

# The freedom *of choice*

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Fellowship at the tree of life

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# THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE

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# Preface

In recent years, the gospel of sonship has brought into sharp focus the conditions that are essential for a believer's entry into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Jesus was unequivocal; unless a person is born to see, and is born of water and the Spirit, they '*cannot* enter the kingdom of God'. Joh 3:5. Sonship is essential to one's citizenship in the kingdom of God.

Significantly, our entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God is not based on how we commence our Christian pilgrimage, *but on how we finish it*. For this reason, it is most important that we are delivered from our loyalties to the 'gospels' and doctrinal understandings of our past. We must all respond with repentance and faith to what the Spirit is saying to us individually, as families, and as local churches, 'today', through the word of present truth. 2Pe 1:12.

With this point in view, Paul exhorted believers to run the race that is set before them as those who are motivated to finish the race and are zealous for the prize of eternal life. 1Co 9:24-25. Inherent in his counsel is the warning that it is possible to fail to complete the race, and thereby to forfeit the precious prize of one's sonship. Paul testified accordingly, saying, 'Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, *I myself should become disqualified.*' 1Co 9:26-27.

Noting Paul's testimony, we must not be uncertain about the gospel of sonship, nor hesitant in our response to what the Spirit is saying to the church in this present season. A person 'runs with uncertainty' when

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their reception of God's word, which should be 'a lamp to their feet and a light to their path', is mediated or filtered by their enduring attachment to other gospels. These may be the gospels of their denominational heritage or the beliefs that are based in their own interpretations of the Scriptures. 2Pe 1:20.

In comparison with other denominations, our church movement has been far more inclusive of people's doctrinal traditions and varied religious perspectives. This has been an implication of past mergers, as well as of the diverse journeys of those whom the Spirit has led to this lampstand fellowship. However, the viability of our fellowship as a church is not found in our cultural or doctrinal commonalities; nor is a person's salvation assured by their religious heritage. In fact, endeavouring to encompass denominational diversity within the church, in the name of love, *is corruption*. We learn from Christ Himself that only *agape* fellowship in a lampstand church qualifies a person to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the New Jerusalem. Rev 2:4,7. Rev 2:2.

In His letters to the seven churches, Jesus warned that those who maintained their factions, which in many cases were based on *doctrinal loyalties*, would be removed from His church as He warred against them with the sword of His mouth. Specifically, He said, 'I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the *doctrine of Balaam*, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the *doctrine of the Nicolaitans*, which thing I hate. Repent, or else *I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.*' Rev 2:14-16.

In this statement, Jesus was indicating that the word of the cross, which is 'the sword' of His mouth, would polarise out of His church those who maintained their allegiance to doctrines that were contrary to the culture of *agape* fellowship. Instead of obtaining the rest that belonged to their sonship as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, they would go, fall backward, be broken, snared and caught. Isa 28:12-13. They would be numbered with those whom the apostle John observed as being outside of the church; namely, the 'dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practises a lie'. Rev 22:15.

We are in the time of the great falling away from the church. Speaking of this season, Jesus said, 'Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness [or iniquity] will abound, the love

of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.' Mat 24:11-13. For this reason, instead of validating and encompassing everyone's views and religious histories, which only promotes disharmony and oppression within a church, we must mourn for our iniquity so that we can be established in our sanctification. This is because *sanctification is our salvation*. As Paul declared, 'God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.' 2Th 2:13-14.

Exemplifying the demeanour of a person who mourns for restoration to sanctification, the prophet Jeremiah declared, 'I called on Your name, O Lord, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice: "Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help." You drew near on the day I called on You, and said, "Do not fear!" O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul; You have redeemed my life.' Lam 3:55-58. Like Jeremiah, from the lowest pit, we must call on the name of the Lord, which is the context for fellowship with Yahweh and His people. Only those who are illuminated to the depths of their fallen, iniquitous condition can pray in this manner. This is the expression of those who are bankrupt in spirit, to whom belongs the kingdom of heaven. Mat 5:3.

This response to the gospel marks the distinction between those who enter heaven and those who go to perdition. The responses of Peter and Judas demonstrate this reality. Peter's connection to the trauma of Christ's sufferings in the court of Caiaphas was his point of conversion. In contrast, it was the point of suicide and eternal damnation for Judas. Where Peter did not draw back from Christ in unbelief as his religious zeal failed and his iniquity was revealed, Judas drew back in unbelief from Christ's piercing gaze, to his destruction. While Peter went out from the court of Caiaphas and wept bitterly, mourning in a manner that led to repentance, Judas went out to destruction in self-justification, putting to death what he deemed to be his failed life and ministry.

How did Peter obtain this salvation, having denied Jesus in such an emphatic manner – a denial that was not so different from Judas's betrayal? We recall that when the rooster crowed for a second time, after Peter had denied Jesus for a third time, the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Mar 14:72. Luk 22:61. At this point, Peter's zeal had completely failed. However, he was now able to see himself and his relationships through the eyes of Christ. He was now able to perceive the depths of his

iniquitous zeal. Having become poor in spirit, he was obtaining the blessing of true illumination.

Those who mourn are blessed because, when they meet Christ eye to eye, they are illuminated to see their wretchedness. As they maintain His gaze, they begin to sigh and to cry in mourning for the abominations that have sprung from their own heart. Significantly, they are also able to sigh and cry for the abominations that are apparent in the church communities in which the Father has placed them. They recognise the wounding effects of these abominations upon Christ as they have injured their families and their brethren. Illuminated in this manner, they can begin to call on the name of the Lord, as Jeremiah did, 'from the lowest pit'. Lam 3:55.

At this point, they beat their breasts as they *go to their house*, saying, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner.' Luk 18:13. In their house, they pray according to the instruction of Jesus, who said that they are to go into their room, shut the door and pray to the Father who is in the secret place. Mat 6:6. They are to pray, 'Do not lead us into temptation, but *deliver us from the evil one.*' Mat 6:13.

From there, they proceed, by the Spirit, to pray with Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. This is the fellowship of prayer that belongs to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who helps them by joining them to this prayer meeting. Rom 8:26. Jesus commanded His disciples to pray with Him in Gethsemane so that they would not enter into the temptation of drawing back from the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, where salvation is obtained. Mat 26:41.

Mourning leads to repentance as one turns from the abominations that Christ's eyes reveal to them and they are converted to walk in the new way to which His word is calling them. When this happens, their repentance from dead works has led to faith. Having received faith, the hearer believes God's word and speaks, or participates, on the ground of fellowship from which the word has proceeded. 2Co 4:13. 1Jn 1:1-4. This fellowship is the context of friendship to which they are restored, in the same way that Peter was restored by Jesus on the shore of Galilee. Joh 21:17. This happens as they receive and walk in the light of present truth, which proclaims their sanctification; and as they maintain their daily participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as a member of His body.

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A person who lives in this manner is being restored to their predestination as a son in the image and likeness of God. To this end, they are choosing the sonship that God had chosen for them before the creation of the heavens and the earth.



# Chapter I

## Freedom in creation

### The image and likeness of God

In his account of the seven days of creation, Moses identified '*Elohim*' – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – as the Creator of the heavens and earth and all that is in them, including the angels. However, he specifically explained that it was '*Yahweh Elohim*' who formed man from the dust of the earth. Gen 2:7. This distinction is significant. It signifies that the creation and naming of man was uniquely, and specifically, connected to the revelation and expression of God's name.

*Yahweh Elohim* made Himself known to Moses by this name, indicating His desire for relationship with Moses. From the ground of this fellowship, Moses was commissioned to lead the children of Israel, and was endowed with grace for this work, as he maintained his fellowship with *Yahweh*. Exo 33:7-11. God said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you ... the Lord [*Yahweh*] God [*Elohim*] of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations".' Exo 3:14-15.

The name *Yahweh Elohim* reveals who God is and how He lives. Moses brought this to Israel's attention, declaring, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord

[Yahweh] our God [*Elohim*], *the Lord* [Yahweh] *is one!* Deu 6:4. Yahweh is one because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in *one Spirit* and by *one life*. The oneness of Yahweh is fundamental to the expression of each Person's unique name as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the work of bringing Their covenant purpose to pass. That is, Their individual names are not expressed, or known, apart from the one Spirit and life of Yahweh. In this regard, we observe that Yahweh, who is *one*, reveals the *three* unique identities of *Elohim*. As each Person lays down Their life to reveal the other two, by one Spirit, and according to the capacity that is unique to Their name, the oneness of Yahweh is manifest.

Within Their own fellowship, before the Everlasting Covenant, the Father is not the first among equals. He is not the Father of the Son; nor is He preeminent in relation to the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are completely co-equal. Php 2:6. Each Person of the Godhead laid down Their life, by Eternal Spirit, to bring Their Everlasting Covenant purpose to pass. The Son emptied Himself to become the Father's Son, and the Holy Spirit laid down His life to become the Helper of the Father and of the Son. Php 2:6-7. Joh 14:16. The Father laid down His life by giving to the Son the fullness of His own expression as Father. Heb 1:3. Joh 16:15.

Yahweh Son became the full expression of the Father when He was begotten as the Son of God by the word of the Father, who said, 'You are My Son, *today* I have begotten You.' Heb 1:5. This birthing action was by the Holy Spirit. Heb 3:7. When the Father said, '*Today* I have begotten You', the Holy Spirit, who had laid down His life to reveal the Father as the life of God, brought the Spirit of the Father to the identity of the Son, causing Him to be born anew as the Son of God. Joh 6:63. Now, a multitude of sons could be created and born of the Father's life, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit.

