

**HWMR: EXPERIENCING, ENJOYING, AND EXPRESSING CHRIST (4) (Week 5)**

**The Tree of Life**

Scripture Reading: *Gen. 2:7-9; Rev. 2:4-5, 7; 22:2, 14; 2 Cor. 4:5; 5:14-15*

- Gen. 2:7     Jehovah God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.
- Gen. 2:8     And Jehovah God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there He put the man whom He had formed.
- Gen. 2:9     And 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.
- Rev. 2:4     But I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love.
- Rev. 2:5     Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.
- Rev. 2:7     He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.
- Rev. 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.
- Rev. 22:14   Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city.
- 2 Cor. 4:5    For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.
- 2 Cor. 5:14   For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died;
- 2 Cor. 5:15   And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised.

**Day 1**

- Gen. 2:9     - The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show to His slaves the things that must quickly take place; and He made it known by signs, sending it by His angel to His slave John.*
- Col. 3:4     - And one of the elders said to me, Do not weep; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so that He may open the scroll and its seven seals.*

- I. Christ as life is the reality of the tree of life, which is the center of the universe; life is the goal of God's creation (Gen. 1:26-28, 31; 2:7-9) and the goal of God's complete salvation (John 19:34; Rom. 5:10; Rev. 22:1-2, 14, 19):**

- A. In the Bible the tree of life always signifies Christ as the embodiment of all the riches of God for our food; God's placing man in front of the tree of life indicates that God wanted man to **receive Him as man's life by eating Him organically and by assimilating Him metabolically**, that God might become the very constituent of man's being—Col. 2:9; Gen. 2:9; John 1:4; 10:10; 14:6; 15:1; 6:35, 57, 63; 1 Cor. 15:45b.

God has always wanted man to **simply receive Him**. In Genesis 1:26 we see God's intention in making man in His image and giving man dominion over the earth. However, Genesis 2 also reveals God's desire that man would **eat of Him as the tree of life**. God put man in the garden of Eden, where He caused to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight. This indicates that God's interest is always to please man, to make man happy. This is why He put man in such a garden and in front of the tree of life. In essence He was saying to man, "Partake of Me as the tree of life; take Me as your life. This will fulfill you and become your satisfaction and enjoyment." God's great desire toward man is that **man would receive Him as life**. (*The Ministry of the Word*, vol. 30, No. 02, chapter 41)

## Day 2

- Rev. 2:7** ...To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.
- 1 Pet. 2:24** - Who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness...
- John 11:25** - Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live.

- B. In Revelation 2:7 the **tree of life** signifies the **crucified** (implied in the tree as a piece of wood—1 Pet. 2:24) and **resurrected** (implied in the life of God—John 11:25) Christ, who today is in the church, the consummation of which is the New Jerusalem, in which the crucified and resurrected Christ will be the tree of life for the nourishment of all God's redeemed people for eternity (Rev. 22:2, 14).

The Greek word for **tree** used in **Revelation 2:7** is the same word used in **1 Peter 2:24**, which says, "*Who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree.*" The Greek word for tree in this verse has the meaning of "wood." This implies the **cross of Christ**, which was made of wood. Thus, when this word is used in the phrase tree of life in Revelation 2:7, it indicates that the tree of life now includes the matter of the cross, the **crucified Christ**. The tree of life also includes the resurrected Christ because in **John 11:25** the Lord said, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" Thus, the tree of life is the crucified and resurrected Christ, and **when we eat and partake of the tree of life, we are taking in Christ in His death and His resurrection**. If you want to live a crucified life or need the cross to deal with something in your being, then you need to eat of the tree of life. Praise the Lord for the tree of life, which is the crucified and resurrected Christ! This is the Christ that we enjoy in the church life today. (*The Ministry of the Word*, vol. 30, No. 02, chapter 41)

## Day 3

*Gal. 1:15-16 - But when it pleased God...to reveal His Son in me...*

*Gal. 2:20 - I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*

### II. We need to see the **obstacles** that God's life encounters in man:

A. The first problem that God's life encounters in us is that we do not realize the darkness of our **human concepts**:

1. We need to see that the only thing that matters in the Christian life is **how we take care of the living Christ in us**—Gal. 1:16; 2:20; 4:19; Phil. 1:19-21; Eph. 4:13; 2 Cor. 3:18.
2. Being a Christian means **not taking anything other than Christ** as our aim; many people have difficulty in their spiritual life after they are saved because they do not know the pathway of life, and they do not take Christ as their life.

