

Tree of Life

(Sermon Notes)

By Warren Zehrung – December 8, 2012

The Tree of Life is about **God's Holy Spirit**.

So few people in this confused world understand what Spirit-Life is all about.

When Adam was created – he was a living breathing human being like you and me.

But, without instruction directly from Jesus Christ, Adam was unable to understand **spiritual** things.

God has to give spiritual knowledge to mankind – because it is **spiritually** discerned.

God was not creating mankind only for the physical realm – but for the eternal **spiritual** realm.

Mankind was created to eventually be made into the image of God – Spirit. Because God is Spirit, He is still bringing us to completion; we do not yet possess His eternal spiritual Life.

Mankind was created to be in the Family of God – not with human life – but with **God Life** – with the same Spirit of God.

We brethren, in God's Church, are the only ones who are able to come to the truth **vis-à-vis** God's Spirit.

Vis-à-vis is a French phrase that means "as regards," but interestingly, it also means "face to face," as in, *the Lord spoke unto Moses **face to face**, as a man speaks unto his **friend**. (Exodus 33:11)*

God's Spirit makes a **real** relationship with Him possible.

1 John 3

We are physical right now – we cannot see God or Jesus Christ.

John reveals that **we will see** God *as He is*.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God [Now we are the Children of God – but there is more to come], and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, **we shall be like Him**; for we shall see him as he is.

We are not **like** God yet – are we?

1 Corinthians 13

Paul tells us that we only have **partial knowledge** at this time.

1 Corinthians 13:9 For we know in **part**,...

That alone should keep us searching and growing in knowledge and Truth.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For **now** we see through a glass, darkly; but then **face to face**: now I know in part; but then **shall I know** even as also I am known.

A genuine and close relationship with God **changes** us to be like God.

Philippians 3:21 [the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ:] shall change our vile body, [We have temporal bodies] that it may be fashioned like unto His **glorious** body.

Jesus' glorified body is now an immortal resurrected Spiritual member of the God Family – as we will be.

We will not retain our flesh and blood bodies – we will be changed to Spirit.

Only the part of us that has put on Godliness will be resurrected – not the body which rots in the grave, but **by His Spirit that dwells in you**.

Paul described how our fleshly body is not that which is gloriously resurrected.

1 Corinthians 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown [buried] in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

1 Corinthians 15:43 It is sown [buried] in dishonor; it **is raised in glory**: it is sown [buried] in weakness; it is raised in power:

1 Corinthians 15:44 It is sown [buried] a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a **spiritual** body.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken [make alive] your mortal bodies **by His Spirit that dwells in you**.

God's eternal Spiritual Family is **open** to all those who live by His Spirit.

God's Family is **not** a **closed** family as Satan would have us believe.

Knowing as we do that the Holy Spirit is not a **third person** of a mysterious **closed** Trinity is a good start at coming to the True knowledge of the nature of God.

The Trinity is the most devious of all heresies in that when you are taught that the Holy Spirit **is a person** – you will make **no attempt to become** that person.

But we are to strive to become like God is – Spirit.

That is our destiny – our incredible human potential – to be like God.

The Truth is – we will be changed and become Spirit as God is Spirit - and know God face to face as family members do.

The evidence of God's Spirit within the Church of God is **rare** these days.

That is a sad thing to say – but it is true.

We all know the Scripture that says "You shall know them by their fruit."
(Matthew 7:20)

Luke 18:8 ... when the Son of man returns, shall He find **faith** on the earth?
[Will there be any true believers when Jesus comes?]

Would Jesus find Faith among the church brethren that you know?

Are their lives shining examples of lives filled with the fruit of God's Holy Spirit?

Are they a joyful people who uplift and encourage you?

Do they trust in God's principles – or, Are they more like the people in the world?

As we look around our scattered congregations – how many brethren are holding grudges?

Who honors his parents according to God's Commandment?

How many refuse to reconcile or to be reconciled?

Who is truthful in their words and deeds?

Is the fruit of God's Spirit evident in their lives?

**Brethren, Most importantly, we must understand what God's Holy Spirit is – and how it is that we grow in Spirit as Jesus did.

Luke 2:40 ...Jesus grew, and waxed **strong in spirit**, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

Growing in Spirit does not come naturally.

"Waxed" means He increased more and more in the vigor of God's Spirit.

That means that the dynamism of God's Spirit was evident in His growing character.

Brethren, we are to do the same thing!!!

