

In Him Was Life

What Is Life?

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Do you remember the Gatorade commercials during the Super Bowl a couple of months ago? They featured such sports stars as Michael Jordan, Peyton Manning, Derek Jeter, and several others, plying their trades (football, basketball, baseball) while dripping with brightly colored fluorescent-looking sweat. And then at the end of the commercial, on the black screen, appeared the Gatorade symbol with only these words: "Is it in you?"

Obviously, the company means their sports drink. That is what they want in you. They want you to go to the supermarket and buy cases of their Gatorade and drink it. But they also imply, "Are the skills, drive, endurance, and competitive spirit to become a great athlete in you?" In other words, they are asking, "Do you have what it takes?"

Now, I want to ask you a much more fundamental question today. Do you have life?

"Of course," you reply. "I'm sitting here. Do you not see me? I am alive. I can feel my pulse. I am aware of myself and my surroundings. I eat and I drink to feed my body and to fuel it. I respond to stimuli, like the hat-pin test—Yeow!—Yes, I am alive." You are right. There is not a non-living person sitting among us here today.

But, what does it mean for an organism to have life—to be alive? Do you know, believe it or not, that scientists and philosophers have never come up with a definition of life that satisfies everybody? If you would check an encyclopedia, or go online and check "Wikipedia," they would tell you that there are two definitions that cover most of the bases. They are not important, but I just want you to hear them.

The first definition is: "Living things are systems that tend to respond to changes in their environment and inside themselves in such a way as to promote their own continuation."

Here is another one: "Life is a characteristic of self-organizing, self-recycling systems consisting of populations of replicators that are capable of mutation around most of which homeostatic metabolizing organisms evolved." Obviously, this last one especially is a very scientific and actually evolutionary definition of life, and it is very unsatisfying because first you have to run to the dictionary and look up all the words.

It may be more understandable to think of life as a characteristic of organisms with complex organization, and inheritable, genetic information. These organisms undergo metabolism, they possess the capacity to grow, they can respond to stimuli, they can reproduce, and they can adapt to their environment. This is still rather scientific, and rather dry, but it seems to hit all the high points of life. Well, in a way, maybe.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* simply defines life as, "The state of functional activity and continual change peculiar to organized matter." Now that is nice, short, and sweet. "The state of functional activity and continual change peculiar to organized matter."

While that is on a physical and material plane, this definition is a bit better, in my view, because it edges, or creeps, toward the fact that for humans, life is more than just existences and certain bodily functions. I mean, what would life be like if all we did was sit, have complex organization, metabolize, grow, respond to stimuli, reproduce, and adapt. I mean, those are fine things to do, but it does not pay the bills. It does not make for any relationships. It is just the life of a one-celled organism, as if you were an amoeba, a slug, or something. That is not the kind of life we would ascribe to.

For us, life includes activity and change, experiences, interactions, and mental and emotional maturity. We like fulfillment of our desires, hopes, goals, and dreams. So in short, life for us is not just a physiochemical existence. It is also mental, emotional, social, and spiritual, most of all, in nature.

As Christians, life is more than just a functional bodily existence; it also has an important and vital spiritual element. My question to you is: Is it in you? Is this spiritual life a part of you?

Before we get to that spiritual life, we are going to go back to Genesis. I want you to see how God defines life as the Bible does so for us. The Bible is not a dictionary. You cannot go to "L" and look up the word "life," and see the definition. No, the Bible is not organized that way. In the Bible, you must compare scripture with scripture and find out how it treats particular words and phrases. And by that, we can then ascribe some sort of definition to them. We can do that here in Genesis.

Genesis 2:4-7 This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being ["soul" in the *King James Version*].

Here we have the first instance of the phrase, "the breath of life," in verse 7. Believe it or not, it is only used a small number of times in the Old Testament, and all of them are in the book of Genesis.

Another use of this phrase is found during the time of Noah. God is speaking to Noah telling him to prepare an ark:

Genesis 6:17 And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die.

