

The Continuing History of the Two Trees

The Bible begins and ends with a revelation of the true and living God. In the beginning of the Bible, God purposefully creates, and in the end, He gains the purpose of His creation (Gen. 1:1; Rev. 22:20-21). This purpose involves man, and in many respects, the Bible also begins and ends with a revelation of man (Gen. 1:26; Rev. 22:19). With these principal participants, the Bible is actually a history of God in His union with man. Before sin ever attempted to frustrate the divine economy or offended the attributes of God, God planned and prepared a way for man to be incorporated into His divine fellowship of life by organically assimilating His life and nature.

The need for man to organically assimilate the God of life also explains the presence of the tree of life at the beginning and end of the divine revelation (Gen. 2:9; Rev. 22:19). The tree of life crystallizes this reality. The history of the serpent's efforts to frustrate and even war against the divine economy also runs nearly coterminously with the revelation of God and man in the Bible. It begins shortly after the revelation of God, man, and the tree of life in Genesis 2:9, and it ends shortly before the revelation of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil crystallizes this reality. The centrality of the two trees in the divine revelation indicates, more than anything, that the continuing history of God and man in relation to God's purpose involves the continuing history of the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

We must have a clear view and a thorough understanding of the continuing history of these two trees. They represent two sources, two principles, and two laws, which produce two kingdoms, each with a very different consummation. In order to access the tree of life, believers must make a radical change in their living to live according to the tree of life for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

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. 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. To

take God as the source is to follow the way of life, the constricted way that leads to life; to take Satan as the source is to take the way of death, the broad way that leads to destruction. 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 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. Even a majority of believers 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

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Bible teachers, by living according to good versus evil, are the same as unbelievers in living a life independent of God according to the principle of the tree of death. We live by these trees because each tree is, in fact, an operating law—the law of sin and of death and the law of the Spirit of life. The law of sin is the power to commit sin that arises spontaneously within us. The law of death is the power that makes us weak and impotent in the things of God and that leads inexorably to decay, corruption, and death. Believers, however, also have access to the highest law in the universe—the law of the Spirit of life, which is the tree of life as a law. This law frees us from the law of sin and of death.

As the two trees grow, increase, and develop within and among mankind, they become two kingdoms—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. 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 seed of the kingdom has been planted into us, and the growth of the kingdom is the growth of the tree of life planted into us.

Christ is the reality of the tree of life, who is sown as the seed of the divine life into the believers for the growth of this life within them. Christ is dispensed into us as a three-

fold seed of life for the growth of God in us. He is the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, and the seed of David to grow and develop within us according to the law of the Spirit of life, resulting in our maturity of life for His expression. As the seed of the woman, He destroyed Satan and saves us from sin and death. As the seed of Abraham, He causes us to receive the all-inclusive Spirit as our blessing and inheritance. As the seed of David, He builds Himself into our being by growing in us for the building of the house of God (causing us to participate in God's sonship) and by growing in us for the building of the kingdom of God (causing us to participate in Christ's kingship).

For the growth of the seed of life within us, we need a fresh, up-to-date, daily consecration to Him that includes: (1) a daily, private, and personal time with the Lord so that we may be rooted in Christ to absorb God and grow with the growth of God; (2) asking the Father to strengthen us with power through His Spirit into our inner man so that we may worship God in and with our spirit and with Christ as our truthfulness for Christ to make His home in our heart; (3) asking the Lord to direct our heart into the love of God and into the endurance of Christ, and dealing with our heart so that it may be the good earth in

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which Christ can grow in an unhindered way; (4) forgiving others from our heart by the indwelling Christ as our forgiving life, allowing Him to rule in us for the reality of the kingdom, and forgiving others from our heart by the indwelling Christ as our arbitrating peace, releasing others by forgiving them so that we may be released to be forgiven by God for the freedom of the growth of the seed of God in us; (5) giving our material possessions in secret for the sowing and spreading of the seed of life; (6) with service originating from God, cooperating with Him to sow Him as the seed of life into others and to water the seed of life within them for their growth in life; and (7) working together with Christ as the Sower to sow the seed of life as the word of God through our preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to the whole inhabited earth, both to unbelievers for their conversion to Christ and to believers for their growth in Christ.

The continuing history of the two trees touches not only our personal relationship with the Lord, but it is intimately related to our corporate enjoyment and participation in the fellowship of the divine life. This can be seen in the operation of the two trees within the church in Corinth. The principal contrast that Paul presents in 1 Corinthians focuses on two organic expressions, which are the issue of partaking of the life and nature of two very different organ-

ic sources. It is a contrast between a corporate expression of the new man, who is sustained and nurtured by partaking of the organic realization of the tree of life, the crucified and resurrected Christ, and a divided expression of the corporate fallen man, who is sustained and nurtured by partaking of the organic development of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the wisdom of this age. The former expression, reflecting the wisdom of God, is an issue of divine fellowship and life; the latter expression, reflecting the wisdom of this age, is the issue of satanic division and death. God in His wisdom prepared man as a vessel to contain His life and nature, and He prepared Himself to be received by man by passing through a process of incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, to be consummated as the life-giving Spirit in order that God and man and man and God would be mutually joined to one another in a divine fellowship of the divine life. As a result of this economy, man becomes God in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead. This is much higher than just being like God according to one of His attributes by knowing the difference between good and evil. As redeemed and regenerated humanity, we once again have the opportunity to partake of the tree of life, fulfilling our purpose within our corporate history.

As believers in Christ, we are in the complex situation of having two trees growing within us; one, the tree of death, must be

uprooted so that the other, the tree of life, can freely grow and develop until our whole being is permeated and saturated with the life of God. The more we turn from the tree of death to the tree of life, however, the more we will become actively involved in the warfare between life and death. This warfare is largely conducted on the battlefield of religion through religious thoughts and intentions. By caring for what is assumed and taught as standards of right and wrong, Christians in droves have fallen into a condition of spiritual death. Today Christianity is a religion of death; it has a name that it is living, but it is dead. God's people must choose which way to take—life or death. 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 this ultimate outcome is certain, the present history of every believer 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. "Narrow is the gate and constricted is the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it." **AFC**

by the Editors