We must be making every effort to bear the same fruit – as much as is possible.

The **Tree of Life** in the Garden of Eden represented God's Spirit – God's Life – God's Family tree – even His eternal Life.

Herbert W. Armstrong used to speak on the Two Trees – and people would say, "Oh NO!" – "Not again!"

That is because they never got it – and the proof of that statement is in the apostasy that carried the great majority away in their dissimilitude from the Truth.

As it says in **Hebrews 13:9** They were carried away with divers and strange doctrines.

The people at headquarters did not get it – they could not understand about the Tree of **LIFE** !!! Satan deceived them into taking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Mr. Armstrong spoke of the Two Trees representing the way of Give and Get.

Without God's Spirit we are "Takers."

With God's Spirit we are "Givers."

That was so clear – – – or was it?

**Without God's Spirit – even that simple concept cannot be established in one's life.

God's Way of Life is one of **Sharing** who and what we've become – caring, sacrificing, healing, loving according to all God's Commandments.

Jesus says, "Will I find faith on the earth?" because so – so many continue to be Takers – without Putting Back - without being willing to **truly** give of themselves.

They withhold their friendship, their concern, their love, their emotions because they maintain a Gentile mindset of "The more I Get – the more I'll have.

Brethren, are we so Blind to the workings of God's Holy Spirit?

Do we understand yet – that the more we exercise of God's Spirit – the more we'll have His Spirit.

Proverbs 13

The more we give of ourselves – the more like God we become.

I'm not speaking of money - I'm talking about giving of ourselves, our emotions, our love, our caring, our being, our attitudes, our concerns – our outgoing concern for others.

The more we give of ourselves, the more we are like God.

Proverbs 13:6 Righteousness keeps [protects] him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthrows the sinner.

That is pretty straight forward – when we live according to God's Law – we are protected in all that we do.

And when we continue to sin – it will catch up to us with dire consequences.

Let's continue here in Proverbs 13 – I wish to expound on the **spiritual principle** in verse 7.

Let's take a good look at this scripture because within it is the **Spiritual Principle** that many neglect to understand.

Proverbs 13:7 There is that makes himself rich, yet has nothing: there is that makes himself poor, yet has great riches.

To the Gentile mind – this is a great contradiction – because every Gentile (and too many Israelites too) knows that the more you hoard – the more you have...

And the more you let get away from you – the less you have. The Gentile mind thinks that is clear and simple logic.

The **principle** says that the **generous** prosper – while the **selfish** decline.

That principle works with property, wealth, riches, etc.

But let's look further – into the **Spiritual Principle** contained in this verse.

"There is that makes himself rich" – this is referring to one who thinks he **gets ahead** of the game by **withholding** from others.

He does not **speak** - to those whom he holds in contempt.

Postage is saved by not sending notes of encouragement to those who are sick.

He lets himself off easily by saying, "They know I care – I don't need to show it."

He is unwilling to share his concerns...

Never does he get around to visiting the elderly or disabled.

He has learned not to get involved – because it might impact him negatively.

He thinks that he gets ahead by hobnobbing and trying to impress the Pastor.

He withholds his spiritual gifts from others he does not like.

He is trying to be **something** when he is unwilling to **sacrifice**, be a living sacrifice for his brother's spiritual welfare, and he is unwilling share of himself.

He will not jeopardize his **social standing** in the church for any reason.

"There is that makes himself rich" – and the Scripture says "yet has **nothing**." He becomes **Spiritually** void, **empty** and has nothing – He is **lacking** God's Spirit.

Now let's look at the second-half of this Scripture.

Proverbs 13:7b ... there is that makes himself poor,

This is the man who willingly gives of himself – without cost to others.

He will willingly go out in the pouring rain to change a flat tire for you – and insist that you owe him nothing.

Better than that (here is the spiritual application) – when you have a **sin in your life** that threatens your salvation – he will come to you in great peril of your friendship – and none the less – he will try to help you with fasting and prayer and spiritual reasoning – to get you back on the straight and narrow.

He sets a Godly example in His life of **giving** and living all the spiritual virtues of Christ.

Proverbs 13:7b ... there is [one] that makes himself poor, yet has great **riches**. He becomes **Spiritually** Prosperous.

2 Peter 1

Peter has some things to say on this topic.

Let's take a look at how we can become **Spiritual** – like God.

2 Peter 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Partakers of the divine nature – that is what we must do to be in the Kingdom of God – in the **Spiritual** Family of God.