The order of headship was established through this offering and is revealed by the name Yahweh *Elohim*. It is an order of 'offering fellowship' through which the life of God is multiplied to a great multitude of sons. This is the life of sonship that God chose for every person.

As we noted above, after creating the angels, *Elohim* created the creatures of the sea, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the earth. He formed them from the ground with their life in them. In other words, the soul, spirit and physical bodies of the animals were created in *one action*, by

the word of God. Job 12:7-10. Ecc 3:21. Their specific expression was defined when Adam named them, from the fellowship of Yahweh.

In contrast to the creation of the angels and the animals, Yahweh *Elohim* formed man from the dust of the ground, creating his fully functional biological body. Then, *in a second action*, the Lord God breathed ‘the breath of lives’ into the nostrils of man and, by this means, he *became a living being, or soul*. Gen 2:7. Whereas the animals were alive and milling around without expression following their creation, Adam’s life, self-awareness and expression were in the natural name that he received as the Lord breathed into his nostrils and he became a living soul. From this point, his life, expression and predestination were *tied to fellowship with Yahweh*.

As we considered earlier, the name Yahweh *Elohim* reveals the order of life through which Their covenant purpose, concerning the sons and daughters of man, comes to pass. We note, therefore, that this creative action was sourced from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. By this creative action, through the order of headship, man received self-possessed and accountable identity *in the image and likeness of God*.

The identification of Yahweh *Elohim* as the Creator of man signified Their Everlasting Covenant initiative and desire for mankind to be born of Their life, and to become participants in Their fellowship. Accordingly, man’s life, and the unique expression that belongs to his name, would also require him to live in one Spirit with the Lord and by Their one life.

This was fundamental to man’s natural name ‘under the sun’, and to the name he was to later inherit in the Son, through new birth. This point highlights that Adam, and every identity in him, has a natural name. Establishing this point, Solomon explained, ‘Whatever one is, he has been named already [in Adam], for it is known [who he is]; and he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.’ Ecc 6:10. Solomon was not referring to a person’s sonship name, which was predestined in Christ. Rather, he was describing the expression, or glory, of a human being’s identity ‘under the sun’.

Further revealing fellowship with Yahweh as being essential to man’s life and expression, Moses explained that it was Yahweh *Elohim* who planted a garden in the east of Eden, where He placed man. Gen 2:8. The garden of Eden was the context for man’s daily fellowship with Yahweh *Elohim* at the tree of life, and for the exercise of his mandate which he received from the Lord God. This mandate was to tend and to guard the garden,

and to name the living creatures of God's creation over which Adam had been given dominion by Yahweh.

The name Adam means 'to make from the red ground'. Significantly, the first mention of Adam's name in the Scriptures was in relation to the exercise of his mandate to name every living creature, as an expression of the dominion over the creation which he had received from Yahweh *Elohim*. Moses wrote, 'Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to *Adam* to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.' Gen 2:19.

Adam's capacity to fulfil this mandate *depended* upon his connection to the order of headship, through fellowship with Yahweh *Elohim* at the tree of life. Significantly, the Scriptures reveal that the fellowship of this *agape* meal was in the 'cool [OT:7307 - '*ruwach*'] of the day'. Gen 3:8. It was the fellowship of the Spirit. As we have previously considered, the work of naming the animals was in fellowship with Yahweh. This is where Adam inquired of the Lord and obtained the wisdom and grace to fulfil this work. He did not presume to name the animals outside of this conversation.

As we will consider later in these notes, Adam received adoption as a son through the creative initiative of Yahweh *Elohim*. The word pertaining to his name and works as a son was ministered to him each day from the tree of life, through fellowship with Yahweh. He was to continue to live and work from the basis of this fellowship as an adopted son, until the name that was written as in a scroll upon the bark of the tree of life was written in his heart and mind, by new birth. After he was born from above and established as a member in particular of the body of Christ, his expression as a son of God would continue to be fed to him from the tree of life, in the fellowship of Yahweh, forever.

Through the action of naming the animals from the fellowship of Yahweh, the living creatures were established in the order of headship. Within this order, they were sustained by the grace of life as it was expressed according to the name that Adam had given to them. Adam fulfilled this work of naming the animals before the Lord God formed a helper comparable to him from a rib taken from his side. When the Lord God brought her to Adam, he named her 'woman', because she was taken out of man. Gen 2:20-23.

## Adam's choice

Drawing from the scriptural principle that 'with the Lord one day is as a thousand years', and the prophetic typology of the Passover, it appears that Adam lived in the garden of Eden for almost 4000 years. 2Pe 3:8. During this time, Adam exercised dominion over all the works of the Lord God's hands. Adam exercised this dominion over the creation as he continued in fellowship with Yahweh, each day, at the tree of life. That is, Adam fulfilled the works that the Father had chosen for him to do in the Father's house.

The fulfilment of these works did not, in and of themselves, indicate that Adam had chosen what God had chosen for him. Rather, Eve's fall put pressure on Adam to reveal where he stood in relation to the sonship that the Father had chosen for him in His house. Significantly, God the Father had prepared Adam for this choice when He said to him, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, *for in the day* that you eat of it you shall surely die.' Gen 2:16-17.

This statement implied that, eventually, Adam would be required to choose the fellowship and life that the Father had already established for him or to choose another way of life typified by another source of food. It is important to recognise that Adam's choice was not whether or not to exercise dominion over the creation; rather, it was whether he would believe and accept the call to be a son, and to reveal the Father through this work.

To this end, Adam was pressed to choose whether he would believe the word of the Father pertaining to his predestination as a son. That word was 'I will be a Father to him, and he will be to Me a son'. To choose this, Adam needed to believe and receive this word, and to respond by saying, 'You have offered me fatherhood; I will be Your son and will reveal You.'

If Adam had chosen sonship when Eve presented him with the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would have brought her, and their conversation, to the light of fellowship with his Father at the tree of life. He would have done so, recognising that the resolution of this breach in their marriage could only be found there. Instead, under the pressure applied by Eve, Adam chose to exercise dominion apart from relationship with God as his Father, evidently viewing his own household as being a separate entity from the house of the Father.

We note that Eve, like Adam, also came under pressure to choose what the Father had chosen for her. He had chosen her to be a helper to Adam, and for her life and fruitfulness to be found under the headship of Adam. However, Eve rejected God's fatherhood, aspiring, instead, to become like God, and coveting what she believed was the capacity to create an image for herself and to bring forth children in her own image. We note that the relationship between a daughter and her father – even God the Father – has particular nuances that Satan endeavours to exploit. The relationship between a father and a daughter is vulnerable to Satan's influence when it is based in a conversation outside of the tree of life.

### Satan's lie

Adam fell because he disobeyed God, believing Satan's lie that, by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he could obtain the capacity to exercise dominion over the creation without the necessity for fellowship with Yahweh. Satan's lie was not only that this was possible, but also that, in doing so, Adam and Eve would become 'like God'.

Satan falsely declared that the Father's creative initiative was the expression of His own identity and life, apart from the fellowship of Yahweh. It was a rejection of the truth that the Father had laid down His fulness to the Son. The Father was no longer seen, except by the Son. The Son was the full revelation of the Father, by the Holy Spirit, who gives, or expresses, the life. Satan was denying that the order of headship was the order of life through which Adam's name had its expression.

When Adam rejected fellowship with Yahweh as the basis for the exercise of his dominion over the creation, *his name was lost* to him. This is because his name was in the tree of life, from which he ate in fellowship with Yahweh. This food provided him with the capacity for the dominion and works that belonged to God's choosing for him. Moreover, the connection of the animals to the order of headship was also severed and they were subject to the implications of the law of sin, in creation. As the apostle Paul observed, 'The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now.'  
Rom 8:20-22.

The ensuing chaos within creation, following Adam's disconnection from fellowship with Yahweh, revealed that the capacity for the works of rulership, or dominion, was not intrinsic to his abilities. This capacity was available to Adam only in the one-Spirit fellowship of Yahweh. Joined to this fellowship, he received the authority of his name, which Jesus likened to a 'mina'. Luk 19:11-27. Furthermore, he received the capacity to express and multiply the life of Yahweh to the creation. Jesus likened this capacity to a 'talent'. Mat 25:14-30.

### God's knowledge of death

As we have already noted, God said to Adam that he would die if he ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Gen 2:17. Satan said to Eve that she would become like God by eating this fruit. Clearly, however, there is no way of becoming like God without coming to the knowledge of death. God alone has this knowledge. He is the One who administers it as judgement, and as mercy and redemption.

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they became 'like God' because they began to experience, or know, death. However, this knowledge was apart from God. Gen 3:22-23. It was the knowledge of death under the condition of cursing. Gen 3:17-19.

Before Adam and Eve were driven from the garden and barred from eating the fruit of the tree of life, a different death was revealed to them. God killed an animal on their behalf, signifying the provision of 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world'. Rev 13:8. This death was for their redemption and to provide them with priestly garments to make offering. Gen 3:21.

