

The Gift of Life

1 John 5:11-13

--CEFC 12/30/18; 11/18/07; 3/21/04

Topic: Eternal Life

I've never been a big fan of artificial plants.
Sometimes, I guess, they're the best you can do,
but they just don't do much for me.

Some artificial plants are really nice, I have to admit—
in fact, you can hardly tell they're not real.
We have an orchid plant at our house that for a long time I thought was alive--
I actually watered it from time to time!
I was very surprised when Susan informed me that it wasn't real.
Which may be what I don't like about artificial plants-
they are inherently deceptive.

They appear to be something that they're not.

They give the appearance of being alive, when they aren't.

But what exactly is this mysterious thing we call "life" anyway?

One dictionary¹ defined "life" this way:
"1. Life is the quality that makes living animals and plants
different from dead organisms and inorganic matter."
Now that's real helpful!

Or it defines "life" as
"animation and vitality, or something that produces animation or vitality."

OK.

Then it defines "vitality" as "the ability of something to live."

Hmmm!

I think we are running in a circle here.

Let's face it—nobody really knows what this thing we call life is.

It's like what St. Augustine once said about time
and the Supreme Court once said about pornography—
Everybody knows what it is
until you are asked to define it.

Certainly, we can describe the phenomena of life—what a living thing does.

We can say that living things somehow take in nourishment as energy,
living things grow, they reproduce,
and in the case of animals, they usually move around.

But what is it exactly that makes all these activities possible?

¹ Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation.

Life is a mysterious thing—
For the life of a plant or an animal
is more than just the ability of its individual cells of that organism
to live on their own.
Life is what allows the various cells and organs to work together.

In the words of a professor of neurobiology—
The death of an organism “occurs when the body ceases to act in a coordinated manner
to support the continued healthy function of all bodily organs.
Cellular life may continue for some time following the loss of integrated bodily function,
but once the ability to act in a coordinated manner has been lost,
“life” cannot be restored to a corpse—
no matter how “alive” the cells composing the body may yet be.”²

The “life” of a plant or an animal is that indispensable integrating force
that somehow makes the different parts function together as a whole.
Without that mysterious force or quality, we are quite simply *dead!*

Life—it’s important that we reflect on what it is and what it means,
for life is presented to us in the Bible as the supreme blessing of God
offered to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John writes in our passage this morning—
**“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.
I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God
so that you may know that you have eternal life.”**

This theme of life, and more specifically of eternal life,
is what most engages John’s thoughts.
It is the most complete expression of what it means to experience salvation;
it is the essence of that it means to be a Christian;
it is the highest good,
defining what it means to enjoy a relationship with God.
Having life—eternal life—that’s what being a Christian is all about.
Being a Christian is nothing less than passing from death to life.

**“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.
I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God
so that you may know that you have eternal life.”**

² Dr. Maureen L. Condic is an Assistant Professor of Neurobiology and Anatomy at the University of Utah. *First Things* 133 (May 2003): 50-54.

That's the theme that John began with in the opening words of this letter—
**1 John 1:1—"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard,
which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at
and our hands have touched—
this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."**

This echoes the same theme in John's Gospel—
**John 20:31—"These things were written so that you may believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

John's Gospel was written to unbelievers so that they might believe and have life;
John's first letter was written to believers so that they might know that they have life.

John longed to communicate this message of life
because life is what Jesus came to impart.

Jesus said, **"I have come that you may have life,
and have it to the full"** (John 10:10).

He said, **"I am the bread of life"** (John 6:35).

he said, **"I am the resurrection and the life.**

He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25).

and Jesus prayed, Father, **"This is eternal life:**

**that they may know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent"** (John 17:3).

And in that summary of the gospel in John 3:16 we read,

**"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son
that whoever believes in him shall now perish but have eternal life."**

Life—this is the heart of our message.

To be a Christian is to have life, eternal life,
and without this life, we are dead—spiritually dead.

A person may continue to function in this earthly sphere;
he may even appear to function quite well.

Like a carefully crafted artificial plant,

he may appear life-like in many ways--

he may be a nice person,

living a nice middle-class American suburban life.

He may be an upstanding citizen, a good neighbor,

a model employee, with a fine family.

He may even be active as a church member.

But without this life found in the gospel of Jesus Christ

a person lacks that indispensable integrating force

that somehow makes the different parts of his inner being

function together as a whole.