Then Peter shows the proper **progression** of Spiritual growth.

Of those who fell away in the apostasy – none understood how to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ – not a one of them.

1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but **they were not of us**; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

God's Holy Spirit is more than just picking an apple off the Tree of Life – and saying **I got it**.

It is a lifetime's process in spiritual growth. God is not mocked.

2 Peter 1:5 And beside this [we come out of the world], giving all diligence, add to your **faith** - **virtue**; and to virtue **knowledge**;

2 Peter 1:6 And to knowledge **temperance**; and to temperance **patience**; and to patience **godliness**;

2 Peter 1:7 And to godliness **brotherly kindness**; and to brotherly kindness charity [**Godly Love**].

How would you like to be a part of a congregation where all the brethren practiced **all** of these **Spiritual Characteristics** in a way that profited everyone?

Is God asking too much of us – or has He set the bar very high for us to be among the firstfruits of His creation.

2 Peter 1:8 For if these things be in you, and **abound**, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is God's Holy Spirit like?

God's Spirit is the one Spirit that the Father and Jesus Christ share with each other and with us.

First of all, God's Spirit is His Life.

That is why the tree in the Garden of Eden is called the Tree of **Life**.

We were fond in the Worldwide Church of God to say that God's Spirit is His **power**.

Well, that was a good starting point – power – but God's Spirit is so much more than His power – it is His very **Life**.

God did not name the tree in the Garden of Eden the Tree of Power, but the Tree of **Life**.

Yes, His Spirit is power, but not just raw power to move mountains – but His very **Spirit Life's essence** that He is sharing with us – to make us His eternal children.

The languages of men fall short when it comes to describing God's Spirit.

"*Ruach*" in the Hebrew language means **breath** in man – but when it refers to God, it means the **Life** of God – His **Spirit**.

It is the **breath** of a man that proves that **he is living**.

"*Pneuma*" in the Greek language means **breath** in man – but when it refers to God, it means the **Life** of God – His **Spirit**.

God is Spirit (**John 4:24**).

John 3

His Spirit is His attitude, His life's force, His mind, His love.

How much does God Love?

Does God give? Does God Share? Does God sacrifice?

God the Father and Jesus Christ do not have a spirit that says. "We'll keep all the Glory and Honor and Power to ourselves..."

That is the spirit of the gentile mind...

God is outgoing Love – and sharing of Life.

John 3:16 For God **so loved** the world, that He gave [up] His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting **life**.

We cannot grasp the significance of these Words.

God the Father gave-up His Son, Jesus Christ – so that we might obtain **God Life** – and live eternally with Him.

Had Jesus failed – had He sinned even once, Jesus would have died eternally for His own sin.

There are ministers in God's Church who wish to believe that God **did not love** us that much – **but He did!!!**

We know that Jesus sacrificed Himself to pay the death penalty for our sins - so that we might obtain **God Life** – and live everlastingly with Him.

But, brethren, ponder the sacrifice that **God the Father** made – that is the greatest act of Godly Love ever made.

God the Father would have been **all alone** without His Son – no people – no universe – nothing, had Jesus failed.

And we think that it is too much to **make the sacrifices** that come our way???

Let's try to think about who and what God's Spirit is.

It is His all-presence, His all-knowing, His unlimited power, His personality, His manifold traits, His character.

God's Holy Spirit is **every characteristic** of God - His righteousness, gentleness, peace, compassion, excellence, generosity, mercy... the list is endless.

We are totally unable to comprehend every characteristic of God's Spirit with our human intellect **for God is too great**.

And yet – it is absolutely necessary that we “grow in Spirit” in order to put on the Godly character that is necessary to be in the Spiritual Family of God.

The complete attributes of God's Spirit are beyond the grasp of our finite minds.

In God's Church, brethren, we have been given the same opportunity to take of the **Tree of Life** that was presented to Adam and Eve by Jesus Christ.

Remember – the Tree of Life represented God's Holy Spirit – freely available to our parents, Adam and Eve. They had freedom of choice – the same as we do.

Like Adam and Eve, we too, are capable of being tempted.

The Tree of Life was freely available to Adam and Eve.

Had Adam and Eve taken of the Tree of Life they would have become converted children of God with eternal life awaiting them.

Satan did not want for Adam and Eve to be able to take the Tree of Life and live forever (**Genesis 3:22**).

Adam and Eve did not avail themselves of the Tree of Life, but instead chose Satan as their spiritual father (**John 8:44**).