And here in the next instance, God is bringing the animals to Noah,

Genesis 7:15 And they went into the ark to Noah, two by two, of all flesh in which is the breath of life.

Okay, here we start to get some definitions or parameters for what the breath of life is, and what has it.

Genesis 7:20-22 The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died.

Here we have all the times in the Old Testament where this phrase, "breath of life," or "breath of the spirit of life," is found. It is very clear when put side by side, that what God means by the breath of life is physical, animal life—organisms that breathe air to maintain their existence. It is creature-life we might say. It is the life of created organisms that must have air to breathe. It is the life of material, fleshly things.

Then we saw that those things that have the breath of life died in the Flood. In verse 21 it identifies them as birds, cattle and beasts, and every creeping thing, as well as men. It is a very broad category of creatures.

In this case it was all land-based creatures. Sea creatures live in the water. They did not necessarily die unless some perished in the sloshing and watery turmoil, but basically this event was to cause all creatures on the dry land to perish. And then God would start over with Noah and his family, and the creatures preserved in the ark.

We see that it is animal life—whatever died in the Flood had the breath of life—except for those eight human beings and the animals with them in the ark.

Now the breath of life does not include any immortal soul. We can tell that by the verses we quoted. But, if it did include an immortal soul, then we would have to admit that animals, birds, and insects all have immortal souls also. Are you willing to go that far? It is actually patently ridiculous. Otherwise, we would all be Hindu, and we would all avoid stepping on the ants, and we would let the cows wander the streets.

Next we are going to go to the one instance where "breath of life" is found in the New Testament. Believe it or not, it is found in Revelation 11 in the passage regarding the Two Witnesses. We know that the Two Witnesses preach for three-and-a-half years, and they say things that the Beast does not like, and they are finally killed after their preaching is finished, and all those who dwell on the earth have a big party to celebrate their death. And then,

Revelation 11:11 Now after the three-and-a-half days [of being dead] the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them.

Now, the New Testament, John the apostle, uses the "breath of life" exactly the same way that Moses used it in Genesis. What is meant here is that the Two Witnesses were killed, and their dead bodies lay openly in the street for over three days, and then God resurrected them to physical, animal life again. They were raised bodily and physically. They were alive again—fleshly. And then it says, a loud voice said, "Come up here!" This means that they then were part of the first resurrection. That is when they were changed into spirit.

In this case, John is very clear in what he saw. The Two Witnesses were raised to physical life first. They breathed. God gave them breath again. Do spirit beings need to breathe air? No. They would not need the breath of life. All they need, and will have, is eternal life—spirit life. We see here that the New Testament supports the Old Testament in terms of the "breath of life." It is a physical existence that needs to breathe oxygen to live.

Now, one more thing before we go on. The first instance in Genesis 2:7 said that God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life. The last instance shown in Revelation 11:11 shows the breath of life from God entered them. This is a case that from the first instance, to the exclamation point at the end of the Bible, only God has the ability to generate life. Even physical life must come from God through the breath of life. So, only God has the power and the prerogative to bestow the breath of life.

We know that this is not the end of the matter about life. Turn back to Genesis 9. We are returning to the story of Noah, but here the Flood is over, they have landed, God made the covenant with Noah, and then God gives some instructions:

Genesis 9:3-6 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.

The big thing I want to get out of this, is that He said that the life was in the blood. And, when a beast, or another man should kill a man, there has to be a reckoning, because the life is in the blood. There is life there—life for life.

Our next passage is the main section where God explains His concept of the life being in the blood. This is a bit of an expansion of what He told Noah:

Leviticus 17:10-11 And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people [that is pretty dire, but He has a reason for it]. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls [lives]; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul [life],

In the passage above, again the word for "life" is *nephesh*. And, where it says to make atonement for your souls, this is also *nephesh*. So, "For the *nephesh* of the *nephesh* is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your *nepheshes*; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the *nephesh*."