Through this prevenient offering, Adam and Eve were atoned for, and were recovered again to choose either death or the sonship that God had predestined for them. To choose His predestination for them, they would need to, figuratively, join the offering of the Lamb of God by making offering at the gate of Eden according to the pattern established by the Lord. By joining this offering death, their cursed death, under the judgement of God, would be 'for their sake', meaning that they would be delivered from eternal death and restored to God's predestination for them. Gen 3:17.

In the period of time prior to the flood, the sons of God were distinguished from the sons of men by this choice. Gen 6:2. We know that

Adam chose sonship through offering, because he is listed in the genealogy of the sons of God. Luk 3:38. Likewise, his son, Abel, chose sonship through fellowship in offering. Gen 4:4.

Obviously, Cain did not choose the predestination that God had chosen for him. He presumed to make offering at the gate of Eden from the fruit of his self-made image. Although the Lord did not respect Cain's offering, He met him and freed him to choose the predestination that God had chosen for him. The Lord said to Cain, 'If you do well [by offering in the manner in which I instructed Adam to offer], will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.' Gen 4:7. The only way for Cain to rule over sin was to humble himself and to become obedient to the fellowship of offering that the Lord Himself had established.

### The effects of the Fall in marriage

Prior to the Fall, the woman knew that God the Father was the origin and source of creation. Everything has its beginning from Him. The spiritual capacity for this initiative is in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What belongs to God, in the fellowship of Yahweh, was viewed by the woman as a way of life that she desired. It was for this reason, prompted by Satan's lie, that Eve saw that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise. Gen 3:6.

The fruit of this tree does, indeed, possess these properties - it is good for food; it is pleasant to the eyes; and it is replete with wisdom. Recognising this reality was not the point of perversion for Eve. It was the *basis of her perception* that manifested her corruption. The woman saw herself as being *like God* in the context of a family. That is, she believed that a family would be created from her, in her image and likeness. Consequently, the woman perceived the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as a resource to service this desire.

Eve, representing all women, coveted what belonged to God. She wanted God's unique capacity as the source of creation to be the basis of her motherhood. She ate the fruit that belonged exclusively to God, in order to become the *origin of multiplication*. This was the life that she *coveted*. We note, in this regard, the words of Jesus, who said, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in *the abundance [or multiplication] of the things he possesses*.' Luk 12:15.

Corresponding with Eve's desire, a woman now believes that, in the family, she is like God. She views herself as the beginning of a house, and believes that a family is created from her. She covets this role as an expression of motherhood, and then she proceeds to live by this principle. This is her delusion. Once a woman becomes a wife and a mother, she feeds this view of herself, with its accompanying wisdom, to her husband and children as a religious philosophy with which she presumes to define their household.

Husbands, in the same manner as Adam, accept what is put to them by their wives as the model of living that belongs to a family; that is, the family is a discrete entity that is separate from the house of the Father, within which his dominion can be exercised. When Adam did this, he ceased from fellowship with Yahweh at the tree of life. We know this to be true, because the Father came looking for Adam, crying, 'Where are you?' Gen 3:9. The man had not chosen to be a son of the Father and to exercise everything that belonged to his creation and predestination from the Father's house. Instead, Adam heeded the voice of his wife and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thinking that he could exercise dominion over creation without the grace that comes from God.

We know that this was an accountable and deliberate choice that Adam made, because Paul explained that Adam had not been deceived by the alternative word that Satan offered to him through Eve. 1Ti 2:14. By consuming the proposition for life that his wife offered to him, Adam chose death for himself and for his children, for God had said, 'In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'

Prior to the Fall, as Adam and Eve fellowshiped with God each day at the tree of life, they were *clothed with grace*. Grace was the garment that mandated their priesthood over creation. 1Pe 3:7. Once they departed from fellowship, they were bereft of grace. Consequently, they were naked and without authority. Gen 3:7. They were ashamed. Drawing from this account, we note that God's grace never becomes a residual capacity within a person, apart from fellowship with Yahweh.

Now fallen, men and women are slaves to their circumstances, and they struggle for survival. This innate struggle, involving each one's personal desire for acceptance, and the need for identity validity through the expression of their personal initiative, is a tension within their marriages.

The woman desires her husband to facilitate the agenda that she has for herself and for her household. The man's agenda for life and expression conflicts with this focus. He has his own ambitions and focus that particularly relate to how he is seen by others. He views his household as a resource from which he can initiate and exercise rulership in the contexts of his life, be it in the family, in the church, in the workplace or in the community. Driven by this motivation, he endeavours to rule over his wife so that she serves his agenda. Gen 3:16.

The conflicting agendas of a man and a woman in a marriage create tension between them. The romance of their affection for each other is inevitably insufficient to compensate for this tension. Unless they are recovered to the tree of life, trading will be the basis of their marriage covenant, resulting in conflict and corruption, individually, and within their relationship.

### The restoration of marriage

The Lord God did not choose fallen romance, based in trading, as the basis for marriage in His image and likeness. What, then, is the true romantic model for marriage which the Lord God has chosen for us? It requires *a remnant of the Spirit* through connection to the order of headship at the tree of life. Speaking of marriage in this order of grace, the Lord said, 'But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring.' Mal 2:15.

What does the remnant of the Spirit in a marriage 'look like'? It begins with two sons of God – a man and a woman – who have been born from above, baptised into Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. They obtain a remnant of the Spirit, as heirs together of the grace of life, as they participate in a dialogue of fellowship at the tree of life. This means that they continue together in the apostles' doctrine, which informs the culture of their conversation and interactions; in fellowship, through which the blood of Christ is operative to cleanse them from sin; in the breaking of bread, as they care for, and nourish, one another; and in the dialogue of prayer. Act 2:42.

Through this dialogue at the tree of life, in the fellowship of one Spirit, they receive a remnant of the Spirit. This portion of the Spirit, which is unique to their marriage covenant, equips them for the works through which the life of God is multiplied in the family to their children, and overflows as a blessing to other houses. That is, from this one-Spirit fellowship, the man is endowed with grace for the diversity of expression

that belongs to his identity as a head, as a husband, and as a father. Likewise, the woman, proceeding from this one-Spirit fellowship, is endowed with grace for the diversity that belongs to her expression as the centre of her house, as a wife, and as a mother.

Fellowship in one Spirit is not possible in a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. We note Paul's questions, establishing this point; 'What fellowship has light with darkness? What part has a believer with an unbeliever?' 2Co 6:14,15. Helpfully, the Scriptures provide instructions to believers who are unequally yoked in marriage, so that their children are not deprived of the blessing of the Spirit that belongs to families in Abraham.

For example, Paul wrote, 'If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him [as he is established in the culture of godliness], let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her [as she is established in the culture of godliness], let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.' 1Co 7:12-15.

Many of the marriages in our fellowship of churches are between two sons of God. The biggest issue that these couples must all negotiate is *carnality*. A carnal Christian is a person who has been born of God, but who sets their mind on the flesh. It is impossible for two carnal Christians to meet in one Spirit, because neither person is walking, or living, by the Spirit. Their marriage relationship will have a religious hue, yet will function by the self-centred principles established in the Fall.

Fellowship in one Spirit between a carnal Christian and a spiritual son of God is also impossible. The Scriptures teach us that 'the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another'. Gal 5:17. Again, the Scriptures provide instruction regarding how a person can live as a son of God with a carnal spouse. The apostle Peter wrote, 'Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear'. 1Pe 3:1-2.

Peter's instructions to a spiritual woman with a carnal husband equally apply to a spiritual man who is married to a carnal woman. As a believing

## THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE

husband maintains his commitment to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, he will demonstrate the culture of fellowship to which his wife can turn. However, she will not be won through his coercive actions or insistent directions. These are the actions of the flesh, based in the Fall, and they produce only death. Gen 3:16.

A spiritual person, whose marriage is marked by enmity between the flesh and Spirit, will maintain their connection to the word and fellowship of the lampstand church community in which they live. Attempting to conceal the dysfunction within one's marriage is an investment in a projection. The endeavour to present well, particularly by church leaders, only isolates a couple from the fellowship of the *agape* meal. Access to grace for their life and family is hindered as their disconnection persists. Moreover, their capacity to minister to others in the body of Christ is curtailed. Irrespective of the response of their spouse, a spiritual person can fulfil the works that belong to their sonship, as long as they walk in the light of the word, and maintain open-faced fellowship with their brethren in Christ.

## Chapter 2

# The freedom of the sons of God

### The freedom of love

The account of the Fall reveals *the freedom of choice* that is inherent in God's Everlasting Covenant purpose for mankind. He has chosen sonship and fellowship in His house, for every person.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit did not initiate the Everlasting Covenant because of any lack in Their fellowship. To do so would have been self-centred and contrary to Their own nature, for God *is* love. 1Jn 4:16. The Scriptures liken the love of Yahweh to 'a vehement, enfolding fire' that is not consumed, nor sustained by a fuel source. Son 8:6-7. Eze 1:4. Exo 3:2-3. That is, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are active and fully satisfied in Their fellowship, for They are the sum of all diversity and expression. There is no 'emptiness' or 'nothingness' in, or beyond, Yahweh, because He fills everything. Eph 1:23.

The desire of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to extend Their covenant fellowship to a multitude of sons who were created in Their image and likeness was the *expression of Their love*. Jer 31:3. This is because it was

pure giving. They were not making this covenant in order to satisfy a need in Their fellowship, or to occupy Themselves, or because They needed validity through the service and adoration of a great multitude. God's Everlasting Covenant was an *action of freedom*, revealing Him who is love. He simply chose to share His life and fellowship with us.