Genesis 2:8 And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom he had formed.

Genesis 2:9 And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the **Tree of Life** also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of **good and evil**.

As children of Adam and Eve we have inherited the proclivity to do our own thing – decide for ourselves.

And just like Adam and Eve, we are capable of being tempted.

But Adam and Eve failed, and were ejected from the Garden and denied access to the Tree of Life.

Genesis 3:22 And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know **good and evil**: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever:

Genesis 3:23 Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

Genesis 3:24 So He drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims [angels], and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the **Tree of Life**.

We know one of the principles in the Bible that we live by is this; when one tries to mix **good and evil** – the result is **evil** – not good.

The world believes that it is **silly** to keep the Sabbath and Holy Days.

The world believes that it is ridiculous to tithe and avoid unclean foods...

The world believes that you only go around once – get it while you can...

...While us Christians live lives of self-sacrificing and striving for the unity of the Spirit.

Why are we on such a different wave-length from multiple billions of people all around the earth?

Here is the answer.

No one is able to know the things of God except by the Spirit of God.

The natural man of the world is unable to receive the things of the Spirit of God because they are absurd to him – he is utterly unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Psalm 139

The wisdom of God: God revealed a great deal to the prophets of old for our understanding, edification, and our knowledge.

Psalm 139:6 Such [Godly] knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high [inaccessible], I cannot attain unto it. [It cannot be grasped.]

David wondered: What is mankind that you would even give him a passing glance (**Psalm 8:4**).

It is **wise** to believe in God – but it is **foolish** to think that we can know everything about God that there is to comprehend (**Psalm 14:1**).

It is exactly like Paul said; man is ill-equipped to be able to understand the all encompassing **scope** of the **reach** of God's Spirit.

Psalm 139:7 Whither shall I go from **your Spirit**? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? [There is no place where God's influence does not pervade.]

Psalm 139:8 If I ascend up into heaven, you are there: if I make my bed in hell [*shehol* – grave or pit], behold, you are there.

Psalm 139:9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea...

Psalm 139:10 Even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. [God's presence and control through His Spirit is everywhere.]

Read and dwell on all of chapter 139 in your own Bible Studies to see how much David delighted in reflecting on God's Spirit.

David even understood that God was aware of his every thought and motivation – and, in faith, David welcomed God's involvement and intervention into his innermost thoughts and consciousness.

Psalm 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, [test me,] and know my thoughts:

Psalm 139:24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Brethren, there's a lesson here for us. How much of our old ways do we wish to retain and desire to hold onto.

Like David, we must be more than willing to be **putty** in God's hands – to shape us, mold us and fashion us.

Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why have you made me thus?
Has not the potter power over the clay... (**Romans 9:20-21**)

God knows how to instruct His people.

Man begins to make the transition from his **physical** existence to growing in **Spirit** toward the flawless **Life of Christ** when he receives the first **token** of God's Spirit at his baptism and the laying on of hands.

You were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the **earnest** of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession [our resurrection], unto the praise of His glory. (**Eph 1:13, 14**)

In the resurrection we will be **Spirit** – like God is.

In order for a Christian to be able to achieve that great leap from man-kind to **Spirit God-kind**, God gives baptized Christians a **security pledge** of His Spirit – His Life, making us His Godly children.

God's Spirit in a Christian begins the conversion process, which culminates in our being born eventually into the eternal Family of God.

God's Spirit is the gift of God unto eternal life (**Romans 6:23**).

Ephesians 4

It is **God's Will** that we enter His Kingdom as His Spirit-born eternal Children.

We are to do our utmost to obtain the same stance and perspective on everything as God has and be exactly like Him in every way that we are able.

And in the same way that God loves us we are to follow suit and **love one another**.

As we saw – God and Jesus Christ have already demonstrated their Love for us.

God gives us the opportunity to demonstrate **our love to them** by loving each other.

Ephesians 4:3 *"Endeavoring to keep the **unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace..."*

We are not supposed to be scattered – independent Christians.

Do we understand what God means by the **unity of the Spirit**?

Drop down to verse 13

Ephesians 4:13 *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."*

Brethren, which of us has reached the *measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ?*

Not one of us has!!! Our work is cut out for us – isn't it?

Acts 2

Our becoming Spiritual – like God is Spirit – is a promise that God Himself has made to us.

Acts 2:39 *God's desire is to share His Spirit with us "for the promise [of His Spirit] is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."*