

THE FOUR GREAT PILLARS IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

The Second Great Pillar—Life

(1)

The Tree of Life

Scripture Reading: Gen. 2:9; 3:24; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19

- I. We need a vision to see that the Bible presents to us a picture of God in Christ as the tree of life to be our food; this is why the tree of life is mentioned both at the beginning and the end of the Bible—Gen. 2:9; Rev. 22:2, 14, 19:**
- A. God's purpose in the creation of man in His image and according to His likeness was that man would receive Him as life and express Him in all His attributes—Gen. 1:26-27; 2:9.
 - B. The tree of life signifies the crucified and resurrected Christ, who imparts life to man and pleases and satisfies man in an edible form—v. 9.
 - C. The tree of life is the center of God's economy; the carrying out of God's economy depends on the tree of life, for it is the way to fulfill God's economy—1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 3:9.
 - D. The tree of life is the center of the universe:
 - 1. 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.
 - 2. Nothing is more central and crucial to both God and man than the tree of life—Gen. 3:22; Rev. 22:14.
 - E. The New Testament reveals that Christ is the fulfillment of the figure of the tree of life:
 - 1. John 1:4, speaking of Christ, says, "In Him was life"; this refers to the life signified by the tree of life in Genesis 2.
 - 2. The life displayed in Genesis 2 was the life incarnated in Christ—1 John 5:11-12.
 - 3. If we put together John 1:4 and 15:5, we will realize that Christ, who Himself is life and also a vine tree, is the tree of life.
 - F. The enjoyment of the tree of life will be the eternal portion of all God's redeemed—Rev. 22:1-2:
 - 1. The tree of life fulfills for eternity what God intended for man from the beginning—Gen. 1:26; 2:9.
 - 2. The fact that the tree of life bears twelve fruits means that the fruit of the tree of life is rich and sufficient for the carrying out of God's eternal administration.
- II. The Lord wants to recover the church back to the beginning—to the eating of the tree of life—Rev. 2:7:**

- A. In general, Christians have neglected the eating of the tree of life and have lost sight of the fact that they have the right to eat the Lord—22:14.
- B. God's placing man in front of the tree of life indicates that God wanted man to receive Him as life by eating Him organically and assimilating Him metabolically so that God might become the constituent of man's being—Gen. 2:9, 16-17:
 - 1. God not only desires that man be His vessel to contain Him; He also wants man to eat, digest, and assimilate Him—Rom. 9:21, 23; John 6:57.
 - 2. God wants to be digested and assimilated by us so that He can become the constitution of our inward being and that we will be one with Him and the same as He is in life and in nature—1 John 5:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:4.
- C. The essence of the tree of life is in the water of life; if we would enjoy Christ as the tree of life, as the element of life, we must drink Him as the water of life, the essence of life—Isa. 12:3-4; John 4:14; Rev. 22:1-2.
- D. Eating the tree of life, that is, enjoying Christ as our life supply, should be the primary matter in the church life—2:7; John 6:57.

III. Through the redemption of Christ, the way by which man could touch the tree of life, which is God Himself in Christ as life to man, has been opened again—Heb. 10:19-20; Rev. 22:14:

- A. As a fallen man, Adam was separated from the life of God and was not permitted to contact God as the tree of life—Gen. 3:1-6, 11-13, 22-24:
 - 1. Satan's tempting man to take the tree of the knowledge of good and evil indicates that Satan wants to keep man from taking God as his life—vv. 1-6.
 - 2. The significance of man's fall is that man was estranged from the life of God—Eph. 4:17-18.
 - 3. God's prohibiting man by the cherubim and the flaming sword from taking the tree of life indicates that God's glory (signified by the cherubim), holiness (signified by the flame), and righteousness (signified by the sword) do not allow sinful man to abuse the life of God—Heb. 9:5; 12:29; Rom. 2:5.
- B. When Christ's flesh was crucified, the veil was rent (Heb. 10:20; Matt. 27:51), thus opening the way for us, those who were alienated from God, who is signified by the tree of life, to enter into the Holy of Holies to contact Him and take Him as the tree of life for our enjoyment.
- C. "Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life"—Rev. 22:14:
 - 1. Through Christ's redemption, which fulfilled all the requirements of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness, the way to the tree of life was opened again to the believers.
 - 2. Those who wash their robes in the redeeming blood of Christ have the right to enjoy the tree of life as their eternal portion in the holy city, the Paradise of God, in eternity—v. 14.