Inherent in our creation in God's image and likeness is the dignity and accountability of 'choice'. This is a fundamental condition of love. Why is this so? It is because love is demonstrated through *giving*. A person can give to another only if they have the freedom and choice to do so. Giving, or offering, oneself in this manner is essential to the life and expression of Yahweh *Elohim*.

There are two key aspects of freedom that belong to a person's salvation as a son of God. First, through the prevenient grace that accompanies the word of the cross, they are set free from the imposition of 'the other law' upon their capacity to choose God's predestination for them. Without this liberating effect of God's grace, a person's choice would be unavoidably self-centred. Paul emphasised this point, writing, 'It is for freedom [of sonship] that Christ has set us free [to choose sonship]. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.' Gal 5:1. Having chosen sonship and fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ, we are delivered from our slavery to sin, and are able to fulfil the works of sonship that the Father has chosen for us in Christ. 2Co 5:21.

The second aspect of freedom that belongs to our creation in the image and likeness of God is our participation in the fellowship of offering. Offering is the expression of love. It is the way of life that belongs to a son in the Father's house. Establishing this point, the apostle John said, 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God [the Father]; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.' 1Jn 4:7-8.

The freedom that is fundamental to love is the uninhibited capacity to lay down one's life to reveal another. Jesus said, 'Greater love has no-one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.' Joh 15:13-14. Clearly, obedience to the commands of Christ is necessary for the expression of love. In other words, we reveal others through obedience to God's word. Unless we receive Christ's commands, which are ministered to us by His messengers in the context of the body where the Father has set us, we are unable to make offering. We see that the first aspect of choice that belongs to our

sonship is to *receive and live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*, through Christ, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

King David rejoiced in his participation in this offering culture, declaring, 'Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own [lit: hand] we have given You.' 1Ch 29:13-14. A person who is choosing what God has chosen for them rejoices in the same way that King David rejoiced. With humility, they acknowledge that the privilege of participation in offering is what God has chosen for them. Their choice to participate is not in their definition of what they will give but, rather, in their willingness to give what they have received through the word of life from His hand. That is, they delight in the word that they are hearing, and obey it from the heart. Rom 6:17. In doing so, they obtain their sanctification, which is the sonship that the Father chose for them; and their reward is everlasting life. Rom 6:22.

Inherent in this freedom is the necessity for our personal connection to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as those who live and walk by the Spirit. We choose this way of living by setting our mind on the things of the Spirit each day. We obtained the freedom to set our minds this way when we were born of God, baptised into Christ, and were filled with the Holy Spirit. Through prayer in the Spirit, we are joined each day to the offering and sufferings of Christ.

In this fellowship, we are being delivered from iniquity, cleansed of sin; and the love of God is being poured into our heart. We are being freed to be the son whom the Father called us to be. The liberty of sonship is not the freedom of self-expression. Confusion on this point has been a problem in the church throughout its history. For example, Paul said to the Christians in Galatia, 'For you, brethren, have been called to liberty [or freedom]; only do not use liberty as *an opportunity for the flesh*, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself".' Gal 5:13-14.

Belief that freedom is the right to choose our own name and expression is a *delusion* that belongs to those who live by the other law. This law, which is other than the Law of love, was fathered in mankind when Adam and Eve, endeavouring to become the source of their own life and destiny, rejected the precious predestination that God had chosen for them. A person who views life in this manner demonstrates that they are not free at all, but are in bondage to the law of sin and death. Rom 7:23.

God's motives for creating man were implicitly called into question when Adam rejected his predestination as a son. Satan incited the presumption that God had created man merely for His own self-centred pleasure and glorification. He claimed that true liberty was only demonstrated by self-definition and expression. Of course, this was a deluding lie. Self-centredness is iniquity, which is the mark of idolatry. Addressing this point, the Lord said, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord: "What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, have followed idols, and have become idolaters?" ' Jer 2:4-5.

There is no life or future that a person can possibly choose that is better or more glorious than the destiny that the Father has chosen for them in Christ. To choose a way other than what He has chosen for them is, therefore, to fall short of the glory of God. Falling short in this manner is sin. Rom 3:23.

## Chosen by God

Jesus taught His disciples that the principle of choice, revealed in the creation and fall of Adam, equally applied to them. He said to them, '*You did not choose Me, but I chose you* and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.' Joh 15:16.

The disciples, by appointment, were set over the Lord's house to give those in the house their food in due season. Mat 24:45. This was not dissimilar from the mandate of Adam, who was named by God and given dominion over the creation. Through the action of naming the animals, *from the fellowship of Yahweh*, the living creatures were brought under the order of headship. Within this order, they were sustained by the grace of life as it was expressed according to the name that Adam had given to them. Like Adam, Christ's disciples had to choose sonship on the ground of Yahweh's fellowship as the basis for their appointment. The expression of authority in the church apart from the fellowship that the Lord had chosen for them would have been no different from rulership in the world.

We note that, prior to their birth from above, and their connection to the offering and sufferings of Christ, this worldly exercise of dominion was the focus of the disciples' conversation. At the last supper, which was an *agape* meal, a dispute arose among the disciples as to who should be considered the greatest. Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles

exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called “benefactors.” But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.’ Luk 22:25-26.

### Your fruit shall remain

Jesus said to the disciples that He had chosen them so that they would go and bear fruit, and that their fruit would remain. This is the fruit of eternal life that belongs to the sons of God. It is the fruit of the Spirit, for the Spirit gives life, and He is the expression of this life for a son of God.

In order to bear fruit that remains, a person must progress from adoption to be *born of water and of the Spirit* to enter the kingdom of heaven. By this means, they are joined to the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings, through which He multiplied His life to those who receive the new birth and continue to grow as sons of God, in Him.

The only way for a person to bear fruit is to be born again and to be conformed to the likeness of Christ’s death and His resurrection. His was a death that *multiplied life* to them. In the fellowship of this offering, having joined the process through which they find deliverance from iniquity and cleansing from sin, their testimony will be, ‘We who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.’ 2Co 4:11-12. Isa 6:6-8.

### Peter’s deliverance from iniquity

The experience of Peter helpfully illustrates the implications of Christ’s initiative to come alongside us and to bear the judgement of our sin so that we can choose the salvation that He accomplished for us through His offering.

At the last supper, after washing Peter’s feet, Jesus revealed to him that Satan had asked for him so that he might ‘sift him as wheat’. However, Jesus said to Peter, ‘I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.’ Luk 22:31-32. In response, Peter declared his readiness to lay down his life for Jesus. Luk 22:33. Joh 13:37. Jesus prophesied, saying, ‘Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.’ Joh 13:38.

This interaction demonstrated Peter's self-righteous zeal. He professed to love Jesus as his Friend, yet he would not receive, nor believe, Christ's words. Peter's reliance on the sight of his own eyes, and his readiness to act according to the dictates of his own heart, were iniquity within him. His iniquity was an idol in his heart, which made him vulnerable to the oppression of Satan. Eze 14:4. Fundamentally, Peter's iniquity was his rejection of God's fatherhood. Peter was self-fathered as he endeavoured to name himself and to define his own works of righteousness. On account of his self-righteous iniquity, Peter was in bondage to the law of sin and death, and under the judgement of God.

In the presence of the chief priests, elders and scribes, Jesus was questioned by Caiaphas, who asked, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' Mar 14:61. Jesus answered him, saying, 'I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' Mar 14:62. Upon hearing this confession, Caiaphas tore his garments and accused Jesus of blasphemy. On the basis of this accusation, the Sanhedrin used the Law to condemn Jesus to death. Mat 26:65-66. Mar 14:63-64. Lev 24:16. Jesus was then blindfolded and repeatedly struck in the face, and His beard was plucked from His cheeks. His back was also beaten with rods. Mar 14:64-65.

Jesus suffered these reproaches as an offering for sin. The iniquity of us all was being laid upon Christ's head as His abusers repeatedly struck His face with their hands, and also took hold of His head to tear the beard from His face. This was a key element of His offering for sin, as the *scapegoat*. Lev 16:21-22. Through these actions, everyone who had gone astray because of iniquity was identified with, or joined to, Christ's body of sin. This was, in fact, all of mankind. Isa 53:6.

As Peter observed the abuse of Jesus over a period of about an hour, he became increasingly agitated and ardent in His denial of Jesus. Luk 22:58. For example, as he denied Christ a third time, he cursed and swore at those who queried him, saying, 'I do not know this Man of whom you speak!' Mar 14:71. Peter was cursing and swearing to emphasise his denial that he was a disciple and friend of Jesus. In doing so, he was identifying himself with the Jewish nation and the Gentiles, in their rejection and abuse of Christ. Significantly, by association with them, Peter was *laying his hands* upon the head of Christ as his sin offering.

Through this abuse of Jesus, Peter's iniquity was being laid on Him. Jesus embodied Peter's rejection of God's fatherhood, and the wickedness of his self-righteous zeal. As a consequence of the sufferings that He

endured at the hands of Peter, Jesus was dying under the curse of the Law; He was being separated from the Father. Peter, and his iniquity, were being taken out into the sea of God's forgetfulness, with Jesus. All of the propensities of the other law in Peter, which were fathered within him by Satan, were being judged and destroyed in Christ as He endured the punishment for, and destruction of, Peter's iniquity within Himself.

