

The Tree of Life

If we were to trace the use of the word “Tree” through the Scriptures we would find two main images, and both these images explain the significance the **Cross**. The first tree is the “**Tree of Life**.” This was placed in the Garden of Eden together with the “**Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**,” from which Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. After this first sin, God evicted Adam and Eve from the Garden – not as a punishment, but because He feared “**lest the man put forth his hand and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live for ever.**” (**Genesis 3:22**) Note, the effect of this would have been to make sinners (and thus also sin) immortal. For it is a fact that death, while being the result of sin, is also the limit that brings an end to sin.

God gave Adam and Eve (mankind) access to the **Tree of Life** in the garden. He gave them permission to eat from every tree. So we have no reason to believe that they did not eat of the Tree of Life prior to the fall. Mankind was intended to live forever. We don't know for sure what kind of fruit was on these trees. However the Bible is clear; there were two trees with literal physical fruit. As stated, the importance of the *fruit* of the **Tree of Life** is that the main benefit of that *fruit* is eternal life. All believers still have the hope of partaking in the *fruit* of the Tree of Life.

But what is eternal life? Eternal life, or “everlasting life”, is more than living forever. Eternal life is the **Life of God**, the Eternal One. The Greek word ‘*aionios*’ is translated both as “eternal” and “everlasting” in the New Testament. The Greek word “*zoe*” is one of several Greek words that are translated life. According to Vine's Dictionary, ‘*zoe*’ means “*life as a principle; life in the absolute sense; life as God has it; that which the Father has in Himself; and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself.*”

Therefore, **eternal life** is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the resurrection of Christ. We are in fact enjoying “eternal life” here on earth!

The second tree is the **Cross of Christ**. The New Testament often uses “tree” rather than “cross.” **Acts 10:39** says, “*They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree.*” The apostle Paul reminds us that the ancient Jewish law openly declared: “*Cursed be anyone who is hanged upon a tree*” (**Galatians 3:13**). Jesus therefore came under this curse. Yet, Peter explains more clearly what was involved: “*For He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness*” (**1 Peter 2:24**). Jesus accepted the “curse” we should have received, and underwent death in our place so that we might not die but **live**. The Triumph of the Cross is therefore the expulsion from Eden reversed. Through the “**Tree of the Cross**”, sin is forgiven, death is defeated, and life is restored. The Cross itself is the true Tree of Life. From Genesis to Revelation the **Tree of Life** represents and symbolises the **Cross** upon which our Lord Jesus Christ hung and paid the price for our sins. The **Cross**, Christ's substitutionary atonement, is the centre and focal point of ‘who’ and ‘what’ we are as Christians.

Jesus Christ, Himself pictured as the conqueror, promises “**to those who overcome**” (those who are truly victorious by faith in Christ), to give them “*to eat from the Tree of Life*” (**Revelation 2:7**). What had previously been forbidden is now offered freely to those who “overcome” - to those that remain faithful throughout their time of trial. The fruits of the Tree of life are now to be enjoyed. The way is now open which leads to paradise regained, and so much more.

How precious the gift of the Cross, how splendid to contemplate! We should stand in awe of this precious gift to mankind.

In the **Cross** there is no mingling of good and evil, as in the Tree of paradise; it is wholly beautiful to behold and good to taste. The fruit of this Tree is not death but **life**, not darkness but light. This Tree does not cast us out of paradise, but opens the way for our return.

This was the **Tree** on which Christ destroyed the devil (the lord of death), and freed the human race from his tyranny. This was the Tree upon which the Lord (like a brave warrior wounded in hands, feet and side), healed the wounds that the evil serpent had inflicted on God's people. A Tree once caused our death, but now a Tree brings **New Life**. Once deceived by a Tree, we can now repel all evil forces by a greater Tree. What an astonishing transformation! That death should become life; that decay should become immortality; that shame should become glory! What's more, the knowledge of all good, which is the fruit of the Cross, has cut away the shoots of wickedness. We are now the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. We identify with His death and resurrection through the Cross of New Life.

