

THE OFFER OF LIFE

At the dawning of this present world, our God fashioned a being similar to Himself for His own holy purposes. Chief among these purposes, as we discussed in chapter one, is that He is seeking a bride. God is in the process of creating for Himself an eternal, intimate companion. Man, the object of God's attention and affection, is the one who was fashioned to fulfill this wonderful design. Let us remember here however, that in God's universe, only creatures who are similar can marry. Such intimacy is only permitted between beings who are the same. Therefore, in order for God's desires to be realized, man must qualify to participate in this union.

As we look closely at our first forefather with these thoughts in mind, some serious deficiencies become apparent. Adam, even before the fall, did not qualify to fulfill God's intentions. Although he resembled God in many ways, it is also clear that he was not exactly the same kind of being as God. As we meditate upon this, one problem which becomes apparent is that God and man did not have the same kind of life. Therefore, they could not be considered the same kind of being. Although the life which Adam and Eve possessed was initially good and never ending, it still was only a created, human variety. In contrast to this, their Maker's life was the supernatural, uncreated kind. God and man were obviously different species. Their "lives" were on a completely different plane. One was merely human and the Other was divine. One was a lower life form, bound to the earth by a physical body, while the Other is Spirit and fills the universe. Not only did man's life not attain to being equal with God's, he wasn't even second in line. The scriptures teach us that man was made even lower than the angels (Heb 2:9). These considerations present us with sufficient evidence to realize that marriage between them was not possible.

From this analysis, we are brought to the conclusion that man as he was created was not fit to occupy the position intended for him. Therefore, it is logical to suppose that since our Maker had this glorious plan in mind, He also had some way of fulfilling it. He must have made some provision for man to change. Somewhere in God's design, there must have been a way prepared for man to become something other than what he was in order to fulfill these holy intentions. And of course there was. God in His infinite wisdom had provided all that was necessary. Not surprisingly, the first suggestion of the existence of such a plan is also manifested in the Garden of Eden.

When we read the Genesis account, among the many features of the garden, two particular trees are mentioned—the "tree of life" and the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:9). We do not have to read very far to discover that these two are much more than mere trees. The devastating effect which eating of the wrong tree had upon mankind seems to be more than sufficient evidence of this fact. Every other

tree of the garden had been offered freely to them as food, but this one tree had been strictly forbidden. Its fruit was so deadly, so devastating, that one taste of it altered forever the course of human history. Now in view of all this, it seems reasonable to suppose that the other tree, the tree of life, also contained fruit of great consequence. If the "death tree" had such a powerful effect, what would have happened if Adam and Eve had tasted of the tree of life? Could it be that one taste of this other fruit would have changed these two in another, equally dramatic fashion? I believe that you will see as we proceed that this is the case.

What then is the significance of this life tree? What is it that Adam and Eve missed by disobeying their Maker. Perhaps the best way to discover this is to look into the rest of the scripture and see if we can find any clues there. As we read Genesis chapter 3 we learn that this tree would have imparted to them a variety of life which they did not yet possess. This truth is shown clearly by the statement God made when they were put out of the Garden. "Lest," He says, they should "take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Gen 3:22). Here we also realize that Adam and Eve had never yet eaten of this tree. Even though it was available to them, they had never taken the opportunity to taste it. If they had done so, they would have already possessed this new kind of life. In fact, it is possible that if they had first sampled this fruit, they would have had the strength and wisdom to forever avoid the other one.

As we have seen, the tree containing this life was "in the midst of the garden" (Gen 2:9). Notice that this was not the jungle of Eden but a garden, signifying it was designed by Someone. And this Designer placed the tree of life in the middle as the very centerpiece of His design. Surely this indicates to us that it is the impartation of this life which is at the very center of all that God's intentions concerning man. It is in fact the very vehicle through which He intends to transform man from what he was when he was created into what God desires him to become. Since this life is so important both to us and to God, enabling us to fulfill His original design, it seems crucial that we learn as much as we can about it. Each and every Christian should understand thoroughly both the goal toward which God is working and also the means which He is using to get there. Let us therefore spend a little time to investigate just exactly what this "life" signifies.

FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY

The scripture reads in Psalm 90 verse 2, "From eternity to eternity thou art God" (JDV). If we would take a moment and think back in time as far as our imagination will carry us, back before anything was created—God was there. And again, if we project our thoughts into the future as far as we can imagine, to a time when this world has been dissolved and new things have been created—God will still be there. Therefore, God is ever-existing. He is a being Who never had a beginning and will never end. The kind of life which God possesses is uncreated. It did not begin at some particular point in time. God's life therefore is described as being "eternal." It is "AIONION" in the original Greek language, which means "spanning the ages." His life is so full of vitality, so ever-living, that even the passage of time does not diminish it. It is a life without origin or declension, without time of birth or season of death, unchangeable, incorruptible and immortal. This little meditation brings us then to the true biblical meaning of the word "eternal." It simply means without beginning and without end and describes the very life of God.

In the scriptures we read: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only

begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal (AIONION) life" (Jn 3:16). Praise the Lord that those who have believed into Jesus are no longer "alienated from the life of God" (Eph 4:18) but have been brought into a relationship—a sonship relationship with the Father. This relationship was begun through God's begetting. We are not merely "adopted" sons of God, but we human beings have actually been born of God's very own life. We have been "begotten . . . again unto a living hope" (I Pet 1:3)! We have been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible" (I Pet 1:23)! (See also: Jn 1:13; 3:3-8, I Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18).

What an unspeakable thing He has done for us small, insignificant human beings! As parents, fathers and mothers, we beget sons and daughters by passing along our life to them. When we conceive and bear children we transmit the human life which God has given us to others. In the same way God has chosen in His glorious, immeasurable mercy and goodness to give finite men His own incorruptible, never-beginning, never-ending, eternal life. This is truly a great love which God has for this world. No gift could be greater. Nothing in the universe is more precious, more worth having, more unsearchably great, than the life of God. We have the opportunity to become partakers of all that God is. He has imparted His life into men and is calling them by this life to rise above what they are born to be as human beings and to grow into all that He is. What a glorious calling indeed!

Unfortunately, this great truth that God is now imparting His very own life to men, has been somewhat obscured to us by the translation of the original Greek words into our own language. The Greeks were evidently very expressive concerning the idea of "life" and had several different words for it, while in English we have only one word. This then often confuses the true meaning of the New Testament words. For our purposes here, we will be focusing on three words in the New Testament which are translated as one English word "life." Even though these three words are rendered as one English word they have separate and distinct meanings. Unless we clearly distinguish between them we may be ignorant of an indescribably essential revelation.

The first word which is translated "life" in our versions is "BIOS" which refers to our life in this physical world. This is the word from from which we get our word "biology" and includes such concepts as our livelihood, the duration of our physical life and our moral conduct. The second word which is translated "life" in English is "PSUCHE." This word has been translated as both "soul" and "life" and perhaps could have been in some places rendered "soul-life" to give a more precise meaning. Throughout the New Testament this word represents the psychological make-up or the soul-life which man possesses. It is this "life" which comprises our thinking, our feeling and our decision making processes. And it is by this life that unregenerated men live in this present world.

AIONIAN ZOE

However there is a third Greek word, a most important word, which is translated "life." This word is "ZOE." It means, according to W. E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, "life as God has it." When it comes to "life," God really has it! In the New Testament this word "ZOE" is used predominantly to refer to God's very own life. This special, unique word has been used by the writers of the New Testament as they were inspired by God, to refer to His own incorruptible, unoriginated, ageless, unending life. Therefore, when the Bible speaks about the new life which God gives us through Jesus, it is this word "ZOE" rather than "BIOS" or

‘PSUCHE’ which is used. The phrase “eternal life” then is expressed in the Greek language as “AIONION ZOE” and means “a life which spans the eons.” This AIONION ZOE, the age spanning, never-beginning, never-interrupting, never-ceasing life of God—this is what Jesus came to bring.