Each time that Peter denied Jesus in the court of Caiaphas, the zealous iniquity within him was dying. His self-proclaimed resolve to lay down his life for Christ's sake was coming to nothing. It was dying in Peter as it was being laid on Jesus through Peter's denials. By the time that Peter denied Jesus for a third time, he had totally failed. The zealot was dead; the circumcision of this iniquity within him was complete. At this point, Peter was bankrupt in spirit.

Significantly, when Jesus looked at Peter following his third denial, *judgement was passed on Peter* through Christ's eyes. Peter had come to the judgement seat of God. As King David declared, 'The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; *His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.*' Psa 11:4. Under this judgement Peter, *and* his other law, went out with Christ into the sea of God's forgetfulness.

Peter had not drawn back in unbelief at this point, because Jesus prayed that his faith would not fail. Heb 10:38-39. Luk 22:31. Rather, Peter had chosen the fellowship of faith. Under the prevenient grace of God at the last supper, Peter had *chosen* this fellowship by receiving the washing that was necessary for his part in Christ's offering journey. In contrast, Judas never chose this fellowship of faith. For this reason, Jesus was not praying that Judas' faith would not fail. Judas had not received faith, for which Jesus could pray, because he did not believe Christ's teaching regarding the necessity to eat His flesh and drink His blood in the *agape* meal. Joh 6:64.

By faith, Peter was joined to Christ's baptism. Mar 10:38. That is, he went out with Christ under the judgement of God, and was united with Christ in His offering death. For this reason, Peter was also joined to the likeness of Christ's resurrection. Rom 6:5. Peter's other law, which had been circumcised from Christ, was circumcised from Peter as well. Peter then rose from the waters of God's forgetfulness, with Christ, having been freed from slavery to sin so that he might live and walk with Christ as part of His corporate body. Rom 6:6-8.

As Peter met Christ eye to eye, he remembered the word of the Lord; how He had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' Luk 22:61. By this means, Peter was illuminated to the depths of his iniquity. However, in the reflection from Christ's eyes, he also saw the heights of his sonship. The face, or expression, of his new creation sonship was in the eyes of Christ, reflected to him, heart to heart, from the priestly ministry of Christ as Melchizedek.

The life of Peter's sonship was being multiplied to him as Christ's blood was being shed for his iniquity. This would become Peter's life as the seed that he had received by faith germinated within him, birthing him from above; and as the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings became the daily reality of his Christian pilgrimage. In this fellowship, he would be able to strengthen the brethren according to the word of his sanctification, which Jesus had already proclaimed to him, saying, 'When you have returned to Me [are converted], strengthen your brethren.' Luk 22:32.

Through this interaction with Jesus in the court of Caiaphas, Peter was joined to Christ's prayer of faith. This was the only prayer to join. Through fellowship in this prayer of faith, his iniquity was taken away and his sin was purged. Moreover, he became obedient to the word of his sanctification, which was to strengthen his brethren.

### The failure of Judas

In contrast to Peter, Judas' faith failed him. He drew back in unbelief from Christ at the last Passover when, by washing Judas' feet, Jesus reached out to him to connect relationally with him. Judas refused this aspect of fellowship. He could not receive a word that asked him to humble himself and become a servant to his brethren, for that is what Jesus was exemplifying and speaking to His disciples about as He washed their feet. Joh 3:12-16.

It was because of idolatry that Judas rejected the entreaty of Christ, who was extending true friendship towards him. Judas' idol was the image that he had of himself as an *entrepreneur*. This attitude made him vulnerable to *covetousness*. He became a thief when his entrepreneurial pursuits and schemes failed. A thief despises those from whom he steals. A thief cannot join fellowship. Jesus was wanting to open a dialogue with Judas as He washed his feet. However, Judas would have none of this.

Judas proceeded from despising Christ and his brethren, to promoting himself and his own image as the greatest among the apostles. He viewed himself as superior to his brethren with respect to understanding, capacity and initiative. This was, in fact, a leaven that was among them all. Luke noted that, at the last supper, 'There was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.' Luk 22:24.

As Judas, through pride, refused this ministry of Christ, Satan entered and possessed him, making him a betrayer. Joh 13:27. He betrayed Christ and his fellow disciple-apostles. His pride was his idol, for it was the strength of his pride that made him the judge and then the executioner of his own life. He stumbled in his own iniquity as he bowed before his own pride, placed the noose around his own neck, and fell to his own death. His own pride destroyed him, as the Scriptures declare, 'Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit [or attitude] before a fall.' Pro 6:18.

### Christ's prayer

In the garden of Gethsemane, the golden altar of the true temple was revealed when Jesus began to pray to the Father, by the Spirit, having been made an offering for sin by the Father.

When the angel came and strengthened Jesus, He received the capacity of Eternal Spirit, through which His blood was shed for the cleansing of our sin. Luk 22:43. Heb 9:14. The work of atonement, which had previously been facilitated by the seraphim, now belonged to Jesus, the Son of Man. Atonement, including our deliverance from iniquity and cleansing from sin, was now being achieved and ministered through His offering and sufferings. Through this offering prayer, He was feeding His flesh and blood to the world as 'the bread of heaven'. This food is the fruit of the tree of life.

The full expression of Christ's offering prayer for every person was manifest in the garden of Gethsemane. Then, in each wounding event, there was a *specific* application of prayer associated with the specific work of atonement that He was achieving. That is, Christ's prayer accompanied each wound. The content and effect of His prayer was twofold. First, Christ's prayer was establishing and fulfilling the word and will of the Father for the salvation of His sons. Second, Christ's prayer was 'imprecatory'; it was proclaiming judgement upon the enemies of the Lord. These two dimensions of Christ's prayer are captured in the Messianic psalms.

In relation to Christ's offering in the court of Caiaphas, where He was bruised for our iniquities, we note the words of Jesus in the prophetic psalm of King David. 'Let not those who wait for You, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed because of me; let not those who seek You be confounded because of me, O God of Israel. Because for Your sake I have borne reproach.' Psa 69:6-7. In this statement of prayer, Christ was feeding the bread of life, as deliverance from their iniquity, to those who would receive it.

In the same offering context, Christ declared judgement upon those who rejected His priestly initiative towards them, praying, 'Pour out Your indignation upon them, and let Your wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their dwelling place be desolate; let no-one live in their tents. For they persecute the ones You have struck, and talk of the grief of those You have wounded. Add iniquity to their iniquity, and let them not come into Your righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.' Psa 69:24-28.

These two statements of prayer, through which the bread of heaven was being fed to the whole world, reveal two sets of keys that Christ obtained as He was crowned with glory and honour in the course of His offering journey. These keys are described in the book of Revelation.

Christ identified the first set of keys, revealing His mandate to judge and condemn all unrighteousness, when He said to the apostle John, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. *And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.*' Rev 1:17-18.

Revealing the ministry of salvation through His prayer, as a second key, Jesus said to those in His churches who were overcoming through fellowship in His offering and sufferings, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the *key of David*, He who opens and no-one shuts, and shuts and no-one opens: I know your works [of sonship]. See, I have set before you an open door, and no-one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name". ' Rev 3:7-8.

### **Pastoral care at the tree of life**

Earlier, we noted that Jesus ministered the fruit of the tree of life to Peter through prayer. The apostle John exhorted us to this same ministry, saying, 'If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to

death, he will ask [in prayer], and He will *give him life* for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.' 1Jn 5:16-17.

An obvious point of consideration for us is the distinction between sin leading to death, and sin not leading to death. The apostle Paul described the sin that leads to death as 'wilful sin'. It refers to a person's determination to proceed in their own way, and according to the sight of their own eyes, after receiving a knowledge of the truth. That is, it is an active rejection of the truth and of those who minister this message.

Making this point, Paul wrote, 'For if we *sin wilfully* after we have received the knowledge of the truth, *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries'. Heb 10:26-27. In other words, Christ is not interceding for those who reject the word of His messengers.

Consequently, they find no deliverance from their iniquity, nor cleansing from sin, in the context of their daily sufferings. Moreover, they are unable to fulfil the works of righteousness that belong to their sonship. The effects of the curse are not for their sake. Instead, they are the indication of condemnation. In summary, they are unable to obtain the salvation that Christ finished for them through His offering for sin.

How does a person receive a knowledge of the truth? Jesus said that the word of the Father is truth, and by this word a person is able to be sanctified. Joh 17:17. That is, they are made aware of what is not true (the projection associated with their iniquity), and they receive the word of faith proclaiming the obedience that belongs to their sonship. Gal 3:1-2. The knowledge of the truth is obtained by hearing the word of God, and through dialogue that is based in this word. 1Jn 1:1-3. This is not a theological discussion. Rather, it is fellowship in the light of present truth through which a hearer is appropriating faith for their personal fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ. Only in this fellowship are they able to obtain their sanctification.

This dialogue is the prayer to which James referred when he said, 'Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.' Jas 5:14-15. We remember that Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. That is, He prayed that, in the day of Peter's trial, as Christ came alongside him, he would not draw back in unbelief, but would maintain

his connection with Christ. By this means, Peter would be converted from his iniquitous zeal and be established in his sanctification as one who strengthened the brethren.

Having chosen to believe that God is their Father, and that they are a son in His house, a person who is not sinning a sin unto death presents themselves for this dialogue in order to be nurtured, trained, taught and disciplined towards obedience to the Father. This is the nature of faith.