Without this life, he remains a spiritual corpse.

Before we came to experience the saving work of Christ,

Paul says that's just what we were--
in Eph. 2--"**we were dead in our trespasses and sins**"—
We were cut off from the life of God,
a reality symbolized in the Book of Genesis by that tree of life,
which Adam and Eve were not allowed to eat from
when they were cast from the garden,
because they had rebelled against the rule of God in their lives.
They experienced death,
and that death has been the natural condition of mankind ever since.

But in the gospel of God's grace we are offered life.
Jesus now gives us access that that tree of life—
He gives us access because Jesus is that tree of life.

Life--This is what the gospel message is all about—
It's not a matter of outward conformity to a certain standard of behavior;
it's not a practice of certain rituals;
it's not a mental assent to certain doctrines—
The gospel provides us with nothing less
than a spiritual rebirth into a new kind of life—eternal life,
which means coming into the knowledge of God,
and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

The prophets of the Old Testament saw the need for this new life—
for they experienced the hardness of human hearts—
mere moral reform was not enough,
for it was superficial—it never lasted.

Just more proclamation of the law of God
could never create people who could obey that law.

The Old Covenant based on the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai
had to give way to something new
in which, as Jeremiah foresaw,
God would write his law on the human heart.

Or as Ezekiel declared, God would remove from them their heart of stone
and give them a heart of flesh,
and he would put his Spirit within them. (Ezek. 36:26,27)

This was the new birth, the new birth of the Spirit, that Jesus talked about,
and which he came to bring.

"I tell you the truth," he said,
"no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"You must be born again," he said.
You must be born of the Spirit;
You must come to share in the very life of God. //

And we can share in that life—
"This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life . . ."
This testimony is not that he will give us this life—later, when we die.
No, it says that he has given us this life—here and now.

This echoes the words of Jesus—

John 5:24--"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be condemned;
he has crossed over from death to life."

This life is ours as a present possession.

It is "eternal" life only because of the kind of life that it is.

The word "eternal" is *αιώνιος*—which means "of the age"—
that is, "of the age to come."

It refers to that future, heavenly kind of life—

that life lived in relationship with God;

that life lived in experience of his love and blessing in our lives.

That kind of life is available to us here and now—

in this age.

We can enter into it and begin to experience it—

not yet in its fullness, of course,

but even in its initial manifestation in this age,

it is just as real.

A Christian is one who now has this life,

one who has been made alive by the regenerating work of the Spirit of God.

That's what makes the gospel message so powerful—

It doesn't say, "Here's the law; now go make yourself good."

It says, "You're not good,

but in Christ you can be forgiven and accepted just as you are.

And by the power of the Spirit you can become a new creature.

God in his grace can change you

so that you can become what you were meant to be."

The gospel doesn't just tape plastic flower buds onto a stem and pretend it's alive.

It infuses that dead stem with life

so that the plant can bring forth its own leaves and its own fruit.

That's what God wants to do in your life,

and it is something only God can do—

bring a dead corpse to life.

He wants you to have that mysterious power

which brings spiritual integrity to your life,

so that you might have a center around which everything else revolves.

He wants your life to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit—

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

He wants you to be alive.

So I ask you, Are you alive?
Do you have this spiritual life of God?
Does it animate you?
Or are you still in a condition of death?
Sometimes that can be hard to determine,
and we must be careful lest we are deceived.
There are lots of artificial Christians
adorning churches these days.

Are you really alive?
Let's explore what John has to tell us about this life
that might help us answer that question a little better.

John helps us to understand this life more clearly first
by defining more directly life's source—
It comes to us in Jesus Christ.
**“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.”**

This is the gospel message:
The life of God has entered this world in the person of Jesus Christ.
He is now the source of that life for all who come to him.

Jesus said in John 5:26, **“as the Father has life in himself,
so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.”**
By revealing his own life in the person of his Son Jesus,
God declares that this life is not some impersonal force, like electricity.
It's not just a form of energy or of intelligence
that mysteriously animates an otherwise lifeless universe.

No, in Jesus we see that the life of God is personal.
It has an intrinsically moral dimension, for it flows from a holy God.
This life has the intrinsic quality of righteousness and supremely of love.
This life has the form of grace and truth.

