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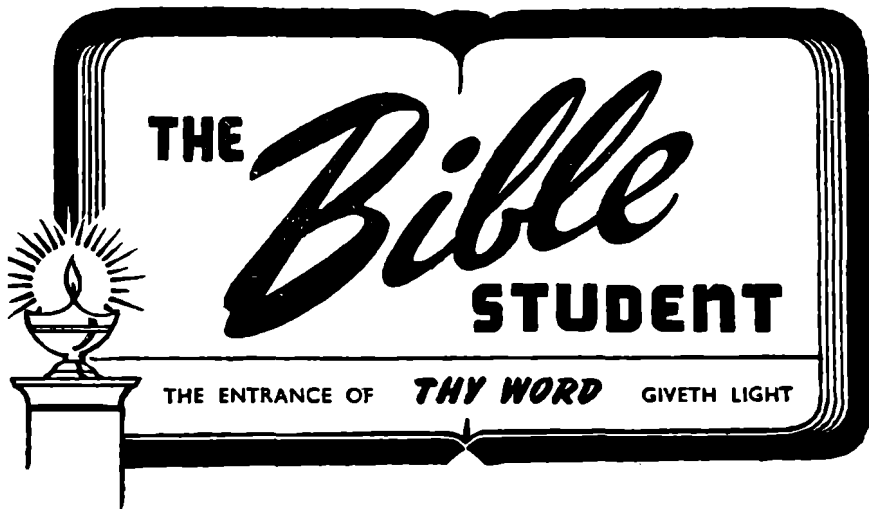
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A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bible-student\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php)



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## CONTENTS

'THE LIFE THAT IS LIFE INDEED' ...	...	...	51
THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN ...	...	...	59
DELIVERING THE MESSAGE... ..	...	...	67
PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL ...	...	...	69
THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON ...	...	...	79
BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS ...	...	...	86
SEVEN O.T. FEASTS ...	...	...	91
CHRIST'S PARTING WORDS ...	...	...	97

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

# The Bible Student

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NEW SERIES

APRIL 1955

VOL. XXVI No. 2

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## 'THE LIFE THAT IS LIFE INDEED'<sup>1</sup>

### EDITORIAL

Man first lived because God breathed into him the breath of life (Gen.2:7). From that primal event arises all subsequent revelation, doctrine and experience of the 'Life that is life indeed', Eternal Life.

The antithesis of Gen. 2:7 is Rom. 5:12, 'Through one man (Adam) sin entered into the world and *death* by sin, and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned'. It was the exact reversal of God's work. He gave life, sin brought death. And death worked out in severing the relationship that existed between God and man—henceforth man has lived in spiritual alienation from God.

But God comes in once more: In fulfilment of the eternal counsels of the Godhead the Son of God is manifested in the world to bring in eternal life. He Himself declares, 'I came that they may have *life*, and that they may have it abundantly' (John 10:10). As by one, sin entered and death by sin, so by One and His death there comes life that is eternal. Life in Christ is God's gift to a world spiritually dead.

'God *gave* unto us *eternal life*, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life' (1 John 5:11, 12). 'The gift of God is *eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord' in complete contrast to 'the *wages* of sin is death' (Rom. 6:23). So that the havoc wrought by sin is reversed, and Christ Jesus abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the Gospel for all who

<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 6: 12 R.V.

accept God's terms (2 Tim 1:10). The revealed motive behind all is the love of God, the source of every good and perfect gift: 'Herein was the love of God manifested in us (not merely "in our case" as R.V. mg., but "in us", as the medium or sphere in which it was revealed) that God sent His only begotten Son into the world *that we might live through Him*' (1 John 4:9).

The apostle Paul, gathering up the varied aspects of this glorious theme into one brief sentence writes: 'We were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest—but God being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when *we were dead* through our trespasses, *quicken*ed us together with Christ' (Eph. 2:3, 4, 5,—see also verse 6). That statement carries much further than John 10:10, etc., and is all inclusive. It reveals the fact that eternal life is *fellowship with God*. If death is separation from God into increasing darkness, life is fellowship into increasing light, for 'the path of the just (or "righteous"; cf. Rom. 5:17, 18) is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day' (Prov. 4:18).

### The N. T. Meaning

The fundamental idea underlying the N.T. revelation of eternal life is vital relationship with God through Jesus Christ in the energy of the Holy Spirit.

