

The Issue Is Life  
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## The Issue Is Life

Tonight is going to be something of an introduction. I'm going to paint with broad strokes and just try to say three things. Three important things that have to be said. And in the weeks to come, Lord willing, we will investigate these things further. I realize that what I am going to say tonight might raise more questions than it answers. Truth always starts that way. Truth has a way of destroying before it can build up. It puts into question things that aren't real, so that it can replace them with what IS real. The Lord is always seeking to do that in our hearts.

So I'm going to introduce three basic questions tonight for your consideration. And the Lord will need to answer each of them for you in a way that is much bigger than words. We are trusting Him to do exactly that.

I'd like to start tonight with a few very basic questions. They are basic questions, but they are very important questions. Our answers to these questions are going to determine the direction of our hearts, and certainly the direction of these meetings. What we believe about these questions is going to set us on one of two paths.

Here's the first question – **“what is Christianity?”** Another way to ask the question would be this – “why did Jesus come, and what did He accomplish?”.

I am quite aware that we generally assume ourselves to be able to answer that question. Every Christian has some sort of answer to that question that has satisfied them at least at one point or another. Everybody has something they can say about Christianity. But it would be great if all of us could temporarily suspend our most familiar ideas and definitions and present our hearts to Christ as those who are always in need of His light. After all, spiritual understanding is NOT our understanding of spiritual things. Spiritual understanding is the understanding of the Spirit Himself, HIS understanding, which only He can write on our hearts.

So what is Christianity? Before I share a few remarks about this question, let me first say a little bit about what I believe Christianity is NOT. Sometimes if we start by sharing some things that dislodge preconceptions, then we'll find ourselves in a better position to see the Lord.

Christianity is not a religion. It never has been. What I mean by that is that Christianity has nothing to do with intellectual belief in certain creeds, or modification of certain behaviors, or teachings regarding what things a man or woman can do to be pleasing to God. I realize that much of the Bible is often presented in these ways, but that is only because we have made a religion out of what was never meant to be a religion. Jesus did not come in order to present us with good doctrines. He did not die on the cross simply to forgive us for shortcomings and provide a perfect model of behavior. He did not drop off a moral instruction manual and then ascend to His Father.

And I'm not trying to be picky about words here. I'm not talking about cerebral definitions, or matters of theology. I'm talking about what Christianity is at its heart and core. Christianity is not a religion. **Christianity is a Life. Specifically, it is the Life of Jesus Christ in the soul of man.**

So, it is not a belief, or a collection of beliefs...although seeing that Life will cause and shape many beliefs. Its not a behavior, although experiencing that Life will certainly have an effect on behavior. It's Life. It's an experience and expression of the Life of God. **Christianity, at its very root, and in every branch, is exclusively concerned with a life that is given to a soul, a life that is formed in a soul, and a life that is glorified in a soul.** Christianity is, in fact, Christ Himself living in you. That is what each and every human has been invited to partake in. And that is what each and every Christian has been born again to experience – whether or not we've ever heard it explained that way.

Christianity is the Life of Jesus Christ. But lets not move on too fast. Assumption is always our enemy in this thing. Our presuppositions are always wrong because they are OURS. And so we really need to ask the Lord, and keep asking the Lord, to help us let go of the things we've assumed we know. I'm not trying to insult anybody or question anyone's intelligence. Intelligence isn't the issue here. The issue is darkness and light. The natural mind is a very dark place. It has been that way since the Garden of Eden. Paul says that it is, by nature, enmity with God, hostility towards God. The sooner we can learn that, the better.

So with that in mind, lets ask the next fundamental question. **What is Life?** Christianity is Life. It is the Life of the Son of God. But what is Life? Generally speaking, people assume that we know the answer to this question because we are alive. Since I am alive, I must know what life is. But that is not true. You do not naturally have what the Bible calls life. You have existence. You are an active and energetic being. You could say that you have biological life. But that is not the Life of which Scripture speaks. **What the Bible calls Life is not something that we have naturally. And therefore, Life is not something that we can know naturally.** This is very important to understand.

I realize that your heart is beating and that you ate food today and that you feel things and move places. That is all very true. But Jesus stood right in front of the Jews in his day and said, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of God and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves". Obviously, whatever Jesus was calling "Life, these human beings did not have. Another time Jesus said "Let the dead bury their dead". So, in His eyes, the ones He called "dead" were able to bury corpses.