That's why this life must be revealed personally, in a Son.
And now it is in that Son that we can come to share in that life.
**“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.”**

Jesus himself used a horticultural image to communicate this—
John 15--**“I am the vine; you are the branches.
If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit;
apart from me you can do nothing.”** (Jn. 15:5)

Jesus is to be more than just a wise teacher who imparts helpful insights for living.
Jesus is to be our source of life itself.

He is literally our lifeline.

Without continuous contact with him, our light won't shine;
we will wither up and die,
just like cut flowers.

As beautiful as they are for the moment,
they won't last.

That's true of any kind of life that doesn't have an eternal source.

Jesus Christ is that indispensable integrating force
that somehow makes the different parts our being function together as a whole.

He is the one in whom our lives hold together spiritually.

He provides an integrating center,
for when our own ego is at the center, our lives fall apart—
and we die.

Christ imparts his life to us by the Spirit who comes to live in us.

The life-giving Spirit makes Christ present in us.

There is nothing else

and **no one** else who can give us this life.

Jesus said, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life.**

No one comes to the Father except through me."

"He who has the Son has life;

he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

This life is found in Jesus Christ.

He was nailed to a cross, but it was impossible for death to hold him.

He was raised from the grave
and is now the source of life for all who come to him.

Where are you looking for life?

Where are you looking for that power to bring you that deep inner joy,
that sense of purpose,
that experience of the love of God?

Will you find it in your job?

Will you find it in your paycheck?
in your honors and achievements?
in your popularity, your friends?
in marriage and family life?

Jesus said, I have come to give you life—life to the full.

That life is found in Christ—

"He who has the Son has life;

he who does not have the Son does not have life."

And there's something else John wants us to know about this life—
This eternal life manifests itself in our lives here and now.

We can't say exactly what this spiritual life is,
any more than we can say what physical life is—
It's a mystery.

But we can see what it does.

It's like the wind—

"The wind blows wherever it pleases.

**You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it come from
or where it is going.**

So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (Jn. 3:8)

So what does this spiritual life look like when it animates a person?

How can we tell if someone is alive?

What are the effects that demonstrate the presence of life?

This is one of John's major themes in this first letter--

He wrote these things to those who believe in the name of the Son of God
so that they may know that they have eternal life.

One writer has summarized the message of the letter with the phrase,
"The Tests of Life."³

How can you know if you have this life that is in the Son?

How can you know if you have, indeed, been born again into the family of God?

John doesn't give us one single test—he gives us several.

But because the life that we are talking about is the life of God

and is ours in virtue of our union with Jesus Christ,

these tests all reflect the essential nature of this life

as a reflection of the nature of God.

First, since God is a God of **truth**,

one test of this life is an understanding of the truth—

especially the central truth of who Jesus is.

It is a doctrinal test.

1 Jn. 4:15—"If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God,

God lives in him and he in God."

or again in 5:1—"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."

This might more literally be translated—

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ

has been and now is born of God."

The Greek tense here clarify an important point.

This recognition of spiritual truth

is a function of the divine life imparted to us by God.

³ Robert Law.

“The devil has been sinning from the beginning.”

But Jesus came to destroy the devil’s work

so **“No one who is born of God will continue to sin,
because God’s seed remains in him,
he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.”** (3:8,9)

Now the Apostle John lived long before the days of genetic science;

he knew nothing of the DNA code,

but family likeness was as obvious in his day as it is in ours.

And it is this notion that he uses in this verse--

John is telling us here that there is more to adoption into God’s family

than a new legal relationship—

In view of our union with Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit,
there is an organic connection, almost a genetic link,
that unites us in the family of God—

“God’s seed remains in [the Christian]” (3:8).

This life within us will manifest itself in the way we live.

We won’t simply continue in the life we once lived—

unconcerned about the righteousness,

the holy character, of God.

To go on sinning would cast doubt on your paternity.

A person’s **Being** is discovered in their **Doing**.

“By their fruit you shall recognize them,” Jesus said.

Artificial plants never bear fruit.

Do you want to know if you have life, divine life, in you?

Then “What kind of life are you living?” John asks.

It’s a second test—the test of righteousness.

That’s the moral test.

But if the truthfulness of God means that

those who share God’s life will acknowledge the truth;

and if the righteousness of God means that those who share God’s life

will do what is right;

then we come to a final and supreme test of life—

and this one is based on the love of God—

3:14—**“We know that we have passed from death to life,**

because we love our brothers.

Anyone who does not love remains in death. . . .”

