

## The Tree of Life for May 21, 2000

The following is a chapter entitled “**The Blessedness of Winter**” from a book by Jeanne Guyon: This one chapter, I believe, says what has taken me hours to try and teach.

“I see the season of winter as an excellent example of the transforming work of the Lord in a Christian's life. When winter comes, the vegetable world, it seems to me, reflects the image of the purifying, which God does in order to remove imperfections from the life of one of his children. As cold comes on the wings of a winter storm, the trees gradually begin to lose their leaves. The green is soon changed into a funereal brown; soon the leaves fall away and die. Behold the tree's appearance now! It looks stripped and desolate. Behold the loss of summer's beautiful garment. What happens as you look upon that poor tree? You see a revelation.

Under all the beautiful leaves there had been all sorts of irregularities and defects. The defects had been invisible because of the beautiful leaves. Now those defects are startlingly revealed! The tree is no longer beautiful in its surface appearance. But has the tree actually changed? Not at all. Everything is exactly as it was before. Everything is as it has always been! It is just that the leaves are no longer there to hide what is real. The beauty of the outward life of the leaves had only hidden what had always been present. The same is true of you. The same is true of all believers. We can each look so beautiful ... until life disappears! Then, no matter who, the Christian is revealed as full of defects. As the Lord works on you to produce purification, you will appear stripped of all your virtues!

But, in the tree, there is life inside; and, as the tree, you are not actually becoming worse, you are simply seeing yourself for what you really are! Know that somewhere deep within the tree of winter there is still the life that produced last spring's beautiful leaves. No, the believer's inmost being has not been deprived of its essential virtue. He has lost no advantages. He has only lost something human, a sense of his own personal goodness, and he has discovered, instead, his utter wretchedness. He has lost the ease of following the Lord. That ease was born more of ignorance of self than anything else. As with the tree, so with you. The Christian now spoiled and naked, appears in his own eyes to be a denuded thing; and all those around him see his defects for the first time: defects, which were previously veiled, concealed by outward graces. Sometimes such revelation is so devastating to the pride of a Christian he simply never recovers, and decides to be a Christian on some other level; or gives up following the Lord entirely. Throughout the long cold winter, the tree certainly appears as dead as the very deadest of all trees in the forest. The tree knows no reality. Here is total destruction, it seems.

But the truth lies somewhere else. That tree is actually undergoing and submitting to a process which preserves its life and strengthens the tree! After all, what does winter do to a tree? It contracts the tree's exterior. The life deep within is no longer uselessly expended! Its life, rather, is concentrated within the deepest part of the trunk and in the hidden portions of the root. The life is forced deeper and deeper into the inmost part of the tree. Winter preserves the tree, no matter how dead the tree may appear. Yes, its leaves have fallen away and its true, deformed, state has been exposed; yet the tree has never been more alive than at that time! During the winter, the source and principle of life is more firmly established than in any other season. In all the other seasons, the tree employs the whole force of its life in adorning and beautifying itself. But it does so at the expense of expending its life, taking its very vitality from the roots and the deepest part of the trunk. There must be winter. Winter is necessary for the tree, if it is to live, survive and flourish.

Virtue has a way of sinking deep within the Christian, while totally disappearing from the surface, leaving the outward and natural defects in very conspicuous view!

If we have eyes to see, then we see that this is beautiful. Grace operates in your life in exactly the same way. God will take away the leaves. Something will cause them to fall. The outward virtue will collapse. He does this that He may strengthen the principle of the virtue. The source of virtue must be built up. Something deep within the soul is still functioning.

Somewhere within the spirit the functions that are the highest (in God's estimation) have never rested. What is going on is exceedingly hidden. It is humble. What is happening is pure love. What is going on in the inmost part is absolute abandonment and contempt of self. The inward man is making progress. The soul is venturing forth into the interior. True, it seems that the operations of God are concentrated on the external parts of the believer, and even a moment's glance reveals that the exterior things are not pleasant to look upon. Yet, in truth, no new defects in the soul have developed! Only the uncovering of old faults has come about! And, as they are exposed, they are better healed.

If you dare the spiritual pilgrimage, you need to remember in times of calamity, and in times of what appear to be dry spells, and in that time which men will call a spiritual winter: Life is there, if winter comes.”