One of the most important things for us to realize is that **this thing that God calls Life is completely and utterly FOREIGN to the natural man. It is a foreign substance. It is entirely other-than what we are, what we know, what we have. There is, in fact, nothing familiar about it.** Until we are born again, which quite literally reads "born from above", we know absolutely nothing of it. And even then, new birth is only the introduction to Life. It is certainly not the same thing as learning Life and walking in Life.

Life is something that we don't have and we don't understand, and therefore it is something that must be revealed. It must be taught to us by the Spirit who is Life. Jesus said, *"All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and*

*the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him*". (Mat 11:27) We will talk about this more later. But my point for now is that Life is something that belongs exclusively to God. In fact, Life is what God is. "In Him was Life". "I am the resurrection and the Life".

And I'm trying to stress this point right now because of our many misunderstandings. If you're like me, many of you may have tried to spend your time and energy and zeal **reading about His life and trying to make your life like His**. That is such a common idea in the church today that it doesn't even strike us as strange. But it should! It should strike us as completely absurd. That would be like you reading about a snail and spending all of your time and effort seeking to mimic snail-hood. Or reading about a molecule of CO<sub>2</sub> and giving your heart to the imitation of Carbon Dioxide. I mean, that doesn't make sense. And yet we try. And we have conceived and taught more ways to try this than could ever be numbered. **We are a very determined people. But determination cannot make death turn into Life.**

Much of what I did in the name of Christianity was an effort to somehow, in some way or another, learn about the Life of Christ, and figure out a way that I could act like it, talk like it, and love like it. In other words, I had this horrible misunderstanding. I had this idea that, although immensely popular, is equally bizarre. I actually thought that, with the right teaching and the right effort, I could be something like Jesus. But what a contradiction to the Scripture. What a contradiction to the truth. What a contradiction to the cross of Jesus Christ.

The Life of God is something that you are not. It is not something that you already have by nature and simply need to learn how to adjust or shape. We may not say it quite like that, but that's what we normally teach. "Here are the things that you can do live a Godly life. Here are the 7 steps, or the 3 keys". But none of those things bridge the gap. None of those things deal with the basic and fundamental fact that "Flesh gives birth to flesh, spirit gives birth to spirit. The flesh profits nothing. It is the Spirit that gives Life". T. Austin-Sparks says it like this – at our very best, we still fall infinitely short of the beginnings of Christ.

The Bible says in many places and in countless ways, that you and I are born dead in transgression and sin. You're not going to change that with 7 steps. You're not going to spray a little religious perfume on that and make it smell like life to God. This is a serious problem. And it is one that demands the putting away of what is formerly there, and the increase of something all-together new. And again, we have much to say about all of that. But right now I am just trying to make a very simple point. **Life is something that belongs to God. It is something that you are not. And the only way that you and I can even begin this journey is to be born anew into a completely foreign, and utterly alien, kind of life. This is the miracle of new birth.**

New birth is not a second chance. New birth is not simply a pardon for offenses. New birth is precisely that – it is a new birth. Not new in respect to time. In other words, it's not a newer version of Jason. It's not new in the sense that we're trying this thing again. **It is new with respect to nature and character and kind and substance. It is altogether new. There is nothing old about it.** It is life from above. It is life indeed. It is something altogether new. When you and I are born again, we are given something that is, in every way, contrary to our nature. It's not an add-on. It's not an addition to the package, or a way for God to fill in the gaps

where we have lack. It is a new life. "Old things have passed away, behold the new has come."

So, what is Life? It is the nature and character and substance of God Himself. It is God's makeup, His kind, as Peter says, we become partakers of the divine nature. And that nature is comprised of the will of God, the mind of God, the expression of God, the love of God. And even though each of these words are familiar to us as words, the substance, the reality of the will, mind, love, and nature of God are things that we will find to be totally different than and contrary to what you and I call human life.

Once again, none of this is meant to offend anyone. The Bible says these same things in words that are much more harsh. Sometimes our familiarity with Scripture makes it seem less severe. The prophet Isaiah tells us that our righteousness is filthy rags. Paul tells us that the natural mind is hostility toward God, entirely unable to know Him or submit to Him. James tells us that the wisdom of man is natural, sensual, and demonic by nature. Consider what Paul quotes of the Old Testament in Romans chapter 3 in order to prove that all men, Jew and Gentile, are in desperate need of another kind of Life.