Brothers and sisters, we have received an indescribable gift. God has given to us more than we could ask or ever imagine. We frail human beings, existing in a body which is decaying, living in a world which is breaking down and falling apart in many different ways, have come into a most wonderful thing. The God of the universe has taken us into His heart and decided to impart to us a new life—an incorruptible, immutable life substance which it is impossible to kill. Jesus Christ rose from the dead because it was not possible that the life which He possessed could be held by death (Acts 2:24). So we also, having become children of God through the new birth, have become partakers of a life over which death has no power. Jesus said that anyone who believes into Him will never perish but has “passed from death unto (ZOE) life” (Jn 5:24).

This is an essential truth. The difficulty which many believers have leading a truly spiritual life can be traced to precisely this point. We all know that Jesus Christ came to bring us life. But what kind? If the distinction between these three Greek words is not made, it is possible for some to think that “abundant life” (Jn 10:10) means having lots of money, many luxuries, or filling their life with material and physical pleasures (BIOS). Others may imagine that “abundant life” means to be happy or satisfied with our earthly existence (PSUCHE). Many of those who are misled in this way end up falling into serious error or sin. By misunderstanding the purposes of God and failing to discern the variety of life which Jesus came to give, they have been turned aside to pursue another “life”—a soulish life or a worldly life—a life which we will soon discover Jesus came to condemn.

EVERLASTING OR ETERNAL?

Another common misconception in the church today is that “eternal” life is simply an extension or prolonging of the life with which we were born. This erroneous understanding has perhaps been fostered in part by the use of the word “everlasting” in the text. “Everlasting” is an incorrect translation of the word “AIONION.” In many English translations, the words “everlasting” and “eternal” are used interchangeably. This has been the cause of great confusion since there is an important difference in their meaning in the English language. Biblically speaking, the word “eternal” signifies, “without beginning” as well as “without end,” while the word “everlasting” only indicates “without end.” Thus it could be applied to a creature which was born at some point in time and then lasted forever and ever. Consequently, it is easy for someone reading about “everlasting” life to suppose that it refers to his own life continuing unendingly. As we have been seeing, this is definitely not the case. To nullify this mistake, let us simply remember that in the Bible, when we read about “everlasting life” what is really meant is “eternal life,” that is the uncreated life of God.

Everyone who believes into Jesus has received God’s own life. And it is this life which is God’s agency for changing us from what we are into all that He planned for us to be. It is this life which will change our nature to be like His. Just as in the beginning, when our heavenly Father placed before man the source of His own life, so today He has made it available to all through His own Son. The scriptures clearly teach us that “he who has the Son has (ZOE) Life” (I Jn 5:12). Those who are wise will avail

themselves of this life, fill themselves with it and thus obtain all the benefits of it. Those who are foolish will neglect it as did our forefathers and eventually suffer the consequences. The life of God which He has given to us is absolutely crucial to our spiritual walk. It is this life which is the source of all that God is doing within us.

I hope that it is perfectly clear here that what Jesus died to make available to us was not a new place to live out the rest of our lives, such as heaven. Neither did He bring us an extension of the life with which we were born. He came to give us a Life which was entirely different from any that we had previously known. Jesus Christ came to impart to men God's very own eternal, uncreated life. He came with the intention of giving to us the very life, essence and nature of all that God the Father is. What Jesus Christ has brought to earth for men is the most precious substance! There is nothing else in the universe like it. The Life that He came to give us never began and by definition it can never end. We have become partakers of the life of God. Hallelujah! Now that is really good news.