Although the forms above are both singular and plural in usage, the root forms of those words above are all *nephesh*.

Leviticus 17:13-14 "Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust; for it is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its

life. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.'"

God makes the same warning that he did in verse 10.

The idea that the life is in the blood is very similar to the idea of the breath of life. They are connected. Blood contains and sustains the life of any animal or person. It is true. Anybody knows that. Once that blood is shed, that life of that creature is gone. It dies. If you cut a creature's throat, like a lamb or whatever, and let the blood drain out of it, the lamb dies.

The circulation of blood carries the life-giving oxygen to all the body's cells. It is just in a different form. The breath of life is oxygen coming into the body through the lungs. Then the lungs transfer that oxygen to the blood. And then the blood circulates by the heart's movement throughout the whole body; and that oxygen is delivered to every single cell that we have to keep us alive, because every cell needs the oxygen.

We just have two different parts of the same process and idea of what physical life is. We could say that in the blood is the breath of life, because the blood carries the oxygen. As it said in verse 14, "Its blood sustains its life."

Now, it is for this reason (that the life is in the blood) that the blood of the sacrificed animal was sprinkled before the Lord in front of the veil, when it was offered, especially in a burnt or sin offering. Also, the priest would take some of the blood and put it, place it, smear it on the horns of the altar. It was sprinkled before the veil, offered to God first, and then it was put on the altar on the horns. We know that a lamb or bullock, or whatever sacrificial animal, has more blood than what was sprinkled and also placed on the altar. What happened to all that extra blood? There might be several pints or quarts of it. They captured it. And do you know where it went? It was thrown at the base of the altar. It was all offered to God either before the veil, or on the altar, or beside the altar.

Leviticus 4 tells us that every bit of the animal's blood was offered, because that life belonged to God. God gave it, and it went back to Him in a symbolic way. It had to be returned to Him. So, what was not sprinkled or smeared or put on the horns of the altar, was poured out beside the altar. And the blood represented the life given to pay for the breaking of God's law. If there was a sin, it had to be atoned for in blood. And so, life had to be given. The blood represented the life given in sacrifice, and that satisfied God.

Now, obviously, we are touching on things appropriate for this season of the year. The life is in the blood, and in whose life was that blood most precious? In the same way, this is why Jesus took such a beating before He was crucified. The reason was that He was an offering for sin. He had to give His life in sacrifice by bleeding to death, because His life, the life of the Creator God, was worth more than anyone's life—everybody's life combined who have ever been, or ever will be. It was going to pay for all our sins. And so it had to be shed, and it had to be offered before God. It had to be given.

He could not die on the road of a broken heart. That is ridiculous. What would that have accomplished? He was the sheep going to slaughter. He had to be killed, and His blood poured out before the altar, as it were, and before the veil. The veil was supernaturally rent in two when that happened. That was because the veil was no longer necessary.

The perfect life had been given for all the sins of all the people for all time. Sacrifice and offering were ended. He gave His precious life in His blood to pay for the iniquities of all mankind before God.

Now, most crucifixion victims died not by loss of blood, but rather they died by asphyxiation. They died because they could not get a breath. Their arms were over their head, and their chests were forward and down, and they eventually did not have the strength to lift themselves up to get a breath.

But Jesus did not die that way. Do you remember that they said, "He is dead already?" And the reason for that surprised statement is that most crucifixion victims lingered for many hours to maybe a couple of days, depending on how strong they were, because death was by suffocation ultimately. As long as the victim was strong enough to pull themselves back up even slightly, they could get another breath—and linger on.

But Jesus had been beaten so badly that His lifeblood drained on the ground, leaving a trail from where He was at Pilate's court all the way to where He was crucified, all through Jerusalem wherever He walked. He hardly had anything left to bleed when they nailed Him up on the stake. He died within a few hours. He did not have any strength. He could not even carry the cross bar. He had reached such a point already that He was basically going into shock, and had no strength. So His life was poured out along that route to Golgatha.