**Rom 3:10** *As it is written: "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE; 11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS; THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD. 12 THEY HAVE ALL TURNED ASIDE; THEY HAVE TOGETHER BECOME UNPROFITABLE; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, NO, NOT ONE." 13 "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN TOMB; WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY HAVE PRACTICED DECEIT"; "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; 14 "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS." 15 "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD; 16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR WAYS; 17 AND THE WAY OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." 18 "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."*

Paul is setting the stage for Romans 4 through 8 here. And the only way to convince a human being that they are in need of what God calls Life, is to show them that their life, in every way, has fallen short of the glory of God.

And the solution for all of this is not learning to discipline the wrong life, but rather gaining and being conformed to the Life that is Christ. Can you see the difference? Paul says,

*Col 2:20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

His point here is simply that regulating yourself in ways that have to do with "do not touch, do not handle", all of this self-imposed religion...he says, "it looks smart, it looks good outwardly, but it is of no value against the indulgence of the flesh". Paul knew what the flesh was capable of. And He knew what it was utterly incapable of. In fact, he says that "in the flesh dwells no good thing". Paul understood that the issue was Life, not effort. It is life, not religion.

And so, you see, God has provided for us so much in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has not provided simply instructions for godly living. He has not simply provided forgiveness for our enumerable shortcomings. No, it goes far far beyond all of that. **God has provided Life. He has given us a way to be partakers of the very life of God.** To be grafted into Himself. I am in the Father, you are in me, and I am in you. Union. He has given to us the life of God.

But it doesn't stop there. The gift of life is how we are born. We are born from above. But Christianity doesn't stop with the acquisition of life. It is not merely the gaining of something that you could never be. No, it is far greater still. **Provided for us in the gospel of Jesus Christ is the means whereby we can actually come to know that Life as the life of our soul.** You see, we don't just know Christ as a Savior who we appreciate or a Lord who we serve. No, we actually can come to know Him as the Life that defines and moves our soul.

In other words, **we can grow to know His Life in such a deep and transforming way, that His nature comes to be the nature that works in us. We can come to know His mind in such a way where it is the Light by which we understand all things. We can come to know His will as more than commands or words on a page. Paul says, "for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure". We can grow up in the love of God. I'm not talking about Hollywood's ideas about love. I'm talking about abiding in Him who said "I am love", and learning to relate to Him and His body in the fullness of love. These are all things that proceed out from His life. These are realities that we experience by partaking of and knowing His life.**

And yes, certainly, these things will effect our behavior and our beliefs. But that is merely the unstoppable byproduct of knowing Christ our life. Peter tells us that all things of life and godliness proceed from knowing Christ our life. **The issue is Life. Life given. Life known. Life formed. Life glorified.** The life of God in the soul of man. This is what Christianity is. It is Life.

For some of you this may sound a bit foreign. But I promise you that it is not foreign to your Bible. As you begin to see it, you will see it on every page of both Old Testament and New. The issue with God has always been Life. Starting with the Tree of Life in the very beginning, and ending with a people grafted into that tree through the cross of Jesus Christ.

So that leaves us with one major question for tonight. And this is all very much an overview. These are all things that we will look at in some depth if you continue to come to these meetings. But here is the last major question for tonight. If you have partaken of Life, if you have been born from above, **how is it that you come to know the Life that is in you?** That is an absolutely essential question, and we can only say a little bit about it tonight.

In one of my teachings I made the following point. You would think that knowing Christ begins when God teaches you something you don't know about Jesus. **But in reality, knowing Christ begins when God teaches you something you don't know about knowing.** I'm not trying to sound clever. I am being as serious as I know how to be. Before we really are able to grow up in knowing Christ, we have to

let the Lord deal with our heart about a different kind of knowing, a different kind of seeing, a differing kind of learning.