Most of us are not aware of our **human concepts**, yet we all have them and subconsciously live according to them. Our concepts are derived from our nature, education, family background, and the society in which we live. All these factors produce **certain concepts** in our mind, and these concepts **govern** the way that we live and how we view and value things. Most of our concepts are quite reasonable; otherwise, we would not hold on to them so closely. For instance, society tells us that we should strive to get the best education so that we can get a good job, raise a family, and live a good life. Therefore, this becomes our concept and goal and is a factor that we take into account, especially when we have to make important decisions in our personal lives. However, we must realize that **there is a darkness to these human concepts that hinders us from considering what the Lord wants us to do in our lives**. (The Ministry of the Word, vol. 30, No. 02, chapter 41)

B. The second problem that life encounters in us is **hypocrisy**—Matt. 6:2, 5; 7:5; 23:13-29:

1. A person's spirituality is not determined by outward appearance but by **how he takes care of the indwelling Christ**.
2. **Our natural goodness is false spirituality** and is actually a **great hindrance to life**; the expression of life involves the rejection of our natural disposition and preference, and simply allowing Christ to operate in us and break us.
3. If we always **do things according to our disposition** and **natural being**, the outcome will always be **hypocrisy**.

Many of us are caught up with pretense by **trying to be something that we are not**. Genuine spirituality is a matter not of outward appearance but of **how we take care of the Christ within**.

We often spend too much time and energy pursuing a kind of **natural goodness**, even a goodness that is up to our perceived "standard" in the church life in the Lord's recovery. We may have a concept of how a "good" brother or sister behaves in the church life, and we attempt to live that way. However, this is a **hindrance to life**. We should not strive to live a perfect Christian life in an outward way, nor should we be disappointed or condemned when we fail. Actually, our failures are opportunities for life to grow in us. Thus, we need to learn to **allow Christ to operate in us and break us**. (The Ministry of the Word, vol. 30, No. 02, chapter 41)

C. The third problem that life encounters in us is **rebellion**:

1. Christ operates and moves in us in order to make us clear about His will and requirements for us and about His leading and dealing with us.
2. However, if we **do not obey** but **go against** the feeling within, **not accepting** His leading or paying the price, this **unwillingness** and **opposition** are **rebellion**.
3. The sin that we commit the most frequently and most severely is not outward and visible; rather, it is the **sin of disobeying the sense of Christ in us**; Christ is living in us, and He is constantly giving us an inward sense of life—Rom. 8:6; 1 John 2:27.

Inwardly, the **Lord is always moving and operating**. Sometimes we may not feel Him or sense His presence, but His presence is still there. Often we do not sense His presence because **we are not paying attention or we are so preoccupied** with our own thoughts, emotions, and intentions that we miss the Lord's inward presence.

**Many times we ignore the Lord's inward operation**, not only in the big things but even more in the small things. For instance, while we are conversing with someone, we may want to say a certain word, but inwardly there is a check, an inward sense, to not say it. Nevertheless, we may say it anyway. In such a case, we must learn to confess to the Lord, saying, "Lord, forgive me. I rebelled. I ignored Your anointing. I ignored the sense within me." (*The Ministry of the Word*, vol. 30, No. 02, chapter 41)

D. The fourth problem that life encounters in us is our **natural capability**:

1. Many brothers and sisters truly love the Lord, are zealous for the Lord, and are very godly; nevertheless, their greatest problem is the **strength and greatness of their capabilities and abilities**; consequently, Christ has no ground or way in them.
2. We may be capable and talented, but we do not consider these things as sin or filthiness; instead of despising our natural capabilities, **we treasure them**; if they remain **unbroken** in us, they will become a **problem** to Christ's life.

The Lord deals with our **zeal** and our **capabilities** and **abilities through failure and disappointment**. This is why we should not despise our failures, because our failures are part of the Lord's process to break our confidence in and reliance upon ourselves. The reason we are self-reliant is because **we have a certain natural capability, and that capability enables us to function in the church life in an outward way**. However, the Lord uses the disappointments, failures, and overwhelming circumstances in our human life and church life to deal with our natural capability, our reliance on who we are and what we have in ourselves.

One of the principles of the tree of life is the principle of dependence. How do we change from being confident in ourselves to being dependent on the Lord? The only way is through failure and through overwhelming circumstances that may involve tragedy, sorrow, heartbreak, and disappointment. The Lord will use these things in such a way to **cause us to realize that we need Him**. It is a great thing to realize our need to become utterly dependent on the Lord, because this realization allows us to gain the benefit of the tree of life. (*The Ministry of the Word*, vol. 30, No. 02, chapter 41)

E. There is **one solution** to all these obstacles in us—**we must pass through the cross and let the cross break us**; if we want Christ's life to be unhindered in us, we must experience the breaking of the cross and allow these obstacles to be dealt with and removed—Matt. 16:24-25.