After Adam and Eve sinned, they were put out of the garden and the way into the Garden of Eden—the avenue to the tree of life—was blocked by a cherubim holding a flaming sword. The original way, the way God first intended man to take, was now impassable. Anyone who sought to enter therein would be slain. God's judgment, symbolized by the Cherubim with the flaming sword, now stood between man and supernatural life. What was once freely offered was now carefully guarded and sinful man was thereby forbidden to partake. Now man, instead of having God's favor, was under His judgment. The bliss that this first couple once enjoyed and the communion with God which was so familiar to them, suddenly disappeared. The choices these two had made were not without consequences. Seemingly the devil had won a victory and God's eternal purposes had been thwarted. The man whom the Lord created in His own image and likeness, intending for them to become His holy bride had instead become polluted by sin and disqualified from partaking of His own life.

But perhaps the devil did not understand the depths of God's love for His bride. Maybe he failed to fathom the lengths to which He would go to achieve His purposes. God's original intention remained unchanged. His heart-felt desire to share His life with human beings continued unabated. These unique creatures, the only ones in all the universe to bear the image and likeness of the eternal God, had fallen. Still God yearned for them to be brought back into communion with Himself and for them to be again in a position to partake of all that He had planned for them. His unsearchable love for mankind was undiminished. His initial plan for creating men and offering them His own life still burned within His heart. God, in His infinite wisdom and according to His eternal purpose, had prepared another way, a "new and living way," back to Himself (Heb 10:20).

THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION

Since the rebellion of man demanded the death penalty and barred the way to life, God, in order to fulfill His plan, had to find a substitute. Through His imponderable foreknowledge, He found an innocent Person who was willing to taste death on our behalf—His own son. In His flesh Jesus Christ made atonement for man's rebellion and sin. In His own self He bore our sins on the cross, taking them out of the way. Jesus has reconciled us to God. Through Christ we have been brought back into a relationship with the Father. By the work of the Son, the shedding of His blood, we now have access to God. Once again, the way to Life Himself has been opened. What an infinitely

precious thing Jesus has done for us undeserving sinners, bringing us back to God and making the way for us to partake of His eternal, uncreated life!

You see God could not give His life to unrighteous men. He would not put His holy, sinless life into polluted containers. Sin had hindered God's purposes. It was impossible for Him to allow His life to be mingled with the unrighteousness in man. So, before the impartation of such a pure substance, the receptacle had to be purified. Christ's blood shed on Calvary has provided just such a cleansing. The innocence and purity of the life which was taken there, has in the sight of God, atoned for our filthiness. There, in a supernatural way which is difficult for us to understand, God passed over our sin and removed the obstacles which stood in the way.

When the time was right God sent His own Son to rescue us. He sacrificed Him, allowing Him to be tortured, ridiculed and slain. The judgment which was reserved for us fell upon the Lamb. With His death on the cross, the righteous requirement of God was satisfied and the Cherubim of judgment with the flaming sword was taken out of the way. Once again the way to the tree of life was opened and the invitation given.

Not only did Jesus make a way to life for us, but He was also the manifestation of this life. When Jesus Christ came to this earth He came as a vessel containing God's life. We read in the scriptures "In Him was (ZOE) life; and the life was the light of men" (Jn 1:4). Again we read, "For the (ZOE) life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (I Jn 1:2). Part of Jesus' mission was to make known to mankind all that the Father was offering. He was the full declaration of the thoughts and intentions of God. The life of God which was somewhat obscurely manifested in the garden in the form of a tree, has now been fully exhibited.

Jesus himself proclaimed this. He invited the people to come to Him and eat, to come to Him and drink (Jn 6:54). He explained that He was the "bread of life" (Jn 6:48), and "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). At one point He even instructed His followers to eat His flesh to obtain this life, causing many of them to be offended (Jn 6:53). But this should not trouble us. Here He was simply proclaiming that whatever had been available in the garden in the form of a tree was now being offered through Him. Through His Son, God was making this offer of life again. Today, just as in the days of our first ancestors there is a choice for every human being to make. How are we responding to it?