The nearest approach to a definition of eternal life is found in John 17:3, 'And this is eternal life, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent'. It is not a definition in the usual sense of the word, but it is Christ's own description of eternal life, and reveals His conception of it. It is to *know* God and His Christ. 'This knowledge is vastly more than mere intellectual perception or understanding. It is moral knowledge, it is personal acquaintance, it is fellowship, a contact, if we may so speak, of personality with personality, an inner affinity and sympathy, an experience of similar thoughts, emotions, purposes, motives, desires, an interchange of the heart's deepest feelings and experiences. It is a bringing of the whole personality of man into right relationship

with the personality of God. This relation is ethical, personal, binding the two together with ties which nothing can separate. It is into this experience that Jesus Christ came to bring men'. (J.J. Reeve).

But the question at once arises, when or how does this relationship, this new life and knowledge, begin; for in view of man's alienation from God, there must be a 'crisis-moment' when God and man 'meet' as never before? The answer, in part, is found in the narrative of the meeting of Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3).

In dealing with Nicodemus the Lord begins by asserting the necessity of the new birth: 'Except a man be born anew (or from above), he cannot see the Kingdom of God' (John 3: 3). He proceeds to shew that it is by the Holy Spirit that man is born anew (verse 5).\* 'It is the Spirit that *quickeneth*, the flesh profiteth nothing' (John 6:63)—a verse over which there has been much controversy, but which seems to us to refer indubitably to the Holy Spirit in contrast to the flesh. 'Of *His own will* He brought us forth by the *Word of truth*' (James 1:18). 'Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the Word of God' (1 Pet. 1:23). It is by the new birth alone and naught else we are brought into this vital relationship.

In the writings of John this relationship is expressed by the phrase '*children of God*'—with which is connected 'begotten of God', and two or three other similar, though distinct, phrases. The first meaning of the phrase is that of the communication of the divine life by a divine act of the Spirit of God, in response to believing faith in Christ. 'To as many as received Him, to them gave He the right (power, authority) to become *children of God*, even to them that believe on His name. Which were begotten *not of blood*, nor of the *will of the flesh*, nor of the *will of man*, but of *God*' (John 1:13). (See the following references and their context, 1 John 2: 9; 3: 9; 4: 7; 5: 1, 4, 18—all of which are in the perfect tense, which regards the initial fact in its *abidingness*). In the same connection is the phrase '*of God*', which expresses

\* See F. F. Bruce's comment on this verse in his article on St John's Gospel in next issue of 'B.S.' (July).

the ideas of 'derivation and dependence, and so of moral correspondence' (Westcott). 'He that is of God heareth the words of God' (John 3:47; cf. 3 John 11:1; John 3:10; 4:6).

Westcott points out that 'the idea of *teknon* (child) as it is presented in St John, includes the two notions of the presence of the divine principle and the action of human growth. The child is made to share in his Father's nature (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4), and he uses in progressive advance the powers which he has received'. He goes on to state that, 'it is therefore easily intelligible why John never uses the title son (*huios*), the name of definite dignity and privilege, to describe the relation of Christians to God.' The title '*sons of God*' is used more characteristically by Paul (see Rom. 8: 14, 15), in describing the attainment of spiritual understanding and *maturity of character* on the part of the child of God. We become children of God by the communication of a new life, and that establishes the vital relationship which issues in the full realization of sonship. The one term stresses the necessity of the new birth, the other the position of privilege into which adoption brings us.

The above considerations enable us to distinguish immediately between the natural life possessed by all men and eternal life as the gift of God. 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3: 6). All men have natural life, not all have eternal life. Therefore the term Fatherhood of God is not admissible in referring to mankind in general. God is the Father of such as are children of God by the communication of a new life—and of none other. This needs to be emphasized more than ever today, for men are willingly blind to the difference. It is only to 'as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name.'

### Man's response to God

Having stressed the divine aspect, we must consider also the essential human response. Whilst in a primary sense it is the work of God by the Holy Spirit, in an essential complementary aspect it is by the active exercise of *faith* on the part of man.

'Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and *believeth* Him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but *hath passed out of death into life*' (John 5 : 24; see also verse 25, and ch. 3 : 15). But in case we should ever be tempted to limit or lower the quality and energy of that faith which is to be exercised, John gives us the measure of its meaning in the memorable discourse of our Lord in John 6 : 47-58. The faith that would appropriate is not to be mere intellectual assent to a doctrine or a theory, but the opening up of the whole being to the incoming of the very life of Christ as made communicable to us through His life and death as perfect man. To 'eat' and to 'drink' is to take to oneself by a voluntary act that which is so essential for life, and then to assimilate and make it part of oneself. It is, as it were, faith regarded in its converse action. Faith throws the believer upon and into its Object; this spiritual 'eating and drinking' brings the object of faith into the believer. That is saving faith, appropriating faith, and without it men can have 'no life in themselves'. But this gift of Christ, of 'his flesh and His blood', becomes a well-spring within 'unto eternal life.'

