9; 3:4), and we have been joined to Him organically. Now, as branches of this tree, we abide in Him, and He abides in us (John 15:4-5). As we abide in Christ as the vine tree, we receive, experience, and enjoy the dispensing of the Triune God as life into us, and this life continually flows throughout the vine and the branches. This is to be one with the tree of life and to live in union with the tree of life for the glory of God.



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### The Significance of the Tree of Death

The tree of life signifies God as the source of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil signifies Satan as the source of death (Heb. 2:14). As Bonhoeffer astutely remarks, “The tree of knowledge is the tree of death. It stands immediately next to the tree of life, and the tree of life is only endangered by the tree of death” (59). That the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is related to death is proved by God’s word of warning in Genesis 2:17: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of it you shall not eat; for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Eve repeated a version of this warning in her dialogue with the serpent: “But of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die” (3:3). As everyone knows, the serpent lied (v. 4), the woman and the man ate (v. 6), and they died spiritually (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). Truly, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the source of death, and knowledge, good, and evil are all somehow involved with death. *Knowledge, good, evil, and death stand in contrast to a single word—life.*

As depicted in Genesis 2 and 3, the issue facing Adam was a matter of receiving God as life by eating of the tree of life or receiving Satan as death by eating of the tree of death. By taking the fruit of the tree of death, Adam received Satan into himself as the element of sin resulting in death to man’s entire tripartite being. If we see this, we will realize that the fall of humanity was not simply a matter of acting contrary to the command of God but of actually receiving the evil nature of Satan and being constituted with it. In this way, all human beings have been satanified; that is, they have been injected with the life and nature of Satan, they have been invested with the characteristics of Satan, and they have become the same as Satan in life, nature, and constitution. Furthermore, because the fruit of the tree of death contains a kind of perverse reproductive and growing power, Satan in the form of the tree of death is growing in fallen humanity. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a tree that brings forth death, is continually growing in humankind. The result is threefold death: spiritual death, psychological death, and physical death.

### Two Sources

The two trees represent two sources—God and Satan. To take God as the source is to follow the way of life, the constricted way that leads to life (Matt. 7:14); to take Satan as the source is to take the way of death, the broad way that leads to destruction (v. 3). Hence, the source determines both the way and the result. Admittedly, few knowingly and willfully would take Satan as their source; however, by living according to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of death, they are in fact taking Satan as their source, and without exception and without fail, the issue is death.

We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that God cares about the source of a matter. “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up” (15:13). God is absolute; what is of Him He will honor, and what is not, He will uproot. He is the only legitimate source, the unique source, and He must be honored as such. “Out from Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (Rom. 11:36). Only that which is out from Him can be through Him and, ultimately, unto Him. “To us there is one God, the Father, out from whom are all things, and we are unto Him” (1 Cor. 8:6).

This is a lesson that Abraham learned through long years of experience. During the course of his whole life, Abraham learned one lesson—that God is the Father. In calling him out of Ur and Haran, God called him away from the tree of death and back to the tree of life, a journey that began when Abraham “went out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb. 11:8). God did a special work on Abraham in order to show him what it means for God to be the Father (Eph. 4:6). To know God as the Father is to

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know that He is the source, the unique Initiator, that everything originates from Him and proceeds from Him. Through all the experiences that led up to the birth of Isaac, Abraham eventually learned that God the Father is the unique source, represented by the tree of life in Genesis 2.

Satan has made himself an illegal, illegitimate, unprincipled source, and as such, he too is a father. "You are of your father the devil," the Lord Jesus declared in John 8:44, "and you want to do the desires of your father." Within the devil's perverted being, there is something that the Lord Jesus designates as "his own possessions": "When he speaks the lie, he speaks it out of his own possessions; for he is a liar and the father of it" (v. 44). "The Lord's word here revealed that in the devil, the father of lies, there is a particular wicked thing that caused him to become the source of sin. This thing is something of his own, his private possession, and it is something that other creatures do not have" (Recovery Version, v. 44, note 2). This dreadful, evil source is represented by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; to partake of this death-tree is not only to partake of death—it is also to eat Satan as the wicked source.