What we have described so far is physical life. And of course, the greatest physical life that ever was, was in Jesus Christ. But there is more. There is more to life than just physical life. In Matthew 6, Jesus said some very interesting things about life.

Matthew 6:25 Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

Like I said, if He had wanted us to have the life of a slug, that is what we would have—just food and clothing—that is not much life. Jesus says here, "Is not life more than that?"

Matthew 6:30-32 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

He made you! He knows what it takes to keep a body alive. He is going to give them. But, He is after different things.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Jesus rhetorically says here, "Is life not more than physical existence? Of course it is! It is more than eating, and drinking, and wearing clothes, and having shelter. Unbelievers everywhere seek only to satisfy their physical needs. They live for good food and clothing to wear. They live to make or buy shelter to have a home. And they live to fulfill these other base urges that they have. They are out

there fighting the fight of survival of the fittest—brutal, nasty, and short—what they can get for themselves."

But Jesus shows us that His disciples must not overly concern themselves with these basic human needs. There is more to life than that. They must instead focus on God's kingdom and righteousness. Our lives are to be dedicated to these higher pursuits. He will make up for the rest. He will come up with ways for us to have the food, the clothing, the shelter. To put it yet another way, God's kingdom and His righteousness is to be our life—the focus of our lives.

Next, in John 10, the Good Shepherd chapter:

John 10:10 . . . The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy [in the flock]. I have come that they [His sheep] may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Here Jesus declares the overall purpose for His incarnation and His ministry. He came to give His sheep life—and not just life, but abundant life! He came as the Good Shepherd, the One who cares for the sheep, and leads them to where they need to go, so that they can have real life—true life—a full life—leading to eternal life! And, that they might have it, not just in a small measure, but more abundantly than they can even grasp now.

Now, this does not really mean much to us. It is just words if we take it subjectively—if we take it only for just what would make us happy. What might be the abundant life for me, might not be the abundant life for you, but rather boring and unfulfilling.

Think about it. If you were I, you would love to just sit in a library somewhere, and read your life away. Or maybe for fun, you would have a notebook and pen, and you would write something! Oh what fun!

I know some folks who would just love to spend their lives in a rocking chair on their porch with a cup of coffee, or glass of wine, and while the time away rocking.

Some people like golf. Some people like skydiving. Some people like gardens. What is fulfilling to you? What would be real living to you—a cognac every night? Napoleon thought that. Maybe, that was life to him. I do not know. But, abundant life to a physical person would be thinking of nothing more than what might satisfy his own desires. And it would be any number of things—almost limitless.

I mean, I would love to spend my days at Lowes Motor Speedway in a car, going around the track—left turn...left turn...left turn...left turn—as fast I could go. Now, that is just a physical desire of mine. That is not abundant life. One incorrect left turn and I would be dead. Where would life be then?

So you see, one person's bowl of cherries is another person's bowl of cherry pits. Most of you would not want to sit into a racecar going 160 to 180 mph perpetually turning left all the time. Yet, there are thousands of men who would just love it, fulfilling their need for speed. But, you see, that is on a totally physical plane, just looking at it absolutely subjectively. What makes me happy? That is not what Jesus meant here about having life, and having it more abundantly.

The Greek word that Jesus used here to describe the kind of life that He came to teach and give His disciples is *perisson*, and it means "superabundant." It does not mean just abundant, but superabundant; more abundant than abundant—about as abundant as you can get. It means superfluous, meaning overflowing. And that is another of the definitions, "overflowing"—over and above a certain quantity.

So, if I said I would give you a bushel of wheat, I might give you two bushels of wheat. That would be *perisson*, meaning more, over and above a certain quantity. It means a quantity so abundant as to be considerably more than what one would expect or anticipate. So, if you knew that I was a generous person, and I was going to give you two bushels for the one bushel that I said I was going to give you, it would then be four bushels, because it was more than you anticipated or expected. You cannot out give God. You might say, "I bet it cannot be this much," and He goes way up here, and gives you that much!