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS ESSENTIAL

Once we are born from above this is just the beginning of a Christian life. As wonderful as it is to receive new life from God, this is only the first step of a life-long process of growing in the Lord. It is only the introduction to "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (I Cor 7:1). Not only do we need to receive this new life but we also need this life to grow up in us into full maturity. The Bible teaches that, after being born in a manger, "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature" (Lk 2:52). In the same way we too must grow spiritually until the expression of God through us is complete.

We as Christians must disabuse ourselves of the notion that once we receive Jesus this is the consummation of spiritual experience. Receiving God's life through the Spirit is just the beginning. Just as the birth of a baby is only the first event of its whole lifetime, so also when we are born of the Spirit this is just the initial step of a life full of growing in the knowledge of God. The Father's intention is that we would be daily eating, drinking and thereby growing into all that Christ came to bring—all of which is

freely poured out to us in the Holy Spirit. The life of God, the most precious, valuable element in the whole universe is abundantly available to every believer right now today. Through His Spirit we can continually partake of AIONIAN ZOE.

Everywhere the scriptures speak of such growth. Ephesians 4:14,15 urges us to “grow up into Him in all things” recommending that we be no longer babies who are easily tossed around. I John chapter two speaks of different stages of spiritual growth, i.e. children, young men and fathers. Surely it is easy to see then that maturity is not instantaneous but takes time and attention. This too is an essential part of our Christian experience. Remaining a baby is not good enough. Spiritual growth is only optional for those who are foolish. We must continually seek the Lord and nurture this life which has been given to us so that it can grow to maturity. Everywhere in nature we notice that all kinds of life must grow. Even though, for example, an entire oak tree is contained within an acorn, it takes time and nurturing for that tree to attain its full stature. In the same way, even though the life which we receive from God is complete, it takes time and attention for it to arrive at full maturity.

If we are to be useable sons of God, manifesting His life and nature to the world in a powerful way, we too must grow into His fulness (Eph 4:15). Babies are wonderful, but they are not very useful. Instead of being able to help out and contribute to the well-being of the household they themselves require our time and attention. I am confident that God greatly loves all His babies, but I am also firmly convinced that He is seeking sons who have grown into maturity to fulfill His purposes on the earth. Too many Christians suppose that being born again is the end, the ultimate. They imagine that after regeneration the only thing left is to accumulate “rewards” in heaven. How far from the truth this is. Growing into a full spiritual maturity is the only way in which we can be really useful in God’s kingdom.

It is important to note that this growth does not happen automatically. God is not forcing His way upon us. He graciously allows us all to choose. Just as we had to make a choice to receive His life to be born again, so we must make a daily choice to be filled with His life. No one else can make you grow. Unless we set our hearts to seek the presence of the Lord every day and spend time in intimate communion with Him, we will grow very little. If our choice is to spend our time pursuing our own interests, spiritual dormancy is a certainty. Growth in God’s life is available to all, but is realized only by those who make a conscious choice to pursue it. Those who make this choice will benefit greatly not only in this world but also in that which is to come.

Once again, as it was with our forefather Adam, the choice is up to us. It is ours to make every day. Will we choose according to God’s desire and partake of that which He is freely offering? Or will we, as the first men, pay little attention to what has been so generously provided and go our own way? This is not a small or insignificant consideration. It is all too easy to become preoccupied with the things which surround us and the outward blessings which God has given and so neglect the most important thing of all. These daily choices have eternal consequences. God’s unmerited favor and mercy should not be lightly disregarded. May God grant us mercy that we would partake of His life continually.

In the coming chapters of this writing we are going to be looking at many different aspects of what God is doing in and through His people. However, in order to do so properly, we must first be firmly rooted in this most basic understanding: Eternal life is not our own life lasting forever, nor is it simply a kind of fire insurance that guarantees we will not spend eternity in the lake of fire. Receiving eternal life is nothing less than receiving God’s very own life—the uncreated life of God!

It is through this life that God is bringing many sons into glory. Without a doubt, God has very serious intentions concerning the impartation of His life. He has not done His work indiscriminately. So if we are to fulfill His requirements we must carefully guard the “good deposit that was entrusted” to us (I Tim 1:14).