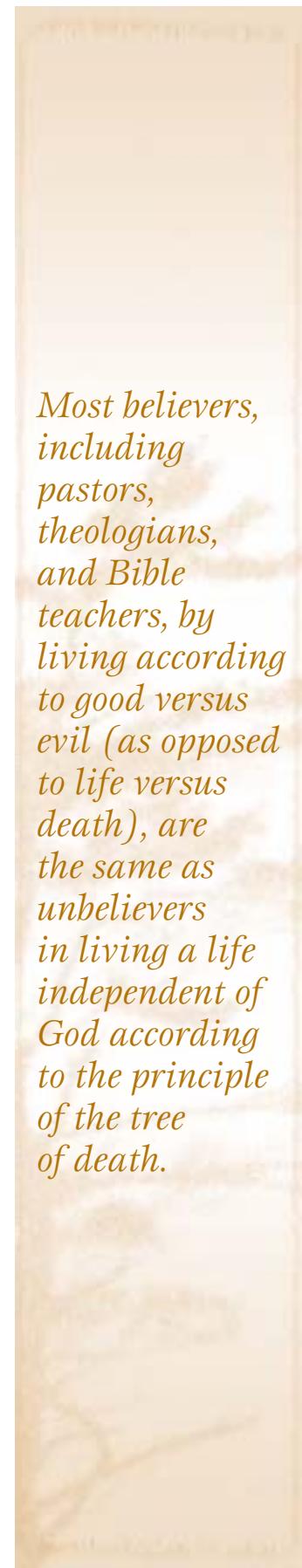
## Two Principles

With each of these two trees there is a principle. The principle of the tree of life is dependence upon God. To live as part of the tree of life is to depend upon God all the time and for all things. The Lord's word in John 15:4-5 refers to this: "Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me...For apart from Me you can do nothing." The branch is completely dependent upon the vine and can do nothing apart from the vine. To abide in the vine, in the tree of life, is to live a dependent life according to the principle of the tree of life. Those who follow this principle have no confidence in themselves; they deny themselves, and they exercise their spirit to pray. The principle of the tree of death, on the contrary, is independence. To live as part of the tree of death is to trust in the self and to do everything in the self, by the self, for the self, and according to the self.

All unbelievers live a life of independence from God in keeping with the principle of the tree of death. The situation of the believers in Christ may be somewhat different from that of unbelievers. We say *somewhat different* because we should not naively suppose that the majority of believers follow the principle of the tree of life, denying the self, applying the cross, praying without ceasing, and honoring the headship of Christ in the Body. Only a minority of believers—the overcomers—live this way. The majority live according to what they regard as good as opposed to evil and what they consider right as opposed to wrong. This means that most believers, including pastors, theologians, and Bible teachers, by living according to good versus evil (as opposed to life versus death), are the same as unbelievers in living a life independent of God according to the principle of the tree of death. "In the present church," William Law boldly asserts, "the tree of life is hissed at as the visionary food of extremists, and the tree of death, called the tree of knowledge, has the eyes and hearts of priests and people, and is thought to do as much good to Christians as it did evil to the first inhabitants of Paradise" (60).

## Two Laws

The tree of death and the tree of life, that is, Satan as death and God as life, have become two laws—the law of sin and of death and the law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2). By *laws* I mean principles that operate spontaneously within us, similar to physiological principles that govern the functions of our bodily organs and systems. "Both Satan and God, after entering into our being and dwelling in us, work within us not by outward, objective activities but by an inward, subjective law" (Recovery Version,



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v. 2, note 1). The law of sin is the power to commit sin that arises spontaneously within us (7:23, 25). The law of death is the power that makes us weak and impotent in the things of God and that leads us inexorably to decay, corruption, and death. Satan has become an evil law operating within us, a law that has tremendous power related to both sin and death. This is the objective tree of the knowledge of good and evil becoming a subjective law within us. In like manner, the objective tree of life has also become a law—the law of the Spirit of life—functioning spontaneously within the believers. As the highest law in the universe, this law—the tree of life as a law—frees us from the law of sin and of death. Regrettably, not many believers have a clear understanding of the two trees as two subjective laws; thus, instead of living and walking by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25), they live by self-effort, by will power, never knowing the blessed release revealed in Romans 8:2.