He came to give us life. Not just any ol' life, but such abundant life that it is more than we could ever anticipate or expect—superabundantly. In short, He promises us a life far better than we could ever envision. It is reminiscent of what Paul says in I Corinthians 2:9,

I Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.

That is superabundant. We have not seen it, we have not heard it, we have not discussed it among ourselves, and we have not imagined it to the point of what He is prepared to give us—your wildest dreams, and more!

Paul informs us, then, in Ephesians 3:20 that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. More! Better! The life that Jesus Christ came to give is beyond our experience and our imagination.

We know John 17:3 is the classic definition of eternal life, where He tells his disciples through His prayer on that Passover evening:

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

So, it is not just knowing the Father, it is knowing the Son too. Note that this definition makes no mention whatsoever of length of days, of health, prosperity, the family type you might have, the occupation you may have, or any of those baser things like food, drink, and clothing. All it mentions is, knowing God the Father and Jesus Christ.

So, what can we take from this? That God defines eternal life in terms of knowing Him and His Son? Well, the first thing, just to get the physical out of the way, is that God is not overly concerned with the physical circumstances of our lives. It does not bother Him in the way that it might bother us. It is enough, as we have seen, that He assures us that we need not worry about what we will eat, or drink, or wear.

Paul says,

Philippians 4:19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

He will supply everything so we will not need to worry about that. Another thing we can take from John 17:3 is that eternal life—the kind of life that God offers us through Jesus Christ, and through His teachings, the kind of life that the true Christian is truly interested—is not determined by duration of time, but by a relationship—a relationship with God.

The key factor in eternal life is not the length of time, but the quality of the relationship. This is why once we are converted and impregnated with the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are said to have eternal life already, because it is not about length of days.

What does the Holy Spirit do? We are baptized. We have repented of our sins. We have hands laid upon us. God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. And then what happens? Christ is in us, through His Spirit, and what does that do? It opens up a communications pipeline directly to the Father, because Christ is the way. He has opened up, by His blood, the way into the Holy of Holies. He stands there and holds the curtain back and says, "Okay, you talk to Me, I'll talk to Him." He is the way. But it is even closer than that. We do not even need to talk to Him because through Him we can talk directly to the Father. Jesus Christ is there as the mediator between us, as our High Priest.

And when the Father says to Christ, "You know, I have never experienced anything like this, what do you think?" And Christ replies, "Well, you know, I had an experience like this while I was on the earth." And it was not easy, because He suffered like us, and He went through all the things that we go through.

We have the ability, then, to have someone there with God the Father, to speak on our behalf. So a relationship has started. We receive the Holy Spirit, and we have a relationship with the Father, and the Son. That is eternal life—having the relationship, and using that relationship, and growing in the relationship with the Father, and the Son. There is a passage to this effect:

I John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

This is so you can continue to have eternal life. Because we are not talking about duration, but rather a relationship, we can say that we do have eternal life in us.

Now, we may die, and we all probably will die—actually we will die—I know that for certain because it is appointed for men once to die, and after this, the judgment. But, even though we die physically, we will live—we will be raised to new life in the resurrection from the dead; and we will live forever. There is where the duration comes in. But the real key to eternal life is not the length, but the relationship.

So the eternal life that God offers to us through Jesus Christ, and His teachings, is about quality, not quantity. To put it another way, the abundant life is life as God lives it. And we are commanded and encouraged many times in the book to live that way too.

In our next passage, God is giving Ezekiel an idea of what his job is to be as watchmen. He concludes with this:

Ezekiel 33:10-11 "Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: 'Thus you say, "If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them [dying in their sins; living in sin; not the life they wanted], how can we then live? [and have the abundant life?]"'??? "Say to them: ???As I live,??? says the Lord God! [That is the key!] ???I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked [He does not want us to die in our sins], but [rather] that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel???"