IV. In God's economy we are not only the eaters of the tree of life, enjoying the continually fresh fruit, but we are also the branches of this tree, abiding in Christ, the tree of life, to enjoy the life-juice—v. 2; John 15:5:

- A. The Bible reveals that the relationship that God desires to have with man is that He and man become one—1 Cor. 6:17:

1. In His desire to be one with man, God created man in His image and according to His likeness and with a spirit to contact, receive, and contain Him—Gen. 1:26; 2:7.
2. God desires that the divine life and the human life be joined to become one life.
3. This oneness is an organic union, a union in life—a grafted life—John 15:4-5:
 - a. The grafted life is not an exchanged life—it is the mingling of the human life with the divine life.
 - b. In order for us to be grafted into Christ, He had to pass through the processes of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit—1:14; 1 Cor. 2:2; 15:45.
 - c. As regenerated ones who have been grafted into Christ, we should live a grafted life, a life in which two parties are joined to grow together organically:
 - (1) Since we have been grafted into Christ, we should allow the pneumatic Christ to live in us—Gal. 2:20.
 - (2) We should live a grafted life by the mingled spirit—the divine Spirit mingled with the regenerated human spirit—1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4.
 - d. In the grafted life, the human life is not eliminated but is strengthened, uplifted, and enriched by the divine life; the branch retains its essential characteristics, but its life is uplifted and transformed by being grafted into a higher life—Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:16-17a.
- B. Christ as the tree of life is the embodiment of God as life to us (Col. 2:9), and we are united with Him organically; we not only eat Christ as the tree of life—we are united with Him, we are one with Him, and we are part of Him—John 15:1, 4-5; 1 Cor. 6:17.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE THOUGHT OF GOD TO BE MAN'S LIFE

**God's Putting Man before the Tree of Life
 Indicating that God Desires that Man Would Take Him,
 Signified by the Tree of Life, as Man's Life**

The tree of life (Gen. 2:8-9) is a symbol of God as life. God is Spirit (John 4:24); as such, He is abstract, difficult for people to grasp, understand, or touch. In His wisdom God used the tree of life as a symbol of Himself. The tree of life is a particular tree. All the other different kinds of trees, such as the apple tree, the peach tree, and the banana tree, are easily understood by everyone. But not many people understand what the tree of life is. Life is mysterious and abstract. The tree of life symbolizes God as life. Therefore, when we take the tree of life, we take God into us as our life. Although this seems very simple, the tree of life is not easy to understand.

On a radio program some years ago in Los Angeles, a famous preacher and Bible teacher was asked what the tree of life is. He replied that, since the tree of life no longer existed, there was no further need for us to know about it. His answer indicated that he was short of the proper biblical knowledge. The tree of life is mentioned not only in Genesis 2 but also in Revelation 2 and 22. Revelation 2:7 says, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." How could the Lord give us to eat of something

that no longer exists? In Revelation 22:2 the Bible concludes emphatically with the matter of the tree of life. The tree of life continues to exist, but few understand the meaning of the tree of life. Life is inexplicable, and God also is inexplicable. The tree of life in Genesis 2:9 symbolizes God. Therefore, the tree of life can also be called “the tree of God.”

According to the description in Revelation 22:2, the tree of life apparently is a vine. This verse says that the tree of life grows on the two sides of the river. Hence, it grows along the river on both of its banks. A pine tree, which grows upward, can never occupy two banks of a river; but a vine can. In John 15 the Lord Jesus said that He was the true vine (v. 1). The other vines are symbols, but the Lord Jesus is the real vine. If we put Genesis 2, John 15, and Revelation 22 together, we can see that God is the tree of life and that the tree of life is a vine. As a vine God can reach people wherever they are.