Remember a few minutes ago when I quoted that Scripture from Matthew. Nobody knows the Son, and nobody knows the Father except the one to whom they are revealed. Jesus is saying something extremely important here. There is only one way to know God, and that way is when God reveals Himself to the human soul. The Scriptures are perfectly clear on this. **You cannot know God with your mind. You cannot know God with your ideas, your reason, your study, your effort, your zeal or pursuit. God dwells in inapproachable light. You cannot approach Him with the natural mind. But He can and will approach you with His Light if we will humble our hearts and let Him shine His Truth.**

Christianity is the life of the Son of God. And that life is in you in its fullness immediately upon new birth. You'll never get more of Christ. Not now. Now after you die. You have all that can be given of Christ. He doesn't come to you in pieces or increments. **But what you lack, and what I lack, is the true knowing of Him that grows in us as He is revealed by His Spirit.**

Think about a human baby for a moment. They are conceived and born into a totally new and wonderful realm and reality. They immediately have the fullness of human life. They can never get any more life. They don't need any more life. But even though they have the fullness of life upon birth, they are completely unable to enjoy their life, experience the capacities and purposes of life, walk in the potential that life affords, so long as they remain ignorant of what it means to be a human. And so growth for them is never really about getting more life. **Growth is the process whereby the life that they already have develops into it's potential through knowing all that life means and all that life is.** And so a human baby grows by learning language and movement and relationships and skills and things of that manner.

Now translate that into the spiritual realm. Your soul is made a partaker of Christ when you are born again. Immediately you have received the life of God. You will never need more. There is not more to have. But what do we lack? Where is our great lack? **We lack the knowledge and understanding of what we have. We know that we have received Christ. But we do not know the Christ that we have received. We do not know Him as the life of our soul.** And we cannot experience or enjoy the capacities and purposes and gifts and potentialities of the life of God if we remain ignorant of it...any more than a baby human can experience the potential of human life if it is kept alone in a dark room for 75 years.

**Friends, I submit to you tonight that this is our primary problem. All of us. We have received a Life that we remain largely ignorant of. And rather than learn the Life of God by the Spirit of Truth, we often build and plan and work and teach largely according to what we imagine Him to be, and what we imagine Him to desire.** That is the reason for our dissatisfaction and disillusionment as Christians. That is why, I trust, some of you have always known that there must be something more to this.

Christianity is not religion. It is Life. And if we will learn the life that we have been given...if we learn to see and know and understand the life of God that has been given to us, then we can grow up. If we will come to know that Life, through the revealing that is from the Spirit of God...then we will know what Paul calls

"transformation by the renewing of the mind". We will find ourselves putting off one man, and putting on another quite naturally. We will find ourselves changed by that indwelling Life, conformed to that indwelling Life, constrained by that indwelling Life....in such a way and to such a degree that eventually we can say with the Apostle Paul, "For me to live is Christ!". "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me."

But my primary point for right now is that **this learning is a work of the Spirit of God**. This is not about my discipline to obey outward commands. This is not about my determination to do certain things and cease doing other things. This is not about praying countless hours and ministering to the poor. **All of those things can grow out from life. But none of them will lead you to life.** Christianity, at its very center, is about learning the life of God that has been given to the Christian soul.

I'd like to close simply by sharing with you a handful of relevant Scriptures that perhaps you can jot down and spend some time with on your own time. I'll read them to you now, but you don't have to turn with me now.

**Mat 16:15** He said to them, But who do you say I am? 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 Jesus answered and said to him, You are blessed, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal *it* to you, but My Father in Heaven.

**Joh 14:26** But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all thing

**Joh 16:13** However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.

**1Co 2:9** But as it is written, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard," nor has it entered into the heart of man, "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 But God has revealed *them* to us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knows the things of a man except the spirit of man within him? So also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 But we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which *the* Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of *the* Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

**2Co 4:6** For *it is* God who said, "Out of darkness Light shall shine;" who shone in our hearts to *give* the brightness of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

**Gal 1:11** And, brothers, I make known to you the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not according to man. 12 For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught *it* except by a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you heard my manner of life when *I was* in Judaism, that I persecuted the church of God with surpassing *zeal*, and ravaged it. 14 And I progressed in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my race, being much more a zealot of the traditions of my

fathers. 15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and having called *me* by His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the nations, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood;

- ˘ **Eph 1:17** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in *the* knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

There are many others that we could look at, but I mention these for your consideration. Before we learn anything in these times together, we need to understand what learning is, how it works, and Who our teacher is.