The **cross** is not merely a doctrine. It has to be carried out in practice. The cross has to be realized in us; all the things that belong to us have to be destroyed. As we are smitten once, twice, many times, there will come a time when spontaneously we will become sober; we will no longer be arrogant. The way is **not through denying our arrogance when our memory reminds us of it**. That kind of denial will disappear in five minutes. Only after a man **passes through God's chastisement** will his pride be forever stripped. A man may be proud at first, but after he is smitten by God once, twice, many times, he will begin to humble himself, and his arrogance will begin to erode away. No teaching, doctrine, or memorization will destroy the outer man. **Only God's chastisement and the Spirit's discipline will destroy it**. When a person is dealt with by God, spontaneously he will not dare to be proud. He does not have to force himself to remember this lesson. He does not act this way because he has heard a message a few days ago about it. He is not acting according to teaching. His pride has been knocked out, removed. He abhors his own methods and views them like fire; he is afraid of being burned. We live by God's grace, not by our memory. God has to smite us to the extent that we will be the same whether or not we remember to act that way. Such a work is reliable and lasting. When the Lord finishes such a work in us, we will not only receive grace and be strong in our inner being, but the outer man which was once a hindrance and frustration to the Lord's word, purpose, and presence will now be broken. Formerly, the outer man and the inner man could not be joined together. Now the outer man prostrates in fear and trembling; it has yielded itself to God and is no longer at odds with the inner man.

Every one of us needs to go through dealings from the Lord. In looking back, we find the Lord dealing with us item by item. **He is continually breaking our outer shell and knocking down our outward independence, pride, and selfishness**. When we look back at all that has happened in the past, we have to acknowledge that everything the Lord has done is meaningful.

I hope that God's children would see the significance of the discipline of the Holy Spirit. God wants us to see that we are poor, that we have been going against Him, that we have failed, that we have lived in darkness, walked by ourselves, and been proud and arrogant for a long time. Now we know that the Lord's hand is on us to break us. **Let us put ourselves in His hand unreservedly and unconditionally, praying that this breaking work will be accomplished in us**. Brothers and sisters, the outer man must be broken! Do not try to save the outer man from being wrecked while hoping to build up the inner man. As we pay attention to the work of breaking, we will spontaneously witness the work of building. (*The Breaking of the Outer Man and the Release of the Spirit, Chapter 6*)

#### Day 4

**Rev. 2:4-5** - *But I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.*

**Col. 1:18** - *And He is the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things;*

**III. In order for us to eat Christ as the tree of life, we must give Him the first place in all things, which is to love Him with the first love, being constrained by His love to regard and take Him as everything in our life—Rev. 2:4-5; Col. 1:18b; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Mark 12:30; Psa. 73:25-26; 80:17-19:**

- A. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to **eat Him as the tree of life**; eating Christ as the tree of life, that is, enjoying Christ as our life supply, should be the primary matter in the church life—Rev. 2:7; John 6:57, 63.
- B. The content of the church life depends on the enjoyment of Christ; the more we enjoy Him, the richer the content will be; but to eat Christ as the tree of life, to enjoy Him as our life supply, **requires us to love Him with the first love**—Rev. 2:4-5.
- C. On the one hand, strictly speaking, to eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God in Revelation 2:7 refers to the **particular enjoyment of Christ as our life supply** in the New Jerusalem in the coming millennial kingdom.
- D. On the other hand, we are enjoying the **crucified and resurrected Christ as the tree of life**, the food supply in our spirit, as a **foretaste today in the church**; every local church is a paradise of God, where Christ is the tree of life for us to enjoy.
- E. When we **give the Lord the first place in everything** and **maintain our eating** of the crucified and resurrected Christ as the tree of life throughout the day, the church, no matter what its condition may be, **becomes paradise to us**; thus, our feeling and our attitude toward the church depend upon our situation.
- F. “If we **do not enjoy** Christ as the tree of life in the church life today, surely we will **not participate** in the tree of life in the kingdom age. According to my experience, today the church in Anaheim is a paradise to me”—*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994–1997*, vol. 5, “The Vital Groups,” p. 157.
- G. The intrinsic reason for the **desolation** and **degradation** of the church is that **Christ is not exalted** by God’s people; they do not give Him the preeminence, the first place, in everything; whenever God’s people exalt Christ, giving Him the preeminence in every aspect of their living, there is restoration and revival—Psa. 80:17-19.