**God’s Prohibiting the Fallen Man,
by the Cherubim and the Flaming Sword,
from Taking the Tree of Life Indicating That
God’s Glory, Holiness, and Righteousness
Do Not Allow the Sinful Man to Abuse the Life of God**

Satan’s tempting of man to take the tree of knowledge indicates that Satan wants to keep man from taking God as his life (Gen. 3:1-6). After man took of the tree of knowledge, God placed cherubim and a flaming sword (Gen. 3:24) before the tree of life in order to prevent man from taking of the tree of life also. God’s prohibiting of fallen man by the cherubim and the flaming sword from taking the tree of life indicates that God’s glory (signified by the cherubim), holiness (signified by the flame), and righteousness (signified by the sword) do not allow the sinful man to abuse the life of God. The sword signifies God’s righteousness. In Revelation 19 the Lord is the One who judges in righteousness (v. 11) with the sharp sword that proceeds out of His mouth (v. 15). The Lord judges by the sword, and the sword is related to His righteousness. God’s glory, holiness, and righteousness keep man away from taking God as his life. Fallen man has lost his position to enter into God to take God as his life.

**Man Having the Right to Partake of God as the Fountain of Life
through the Redemption of Christ**

Christ’s redemption meets the requirement of God’s glory, holiness, and righteousness. The Lord Jesus died for us in order to satisfy God’s requirements. Christ redeemed us back to our original position so that we can enter into God and enjoy Him as our life. Since the redemption of Christ had not yet been accomplished in the Old Testament, God used propitiation, which was accomplished with the animal sacrifices. Propitiation in the Old Testament typified the redemption of Christ in the New Testament. The blood of the sacrifice offered to God for the sins of the Israelites on the day of propitiation was brought into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled upon the cover of the ark (Lev. 16:14-15). Within the ark, under its cover, were the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. These commandments placed certain demands upon man before God. But the blood of the bullock covered the demands of these commandments. As a result, God could see only the covering blood and not the Ten Commandments. The troublesome situation between man and God was covered, that is, propitiated. The issue of this propitiation was peace. On the propitiatory place, the cover of the ark, God and man were able to meet in peace. The propitiation in the Old Testament gave the saints the right to partake of God as the fountain of life for their satisfaction (Psa. 36:8-9).

The propitiation in the Old Testament pointed to the redemption of Christ, which He accomplished in the New Testament. Now, under this redemption we have the full right to

enter into God and take Him as our life. (*The Triune God to be Life to the Tripartite Man*, pp. 16-18)

Putting Man before the Tree of Life

The third striking point in God's creation of man is that after God created man, He put man before the tree of life (Gen. 2:8-9). The man created by God was complete and perfect, having a body and a spirit with a soul. God put this complete and perfect man in front of the tree of life.

The figure of the tree of life in the Bible has puzzled nearly all the Bible teachers. In the Bible the tree of life is mentioned first in Genesis 2, and it proceeds through the Bible to the end, to Revelation 22. Between the two ends of the Bible, in Revelation 2:7 the Lord promised the overcomers that He will give them to eat of the tree of life. In order to discover what the tree of life is, we need to read through the Bible, beginning from Genesis 2. Eventually, we will reach Psalm 36:9, which says, "For with You is the fountain of life." According to this verse, with God is the fountain of life. The tree of life must be something that is related to life. Where is life? Life is in God. With God there is the fountain of life. Thus, God is the fountain, the source, of life. After reading further, we come to the New Testament. In John 1:4 we read, "In Him was life." The word *Him* in this verse refers to the Word in verse 1, who is God Himself. In the Word, who is God, is life. In John 14:6 this One came and told us, "I am...the life," and in John 15:1 He said, "I am the true vine." Besides Christ, every vine is a false one. Only He is the true vine. A vine is a tree. If we put these two matters, life and the tree, together, we have the tree of life. Who is the tree of life? The tree of life is the Triune God, who embodied Himself in Christ. Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God is the life in the vine tree. Therefore, Christ is the tree of life.

The tree of life is a vine tree...Ultimately, the tree of life is described in Revelation 22:2: "And on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." From this verse we can see that the tree of life does not grow by shooting upward; rather, it grows along the river of water of life, on the two sides of the river. A tree that grows along the two sides of a river surely must be a vine.