### **Two Kingdoms**

As the two trees grow, increase, and develop within and among humankind, they become two kingdoms—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. A kingdom, it must be noted here, is the totality of a particular kind of life with its activities. For example, the animal kingdom is the totality of animal life with all the activities of this life. In the same principle, the human kingdom is the totality of human life with all human activities. Although it is beyond dispute that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan both involve the exercise of authority—the rule of God and the authority of darkness respectively—our emphasis here is less upon a kingdom as a sphere of authority and more upon a kingdom as a realm of life. The divine life signified by the tree of life and the satanic life signified by the tree of death both have produced kingdoms.

We need to be enlightened to see that the kingdom of God is a matter not only of the reign of God over the universe and everyone and everything in it but a matter also of the enjoyment of God as the tree of life. The kingdom of God is God in Christ being the totality of life with all its activities. The seed of the kingdom, sown by the Lord Jesus as the Sower, is the Triune God as the tree of life which has been planted into us, and the growth of the kingdom is the growth of the tree of life planted into us (Mark 4:26-29). God Himself is both the tree of life and the kingdom produced by the tree of life. The kingdom of God is God Himself (1:15; Matt. 6:33; John 3:3). God's kingdom has God as its content, and God is life, having the nature, ability, law, and shape of the divine life, which forms the realm of God's ruling in life. This indicates that, especially as far as the believers in Christ are concerned, God's reigning over us is not merely an outward matter but an inward matter involving the innate ability of the divine life. Therefore, the kingdom of God is not only the reign of God but also the realm of the divine life (vv. 5, 15-16). As the realm of the divine life, the kingdom of God is the sphere for His life to move, to work, and to govern so that this life may accomplish its purpose of producing the corporate expression of God.

**T**he unique way for us to enter into the kingdom of God as the realm of the divine life is to receive Christ as the tree of life through regeneration. The kingdom of God is a realm which requires the divine life; hence, if we would see and enter into the kingdom of God, we must be born of God to receive the life of God and thereby become children of God qualified to live in the realm of the divine species. To see this is to realize that repentance and regeneration through believing in the Lord are not first for salvation but for entering into the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:17; John 3:3, 5). Because through regeneration we receive the life of God, regeneration is the unique entrance into the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God in the sense of life and as a realm of life is the Lord Jesus—the tree of life—sown into us and developing into an organic realm over which God can

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rule as His kingdom in the divine life. Apart from the tree of life planted into us as the seed of life and the seed of the kingdom, there can be among humankind no kingdom as a realm of life. Christ establishes the kingdom by sowing Himself as the seed of life into believing people so that the kingdom may grow and develop. This reveals that the establishing of the kingdom of God is absolutely a matter of the growth of Christ in us as the tree of life.

The kingdom of Satan (Matt. 12:26), a counterfeit of the kingdom of God, is also produced by sowing. The devil is the enemy who sowed tares into the world as the field, and these tares are “the sons of the evil one” (13:38). Just as the kingdom of God is increasing through the growth of Christ as the tree of life among “the sons of the kingdom” (v. 38), so the kingdom of Satan as a realm of the satanic life with its activities is increasing through the growth of Satan as the tree of death among the sons of the evil one.

Here we have two kinds of sowing, two kinds of sons, and two kinds of kingdoms. We may say that Christ as the tree of life sowed Himself as the seed of life into the believers to produce the kingdom of God in life—the kingdom of the Son of God’s love (Col. 1:13)—and that Satan as the tree of death sowed himself as sin and death into fallen humanity as the kingdom of Satan—the authority of darkness. The source of these two kingdoms is two trees with two principles and two laws. To live by the tree of life is to live in the kingdom of God brought forth by this tree; to live by the tree of death is to live in the kingdom of Satan produced by this tree. The tree we live by determines the realm we live in.