### Day 5

*Eph. 2:10* - For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them.

*2 Cor. 4:5* - ...We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.

- H. Christ must have the first place not only in our living but also **in all our messages**; “we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake”—2 Cor. 4:5; cf. Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 12:2; Psa. 80:1, 17-19; 110:1-7:
  - 1. In our work we should continually **draw people back to the center** and let them see that “Christ is Lord”; we must give the Lord Jesus His place on the throne—cf. S. S. 1:1-4; Isa. 6:1, 3; John 12:41.
  - 2. In order to give such a message, we ourselves must be **broken by God** and **allow Christ to have the first place in us**; our message is just our person—2 Cor. 4:10-13; John 12:24-26; cf. Luke 12:49-50.
  - 3. The Lord’s “well done” surpasses all the praises of the world; the **smiling face of heaven surpasses** all the angry faces of the earth; the **comfort of heaven surpasses** all the tears of the earth—Matt. 25:21, 23; Jer. 1:7-9, 18-19; Dan. 4:26.

- I. In order to give Christ the first place in all things, we must have an **affectionate love for Him as our King**; then our tongue will be the pen of a ready writer, ready to write our love for Him and our praise to Him with our experience and enjoyment of Him according to all that He is—Psa. 45:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6.
- J. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to **take Him as our centrality**—our holding center—and our universality—our everything; we need to take Him as the center, content, and circumference of our personal universe—Col. 1:17b, 18b.

### Day 6

*Psa. 45:16-17 - In the place of Your fathers will be Your sons; You will make them princes in all the earth. I will cause Your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore the peoples will praise You forever and ever.*

- K. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is to **behold His beauty** and to **ask for the counsel** of Jehovah in every detail of our Christian life and work—Psa. 27:4; Josh. 9:14; Phil. 4:6-7.
- L. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is **to be dominated, governed, directed, led, and moved by our mingled spirit**, caring for the rest in our spirit by being His captives and by praying, “Lord, conquer me. Make me Your captive. Never let me win. Defeat me all the time”—2 Cor. 2:13-14.
- M. To love the Lord with the first love, to give Him the first place in all things, is **to have a clear sky** like awesome crystal with God’s sapphire throne above it; this means that there is nothing between us and the Lord and that we are filled with the heavenly atmosphere, condition, and situation of His ruling presence—taking Him as our King and allowing Him to rule and reign within us—Ezek. 1:22, 26.
- N. Only **Christ the King reigning** on the earth **with the overcomers** as His helpers in the kingship can solve the problems of today’s world (Isa. 42:1-4); Christ’s name will be remembered in all generations and praised by the nations through His overcoming and co-reigning saints (Psa. 45:16-17; Rev. 2:26).
- O. The **overcomers**, who are typified by Zion, are the **beachhead** through which the Lord will return to possess the whole earth—Psa. 48:2; Dan. 2:34-35.
- P. “Lift up your heads, O gates; / And be lifted up, O long enduring doors; / And the King of glory will come in. / Who is the King of glory? / Jehovah strong and mighty! / Jehovah mighty in battle!... / Who is this King of glory? / Jehovah of hosts— / He is the King of glory!”—Psa. 24:7-8, 10:
  - 1. The **gates** are of the cities of the **nations**; the **doors** are of the **houses of the people**, and Christ is the Desire of all the nations (Hag. 2:7); all the nations, in a general way, are expecting Christ to come, but Christ will not come quickly according to our human concept (2 Pet. 3:8-9); thus, **we need to lift up our heads and await** and expect His coming with long endurance.

2. The **King of glory is Jehovah of hosts** (that is, of armies), the consummated Triune God embodied in the victorious and overcoming Christ (Luke 21:27; Matt. 25:31); Jehovah is Jesus, and Jesus is the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Triune God, who is strong in fighting and is victorious (1:21; Rev. 5:5).
  3. He is the One who will come back in resurrection with His overcomers to possess the entire earth as His kingdom—Dan. 2:34-35; 7:13-14; Joel 3:11; Rev. 11:15; 19:13-14.
- Q. Christ as the One on the throne of God has the appearance of **sardius** (its red color signifying redemption) and **jasper** (its dark green color signifying life in its richness); thus, when **we submit ourselves** to Christ's headship and are under His throne, we are the beneficiaries of all that He is in His judicial redemption and His organic salvation so that we may bear the same appearance of the God of glory in His rich life—4:3; 21:10-11a; Rom. 5:10.
- R. 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—Rev. 22:14; 2:7.