

OUR BASIC CHOICE

After leading the children of Israel to the threshold of the good land, Moses recounted at length their history, including both negative and positive events, as well as God's revelation of Himself through His laws and statutes. At the end of his speaking, Moses said, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today: I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life that you and your seed may live" (Deut. 30:19). Speaking of Moses' words in the verses in this passage, Brother James Lee said:

After he opened up everything, he reviewed the past and pointed out the future to them. He set before them the entire counsel of God, setting before them life and death, blessing and cursing. Then he said, "Choose life" (v. 19). He could not choose for them. At the end of his life he could not make this decision for them. ("Crystallization-study of Deuteronomy," *The Ministry of the Word* 24:1 (January 2020), 343)

As we seek to follow our Lord to fully possess Christ as our good land to build God's habitation and establish His kingdom, these words have great significance to us today. Moses' charge was based on all that he recorded in the Pentateuch. That history included not only God's glorious work among His people but also Israel's repeated failures and rebellions against God and His representatives. At this critical juncture, recorded at the end of his writings, Moses charged the nation of Israel to choose life. This choice lies at the heart of the Scriptures. Moses' word made it clear that what the Israelites chose would determine their future. Likewise, what we choose today will determine our future with the Lord. Each of us must make the choice between life and death.

The beginning of Moses' writing shows that the basic choice facing man is between the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the issue of which is death (Gen. 2:9; 3:1-6). Moses' review of Israel's history and the law brings us back to the same choice between life and death (Deut. 30:15, 19). Moreover, the entire Bible ends with death and Hades, the place of death, being cast into the lake of fire and with a promise of the enjoyment of the tree of life and a call for those who are thirsty to come and take the water of life freely (Rev. 20:14; 22:17).

The Narrow Gate and the Constricted Way

In Matthew 7:14, the Lord Jesus said, "Narrow is the gate and constricted is the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it." The gate here is the entrance to the way. We begin by entering through the narrow gate, by choosing to be governed not by right and wrong but by life. We continue on the constricted way by walking according to the choice we made to enter through the narrow gate, that is, we pursue living and walking by the Spirit of life (Gal. 5:25; Rom. 8:2). Those who dwell on real or perceived failures, whether their own or others', have either never entered the narrow gate or have abandoned the constricted way.

Matthew 7:15-20 says that some will speak falsehoods to deceive God's people from remaining on the constricted way. These verses also tell us how to discern those who speak such words: "By their fruits you will recognize them" (vv. 16a, 20). Brother Lee told us, "All Christians today are accustomed to being influenced by people's talk. An eloquent speaker with enticing words is able to seduce many. Do not listen to eloquent speech or to enticing words. Rather, wait and see what kind of fruit is produced" (*Life-study of Matthew*, 302). He advised us to use the narrow gate and the constricted way as a measure: "Many Christians claim to be right in certain matters. We should not listen to their claims but test them according to the narrow gate and the constricted way" (*The Kingdom*, 331). Those who without constraint use the Internet and social media to spew forth reckless accusations without regard to facts or damage inflicted on others fail this test.

We need to develop a strong sense of life to discern the source and nature of men's words (Rom. 8:6). Words of life produce oneness (Ezek. 37:1-14), but words of death issue in division. The fruit of those who attack the ministry and leadership in the Lord's recovery, though they may use enticing words, is death and division. The issue of their words testifies that they have rejected the constricted way that leads to life.

The Blessing of Life on the Ground of Oneness

There is another critical factor that will determine whether we will abide in life or in death. Psalm 133 shows that the Lord bestows the blessing of life upon those who dwell together in oneness. It begins, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity" (v. 1). It ends with the Psalmist's declaration, "For there Jehovah commanded the blessing: life forever" (v. 3). This life is the Triune God Himself, who, as the Spirit, is the all-inclusive

blessing of the gospel (Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:3). To enjoy the blessing of life is to have the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). To lose the blessing of life is to forfeit all these things experientially. This is why causing discord and division is so serious (Prov. 6:12-19). Those who foment division have lost the blessing of life, meaning that they have experientially lost God. We must be those who choose to keep the oneness of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3) so that we may remain under the commanded blessing of life.

The Enemy's Attack on the Church

God's work centers on the church, so Satan's attack is focused there as well. The Lord said that the gates of Hades would assail the church but would not prevail (Matt. 16:16b). The Lord's word shows that Satan attacks the church mainly with death. Watchman Nee called death "the ultimate weapon Satan uses to attack the church" (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 44: Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (4)*, 882). If we realize how critical the believers' growth in life is to the building up of the church, we can understand why (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:13-16).

To resist the attack of death, we must understand how Satan works. In Genesis 3:1 he came to Eve subtly and asked, "Did God really say, You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" In simple terms, he questioned God's word and by extension God's heart toward Adam and Eve. He then stirred up Eve to distrust God's word and partake of what God had forbidden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (vv. 4-6). Satan's work progresses from inserting a negative thought into the mind, to either inflaming or deflating the emotions, to leading the will to choose what is contrary to God. Today the target of his attacks is often those to whom the Lord has given responsibility either in His ministry or in the church. The spirits of those who receive such attacks are deadened, and their hearts are cooled toward the ministry and the leadership in the churches, then toward the church, and ultimately toward the Lord Himself. Thus Satan achieves his aim of turning those who are affected from the way of life and oneness.

Any deadening of our spirit or cooling of our heart is a strong sign that criticism we have taken in is an attack of death. This website presents facts to correct false accusations with the intention of helping some return to the way of life. We should not be distracted from the central revelation of the Bible—God's desire to dispense Himself as life into man—and become preoccupied with who is right and who is wrong. That in itself is to succumb to Satan's temptation to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We must keep before us the fact that only the operation of the life of the Son of God within us can carry us forward to the goal of God's full salvation (Rom. 5:10; Phil. 2:13; Eph. 3:20). Watchman Nee said:

Only the life of Christ and that which issues from it will prevail against the gates of Hades. Everything else is just disguised forms of death and cannot withstand the attacks of Satan. May the Lord be merciful to us, and may He keep us from touching death or bringing death into the church. May God fill the church with life, and may Satan find no opening to attack the church. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 44: Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (4)*, 884-885)

Keeping Life as Our Goal

Every kind of dealing is with a view to restoring or preserving the saints in the line of life. We deal with our sins, things that occupy our heart, and bad things that have happened to us so that our growth in life may not be hindered. We deal with offenses between ourselves and others so that any barrier to our fellowship in the Lord's Body may be removed and we may remain under the blessing of life in oneness. Any kind of discipline exercised by the church toward sinning ones is in the hope of restoring them to life and of preserving the other saints in life.

The bottom line is that no matter what has happened in our personal or church life history, we still face the same basic choice—life or death. Brother James Lee said further:

When Moses was speaking these words, it was as if God was speaking directly to the children of Israel. Moses was saying, "Choose life. My people, choose life. Look back at all the things that we have passed through, whether good or bad. These things have been reviewed and presented to you. Now you have to make a decision; you have to make a choice." ("Crystallization-study of Deuteronomy," *The Ministry of the Word* 24:1 (January 2020), 343)

Our earnest hope before the Lord and prayer to Him are that the saints in His recovery would choose life to be the overcomers in this age who afford the Lord a way to accomplish His heart's desire and come back.