He is saying, "Do you want to live? Live like I live."

I Peter 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

I John 2:6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

If we say that we have Christ in us, and we are living in Christ, then ought to walk and follow His examples just like He did. These are all throughout the Old and New Testaments. "Follow me as I follow Christ." "Imitate me," Paul says. Once we truly come to know God, and realize what He is doing with us, we will desire to emulate Him in every facet of life. And in doing that, we live with Him the life of God, which is eternal life.

Physical blessings may or may not be by-products of God???s way of life. God tells us not to worry about them. He will give them as we need them. Neither our wealth, nor our poverty is really a sure indication of our standing with God. Sometimes it might be better that we be poor. Sometimes it may be better that we be rich. It depends on what God???s will is, and our character. It is not necessarily going to be a reward for something. Just because you are rich does not mean that your standing with God is good. As a matter of fact, the New Testament is full of rebukes to the rich.

Now I ought to balance this out. There are plenty of rebukes to the poor also. Just read the Proverbs. It just depends on whether we are living the life of God or not. That is what is important, not the physical trappings that we might have. Certainly God desires that, as is said in III John 2. Here, John is speaking for God:

III John 2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

Of course God does! He wants to work with us. But verse 4 maybe gives the bottom line to all this:

III John 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Gold-braided hair, as is mentioned in the New Testament, does not mean a whole lot. But what does mean a lot is whether we are walking in the truth. So whether we are walking in the truth with gold-braided hair, or just normal hair, the key is walking in the truth. Are we living the life of God? Are we following eternal life?

II Peter 3:18 . . . but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

This is the Christian life in a nutshell: growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is what a Christian's life revolves around. This is our task. So this suggest that the abundant life is a process, or a continuum of learning, and practicing, and maturing, as well as failing, and recovering, and adjusting, and enduring, and overcoming—until we reflect Jesus Christ as perfectly as we possible can.

We could paraphrase it like this, "Grow in the image of Jesus Christ until you are the express image of Him, just as He is the express image of the Father." That is life. That is the life that we are called to live.

One of my favorite scriptures is Colossians 3:3. We will begin with verse 1 just to get the context:

Colossians 3:1-3 If then you were raised with Christ [in baptism], seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth, for you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

I believe that this is a very profound scripture. As humans, we are naturally oriented toward material things. But as true Christians, our perspective toward life has to change dramatically.

Now our human nature is essentially selfish. It is geared toward the preservation of the flesh. And beyond the preservation of the flesh, it wants to satisfy the flesh. It wants to do everything for me, me, me, me, me. It follows the way of get.

God's nature is 180 degrees opposite from that. God's nature is holy, pure, untainted, and essentially outgoing. It allows for us to please ourselves on occasion. It allows us to fulfill desires, and of course, it allows us to eat, drink, and put clothes on, and fulfill other needs and desires that we do have. But, beyond that, we have a much higher purpose, because the Holy Spirit is God's nature. And God's nature is outgoing. It teaches the way of give.

So it is geared toward, first of all, pleasing God. What is the first great commandment of all? "Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all might." And what is the second great commandment? It is part of the Golden Rule, "Do unto other as you would have them do unto you." It is, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Even though we have a love for ourselves, the Holy Spirit, comes into our lives and makes us want to please others, to look out for their interests, as Paul said in Philippians 2: "Do not look out just for your own interests, but look out for the interests of others too." We have these two opposing natures, two opposing spirits in us—the carnal human nature, and the Holy Spirit of God—and they work at cross-purposes with each other.

This is the set up that we come into when we are raised with Christ. We have these two opposing motivations within us. And then He says in verse 3 that we died and our lives are hidden with Christ in God.