Or 4:7—**“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.**

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

The idea that a person could be a Christian

without some concrete demonstration of care and concern

for the human needs around them
was incomprehensible to John.

It ought to be the same for us.
Love is the pulse of the Christian life;
it flows from the living heart.

Where there is no love, there is no life.

“Anyone who does not love remains in death. . . .”

We could call this **the social test.**

The recognition of truth,
a concern for righteousness,
and the demonstration of love--
this is how we discern the presence of life.

The person who has the life of God that is found in Jesus Christ
believes the truth about Jesus;
that person seeks to do what is right;
that person responds to human needs with love.

Let me say again,
these aren't the means of **attaining** that life;
these are the **effects** of that life—
this is what that life looks like in a human being who is spiritually alive.

What this life **is in its essence** is still a mystery.

We can but repeat the words of the Apostle:

**“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.

**I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God
so that you may know that you have eternal life.”**

It is not our attainment, any more than our physical life is our attainment—
it is God's **gift.**

All we can do is receive it **by faith**—
believing God's promise that this life comes to all those
who recognize their need of his grace and mercy,
and turn to Jesus Christ in faith.

It belongs to all who **“believe in the name of the Son of God.”**

Life—This is what the gospel is all about—
a passing from death to life.

So I ask again—
Are you alive?

Have you been brought to life by the regenerating work of the Spirit of God?

Have you been born again?
And are you displaying that new life which Christ gives?

**“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God
so that you may know that you have eternal life.”**

If you are a Christian this morning,
these words ought to give you assurance—
as you see the evidences of life—
the fruit of faith, of obedience, and of love.

What a great gift this is—
that you have been born into the family of God—
that you are his child, now beginning to display the family likeness.
You ought to thank him this morning,
and pray that this family likeness may become more and more visible.
May you rejoice in the life, the eternal life—
the life of the age to come, which you are even now experiencing.
Nothing can compare to it—nothing.

But maybe you're not sure if you are Christian this morning—
maybe these tests of life have left you wondering
whether you are really alive after all.

You're not really sure what you believe;
you know that the righteousness of God
has not been your concern in the way you live;
And demonstrating the love of God
is far from your motivation in your dealing with most people.

The first thing you need to do is ask whether you really **want** to change.
Do you want to live differently?
Do you want to experience this thing we've been talking about—
this life, this divine life, this eternal life?

You can change a few outward behaviors and maybe you'll pass for being alive—
like an artificial plant.

But if you want to experience real life,
let me refer you to one last botanical illustration.

In John 12:24-26 Jesus says,
**“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies,
it remains a single seed.**

**But if it dies it produces many seeds.
The one who loves his life will lose it,
while the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”**

To experience this new life which is found in Christ,
you must first die.

You must die to the desire to run your own life;
You must die to the desire to determine for yourself what is good and what is bad;
you must die to the desire to seek after the goods of this world
rather than the goodness of God.

Otherwise, if you try to hold on to that life,
you will remain a single seed, and that's all—
dead and lifeless.

but if you say No to that life,
and turn to Jesus Christ,
you will in that death to the world,
find the life, the eternal life, that is found in the Son of God.

He offers you life—
don't wait another day to receive it!

Great Biblical Themes

“Life”
1 John 5:11-13

What is the necessary condition for being a Christian? What distinguishes the true believer from one who is a Christian in name only? What is the essential reality from which all else flows? According to John, it is **Life**—*eternal* life. This morning we explore the richness of this term as it captures the fullness of God’s love toward us.

I. Eternal Life:
The Supreme Blessing of the Gospel

II. Eternal Life:
Comes to Us in Christ

III. Eternal Life:
Manifests Itself in Our Lives

A. The Doctrinal Test

B. The Moral Test

C. The Social Test

IV. Eternal Life:
A Gift We Receive by Faith

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” —1 John 5:13

Sermon Response—

“Life”
1 John 5:11-13

- Why is “life” often presented in the Bible as the supreme blessing of the gospel?
- How is this “life” related to Jesus Christ?
- How is “eternal life” something that we can possess now?
- Why is the notion of this new life so important for understanding what it means to be a Christian?
- What are the three tests of life that John gives us in 1 John? Which of these three gives you the most assurance that you are alive? Which is the most difficult for you?
- Read John 12:24-26. Why is death an essential part of receiving the life Jesus provides?