Eternal life is a *present possession*. This point is specially emphasized in John's writings. He writes the Gospel that 'we might believe', and believing *have* eternal life in His name (John. 20:31); and he writes his Epistle 'that ye may *know that ye have* eternal life' (1 John 5:13). Whilst there are passages in the N.T. such as Matt. 19:29; Lk. 18:30; Tit. 3:5; etc., which point to a *future* realization in richer and fuller measure, Christ's own words are clear and decisive, '*hath* everlasting life.' (see John. 5:24; 6:47; etc.). It is to be enjoyed in the present, amid all the inevitable limitations of earthly environment and the presence of sin. What is more, once possessed it can never be lost. It is eternal not merely as to duration, but in its efficacy and possession. The one who has it '*cometh not into judgment*', but hath passed out of death: 'They shall never perish' (John. 10:28). Christ Himself is the guarantee—'Because I live, ye shall live also (John 14:19). Therefore, said Augustine, 'Join thyself to the eternal God, and thou wilt be eternal.'

### The Practice of Life Eternal

But we must ever recall ourselves to the *pursuit* of this Life Eternal. Peter, perhaps remembering his own experience, exhorts us to 'Beware lest . . . ye fall away from your own steadfastness. But *grow* in the *grace and knowledge of our Lord . . .*' (2 Pet. 3:18). Similarly Paul—'walk worthily . . . bearing fruit . . . and *increasing in the full knowledge of God.*' (Col. 1:10). And reverting again to John 17:3, 'this is life eternal *that they should know*', on which Westcott points out, the '*that*' (*hina*) expresses aim, an end, and not only a fact. So too the tense of the verb (*ginōskōsin*) marks 'continuance, progress, and not a perfect and past apprehension gained once for all.' It is always advancing from glory to glory (see 2 Cor. 3:18; and cf. 4; 6).

Col. 1:10 bears the same meaning: knowledge grows through *inward moral practice* in virtue of the power of the inward experience of the divine life (see Eph. 4:18), by which God reveals Himself more and more to the inner man. In another aspect 'the knowledge of God is as the dew or the rain which nurtures the growth of the plant' (Lightfoot.)

We see, therefore, that the Life Eternal is a very *practical* life, and its ideal is realized in setting Christ on the throne of our redeemed personality. Paul states the position in a crystal-clear sentence: '*The love of Christ constraineth us . . . that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto HIM who for their sakes died and rose again*' (2 Cor. 5:14,15).

In other words, He has done His part, we must now respond in all the power of the new life. The question is, *how?* And the answer (in part at least) can be found in three 'challenging words' of Paul's, which we must examine. All we can do is to summarize the teaching briefly.

1. Turn *first to Rom. 6:11*, 'Even so (see verse 10) *reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.*' Paul views the believer as having died with Christ to sin: 'Our old man was crucified with Him' (verse 6). That is the first, but not the whole, truth. He goes on to state we are



'*alive unto God*' (cf. verse 13). That is the other side. So that eternal life involves two fundamental ideas, not necessarily separated from each other in regard to time, but distinct in teaching and apprehension—first crucifixion with Christ (see carefully Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; 5:24; 6:14), which in other words means dead to sin, dead to the law, and dead to the world. The second thought is expressed in Rom 6:4, 'so we also might walk in *newness of life*'; or, as verse 11 puts it, 'alive unto God'. It is to be noted that these are experimental *facts*, the work of the Spirit, but the believer's part (without which the facts are inoperative in practical life) is to *reckon* ourselves to 'be dead unto sin,' and in faith to step out upon them for daily victory.