When we died and were raised again with Christ, it says that we were hidden with Christ. This has a couple of different meanings. This word "hidden" is very similar to the Greek word for a book of mystery. It is something like *apocalypso*. It has to do with mystery, concealing, and hidden things. It means that we were concealed, or are concealed, or are put into a secret place, or are put out of sight with Christ in God.

Interesting! This is a difficult concept to think about. However, if we think in terms of the body of Christ, the analogy that is given in I Corinthians 12, that Christ is the head, and we are the body, members individually of the body, it becomes a bit clearer.

Suppose that Christ is an actual person among us. If someone were to come up to Him, how would they recognize Him? They would see His face, right? He is the head. And they would recognize Christ, because they would recognize what He looked like. How do we recognize each other? Most of the time, by our faces. As we get to know each other better, we learn to recognize different persons by other attributes, such as their voices. But, if we come into a room, the first thing we do is look for somebody's face that we know.

Well, with the body of Christ, it is the same way. He is the head. What are we? Well, maybe, if we are lucky, we are a group of cells in an organ in a member, as Paul puts it, in some part of the body.

Now when you look at somebody, and you see his face, do you think about his liver? No, I hope not. Do you think about his left toenail? No, I hope not. Do you think about his gallbladder or a rib? No. You think of him—his face—his mind—his personality. You are not thinking of a part of his body. You may see it, but in essence, those parts of His body are hidden in him. In other words, as part of His body, we are subsumed by Him—by what He is.

Somebody, when they see us, should not necessarily see us, but they should see Christ instead. That is what Paul is saying. We were absorbed into the body of Christ, and now we should be recognized as Him, as belonging to Him, as being in Him.

We are Christians, are we not? We have been integrated so closely with Jesus Christ—in fact it is so close that He is in us, and we are in Him—it is a bonding so tight that it is internal and spiritual—that we are covered by His identity. We are hidden, concealed by Him. The more we conform to His life, the more hidden we become.

This is kind of strange, is not it? The way of God is not self-exaltation. The way of God is humbling. And so we give ourselves up to Him, and let Him take all the glory. We become more hidden, not more conspicuous.

But it is only when we say and we do things unlike Him, that we spiritually stand out as individuals. This is why Paul says (if we would go on) to kill those parts of you—mortify—the flesh—that comes out in all these sinful acts. Get rid of them, because they are not things of Christ. We want to get rid of things that anti-Christ, against Him, and that includes all these things:

Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

And he goes on, a little later, you must put off all these:

Colossians 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.

Why? Because Christ does not do these things. And if we do these things, we are not living the life of Christ. We are living the life of Satan the devil instead. We are living the life of men in their baseness, and physicality, and materialism. So, Paul said to get rid of those things because we are making the new man. And the new man is Christ.

Do you know how far this goes?

Colossians 3:10-11 . . . and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

He is saying that we get rid of all these things that are not Christ. We are getting rid of all we are: Greeks, Jews, circumcision, uncircumcision—barbarian traits, Scythian traits, slave and freemen traits—but Christ is all in all. We are supposed to strip off everything out of our lives until all that is left is Christ. That is life.

Now, notice the first clause, back in Colossians 3:4, "When Christ who is our life appears . . ." Do you know what that says in the Greek? "When Christ our life appears." It is even stronger in the Greek than it has been made here in English.

Colossians 3:4 When Christ our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

That is when we will be revealed as the sons of God! Is that not what it says in Romans 8? "The creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God." They cannot be seen right now. They are subsumed in Jesus Christ. They are concealed and hidden. And then, Christ returns, and His body is magnified and glorified, manifested before the whole world. Everybody is going to see the 144,000 sons and daughters of God. Then they will be revealed. That is the true apocalypse—the revealing—because we are hidden right now.

