

"Zoe" & "Psuche" Life

And explanation of these two Greek terms used in the original New Testament writings.

by Steve Bray

The Greek word "zoe" is used to express the form of "life" that Jesus gives to His followers. *"I have come that they may have life {"zoe"}."* (John 10:10) This heavenly form of life needs to begin within our soul today. We gain access to this life by being raised spiritually with the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit into the heavenly realms with Christ. *"But God...because of His great love...made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."* (Eph. 2:4-6)

While words tend to have various meanings and uses, we intend to keep our discussion as simple as possible. Spiros Zodhiates in his Greek Word Study defines "zoe" as follows: "life" referring to the principle of life in the spirit and soul. Distinguished from bios, physical life...of which zoe is the nobler word, expressing all of the highest and best which Christ is and which He gives to the saints. The highest blessedness of the creature."

We sometimes miss the deeper meaning of our Lord's teachings when we are limited to our English versions of the Bible. For example, there are various types of love that can be expressed in the Greek by using different words. We tend to lose the original meaning by grouping them all together using one term.

Similarly, there are different Greek words representing different forms of life. In contrast to the "zoe" life that comes from above, the original New Testament Greek uses the word "psuche" to express the lower form of life that comes from the flesh. For example, Jesus said, *"My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life {"psuche"}."* (John 10:17) If we do not look at the Greek in this case, we cannot fully understand what Jesus chose to lay down in order to please His Father.

Most people think that Jesus was referring to laying down His "bios," the Greek word representing physical life, at the cross in dying for our sins. However, He specifically speaks in this case of laying down His "psuche." While this word also has several different variations in meaning, sometimes translated soul, we will be using it when referring to the lower form of life that is developed through the works of the flesh.

The Greek word "sarx" is translated flesh. The Bible reveals how fallen man uses the "sarx" to develop a "psuche" form of life. This "psuche" life is what separates people from

the eternal "zoe" life that God intended for man to possess. The "psuche" life comes from the world and its things. Because this lower form of life is dependent upon temporal circumstances for its support, it is very unstable. It is that up and down life that the people of this world, including many in the church, just naturally experience. This is what Jesus chose to lay down in order to share with His Father in the eternal "zoe" life.

If we will follow Jesus by laying down the old "psuche" life that originates in the flesh, we too can enter into His eternal "zoe" life. This should help us to better understand what Jesus expects when He instructs us to follow Him. Here is where we find one of those "ifs" that has separated many of God's called-out people from His life of promise.

"If anyone desires to come after Me {into the heavenly realms to share in the eternal 'zoe' life}, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his {"psuche"} life will lose it, but whoever loses his {'psuche'} life will find it {the eternal 'zoe' life}." (Matt. 16:24-25)

Those who seek to develop their own "psuche" through the flesh are living in the lower form of life that man developed after Adam lost the eternal life. The Scriptures clearly distinguish between these two different forms of life. In this age of fulfillment {the New Testament age}, we are to follow Jesus by laying down the lower form of life that man develops through his own fleshly activities so we may live by the Spirit and share with God in His eternal life.

"For if you live according to the flesh {the "sarx"} you will die {you will experience a dying spiritual life}; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body {the self-originated form of life}, you will live {you will receive the eternal life}. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Rom. 8:13-14)

The Scriptures are constantly contrasting these two different ways of walking. We will either walk by the flesh according to our own desires or we will permit the Spirit to lead us as He pleases. The first way leads to an ever dying form of life. Yes, it can be built up and provide some pleasure for a season, but it is constantly dying. That is why people are always looking for something else or something new to do. They are constantly searching for a means to support their spiritual life.

"Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." (Eph. 2:3)

"For when we were in the flesh {living by the lower order of life}, the sinful passions...were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered {from the lower order of life}...that we should serve in the newness of

the Spirit..." (Rom. 7:5-6)

"For the law of the Spirit of {"zoe"} life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled {fully met} in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh {the lower and carnal form of life} set their minds on the things of the flesh {temporal things}, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death {resulting in an ever-dying form of spiritual life}, but to be spiritually minded is {"zoe"} life and peace. Because the carnal mind {which naturally seeks to develop the "psuche" life through the flesh} is enmity against God... So then, those who are in the flesh {those who direct their steps in order to please their own fleshly desires} cannot please God." (Rom. 8:3-8

Many think they can be forgiven for their sins and someday go to heaven to share with Christ in His eternal "zoe" life even while they continue to live by the flesh. But God's Word clearly reveals how they are sadly mistaken. Those who live by the flesh already have a dying spiritual life, and they know it from experience. God does not leave anyone deceived.