In our study of being **conformed to our Lord's death**, we must understand the importance of the dual aspect of our Lord's work on the Cross. That is, that we have been forgiven because *He died in our stead*; but we may be delivered when we accept the reality that *we died with Him*. It is God the Holy Spirit who will make these facts real and true in our experience as we cooperate with Him and become transformed into the likeness of Christ. After all what sort of salvation would we have if God simply saved us from the penalty of our sins and then left us on our own to deal with the power of the sin nature in our Christian life and walk? We must be brought back to these two basic results of His finished work on the Cross: first that we are freed from the penalty of sin and secondly that we are freed from the power of the sin nature. Therefore, we are "**Justified by faith**", Gal 3:24; and "**We walk by faith**", 2Co 5:7; "**As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.**" Col 2:6. We are not left to deal with the old life ourselves; it has been dealt with by Christ on the Cross. This is how we are being conformed to our Lord's death. The Cross is as much the foundation for our Sanctification as it is for our Justification. Both gifts spring from the same Work.

Justification is an official judicial act, which occurs every time anyone believes in Christ. The justice of God acts on our behalf pronouncing us justified, which means, we have a relationship with God forever, having the perfect righteousness of God imputed to us. We also have sanctification, an experiential sanctification, which is the function of the spiritual life after salvation 1Th 4:1-8. Believers who are unaware of this dual aspect are bound to handle sins through rebound, (1Jo 1:9), but that is not the true victory. This does take care of the penalty of the product but not the source. When believers get tired of wasting their time in a religious circle, they will be ready for God's answer to the source of sin, which is death to self, brought forth from the completed work of the Cross. We all appreciate God's forgiveness for what we have done, but we should also aspire to deliverance from who and what we are. The finished work of Christ on the Cross includes death to our sin nature which is God's way of deliverance. We do not add to the finished work regarding Justification and we cannot add to the finished work of deliverance from the entire sin nature. We will only be free when we enter His prepared freedom for us, there is no other freedom. This is why the command to lose our life is given so many times by our Lord in such passages as Mat 16:23-27 "**But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's. Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds.**"

Unless the Cross is made the basis upon which we overcome the old man, we will only drop into another form of morality; seeking by self-effort to overcome self, and that struggle is a hopeless one. We are not to blame others, instead we must recognize that the enemy is really the flesh,

the old nature, the self life. Our reckoning on the old man as crucified results in the Holy Spirit's leading us daily in the path of the Cross. God wants us to be conformed to the image of His Son, He allows us, through our own mistakes and willfulness, to become entangled in situations and circumstances where we experience the self-life being crucified, which breaks its power. There is nothing easy about the Cross, but we learn to glory in it because its crucifying power frees us from the **"law of sin and death"** Rom 8:2-8. As we exercise this attitude of having died unto our sin nature, and being conformed to our Lord's death, we take up our Cross daily. Therefore, in our **standing**, we find ourselves **"always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake"** (2Co 4:11). The continuity of the Cross in our lives produces continual freedom from the reign of not just sins but from the entire sin nature Jam 1:21-27.

The very things that crucify provide the daily death from which our new life in Christ is revealed. In fact, the more death, the more life.

The sacrificial quality of being poured out for others is the essential characteristic of the Lord Jesus that is to be manifested in us. It is our willingness not to play religion but to accept God's calling in our life. We are not struggling believers who barely exist until we finally go to heaven; we are recipients of resurrection life for ourselves, and sacrificial life unto all. /The Lord said, **"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"** Joh 10:10.

We know that the anchor and source of our life is safely and eternally hid with Christ in God. We are assured that nothing, and no one, can touch us apart from His will, Rom 8:35-39.

Our attitude is that of looking down upon all that He takes us through, we are not under His circumstances, but above them all in our victorious Lord. Standing in our position, we learn in whatever state we are in, **"to be content"** we learn how to be abased, and we learn how to abound, Phi 4:11-12. We enter each day and each situation, from that blessed vantage point. We abide in Him, accepting everything from His nail-pierced hands. This is why we are told that in everything we should give thanks: **"For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"** 1Th 5:18.

What is lacking among believers today is the **proper** emphasis on spiritual growth.

Our confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ develops as we realize that His grace is sufficient for all these things, and that His strength is made perfect in our weakness, 2Co 12:9-10. We are compelled to prove His faithfulness at every point of need.

Remember, although we are living in our risen Lord, we are still dwelling in this body of humiliation, and serving in this world of death. Therefore, God keeps us in the place of need and helplessness in ourselves. **"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us"** 2Co 4:7.

We have the attitude that **"I come to do Thy will, O God"** Heb 10:9.

What are the limits of obedience, the ends of abandonment, the ultimate willingness of the will? If a person has surrendered his life to his Lord, it would be inconsistent for the one who places his whole happiness, his whole state, in the hands of God alone, that they could continue to have a list of desires for their own happiness and wants.

Love alone should cause us to surrender up our will to the Lord. Because if it is not love that produces submission, eventually that wrong motive will be revealed. That's why the first commandment is Mat 22:37 **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."**

The issue is **"His will or yours?"**