If I can put this all together with verse 4 for us right now, what this means is that to a Christian, life is a Person—a Divine Being. That sounds strange, but it is true, nonetheless. In the ideal, all other parts of life, all other meanings of life, pale beside the fact that we have been chosen by God to come to Christ, and to follow Him. This is why Paul wrote Galatians 2:20.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live [remember, we died, and were raised with Christ], but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

And also,

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Why? Because, in the next instant, he would be revealed as a Son of God in the resurrection from the dead. To live is Christ! Do you know what I mean now, if I say to us, "Life is a Person?" Everything in our lives should be so wrapped up in Jesus Christ that He is all that we think about, desire, and strive to be. That is our life. Of course, that is the ideal. None of us are living up to that, but that is what we are here for. That is why we have been called.

Now, where did Paul get this idea? Of course, he got it from Jesus Christ Himself.

John 14:1-6 "Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you [because, remember, those sons and daughters are going to be revealed, and they are going to have to have a place, and He is still preparing that place]. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

He, a Person, is the way. He, a Person, is the truth. He, a Person, is the life. What does "being the life" mean? Two primary things:

First, being the Model, He is the pattern of Godly living and holiness. He is the life that we are to lead. If we follow His example, we cannot go wrong. If we lead His kind of life in our everyday living, we can reach the same potential of character that He did, made possible through the Holy Spirit—Him living in us by His Spirit. Certainly, we will never quite reach that height, but it is our job to try.

And secondly, because He has inherent life—life in Himself. He has always had life, from eternity to eternity, forward and backward. When He comes and lives in us by His Spirit, His life becomes our life. He provides us with true eternal life—life as He and His Father experience; and in the end, it will be for all time.

I would like to read something from the 15th century theologian, Thomas á Kempis, who wrote *The Imitation of Christ*. He paraphrased and expanded on "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He says,

Follow thou Me. I am the way, the truth, and the life. Without the way, there is no going. Without the truth, there is no knowing. Without the life, there is no living. I am the way that thou must follow; the truth, which thou must believe; and the life, for which thou must hope. I am the invariable way, the infallible truth, and the never-ending life. I am the straightest way, the sovereign truth—life true, life blessed, life uncreated. If thou remain in My way, thou shalt know the truth, and the truth shalt make you free, and you will lay hold on eternal life.

Those are pretty interesting words. Finally, in John 1, we often read the first verse:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

We may even go to verse 2:

John 1:2 He was in the beginning with God.

We may even go on to verse 3:

John 1:3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

But we often give short shrift to verse 4:

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

In this man, Jesus Christ, the pre-incarnate Word of God, was life—inherent life indeed. But more than that, in Him was everything worth living for, if I can put it that way. In Jesus Christ is everything worth living for. In Him are the words. In Him is the power. In Him is the motivation to live in a way that super-exceeds human life.

When we accept Him, our lives move up many notches from the average life. For in Him is God's very life and all that that implies, both in quantity and quality.

John is saying, as he just finished saying that Jesus Christ is the creator of all things, that He—the Word of God—the Word made flesh, and now raised to glory—contained everything that we need to really live! From start to finish, from A to Z, He is the Alpha, and Omega; He is everything to us. We need to go nowhere else for fulfillment. He is our life now. And our lives are eternally, and completely wrapped up in Him.

Revelation 14 says the 144,000 go wherever the Lamb goes:

Revelation 14:4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

Not only are we completely concealed in Him now for our entire physical lives, but for the entire eternity. He is our life.

And so, He is also the light of men. He was specifically speaking about the men and women who have been called and chosen to become part of His body. As the light, Jesus Christ reveals the way to live, He reveals our sins to us, and He casts away the darkness of Satan and sin from us. If we follow that light, He will lead us to real life.

In conclusion, turn to I John 5—what is true life? Notice how confident John is here:

I John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

This is the true God and eternal life: that we know Him; that we are in Him.

What is true life? It is being totally dedicated to God and His way of life, and that we not only know the truth, but also by experience and growth with Him, soon become like Jesus Christ, walking and talking examples of what is true and godly. This is what it means to have life.

Is it in you?