

The Tree of Life and Its Branches

by DeVern Fromke

The fourth message by Mr. DeVern Fromke at the Conference in Switzerland

(The second message was *At Ease or at Rest?*; The third message was *From Separation unto Revelation: From Revelation unto Worship*).

Today we are going to see that there is a tree and there are branches on that tree. We saw some of them yesterday when we were saying that *worship* really is the fruit that satisfies the Lord. I sometimes tell people that if there were nothing else to do in all the world, there is one primary occupation and that is worship. We saw that real worship grows out of having seen the Lord, or *revelation*, and then we saw that it is *separation* that allows revelation. But maybe you are asking: 'How do I get separated?' It is really quite simple if we notice the life of Abraham.

Obedience

When God first spoke to Abraham and said: 'Abraham, get out of Chaldea,' he just obeyed', as he did in all the other separations. It is *obedience* that separates us unto the Lord. One young man came to the evangelist, D.L. Moody, and said: 'Now that I am a Christian do I have to give up the world?' Mr. Moody replied: 'Just give a real good testimony unto the Lord, and the world will give *you* up!' But I must not spend too much time on each of these branches, so we will ask: 'How do I obey?'

Hearing

The Word of God says: "*Faith (or obedience) cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17). I am always amazed that parents expect their children to obey when they often do not learn to hear. If Abraham did not hear the words of the Lord he could not have obeyed. Let me explain it this way.

I was riding to church one night with a pastor, and the children were all seated in the back of the car. They were making so much noise there in the back that we could not talk together in the front, and the mother, turning, said to Mary: 'If you don't be quiet we will let you out at the next corner!'. But Mary did not hear and it did not make any difference to the noise. Then a few blocks later the father turned to Johnny: 'Johnny, if you don't be quiet I am going to chew your ear off!', but they did not hear and Johnny was just as noisy. Then I realised that the trouble was not in the back seat — it was in the front seat. I turned to the mother and asked: 'How far are we away from home?' When she said it was about ten miles, I said: 'Would you really let Mary out here alone?' Then I asked the father: 'How many ears have you chewed off?' Then I could show the mother and the father that the reason why Johnny and Mary did not hear them was because their words were quite meaningless to them. If parents expect their children to obey quickly they must learn to command them properly. This last year, in our Christian school, I discovered that my teachers had to learn to speak properly if the children were to learn to hear. Are you not glad that when God speaks to us He so speaks that we can hear Him if we will?

But, you say: 'How do I learn to hear, or how do I get others to hear? What determines hearing?'

Authority

I think we have a good example of this in Luke 7. This is the story of the centurion who had a sick servant. The centurion was surprised that Jesus came to his house, and when he met Him he said: "*Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee; but*

say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it" (Luke 7:7-8). This centurion understood that he had authority and the soldiers would hear him say: 'Go! Come! Do!' You see, if a father has authority, then his children learn to hear. Can you not see that one of the great battles today is over the authority of the Word of God? People say: 'If it has authority, then I will hear'. But I hear some fathers say: 'That is what I need — authority! Then I can command my wife and my children! But how do I get authority?'

Right(eous)

All of these are like natural laws which are also spiritual laws. If these soldiers did not believe that the centurion was *right* in what he was doing, or that he had the *right* to command them, would they hear him or accept his authority? It seems that the measure of authority is to the degree that I am right. Let me illustrate this way.

Several years ago I was in meetings in Richmond, Virginia. As we walked into the church on Saturday night for the meeting the pastor looked up at the sky and said: 'Does it look as if there will be any snow tonight?' I said I was not a weather prophet, but it did not look like it to me. Then he told me that they had a very special kind of weather forecaster who had predicted four inches of snow by morning. The thing about him was that in the past ten years he had always been right in his weather forecasting, and even the Federal Government wanted to know his secret for understanding the weather. Now the other radio stations had pointed a finger of scorn at this weather man, saying: 'This time he is wrong!' They thought that this time he would lose his peculiar authority and then people would not be so ready to hear him. When I got up next morning, can you guess what I did? I walked to my hotel window, lifted up the shade — and there, all over Richmond Square, were four inches of lovely snow! Let me ask you: What gave this man his authority? Was it not that he had always been right? Oh, to be right! You see, when a son or daughter challenges father in his authority, they are saying: 'But, Dad, you are not right!' Now I am enlarging the word 'right' to include 'being righteous'. We have a verse that says: 'When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice' (Proverbs 29:2). And so I hear the father say: 'But how can I be right all the time?'

The Tree of Life

Is there anyone here who has been right all the time? Then you have lacked in having authority, and do you know why people don't hear you all the time and don't obey everything you ask them to do? Well, how do we get this rightness that is not in ourselves? The Book of Romans, chapter 11, tells us that we are like a wild olive branch, and at the cross the Lord Jesus cuts us off from the old family tree of Adam, and, contrary to nature, He grafts the wild olive branch into a good olive tree. Now you know that the usual way is to graft a good branch into the strength of a wild olive, but God's way is to take us as the old branch and graft us into His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So it says: "*Make the tree good and the branch and the fruit will be good*" (Matthew 12:33, 7:16-20).

Now, if this tree is the Lord Jesus, He is our Tree of Life, and I believe the one distinctive thing about this conference is that we learn to live by the way of life. So many people in the religious world today are saying: 'Don't tell me any more *what* to do, but *how* to do it.' Remember, it says that "*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*" (Galatians 3:6). So it is our believing that grafts us, or unites us, with the Tree. We also read that "*with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*" (Romans 10:10). So the point at which we touch the Lord is the point of being honest, or right, or open, before God. He does not ask us to start worshipping first, or to see something first, or to get separated first, or to start obeying, or to hear the word of authority, but He asks the only thing we can do. When we come in this honesty, the first thing we have is

His life: "*In Him was life; and the life was the light of men*" (John 1: 4). Oh, there is such a difference when we sense that it is by life! God does not expect us either to grow or to prune off branches by ourselves.