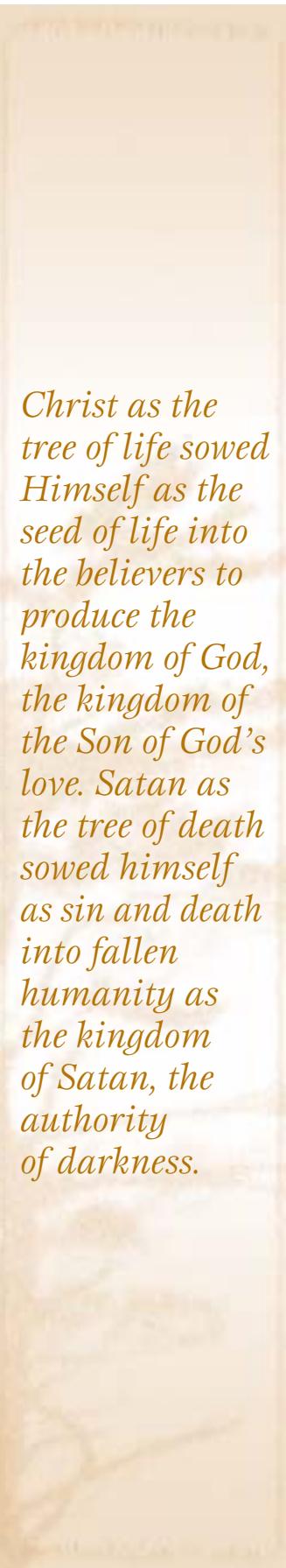
### Two Lines with Two Consummations

The two trees, as two sources, two laws, and two principles, are two lines that run throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. For the most part, these lines are seen in the lives of prominent persons. On the line of the knowledge of good and evil we have Cain, Nimrod, Esau, Pharaoh, Korah, Saul, Absalom, Ahab, the scribes and the Pharisees, Judas, the dissenters in the churches, and Antichrist. On the line of life we have Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, Daniel, the Lord Jesus, and Paul. These two lines will issue in two consummations. The consummation of the tree of knowledge and of the line of the knowledge of good and evil will be the lake of fire, the second death (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8). The consummation of the tree of life and of the line of life will be the New Jerusalem, the city of water with the tree of life as its centrality and universality (vv. 2, 10-11; 22:1-2). Satan, signified by the death-tree, will be forever in the lake of fire. The Triune God, signified by the life-tree, with His redeemed and regenerated people, will become the New Jerusalem, and as the eternal tree of life, He will sustain and maintain the city with Himself as the life and the life supply (vv. 14, 19).

### The Lamb of God and the Tree of Life

As a fallen human being, Adam was separated from the life of God and was not permitted to contact and receive God as the tree of life (Gen. 3:1-6, 11-13, 22-24). Thus, “Jehovah God said, Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also from the tree of life” (v. 22). According to verse 21, Adam and Eve benefited from an anticipated redemption, which allowed them to have some degree of fellowship with God, but they nevertheless were not permitted to partake of the tree of life:

Although Adam and Eve had the anticipated redemption, they did not yet have the actual redemption, which was accomplished by Christ on the cross. They were still sinful in nature. If they had eaten of the tree of life while in that condition, they would have lived



*Christ as the tree of life sowed Himself as the seed of life into the believers to produce the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the Son of God’s love. Satan as the tree of death sowed himself as sin and death into fallen humanity as the kingdom of Satan, the authority of darkness.*

*To hear that God's people are enjoying such an experience of the divine life is encouraging. However, knowing that we have access to the tree of life through the Lamb of God is only the beginning. A crucial matter remains to be settled in the core of our being.*

forever with their sinful nature. God did not allow that. The tree of life, signifying God as life to man, must not be touched by sinful man. Thus, before the actual redemption was accomplished, God had to close the way to the tree of life. Once the actual redemption was completed to take away man's sin (John 1:29) and terminate man's sinful nature (John 3:14 and note; Rom. 8:3 and note 3), access to the tree of life would again be possible (Rev. 22:14). (Recovery Version, v. 22, note 1)

Genesis 3:24 continues by saying, "So He drove the man out, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword which turned in every direction to guard the way to the tree of life." Human access to the tree of life was prevented by God's glory (signified by the cherubim), holiness (signified by the flame), and righteousness (signified by the sword). Unless the requirements imposed by God's glory, holiness, and righteousness are fulfilled, we cannot have access to the tree of life. But what is impossible with man is possible with God! Through the redemption of Christ, the way to the tree of life has been reopened. The death of Christ on our behalf satisfied the demands of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness, and He with His redemptive blood is now our access to God in Christ as the tree of life. When Christ's flesh was crucified, the veil of the temple was split in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51; Heb. 10:19-20), thus opening the way for us, fallen human beings, to enter into the Holy of Holies to contact God and receive Him as the tree of life for our enjoyment.