In brief, the tree of life in the Bible is a figure of the Triune God embodied in Christ to be the very substance of the divine life. This tree is good for man to take and eat (Gen. 2:16; John 6:57b) that man may be constituted with God as the constituent of life. Thus, man and God become organically united and live together as one person (John 15:5; Phil. 1:20-21a). Colossians 3:4 says that Christ is our life. Therefore, we need to take Him as our supply, as the very substance of the divine life, in which life we can be victorious and overcoming and can be so high that we can even reign in His eternal life (Rom. 5:17). We can be kings in the eternal life. Eventually, we will be co-kings with Christ in the thousand-year kingdom (Rev. 3:21; 20:4).

However, according to my observation, I have not been able to find one dear saint through the years who truly lives not himself but Christ. We all have two lives. We have the natural life, the human life, and we have the spiritual life, the divine life. The natural life is just us, ourselves; and the divine life is also a person, Christ. Each one of us is two persons, one person being our self and the other being Christ in us. As two persons, we have two lives, our natural life and the divine life. We have the life from Adam and we have the life that is Christ Himself in us.

The problem is, by what life will we live? By the first life or the second life? By the natural life or the divine life? By our self or by Christ? I say again that I have not found anyone, even

one who is very much in the church life, who lives Christ day by day and hour after hour and does not live himself. Hymns #841, 499, and 501 (*Hymns*) speak of living Christ and not ourselves. We need to check to see if our life matches the standard expressed in these hymns. We need to realize that we were created to be like God, even to be one with God. Furthermore, we have been saved into God to be regenerated by Him that we may be His children and may be members of Christ to constitute the Body of Christ. However, we need to ask ourselves whether we live God or not. We do have a marvelous provision. God has provided us with a body and with a spirit, which are very sufficient for us to live as a man to worship God, to receive God, and to contain God that we may live God and express Him.

Even after being saved by God, we may not live Him. We may be gentlemen, men who are right, but we may not be able to say, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20a). We may not be able to apply this holy word to ourselves. We need to realize the organic union between us and God. We need to behave ourselves, to walk, to live, to do everything, in this organic union. It should not be I but Christ; it should not be I by myself, but I with God, united, mingled, and blended to be one person, a God-man. (*The Organic Union in God's Relationship with Man*, pp. 18-21)

Man as an Eating Vessel before the Tree of Life

The picture shown by these portions of the Word is that God created man as an eating vessel. To eat is to receive, digest, and assimilate food. In this way, whatever you eat will eventually become you. Last night I ate a very good fish. Before I ate the fish, it was fish. But this morning while I am sitting here, the fish is becoming me. It was received by me last night at dinner. Later, I digested it. A little later, it was assimilated into me, and eventually this morning it has become me. Look at the picture in Genesis 1 and 2. Man was created as a vessel with God's image and likeness outwardly and with a spirit as a receiver inside. After man was created in this way, God brought him to the tree of life (Gen. 2:9). This tree of life was good for food. This is like bringing someone to a dining table. Once he eats the food, he begins to digest and assimilate the food. Eventually the food becomes part of him.

Before man could eat of the tree of life, the Bible tells us that Satan the Devil, through the serpent, distracted man (Gen. 3:1-6). Thus, man was separated from the tree of life (Gen. 3:22-24). Eventually, the Lord Jesus came that we may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). The life the Lord came to bring us is the life of the tree of life, a tree which is good for food (Gen. 2:9). In the Gospel of John, the Lord also told us that He is the vine tree (John 15:1, 5) and that He is food (6:35, 55), good for eating (vv. 51, 53, 57). The picture in these verses in the Gospel of John is the same picture as that in Genesis 2. In Genesis 2 man was placed before the tree of life, and in the Gospel of John we are told to eat Jesus, who is the tree of life (John 15:1).

In Revelation 2:7, after the churches had become degraded, the Lord came in to call the overcomers to eat the tree of life. The overcomers are those who are eating Jesus as the tree of life in the church life today. This eating of the tree of life today signifies that the tree of life will be in the New Jerusalem in the millennium. Today in the church life as overcomers, we are eating Jesus as the tree of life, and tomorrow all the overcomers will be eating Jesus as the tree of life in the New Jerusalem during the thousand year millennial kingdom. Ultimately, in eternity the tree of life will be in the center of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2). The tree of life will feed all of God's redeemed people for eternity. (*The Experience & Growth in Life*, pp. 6-7)