In the yard of the house where we used to live in America we had many big oak trees. One fall, when the leaves were falling to the ground, about half of them continued to hang on the trees. Now I like to be efficient and get things done all at once, so I wondered if I should get a tall pole and start knocking off some of the leaves so that I could rake them all at once; otherwise I would be raking all the winter long. But my wife thought I would look foolish out in the yard knocking leaves down, so she said: 'If you will just wait until spring, the life will just push the dead leaves off', and in the spring, when the sap began to flow up through the trees, sure enough the dead leaves fell off. Then the Lord spoke to me again and showed me that too many times in my ministering I had stood in the pulpit with a long pole, trying to reach out to the audience and knock off the dead leaves in their lives, but after I got them all trimmed down and pruned the way I thought they should be, there they sat, nicely pruned outwardly, but, oh, so dead! Can you see that we are not wanting merely to change the outward leaves, or branches, in your life? You can look at your neighbour and conform your life like his, but it is mere imitation. God's way is the way of life, and this takes all the strain out of it. I am not merely doing something, but God is doing it from within, and this is why we must learn how to live identified, or in union, with our wonderful Tree.

The devil's great strategy today is to do away with separating or distinguishing marks. I know that God is the unifier, but He is also very careful about making distinctions that are very important. In my country the enemy is erasing the distinction between male and female. The women are becoming more like men, and the men are becoming more like women, but you know how in Israel God was very careful about separating things that were very different. You say: 'How can I distinguish?'

In Ezekiel 44 the only way that the priests were able to separate the holy from the profane was because they had been in the Most Holy Place ministering unto the Lord, and when they came out from there, where they had been right with God, they had eyes to see the difference. There will never be any living separation unless the Lord is doing it.

And when we want to obey the Lord the devil has another strategy. He knows the one who wants wholly to obey the Lord, and so he diverts the attention of that one to some bigger mountain that God never intended, and that poor child of God sees this impossible mountain and goes down in defeat because he cannot obey it. When Jesus spoke to the young man with the withered hand, did He tell him first to stretch forth his hand? Jesus only asked him to do the thing he could do if he would — and what was that? He said to him: 'Rise up and stand on your feet in the midst of them?' Did he have withered legs? No, he could stand up if he would really inwardly respond to the Lord. So when the Lord gets this little inner beachhead, then He can perform the outer thing — but that is *His* work. I have seen so many wives come to a Bible conference and hear God's Word where it says: "*Wives, obey your husbands*", and it stands like a great big mountain before them, because they say: 'You don't know my husband!' If they are not careful they will try to hang a branch of obedience on their tree. Now, what is God's way of helping these dear wives? It is to help them inwardly just to live hour by hour right with the Lord. Just forget about this big branch out here and learn to abide quietly as a branch in the Vine. Did you ever see a wife go about the house under strain, saying: 'I must obey!?' It is quite true that God wants that branch of obedience, but have you ever lived in a home where the husband looked on and saw that kind of a strained person? He can only imagine that it must be an awful hard thing to be a Christian! But when the dear wife forgets about trying to do something, and learns how to be just right with the Lord, then she is relaxed, and released, and full of joy, and her husband looks at her and says: 'Something happened to you at Aeschi!'

You see, it is not setting up impossible standards that we try to fulfil. When we learn to live by the life of the Lord Jesus the strain has gone. There is such a difference between the glad-hearted obedience and the pouting obedience. The wife who knows she must obey says: 'Yes, I will', but she pouts with her tongue in her cheek. You see, the devil is trying to confuse the issue in obedience. It is obedience, but it is God who works within us by life to make it a wonderful obedience, not a difficult one.

Then we must learn to hear properly. There are so many confusing voices in the world today. I have met so many precious believers who have not learned to distinguish between the accusing voice of the enemy and the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: "*Take heed how ye hear*" (Luke 8:18). As a younger man, there were many nights when I would get through with a meeting, get down at my bedside to pray, and something like a heavy, depressing blanket would come down over me. So many things I had said during the message that night would come up to accuse me, but even though I prayed and asked for forgiveness, there was none. I did not recognise that it was the 'accuser of the brethren' who was depressing me, and it was only after some years that the Lord helped me to recognise the difference between the voice of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the 'accuser of the brethren'. The enemy's way is to come in with a heavy, wet blanket, but the Holy Spirit's way is to come with a gentle pointing out of the thing He wants us to do. Because He brings light, the enemy only brings heaviness and darkness. When we confess the thing the Holy Spirit points out, God is faithful and just to forgive us, because He works as a comforter, but the enemy works as a confuser. So, you see, when we learn how to abide, there is the developing of hearing.

We must stop for today, but tomorrow we will go into a better seeing of how we learn to live by the Tree of Life. However, I feel pressed to say to someone who may be sitting with strain and wondering how they can do all this: Through the years I have tried to prune my tree, the branches and the leaves, but I only got deader and deader. But when the Spirit of God worked from within I saw things so differently. It was not the pruning of myself, but the way of life, and then the things began to fall off. Remember, the devil is a hard taskmaster, but the Lord is a wonderful Master. Oh, I know that when life begins to surge within, you begin to hurt within!

Finally, remember that all the fruit on this Tree is not for you; it is for Him. Did you ever see the branch of an apple tree just grasping around trying to reach for an apple for itself? I know there are some people who stand before the mirror, but God wants us to see that any loveliness is just the reflection of the Lord Jesus, but the Tree is never conscious of that.