Note, the Tree plays an important part in the living tradition of the **Cross**, and in this we find something that was very important in pre-Christian religion, something deep and universal, and again probably something that retains great significance for many people today (even if they hardly acknowledge it consciously). For our ancestors, trees were not merely natural objects; they were majestic signs of the connectedness of the heaven and the earth. They saw the pattern of its complex root system that bound the tree to the earth. And then above it, that immense system of arms and hand-like leaves stretching out into the sky above. The trunk itself standing there so strongly, the vertical object that bound the natural-world with the upper-world, the human with the divine, the earthly with the spiritual, the world itself with God. Yes, the Tree was a link to the sacred!

So when Christ was lifted up from the earth and displayed spreadeagled on a dead tree set up on a hill, the ancient archetype of the **Tree of Life** suddenly burst out in living historical actuality. Fulfilled once and for all! And the primeval myth of the sacred tree-ladder connecting God with the natural world, the divine with the earth, suddenly found real and historical expression. For there is now an actual Tree, the Cross of the crucifixion, connecting us with God - and God with us.

To put the records straight... Whenever we focus on the **Cross** we are simply using the 'Cross' as a straightforward way of seeing ALL that God has done for us through His only begotten Son - and Him crucified. "**The message of the cross,**" that Paul refers to includes not only our Lord's suffering and death as the full atonement for all of our sins, but also His resurrection on the third day as the final and complete victory over death, the grave and satan. Triumphant in it!

The **Cross of Christ** is the altar upon which the offering that atones for the sin of world was sacrificed. Never has there been an altar that has held a more costly and precious offering than the Cross. Never has there been a more glorious Tree as the Cross of Christ. For never has any Tree held a more beneficial figure as the Holy One - the Son of God. And never has there been a Tree bearing such glorious fruit as the Tree of the Cross has borne. For proof,

just look around you!

The **Cross of Christ** is the true 'Tree of Life' that the tree in the Garden of Eden pointed to. The fruit that gives and sustains life, even eternal life, hangs from the Cross of Christ. Echoing the word to Adam in the beginning, Jesus points to Himself by saying, *"Take and eat, take and drink."* *"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life"* (**John 6:54**). This divine fruit that hangs from the Cross gives **life**. It gives eternal life, even to those who have tasted death (sin).

This divine fruit removes the bitterness of death by its sweetness, and dries up every tear with the sure and certain promise of our eternal return to the Garden of Paradise. Have you tasted its fruit? And if you have, do you still cherish its divine flavour and benefits?

God Almighty was on the **Cross**. Reconciling the world to Himself, atoning for the sin of mankind; raising the dead in Christ to eternal life; working all things for good of those who love Him; becoming broken that we might be whole; cleansing us with His precious blood; and delivering us from all evil. The Son was glorifying the Father and the Father was glorified by His Son. This is pure folly to those who seek wisdom according to the wisdom of the world. And to those who demand that God show us some sign that He is still in control, that knows what He's doing, the message of the **Cross of Christ** is a real stumbling block. But to all who are *"being saved,"* the Cross of Christ is the altar where the Lamb of God has been sacrificed as our substitute. It is the banner, stained by the blood of Christ, under which believers live and are delivered from death. It is the Tree that holds the remedy for all of life's trials - for all who will look to it! It is the **Tree of Life** that bears the life-giving fruit to all who will eat of it. The Cross is non exclusive, it is accessible to anyone who will put his trust and faith in Christ Jesus.

So, look intently at the Lord on His precious Cross. Look past the scoffing and mocking. Look and see that the Cross of Jesus is the **Tree of Life**. *"Blessed is he who is not offended in Me,"* said Jesus. That blessing enables us to see that the **Cross** on which Jesus was so painfully lifted up represents **New Life** - a fresh start. And this is a daily, ongoing privilege that every one of us can enjoy. So don't wait until Easter to gaze upon the Cross. Keep your eyes on it daily. Visit it daily! The "fruit" is there to be enjoyed every moment of the day! And remember, the "fruit" represents the very **Life of God** - Life as God has it!