**A**ccording to the revelation in the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation, the Lamb of God is our access to the tree of life. We have seen that the life in Christ as the incarnate Word is the divine life (John 1:4, 14), the life signified by the tree of life. Because we are sinful, we cannot, in and of ourselves, approach the tree of life or appropriate it. For this, we need Christ as the Lamb of God. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (v. 29). The redemption accomplished by Christ is not an end in itself; rather, it is the means by which God, without violating His attributes of glory, holiness, and righteousness, can permit the believers in Christ to approach Him, contact Him, receive Him, and enjoy Him as the tree of life. Redemption recovers us to God's original intention that we receive Him as life in order to express Him and represent Him (Gen. 1:26). The Lamb of God is for the tree of life.

This is portrayed vividly in Revelation 7 and 22. The great multitude clothed in white robes are those who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). Because of this application of Christ's redemption, "they are before the throne of God," and the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shepherds them and guides them to springs of waters of life (vv. 15, 17). This picture of the corporate enjoyment of the tree of life through the redemption of Christ is reinforced by the word in 22:14: "Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life." The redeemed ones have something more than permission to contact the tree of life—they have right to the tree of life. The redeeming God—the Lamb—has authorized them, based upon His blood, and given them right of access to the Triune God as the tree of life.

### **The Need for Believers to Make a Radical Change**

After believers have been enlightened to see that they have right to the tree of life through the redeeming blood of Christ, many seeking ones, by exercising faith in His blood (Rom. 3:25), will come forward in faith to contact God in Christ as the tree of life. To hear that God's people are enjoying such an experience of the divine life is encouraging. However, knowing that we have access to the tree of life through the Lamb of God is only the beginning. A crucial matter remains to be settled in the core of our being. This crucial matter involves the principle according to which we live day by day. To be sure, when we were regenerated, Christ planted Himself into us as the tree of life. Nevertheless, in our practical human and spiritual living, we may live not

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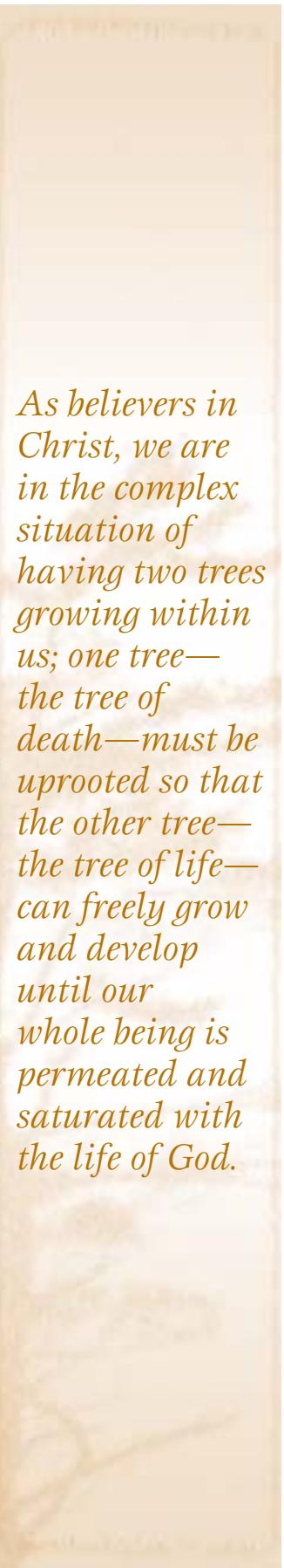
according to the principle and the line of the tree of life but according to the principle and the line of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If this is our actual situation, then in our daily living we are not in the realm of the tree of life but in the realm of the tree of death. Hence, there is the need for the believers in Christ to make a radical change—a change at the root in the depths of our their being, from the principle of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to the principle of the tree of life. As believers in Christ, we are in the complex situation of having two trees growing within us; one tree—the tree of death—must be uprooted so that the other tree—the tree of life—can freely grow and develop until our whole being is permeated and saturated with the life of God.