It is important to note that if a person has rejected the word of a messenger, and is becoming weak and sick, their recovery requires them to return to the discussion, or word of truth, that they originally dismissed. If they come to an elder without addressing this fundamental disobedience, in humility and with repentance, *they do so with an idol in their heart*. By seeking deliverance from their distress without addressing their iniquity, they are asking the elder to bless their idol.

If an elder or a brother receives this one, and prays for them, both the one who has the idol, and the one who presumes to minister blessing to them through prayer, come under the same condemnation. Eze 14:1-11. This is not fellowship in the light.

The distinction between praying for a brother who is sinning a sin not unto death, and not praying for a person whose sin is leading to death, was evident at the last supper. Christ said to Peter, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me [are converted], strengthen your brethren.' Luk 22:31-32.

Peter's iniquity was sin, but it was not 'unto death' because, fundamentally, he identified himself as belonging to the community of faith established by the word that called him to eat and drink of Christ's body and blood. In contrast, Jesus did not pray for Judas. The disobedience of Judas was incorrigible; it was sin unto death.

The other distinction to note is that while Peter believed in his own zeal, he was upfront about it. In contrast, Judas professed to be Christ's friend but, having been progressively polarised by the word, began to court another conversation with those who were sceptical and jealous of Jesus, and who hated His message. Not only was Judas duplicitous, but his deception also concealed other aspects of corruption, indicating his sin-sickness - that is, he was an entrepreneurial thief stealing from his brethren.

## A righteousness revealed

Speaking of the purpose for his ministry as a messenger of God, the apostle Paul declared, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith".'

Rom 1:16-17.

The ministry of the word of God is the means by which the righteousness of sonship life is proclaimed to a hearer. Those who hear and receive this message are delivered to the doctrine of baptism, through which they are set free from sin to become slaves of God. The fruit of living this way is sanctification and eternal life. Rom 6:22. This is the inheritance that belongs to the sons of God.

When a person remains beset by sin, such as by an addiction to pornography, it reveals that they have not yet received, nor believed, the gospel of sonship. Instead, through their unrighteous presumption, they suppress the truth that is made known to them through the proclamation of the word. Consequently, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them as they become weak and sick, and spiritually die.

Rom 1:18-19. To find deliverance, they must choose sonship and come properly into the Father's house, through the gates, to learn obedience and the culture of sonship.



## Chapter 3

# The right to eat of the tree of life

### 'I AM' is coming quickly

In the concluding chapter of the book of Revelation, Jesus declared, 'Behold, I am *coming quickly!* Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.' Rev 22:7. He further declared, 'And behold, I am *coming quickly*, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.' Rev 22:12-13.

Jesus made this statement as 'I AM', indicating that what He was saying applied equally to the past, to the present, and to things that were to take place in the future. Rev 1:8. In other words, Christ comes to His people this way, in every generation. He comes quickly to give to each one according to their works. Those who keep the words written in His book are blessed in Him as they obtain the inheritance of their sonship; those who do not, are condemned.

When Jesus comes *quickly*, He comes *suddenly* and at an hour when He is not expected. We note, for example, that Jesus comes to the overseers of

His house - those whose work is to give His household food in due season - on a day when they are not looking for Him, and at an hour of which they are not aware, when they begin to beat their fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunkards. He rewards them for their carnal ministry and corruption by cutting them in two and appointing them their 'portion with the hypocrites'. Mat 24:45-51.

Having communicated Christ's directives to the church, the apostle John then said, 'Blessed are those who do His commandments, *that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.* But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.'

Rev 22:14-15. John further warned, 'If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.' Rev 22:18-19.

In these statements, John was not referring to Jerusalem in the new heavens and earth. He was speaking of the bride city that was established on the day of Christ's crucifixion, which was first manifest as 'the New Jerusalem' coming down out of heaven, on the day of Pentecost. He was speaking to every generation of the church.

We recognise that John was referring to the church in this age, because he distinguished between those who were in the city, and the dogs, sorcerers, sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters and liars who were outside of the city. In the new heavens and earth, those who are not part of the bride company will not be living outside the gates of the city; they will have been taken away and forgotten in the lake of fire. Further illustrating that John was referring to the church in this age, Paul said that we have *already* 'come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven'. Heb 12:22-23.

A foundational point for us to recognise is that the book of Revelation is the gospel that Christ, by the Spirit, is proclaiming to every church, for the whole church age. It is calling every person to enter the gates of the city and to partake of the tree of life, which provides them with the food of their eternal sonship. To enter and remain in the heavenly city, we must *heed* what the Spirit is saying to the seven churches, *turn in*

*repentance* to overcome our fallen practices and proclivities, and walk in obedience to Christ's commands.

While they apply to all churches, these seven directives will be particularly pertinent to particular churches, depending on their situations. For example, there are some churches who are experiencing severe political persecution, for whom Christ's letter to Smyrna is especially relevant. Jesus said to them, 'I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich) ... be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.' Rev 2:9-10. He is saying this to those who are suffering in a similar manner, today.

Other churches may be beset by alternative doctrines that promote sacramentalism and undermine their access to the *agape* fellowship at the tree of life. To these churches, He is specifically saying to them, 'I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. Repent [of encompassing these alternative doctrines], or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.' Rev 2:13,16.

There are no other gospels, nor religious practices, by which we can obtain the promises that Christ outlined to the churches. This is why John was so strong, warning that God would add plagues to those who add to the content of the book of Revelation; and would remove from the book of life, and from the heavenly Jerusalem, those who take words from the book. Rev 22:18-19. As we receive and respond to the call to 'Come', we will be able to proclaim this invitation to others. We recognise the urgency in the Spirit to hear and respond to this word of restoration, for the time is short and the end fast approaches. 1Co 7:29.

## The right to eat

Returning to John's exhortation, we note that those who are in the city have the *right* to the tree of life and to enter through the gates of the city. John referred to this 'right' in the opening statements of his Gospel, writing, 'But as many as received Him, to them He gave *the right to become children of God*, to those who *believe* in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' Joh 1:12-13.

The tree of life is in the midst of the New Jerusalem. It is the centrepiece of the *agape* meal, and its fruit is the bread from heaven. The right to eat from the tree of life in the heavenly Jerusalem is the right to live as a son of God.

Jesus wrote to the church of Ephesus, saying to those who repent and return to the fellowship of first love, 'I will *give to eat from the tree of life*, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.' Rev 2:7. Furthermore, to those who overcame the synagogue of Satan, the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, He promised, 'I will give some of the *hidden manna to eat*. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no-one knows except him who receives it.' Rev 2:17.

Earlier, we read John's warning that whoever takes anything away from the prophecy contained in the book of Revelation, the Father will take away their part from 'the book of life', from 'the holy city', and from the things written in the book. Rev 22:19. Significantly, the term '*book of life*', in which our names as sons of God are recorded, can equally be translated '*tree of life*'. This point provides us with insight to how we eat of the tree of life, and its implications for our sonship now and in the age to come.

### Names in the tree of life

The papyrus of the book of life, in which are written the names of the sons of God, is taken from the inner rind of the trunk of the tree of life. Importantly, the names recorded in the book of life are not simply identifiers. Each name is the *substance* of one's sonship. This substance, which is necessary for one's expression as a son of God, is fed to them through the fruit of the tree of life, which Jesus described as 'the hidden manna', or 'bread from heaven'.

The Father is the source of this substance, and it is fed to us from the mouth of Christ, who is the Bread of life. Joh 6:48. It is the fruit of His lips. Jesus Himself testified that 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*'. Mat 4:4. He also declared, 'The *words that I speak to you* are Spirit, and they are life.' This 'Spirit and life' is ministered to us by the Holy Spirit. Joh 6:63.

The name of every son of God was a seed of identity that was given to Yahweh the Son when He was *begotten* by the word of the Father, before. Heb 1:5. When He was begotten as the Son of God, we were

begotten as sons of God, in Him, and our names were written in the book of life.

The identities of all the sons and daughters of men were passed on to Adam in a *creative* action, when the Son of God breathed into man 'the breath of lives', and he became a living soul. Gen 2:7. This was not a 'begetting' initiative, but a 'creative' initiative. While the identities were given to Adam, which would be brought into being through a *procreative* action, the name and works of each identity were in the tree of life. The implication is that the sonship expression of every identity would, forever, be dependent upon an ongoing fellowship with Yahweh at the tree of life. Initially, this would be as an 'adoption', where the word of every person's name would be spoken to them by Yahweh, from the tree of life. Even when their name is written on their hearts and foreheads through new birth, the sons of God continue to receive grace for the expression of their sonship through their ongoing participation in the *agape* meal at the tree of life.

Once created as a living soul, Adam had identity but did not yet possess his name as a son of God. It was not yet written upon him. *Through adoption*, Adam had access to the works that belonged to his name, and he obtained grace to fulfil these works as he fellowshipped with Yahweh, each day, at the tree of life. He was to continue to live and work from the basis of this fellowship as an adopted son until the name that was written, as in a scroll upon the bark of the tree of life, was written in his heart and mind by new birth. His expression as a son of God would continue to be fed to him from the tree of life in the fellowship of Yahweh, forever.

