

## Eternal Life

1 John 1: 1-4.

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### Part Fourth. LATER MINISTRY.

There is a remarkable connection between the different writings of John. His gospel gives us the life of the Son of God, after describing His divine glories; and almost immediately after His resurrection He disappears into heaven. The epistle then takes up the stream of eternal life that flows down from Him in heaven — the Rock of ages that was smitten on the cross. There is a connection, too, between this epistle and that to the Philippians. There we get the apostle Paul in active devoted service in suffering, giving opportunity for this eternal life to show itself; but here John takes it up, not in connection with service, but showing what this eternal life is in itself, flowing, too, through circumstances down here.

"From the beginning," a remarkable expression. In the gospel it is, "*In the beginning,*" there as connected with the divine glory of the One who was the Son of God. There was a difficulty, the Spirit of God felt in writing of this subject, because "That which was from the beginning" was also the One of whom John could say, "Which we have heard, which we have seen," etc. John had not seen the divine glory in the abstract, but he had seen it in the One who was down here — God manifest in flesh. It is very important to notice in the gospel, that it is not only said that He was the Word, but also that the *Word was God*. He took the place of being the Word.

"The life that was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." God never made a revelation of Himself except through the Son, whether in creation, in the re-establishing of things after the flood, in His dealings with Israel, or afterwards with the Church. There was no medium through which the divine glory found expression save through the Son: everything that came out about God came out in the Son. (The term *word* in the Greek implies more than it conveys to our minds in English. It implies the power by which thought exists *and flows* out — all divine intelligence, and all divine manifestation of it.) People might conceive of God's taking a seraph and making a manifestation of Himself in him, but that would have been *all*. But in sending His Son we get not only the message, but the *personality of the Son*. Before the creation of the world God existed, and existed Father, Son, and Holy Ghost — ever subsisting in perfect blessedness. God is self-existent. There never was a commencement of Deity, and that is where the human mind fails. Tell me of a life that is never to end, and I can understand it; but where a self-existent One is put before me it is beyond my apprehension. Man cannot grasp an effect without a cause.

Christ was God. This is very important in the present day, when there are all sorts of false religions abroad, and when another class is making an immense effort to cast off altogether all religion. One thing is common to both. The one — infidelity — throws up its shoulder, and says it will not own a Being that is self-existent; the other says, "I own the Being, but I am perfectly competent to form my thoughts of God, and to form a system for myself." He has written a book, and if I read it with a humble heart it puts everything straight between me and the living God. This book is the expression of One who existed in Himself before the world was. God might have sent from heaven a description of Himself; but that was not His way. No; He sent the man Christ Jesus; the babe that was born, and laid

in the manger at Bethlehem. That is the One John is speaking of when he says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have *handled*" — showing how completely the Lord had been there among them. John's head had been on His bosom; He could wash their feet — "concerning the Word of life:" of might imply part of a thing, but this is rather *about* or *concerning*.

In verse 2, he speaks of the life itself. "The life was manifested." They had seen this Person, and in Him eternal life. The One who walked on the sea, who fasted forty days — He had got life in Himself; He had the reins of life in His hand; He could command Lazarus to come forth from the grave, and to return to the life which he had before; and so, too, the widow of Nain's son. He could command them to cast out their nets, and draw all the fish together round the ship. All was under His control. But besides this, He had life with the Father before the world was.

Turn for a moment to the source of this "living soul," the life which Adam had, and which in him was received. God spake, and there was light; but He did not tell man to come forth out of the ground. He did not make a woman start up out of Adam's side. He *took* the dust and made a man, and He *took* the rib and developed it into the form of a woman — putting special honour on man, distinguishing him from the rest of creation; and then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. In Gen. 2, we get the scene in which this life was meant to act. (v. 8, etc.) Man was put into this garden to dress and keep it — made the head of the whole system. If he stood, it would stand; if he did not stand, it would not. There was everything in it the mind of man would like, just suited to his pleasure as a creature down here, working round itself. It had only to recognize God as its centre, and all would remain. How did man lose it? It is a most important question. People often speak of Satan as if he were omnipotent; but he is not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent. He is a subtle spirit, who has had six thousand years to watch the heart of man; and he knows that man has a heart rebellious against God, and so he is a very awkward person for a poor, weak, guilty man to have to do with. You have only to look at his limited power, and at the stupidity of his actions, to see that it only needs a mind superior to his to overcome him. Well, how did he act? He got Eve, and presented the fruit to her. Directly she gave up the thought of subjection, the desire of self-exaltation weighed on her. "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat." (Gen. 3: 6.) Taking something forbidden by God, that is lust; if because it is good for food, that is, the lust of the flesh; if pleasant to the eye, the lust of the eye; or if to exalt you, the pride of life. She should have said, I would rather be in a limited space than snatch at anything."