This is a deep spiritual experience with a number of decisive elements. First, there is the need for the cross of Christ in the power of the Spirit to be applied to the root of the tree of death in our soul. A mere pruning of this tree is not sufficient; the root must be severed. The axe must be laid at the root of the tree (Matt. 3:10). Along with this, we need to be strengthened into our inner man, our spirit regenerated and indwelt by the life-giving Spirit, with the result that Christ gradually makes His home in our heart (Eph. 3:16-17). As Christ makes His home in us, He as the tree of life spreads in us, branching out into every part of our soul. This enables us to have more faith in the Lord, in His word, and in His blood, more love toward Him, and more experience and enjoyment of Him as the divine life dispensed into us. This supplies us to live by the principle of the tree of life and thus to remain constantly on the line of life in the kingdom of God. Instead of living by opinions regarding good and evil, right and wrong, we live by the sense of life in our spirit, paying attention to the flow of life within. According to his testimony in Romans 8, this was Paul's living; he set his mind on the spirit (v. 6), which is life (v. 10), and enjoyed the dispensing of the Triune God as life. If we learn to live according to the sense of life in such a way, we will be led by the Spirit (v. 14), be liberated by the law of the Spirit of life (v. 2), and walk according to the spirit (v. 4). This is a living according to the principle of the tree of life and on the line of life in the kingdom of the divine life.

That God intends for His people to make a radical turn from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to the tree of life is illustrated by the book of Job. As indicated by their voluminous words, the logic of Job and his friends was according to the line of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:11—32:1). Not knowing God as the tree of life, they were ensnared by their notions of right and wrong. Thus, Job and his friends were altogether in the realm of the tree of death. However, God had an intention, especially with Job, and God's intention was to rescue Job from the realm of good and evil and to plant him in the realm of the tree of life (1:1; 2:3; 19:10). In order to fulfill this intention, God used Satan to tear down all that Job had built up in himself according to the principle of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then, based upon a revelation of Himself that caused Job to abhor himself and repent, God worked to rebuild and reconstitute Job with Himself as the tree of life, with the divine life and divine nature, so that Job would become the kind of person God wants and needs—a man of life absolutely one with Him in life and expressing Him in His attributes. Eventually, all believers in Christ will undergo such a tearing down and reconstituting to become part of the tree of life and components of the city of God, New Jerusalem.

### The Warfare between Life and Death

The more a believer turns from the principle of the tree of death to the principle of the tree of life, the more he or she will become actively involved in the greatest battle in the universe—the warfare between life and death. As a result of experiencing and enjoying Christ as the tree of life according to the law of life in the kingdom of the divine life, we first become aware that such a warfare exists, and then we find ourselves thrust into the center of the war.



*As believers in Christ, we are in the complex situation of having two trees growing within us; one tree—the tree of death—must be uprooted so that the other tree—the tree of life—can freely grow and develop until our whole being is permeated and saturated with the life of God.*

*If we are filled with the divine life and are rich in the experience of life, we will not only recognize and appreciate life in others, but we will have a keen sense of death. However, those who have death in themselves can recognize neither life nor death but are oblivious to both.*

Regarding the warfare between life and death, I have received immense help from the ministry of Watchman Nee, and for this portion of the essay it is appropriate, even necessary, to follow his lead. My approach here will be to cite and then comment upon certain crucial portions.

"The main battle between Satan and man has to do with life" ("Warfare" 875). Because God's purpose is fulfilled only when man receives God's life, Satan's stratagem is to distract us from life and to lure us into death. The presence of the tree of death in Genesis 2 indicates that Satan's goal is to bring death to man and to bring man into death.

"Death is the characteristic of Satan's work. The ultimate goal of his work is to saturate man with death" (876). Contrary to what is alleged by some writers on spiritual warfare, the devil's main weapon against God's people is not demons or so-called territorial spirits but death. He, Satan, is the source of death and has the might of death, and his most powerful weapon in attacking the church is death.

"A Christian must realize that there is nothing more evil than death. At the same time, there is nothing better than life. In God's eyes death is the most ugly thing, while life is the most precious thing" (876). We should not suppose that there are many Christians who realize this, for the number is actually extremely small. Most believers have no revulsion toward spiritual death because they are deficient in the experience of Christ as the tree of life, and it is this experience that gives one the discernment between life and death. If we are filled with the divine life and are rich in the experience of life, we will not only recognize and appreciate life in others, but we will have a keen sense of death. However, those who have death in themselves can recognize neither life nor death but are oblivious to both.

"Every believer can be under the effect of the power of death" (877). The first thing to be affected by death is our spirit, which may be suppressed and even killed. Death may then assault the faculties of our soul, depleting us of needed energy and vitality.

"We should drive away the power of death through prayer" (878). To be passive is to surrender to the operation of death. If we would prevail over death and conquer it, we need to exercise our spirit to pray, declaring the victory of Christ in His death and resurrection (Acts 2:24).