2. *The next passage is Rom. 12:1*, with which we must couple Rom. 6:13, 16, 19, where the same word 'present', or 'yield' is found. '*Present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . unto God . . .*' The body includes the whole man, every faculty—body, soul and spirit; will, affections, and mind. As alive from the dead we are to present our members as instruments of righteousness unto God. In view of the loose thinking prevailing among Christians today, we are impressed with the need of emphasizing the teaching of this verse. We believe this 'presentation' unto God is as truly an act, a conscious and deliberate act, of the soul as that of yielding to Christ for salvation, or any similar crisis. And in 'presenting' ourselves to God thus, we are to keep nothing back or it fails in its intention. What is more, just as truly as the priests were consecrated to the service of the sanctuary and thenceforth were for their life-time committed to that service, so the believer having presented himself a living sacrifice unto God is thenceforth to live only unto God, and not unto himself. How great the church would be today if every believer enjoyed the practical experience of Romans 5:17! Read the verse in the R.V. specially and note the almost 'violent' contrast between the fact of 'death reigning through sin' in the *past*, and the possibility of the believer 'reigning in life, through Jesus Christ' in the *present*. W.R. Newell phrases it '*reigning-as-kings in life*'. He comments 'here is a kingdom before which all earth is *dust*. And who are the kings here? Believers! Those whose humble faith has "received the abundance

of grace and the gift of righteousness" these shall reign-as-kings through Jesus Christ.'

3. The final passage is in Col. 3: 1-3, coupled with two or three closely related; 'If then ye were raised with Christ, *seek the things that are above . . .*' (the whole passage should be read carefully, to v. 3).

This appeal of the apostle refers primarily to *the mind* as the directive faculty of the whole personality. It is *there* that the personality first opens to the realities of the New Life in Christ, 'for the god of this age hath *blinded the minds of the unbelieving*, that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ . . . should not dawn upon them' (2 Cor. 4: 3-4, RV and marg). Every mind is endowed with the propensity to 'seek out,' in all kinds of ways and spheres of life that which will gratify the natural cravings of the soul. So that just as the sinner 'seeks in the darkness' for that which will satisfy, so the Christian is to seek, to reach out after, 'the things that are above'—and *that*, be it noted, is effected by St Paul's 'great word' in Rom. 12: 2—'Be ye transformed *by the renewing of your mind.*'

The mind can be either a caravansary for all the passing 'Fashions' of the day—multitudinous, fickle, bullying or bland, according to type—or a Temple of the living God.<sup>1</sup> If He holds audience *there* the whole of life will be regulated and conditioned by the 'good and acceptable and perfect Will of God'. We shall 'prove' the unspeakable virtues and blessings of conforming to that Will, and learn that 'the real secret of a transfigured life is a transmitted life—Somebody else living in us, with a capital S for that Somebody looking out of our eyes, giving beauty to our faces, and His winningness to our personality' (S. D. Gordon).

Finally, in all this we must ever keep in mind the essential ministry of the Holy Spirit. From the moment of the New Birth to the moment of our entering the glory of the heavenly home above, there needs to be a continual, unflinching recourse to the control, guidance and help of the august third Person of the

<sup>1</sup> See 2 Cor. 6: 16,17 R.V. and context.

Holy Trinity, without which life will be barren. The teaching of Romans, chapter eight, will provide a life-time of study and practice in this aspect. It is worth mention that the American R.V. refers every occurrence of 'spirit' in this chapter to the Holy Spirit except in verse 10.

The believer's life-motto should ever be 'For me to live is CHRIST' therefore 'lay hold on the life that is LIFE indeed'.

## AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

F. F. BRUCE, M.A.

### II. Jesus reveals Himself to the World (John 1: 18—12: 50)

#### (b) MINISTRY OF JESUS IN GALILEE, JERUSALEM AND SAMARIA

(John 2: 1—4: 42)

#### ii. *The Cleansing of the Temple* (2: 13-22)

Ch. 2, v. 13—*And the passover of the Jews was at hand and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*—The Passover, celebrated on the eve of Nisan 15, was (with the week of Unleavened Bread, which immediately followed) one of the three great pilgrimage-festivals of the Jewish year. The other two were Pentecost (seven weeks later) and Tabernacles (six months after Passover). Three Passovers are mentioned in this Gospel—the present one, the one which fell about the time of the Feeding of the Five Thousand (John 6:4), and the Passover of the Passion (John 11:55 and onwards). It is disputed how far this Evangelist intends to preserve a strictly chronological sequence, and it is argued by some that, owing to displacements of the material of the Gospel at an early stage, the section from 2:13 to 3:21 has been detached from the record of the last Passover, to which it properly belongs. This last suggestion would remove the problem of relating John's record of the cleansing of the temple to the Synoptic record, which dates it at the time of the last Passover. But it is most probable that we are meant to regard the three Passovers