Turn to the temptation of the Lord Jesus. Satan tried Him, too, with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. He had no second principles to act on. He could not hope to move a person out of a position, but by tempting him out of subjection to God in that position. There is a great difference between the way he came to the woman and to Christ. He went to Eve, saying, "Look at this beautiful bit of fruit; what is the taste of it?" The woman's answer should have been, "God has given me everything, and I would rather be without tasting it than turn my back on God." When Satan came to Christ he knew he was not coming to One unsuspecting of evil, but he puts things in a very different way. "This is the One that I have heard announced as the Son of God; cannot I puzzle *Him*? I will give Him a question with two points, so that if He takes one He must stumble on the other. *'If thou be the Son of God, command these stones that they be made bread.'* God does not like man to be hungry. You are hungry. What can more accord with the divine thoughts than that you should just tell these stones to become bread?" Christ looks to Scripture, and takes from Deuteronomy (the book which tells how that for Israel all blessing was dependent upon obedience), "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every

word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matt. 4: 4.) What can Satan do here? There is no lust of the flesh. Christ was God's servant, and was quite satisfied to let God take care of Him; so He could answer, "God can keep me alive without bread, and it is more like the Son of God to *do without* bread than to turn stones into bread for My own relief." Then Satan comes more strongly; he quotes Scripture. "*If thou be the Son of God*, cast thyself down from this pinnacle. If you are really the Person you say you are, give some visible, distinct proof. God has said that His angels take charge of you. Do this, and then it will be perfectly plain, and the whole question will be settled between us — "Here is the lust of the eye — something to *see*, and not to trust. The Lord did not want anything to see, and again draws from Deuteronomy, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." It is tempting the Lord to ask for a sign when He has said, "I am with you." Satan again tries: "You shall have all these kingdoms if you will just take it at my hand." "Ah!" says Christ, "I know you. You want me to give you what is due to God alone." He has stood as quietly as the target for all the temptations to strike against; but directly Satan lets out that he is God's adversary, Christ bids him depart — "Get thee hence, Satan."

Thus Satan ever works with the mind of man, to make him exalt himself. But not so in this eternal life that we get in Christ. Everything that beats in you, that makes yourself the centre, is not of this eternal life. Everything of this eternal life puts you into connection with the Father and the Son. This life is not perpetuity of existence. The life drawn from Adam has got the poison of sin in it, and men go on feeding on things that have poison in them, and they find themselves in the place of judgment before God. The mind that man has got in fallen nature is not capable of entering into the things of God. We must have a different order of being. God has thoughts of His own.

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." John says, "This is what we present to you — the Lord Jesus Christ, not now as on the cross, but as the One in the glory in whom is this eternal life and whence it comes." Have we got this eternal life, having the character of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? What a marvellous thing! There is a Man at the right hand of God, a Man who has been put to death, a Man whom everybody thought contemptuously of and despised, and God has given everything in the wide universe into His hand, and He gives eternal life to His people — a life of communion with the Father and Himself. I can thus know the things of God; and when flesh and heart fail there is the One that carries me through, into the reality of what I have in Him. Often I can only comfort myself with this. I say to the Father, "Thou seest Christ as He is. My portion is what Thou dost apprehend about Him." I say to the Son, "Thou hast revealed God as Abba, but I have only a faint idea of it. Thy divine apprehension is the only true one." The fact that this eternal life brings out communion with the Father and the Son is the mark that it is eternal life. People are very fond of talking about themselves; but when I get God's thoughts and Christ's I am in a very little place. You never act the measure of sin till you have found that it is immeasurable, and you never find it immeasurable till you see God's face hidden from His Son. That death of the Son removed sin from the presence of God, so that God could act in mercy to the whole world. He knew what God's mind was, and He settled it all. I am *nowhere* when I am there. All is mine — all, because God and the Son are mine, and have given me the power of communion with the Father and the Son. The whole question is settled between God and Christ, and my soul can enter into the Divine Presence, and shall I go into heaven with a long list about myself, and begin, "But I"? When God has settled with His Son about sin, do I want to begin, "But I"? A strange place to bring "I" in! God is to be let in there — Christ is to be let in, but not self — in the scene where God is all in all.