It is important to recognise that while the fruit of the tree of life was given to Adam to be the food that enabled the exercise of his dominion over the creation, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil belongs *only* to Yahweh *Elohim*. Yahweh Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the sum of all diversity; the sum of everything that could ever be expressed. They, alone, are the origin of all things. The creative initiative of God from this fellowship is symbolised by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam had no right to this tree, because he was not the origin of anything; nor was he predestined to be a creator. Rather, Adam was created for the purpose of *fellowship with Yahweh*, through which life would be multiplied, by offering, to the creation over which he had been given dominion. Participation in this expression of Yahweh's Everlasting Covenant initiative is symbolised by the tree of life.

## THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE

As we have considered in previous notes, Christ on the cross was the sum of both trees. In the course of His redemptive journey from Gethsemane to the cross, Jesus was bringing the old creation to an end under the judgement of God, and He was establishing a new heavens and earth. Isa 65:17-18. He was also multiplying His life so that it would become the new creation life that belongs to the sons of God, which is the divine nature. Through this work, which culminated on the cross, we see the two aspects of Yahweh's Everlasting Covenant initiative - *creation* and the *multiplication* of life through offering.

Speaking of this fullness, which Christ embodied, the apostle John wrote, 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'. Joh 1:14. John then explained, 'And of His fullness we have all *received*, and grace for grace.' Joh 1:16. We *receive* of this fullness through fellowship in Christ's offering and sufferings as we eat and drink of the tree of life. However, we never become the source, or origin, of this life. As we noted above, inherent in our creation, and essential to our predestination as sons of God, is fellowship with Yahweh at the tree of life. We will, forever, live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God in the *agape* meal. God's word will always provide us with the grace of life that is necessary to fulfil the works that belong to our name as a son of God.

Adam ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, presuming that he could exercise dominion over the creation apart from fellowship with Yahweh. That is, he did not recognise or believe that the expression of his identity was dependent upon connection to the fellowship of Yahweh. When Adam ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was disconnected from the tree of life, in which resided the substance of his name. His eyes were opened, and he knew that he was naked. Gen 3:7. Adam's nakedness meant that he had no capacity within himself for the exercise, or expression, of dominion. Disconnected from his name, Adam's only alternative was to craft and project a name for himself. He did this, figuratively, by sewing fig leaves together as a covering to conceal his nakedness. Gen 3:7.

Adam and Eve were restored to the adoption through the offering of the Lamb of God, before they were sent from the garden. This restoration was signified by the sacrifice of an animal to atone for their sin and to clothe them with garments for the works they were now to fulfil in obedience to God's word. Gen 3:21-24. As we considered earlier in these

notes, Adam's predestination as a son of God could now be obtained *only* through participation in the offering of Christ as he made offering each day at the gate of Eden. Through this activity of faith, the ground upon which he did the works that were prepared for him by the Father was cursed for his sake. Gen 3:17.

Adam was the first man; Noah was the second Adam; and Christ is 'the last Adam'. 1Co 15:45. The seed of identities that was given to Adam, which was lost when he disobeyed God's word, was *reclaimed in Abraham* and passed on to Christ, the last Adam. Christ did not come down from heaven as a new humanity, apart from man. The word became flesh in Christ through Abraham and David, in the womb of Mary, as an *incarnation*. The DNA of His body is from Abraham. Now, in the resurrection, the spiritual body of every son of God is from Abraham, through Christ.

### Obtaining the promise

Until the Son of God became flesh, died on the cross, and rose again, a believer could only meet their name as *an adoption*. They received faith by hearing the word of God, believed in God, and diligently sought Him. Heb 11:6. Their name, or the substance of their sonship, was in the tree of life in the midst of the heavenly city. Although they did not possess their name, *they saw the city from afar*. They did the works of their sonship because the faith that they received in the word of God was the substance of this inheritance, which they hoped for. Heb 11:1. They lived by faith as strangers and pilgrims on this earth, considering themselves to be citizens of the heavenly city, which God had prepared for them. Heb 11:13-16.

In the New Covenant, a believer can now obtain the promise of sonship. On the first evening following His resurrection, Christ appeared to the disciples in the upper room. He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' Joh 20:22. Through the action of breathing on them, the disciples were strengthened in the inner man so that Christ could dwell in their hearts through faith. Eph 3:16-17. By receiving the Holy Spirit, Christ, the Seed, was able to germinate in their hearts and they were *born of God's life*. Through new birth, their name as a son of God was written in their heart and on their forehead.

When a person's name is written in their heart and on their forehead, *the word of their testimony is from the tree of life*. This testimony is fundamental to overcoming Satan, and to obtaining one's salvation as a

citizen of the kingdom of God. Rev 12:10-11. We note that they 'overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death'. Rev 12:11. We have this testimony, and overcome Satan, only as we continue to eat from the tree of life.

Although a believer is born of God through this process, the parable of the sower and the seed teaches us that unless they are baptised into Christ and continue to live in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, they will lose their sonship. They will have no root in themselves, and will endure only for a while. When tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, they stumble and fall away. Mat 13:21.

Those who are baptised into Christ's body, the church, have obtained entrance to the bride city, the heavenly Jerusalem. Eph 5:23. Unlike the Old Covenant believers who saw the heavenly city from afar, they have come into the heavenly Jerusalem, which Paul described as 'the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven'. Heb 12:22-23. Their name as a son of God, which is written in the book of life, has been written upon their heart and forehead. However, unless they continue to eat the fruit of the tree of life, which provides the energy for the works that belong to their sonship, they will die again.

The Spirit, through whom the seed of sonship germinates in a believer's heart, enables a person to be baptised by one Spirit into Christ's body, where they are set by the Father according to His good pleasure. 1Co 12:13,18. The access of a son of God to the tree of life, which is the source of food for the *agape* meal, is contingent upon their connection to this fellowship.

The key point is that unless a son of God continues to eat the fruit of the tree of life, their sonship will die. Saying it another way, a person's sonship depends upon eating the fruit of the tree of life at the *agape* meal. They do this by receiving the word proclaimed from the presbytery, and by participating in their fellowship, which is the fellowship of Yahweh. 1Jn 1:1-3. They reject the *agape* meal as the ongoing source of their expression as a son of God when they seek to validate their identity through any means other than obedience to God's word in the fellowship of Yahweh.

This principle was exemplified in Jesus' parable of the great feast. He identified various people who did not partake of the supper because they

were pursuing identity verification elsewhere. He said, "They all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused." And another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused." Still another said, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come".' Luk 14:18-20. He described these ones as 'not worthy'. Mat 22:8.

Even those who did accept their invitation to the wedding supper were cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, because they presumed to participate in the *agape* meal without the sanctification that is symbolised by a wedding garment. Mat 22:11-13.

Elsewhere, we have elaborated on the meaning of the excuses that were given by those who disregarded the great *agape* feast prepared by the Father. As a passing comment, it is helpful to recognise that the implications of 'marrying a wife' are not limited to the confounding effects of a fallen marriage culture on one's connection to the *agape* meal. It also includes young people who forsake the communion in pursuit of romantic attachments outside the church communities in which the Father has placed them. Driven by lust, and emboldened by alternative 'gospels', these young people relinquish their eternal inheritance for the passing pleasure of a carnal liaison. They are spiritually short-sighted, and are unable to perceive the true romance that belongs to marriage in the image and likeness of God. The apostle Paul warned of this wantonness, writing, 'But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith'. 1Ti 5:11-12.

## The fruit of the Spirit

Reiterating what we have already considered, the fruit of the tree of life is the energy for the expression of our name as a son of God. The Father is the source of our name and works as a son of God. Our name is written in Christ, who gives to us the substance of our sonship through His word. This food is fed to us by the Holy Spirit, for it is the Spirit who gives life. Joh 6:63. 2Co 3:6.

The apostle John observed that the tree of life in the New Jerusalem, which was coming down out of heaven, *yielded twelve fruits every month*. The leaves of the tree of life were for the healing of the nations. Rev 22:2. Significantly, these fruits are the divine nature, given by the Spirit.

## THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE

The apostle Peter specifically identified eight aspects of the divine nature that belong to a son of God, in Christ – faith; virtue; knowledge; self-control; perseverance; godliness; brotherly kindness; and love. 2Pe 1:4-8. He said that we are to give diligence to adding to, or multiplying, these qualities, indicating that a son of God already possesses the divine nature, albeit in a ‘seed’ measure. Paul described such diligence as ‘working out our own salvation with fear and trembling’, saying, ‘For it is *God who works in you* both to will and to do for His good pleasure.’ Php 2:12-13. Peter explained that if these qualities are ours and abound, it is the evidence that we are ‘partakers of the divine nature’. 2Pe 1:4,8.

Similarly, the apostle Paul identified nine fruits of the Spirit that are exhibited by those who walk according to the Spirit – love; joy; peace; longsuffering; kindness; goodness; faithfulness; gentleness; and self-control. Gal 5:22-25. He said that these fruits belong to those who are Christ’s and who have crucified the flesh, with its passions and desires. That is, they are joined to the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings.

When considered together, Peter and Paul nominated twelve fruits of the Spirit, which are the divine nature: (1) faith, or faithfulness; (2) virtue; (3) knowledge; (4) self-control; (5) perseverance, or longsuffering; (6) godliness; (7) brotherly kindness; (8) love; (9) joy; (10) peace; (11) goodness; and (12) gentleness.