"Since God's goal today is the church, Satan's attacks are directed specifically against the church...The ultimate weapon Satan uses to attack the church is death" ("Attack" 882). The enemy of God will seek every opportunity and take any way, especially religion and religious knowledge, to spread death in the church of God.<sup>3</sup>

"A Christian should not ask whether a thing is good or evil but should ask from where a thing originates. Does it originate from the natural life, the flesh, the soul, or does it originate from the spirit?" (883). Recall that the tree of life and the tree of death represent God and Satan as two opposing sources. A matter may seem good, and it may actually be good, but if the source is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the outcome will be death. Only that which originates from Christ as the tree of life in our spirit will issue in life.

"If the church is built on Christ the Rock, it will distinguish between death and life, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (883). The Lord Jesus declared, "Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). The gates of Hades are the devil's power of death. For this power not to prevail against the church built by Christ—what He can call "My church"—indicates that the church is built with the resurrection life of Christ (John 11:25). Those

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who are part of such spiritual building in resurrection life will distinguish between death and life and stand against the attack of death.

"Only the life of Christ and that which issues from it will prevail against the gates of Hades. Everything else is just disguised forms of death and cannot withstand the attacks of Satan" (884-885). Among believers today and in the so-called churches, there are numberless "disguised forms of death." What a dreadful situation, especially in light of the fact that so few are aware of it! Only by living according to the tree of life as the law of life in our regenerated spirit can we discern between death and life and stand against every onslaught of death personally or corporately.

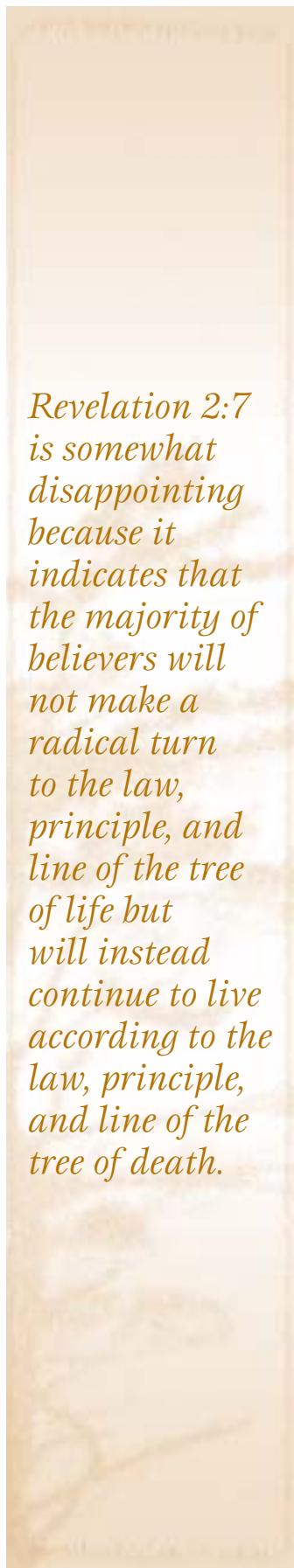
### The Tree of Life as a Reward to the Overcomers

Those who live in this way and resist the attack of death are the Lord's overcomers. "To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7). To overcome here and elsewhere in Revelation 2 and 3 is not to overcome the world in a general sense as mentioned by John in 1 John 5:5.<sup>4</sup> Because the churches have been distracted from the tree of life and have become degraded, the Lord needs overcomers among the churches. "In these seven epistles [Rev. 2—3], to overcome is to overcome the degraded situation of the churches. In this epistle, to overcome is to recover our first love toward the Lord and to hate the works of the Nicolaitans, the hierarchy that the Lord hates" (Recovery Version, Rev. 2:7, note 4). As their reward, the overcomers will eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God; that is, they will have a particular enjoyment of Christ as the tree of life in the New Jerusalem during the coming millennial kingdom.

Another aspect of the Lord's reward to the overcomers is seen in Revelation 2:10-11: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life...He who overcomes shall by no means be hurt of the second death." Once again, the victors in life are rewarded with the enjoyment of life in the thousand-year kingdom. "The crown of life, as a prize to those who are faithful unto death in overcoming persecution, denotes the overcoming strength that is the power of the resurrection life (Phil. 3:10)" (Recovery Version, Rev. 2:10, note 3). Only those believers who take the way of life today will enjoy the reward of life with the Lord in His kingdom.

**T**he Lord's word in Revelation 2:7, 10-11 is encouraging, but in a sense it is also somewhat disappointing. The word is encouraging because it is a word of incentive and promise, a word that motivates the seekers of the Lord to remain steadfast on the line of life until the end. The word is rather disappointing because it indicates that the majority of believers will not make a radical turn to the law, principle, and line of the tree of life but will instead continue to live according to the law, principle, and line of the tree of death.

Nevertheless, the tree of life and the way of life will ultimately prevail in the New Jerusalem, and the tree of death will have its consummation in the lake of fire. As we have pointed out, what began with the two trees as the two sources will culminate with the lake of fire and the city of water as the two consummations. In eternity and for eternity, all the chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, renewed, transformed, conformed, and glorified tripartite believers in Christ will, as mature sons of God and constituents of the city of God, enjoy the tree of life as their eternal portion. Although the ultimate outcome is certain, the present situation among the believers with respect to the two trees is, from our perspective, undecided. Many will remain in the religion of death, but a few, we say in hope, will turn to God's way of life and, even now, experience and enjoy the tree of life. "Because narrow is the gate and constricted is the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it" (Matt. 7:14). **AC**



*Revelation 2:7  
is somewhat  
disappointing  
because it  
indicates that  
the majority of  
believers will  
not make a  
radical turn  
to the law,  
principle, and  
line of the tree  
of life but  
will instead  
continue to live  
according to the  
law, principle,  
and line of the  
tree of death.*

*The tree of life  
will ultimately  
prevail in the  
New Jerusalem,  
and the tree  
of death will  
have its  
consummation  
in the lake of  
fire. What  
began with  
the two trees  
as the two  
sources will  
culminate with  
the lake of fire  
and the city of  
water as the two  
consummations.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The life of God, being divine and eternal, is immortal and unchangeable; it remains the same and continues living even after passing through any kind of blow or destruction. All other kinds of life in the universe—angelic life, human life, animal life, and plant life—are mortal and changeable. Only the life of God is divine and eternal, immortal and unchangeable. No matter what kind of blow or destruction it undergoes, it remains unchanged and stays forever the same. Therefore, from the standpoint of eternity only the life of God is life. According to the divine and eternal nature of the life of God, God's life is the unique life. Because the life of God is the unique life, whenever the New Testament in the original Greek speaks of this life, it uses the word *zoe*, which refers to the highest life (John 1:4; 1 John 1:2; 5:12). (Lee, *Conclusion* 74)

<sup>2</sup>The tree of life is the center of the universe. According to the purpose of God, the earth is the center of the universe, the Garden of Eden is the center of the earth, and the tree of life is the center of the Garden of Eden. Hence, the universe is centered on the tree of life. Nothing is more central and crucial to both God and man than the tree of life. The tree of life in the garden was an indicator that God desires to be our life in the form of food. (Lee, *Conclusion* 429).

<sup>3</sup>William Law had insight regarding this.

But now corruption, sin, death, and every evil of the world have entered into the Church, the spouse of Christ, just as they entered into Eve, the spouse of Adam, in Paradise. And in the very same way, and from the same cause: namely, a desire for knowledge other than that which comes from the inspiration of the Spirit of God alone. This desire is the serpent's voice in every man, doing everything to him and in him which Satanic deception did to Eve in the garden. It carries on the first deceit, it shows and recommends to him that same beautiful tree of human wisdom, self-will, and self-esteem springing up within him, which Eve saw in the garden. And this love of human wisdom and knowledge so blinds man, that he cannot see that he is eating of the same forbidden fruit and keeping up in himself all the death and separation from God which the first hunger for knowledge brought forth. (52-53)

<sup>4</sup>In a note on Revelation 2:7 in his study Bible, John MacArthur claims, "According to John's own definition, to be an overcomer is to be a Christian." He refers the reader to a note on 1 John 5:5, where he says, "The overcomers are believers—all of them." Simply put, MacArthur is mistaken. Although the overcomers in 1 John are all the believers, this is not the case in Revelation 2 and 3. In these chapters the Lord Jesus is speaking to the churches and is calling for overcomers in the churches. Such believers, a minority, overcome the degradation of the churches to fulfill God's eternal purpose in life.

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