These twelve fruits are not simply general qualities that are expressed by a son of God. Rather, the Spirit feeds them to a believer as the food that is ‘convenient’, or necessary, for the expression of their name and works as a son of God in every context of life. They are tailored to each person’s unique pathway of sonship so that they can overcome Satan and walk blamelessly in the circumstances of life that are particular to them – be it a difficult marriage; a contrary political or social environment; a challenging work situation. With this understanding, we see that one person may require more knowledge for the expression of sonship in their unique context, while another may need peace.

Jesus spoke of this unique work of the Holy Spirit, saying, ‘Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.’ Luk 12:11-12. In these instances, the fruit that the Spirit feeds to us becomes the fruit of our lips as the expression of our sonship.

## An entrance into the everlasting kingdom

The evidence that we are eating from the tree of life is that these qualities of the divine nature are being increasingly expressed by the Spirit within us as we fulfil the works that belong to our sonship in Christ. What we are eating is being demonstrated through our speech and conduct as we fellowship each day in His offering and sufferings. We are being delivered from our carnality and are growing up in our sonship. Describing this reality, the apostle Paul said, 'Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' Heb 13:15-16. We see that 'freewill' offering, as an expression of thanksgiving, is the evidence of a person's fellowship in the *agape* meal at the tree of life. It is the mark of those who are spiritual.

Alternatively, a person who is choosing to walk according to the flesh, rather than according to the Spirit in Christ, will be in bondage to the deeds of the flesh. Paul said these are evident: 'Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like.' Gal 5:19-21. Those who practise these things will not inherit the kingdom of God, because they are already outside of the heavenly Jerusalem, as the sorcerers, sexually immoral, murderers, idolaters, etc. Rev 22:15.

Notably, Peter said that if these fruits of the Spirit are ours and are being multiplied in us, and from us, through offering, an entrance will be supplied to us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 2Pe 1:8-11. In other words, it indicates that we are entering through the gates into the heavenly city, where the tree of life is planted. It also means that we will be assured of our eternal fellowship with Yahweh as part of the bride city in the new heavens and earth once our mortal life expires and we fall asleep in Christ.

## Wisdom is a tree of life

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul distinguished between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God, which is fed to a person as fruit from the tree of life. Summarising the wisdom of this world, Paul asked, 'Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer [debater] of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?' 1Co 1:20. The wisdom of the world is demonstrated by those

who presume to have wisdom in themselves; by those whose qualification to teach others is based on their accumulation of knowledge; and by those who debate others to establish a point of 'truth'.

In contrast, Paul was clear that the wisdom of God does not originate in anyone, but is *received* when a person receives the message of the cross preached by messengers who are *speaking in Christ*. 1Co 1:18,21. 1Co 2:2-5. 2Co 12:19. By receiving this message, a hearer receives the wisdom of God as the fruit of the tree of life. In doing so, they exemplify the principle described by King Solomon, who said that wisdom 'is a tree of life to those who take hold of her'. Pro 3:18.

Through His offering journey, which culminated in Jesus Christ being lifted up on 'a tree', He '*became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption*'. 1Co 1:30. That is, Christ was revealed as the tree of life through His offering on the cross. Christ ministers to us the fruit that belongs to this tree, which is His body and blood, by the preaching of His word. This fruit is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption to those who receive it.

As we have previously established, our name and works as sons of God are in the tree of life. Through the word of the cross, Christ ministers to us the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption that is necessary for our expression as sons of God. Paul described this expression as 'glorying in the Lord'. 1Co 1:31.

Christ's messengers do not feed the fruit of the tree of life, which is the bread of heaven, to their hearers by preaching with persuasive words of human wisdom. Rather, they, in Christ, demonstrate the Spirit and power of God as they maintain their fellowship in His offering and sufferings. 1Co 2:4-5. Paul noted that from this fellowship they speak 'hidden wisdom' *among* those who are mature. The 'hidden wisdom' is the 'hidden manna' that belongs to those who have overcome the synagogue of Satan and their 'leavenous' doctrines in the church. 1Co 2:6-7. Rev 2:13-17.

Earlier, we understood that the divine nature, expressed as twelve fruits of the Spirit, is the *fruit* of the tree of life. How is it, also, wisdom, establishing righteousness, sanctification and redemption? Helpfully, the apostle James explained this point, writing, 'But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.' Jas 3:17-18.

The wisdom from above is, first, pure, because it is the word of Christ that proceeds from His finished offering through the ministry of a presbytery fellowship that has been restored to His hand. 1Jn 1:1-3. Rev 1:20. This is 'fellowship in the light', where the blood of Christ is active to cleanse and purify from sin those who abide in this fellowship. 1Jn 1:3,7. The word of the cross, which is 'the wisdom from above', ministers the fruits of the Spirit to those who hear and receive it, and walk in its light. As James noted, the word is 'peaceable, gentle and full of good fruits'. Jas 3:17.

Paul explained that the fruit of light, which is the word, is the fruit of the Spirit. He exhorted us, saying, 'Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit [equally, light] is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.' Eph 5:8-10. A son of God does not presume to express their name apart from fellowship in the light. Rather, they are 'finding out' what are the works that belong to their acceptable offering in Christ as they receive the word that is light, ministered by the Spirit. As they walk in the light, they are equipped with the grace of life necessary for their participation in the offering of Christ. In this offering, they are finding deliverance from the darkness of their own way, and are becoming the expression of the light that they have received. What they have eaten is now becoming the fruit of their life. Rom 10:6-8.

## Shepherding from the tree of life

Receiving wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption by eating the fruit of the tree of life is fundamental to leadership and pastoral care in the church. This is the only legitimate basis for the exercise of dominion, or authority, that belongs to a person's sanctification. This authority is not exercised as dominion over another's faith. 2Co 1:24. That would be an expression of worldly wisdom.

Nevertheless, those who have been called to shepherd the church need to faithfully speak the word without fear or favour so that the word of the cross is effective in the lives of their hearers. Testifying of this work, Paul wrote, 'Him we preach, *warning* every man and *teaching* every man *in all wisdom*, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. *To this end I also labour*, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.' Col 1:28-29.

Paul's speech was enabled by the wisdom that he obtained for his labour as a messenger, by eating the fruit of the tree of life that was fed to him

by Christ. His access to this food was the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as part of a presbytery. Accordingly, he further testified, 'To the present hour *we* both hunger and thirst, and *we* are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And *we labour*, working with our own hands. Being reviled, *we* bless; being persecuted, *we* endure; being defamed, *we entreat*. We have been made as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things until now.' 1Co 4:11-13.

### In conclusion

*Freedom* is fundamental to our creation as sons of men, and to our predestination as sons of God in the fellowship of Yahweh. We are chosen by God to be free. Essential to the principle of freedom is *choice*. In other words, if there is no choice, we have no opportunity for the expression of our freedom. This choice is not our own right to decide who we are or how we will live; nor does it entitle us to choose what word does or does not apply to us.

Our only choice is whether we will forgo our presumed right to determine our own life and destiny, which indicates our slavery to sin, and instead, will lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of us – our sonship as part of His body. Php 3:12. When we make this choice, we are delivered into the glorious liberty, or freedom, that belongs to the sons of God. This freedom means deliverance from every encumbrance that imposes itself upon the expression of our sonship in Christ. A person who is free in this manner is obtaining their sanctification, the end of which is eternal life. Rom 6:22-23.

*Pain* is an implication of choice. By choosing one thing over another, something must be foregone. Drawing attention to this reality, Jesus said, 'No-one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.' Mat 6:24.

Having chosen the sonship and fellowship that God has chosen for us, we are free either to 'speak' or to 'remain silent' in relation to the various relational matters that we encounter in life. In this regard, we are not under the obligation of good and evil to assess, react to, or justify others.

When our food is the fruit of the tree of life, the choices that we make in the midst of these circumstances are an exercise of the dominion that belongs to our sonship. This dominion is enabled by the resource of

wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption that is made available to us, by Christ, from the tree of life.

Reiterating the key principle that we have already described in these notes, our name and works as a son of God are written in the tree of life. From this tree, through the fellowship of offering, comes the fruit that sustains and covers us in the administration of priesthood that is given to us as a son of God. 1Pe 2:5,9. It provides us with the energy necessary to '*labour*' and to fulfil the works that belong to our name as a son of God in Christ.

When fellowship at the tree of life is the basis of our conversation, the determination to remain *silent* or, alternatively, to *entreat* a brother, as well as the content of our communication, is enabled by the wisdom of God. Moreover, it is sanctified because it is commensurate with our sonship. Engaging in this manner demonstrates the dominion that belongs to our sonship as we remain in the fellowship of Yahweh.

Those who leave the fellowship to which we are called as sons of God have the *right* to depart. The right to make this choice is essential to the freedom that belongs to their identity. While we dignify others with this choice, we do not justify their reasons for departing by embracing, or endeavouring to understand, them. Such reasoning does not belong to the wisdom from above.

If we attempt to justify the reasons that are given for a person's departure from a faith community or we engage in their debates in an attempt to arrest their perspective, we, ourselves, are forsaking the fruit of the tree of life. At this point, we are at risk of departing with them, having come to agree with the reasons that they have expressed for the exercise of their right to leave. In the name of love, we will have chosen and begun to live a lie. Consequently, we will forfeit our part in the bride city, for outside the city '*are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practises a lie*'. Rev 22:15.