In contrast, those who consistently walk by the Spirit experience an ever-flowing supply of Christ's Living Water welling up into everlasting life. *"Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting {"zoe"} life."* (John 4:14)

The Greek word for eternal is "aionios." It has the meaning of "constant, abiding and everlasting." In other words, the "aionios zoe" life that Jesus gives to His true followers is constant and abiding. It is not like the up and down "psuche" life that remains dependent upon what is taking place in the world around us. Those who experience a dying spiritual life whenever their outward circumstances are in disarray can know they are still relying on what they can work up through their own fleshly efforts. They are still finding their spiritual life from the temporal realm.

Jesus came to reveal how God originally intended for man to walk. He did not waste His time trying to find life from the world. He received His spiritual sustenance from above as He permitted His Father to live through Him. He said, *"My food {the means for receiving spiritual sustenance from heaven} is to do the will of Him who sent Me..."* (John 4:34) And then He instructed us to follow Him along the same course. We can only expect to be raised up into His heavenly spiritual life "if" we have truly died to the lower order of "psuche" life.

"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death {dying to the "psuche" life that is developed through the "sarx"}, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection {sharing with Him in His eternal "zoe" life}. (Rom. 6:5)

Jesus said, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal {"zoe"} life..."* (John 10:27-28) Jesus is not referring to a hypothetical theory.

Many claim to have "eternal life," and they make this claim without ever choosing to follow Jesus in His way of life. But it becomes obvious they have been deceived by the devil as they daily reveal how they have never lost their constantly dying "psuche" life.

A life devoted to the interests and enjoyments of this world, spent and wasted in the slavery of earthly desires, will result in the loss of God's eternal life and everything else. While this self-originated form of life can support the soul for a season, when the soul is cut off from the temporal pleasures of this world it will find itself empty and void. In contrast to the eternal "zoe" life, which is constant and abiding, the "psuche" life does not abide forever.

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. {Notice the absence of placing the things of the world into good and bad categories.} If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father {His life} is not in him. For all that is in the world" the lust {desires} of the flesh, the lust {desires} of the eyes, and the pride of life {the source of the "psuche" life} is not of the Father {this form of life does not have its source in Him} but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides {lives in the eternal "zoe" life} forever." (1 John 2:15-17)

Many people seem to think they can live by their own desires and for their own purposes as long as they do not commit gross sin. But God's definition of living by the desires of the flesh entails everything that turns man to the temporal {natural, of this world} realm in search of fulfillment. It is not possible to serve God and serve self at the same time. "No one can serve two masters." (Matt. 6:24) We cannot simultaneously walk by our own will according to our selfish desires and pursuits, no matter how innocent they may appear, and also walk by the Spirit of God.

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is... Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth. For you died {to the old self-originated form of life}, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col. 3:1-3)

*"Brethren, join in following my example, **and note those who so walk**, as you have us for a pattern. For many {in the church} walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ {they are unwilling to follow Jesus in His way of the cross}: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly...who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship {our place of life} is in heaven..." (Phil. 3:17-20, Emphasis added)*

God planned to have a universe where everything had its source in Him. His purpose was to display His nature of love in everything He created. Man was to be His means for displaying this divine love in its highest form. But man separated himself from God's life of

holy love the "zoe" life" when he chose to have an independent "psuche" life of his own. We now have a world filled with self-centered and self-seeking people spreading their carnal darkness wherever they go. *"This wisdom {that seeks to live for self} does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic {of the devil}. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there."* (Jam. 3:15)

There is a blessed simplicity in the true Christian walk. It is not a complex list of things that we must do in order to be "right." The way of the Pharisees has never made anyone "right" in their heart. While God insists that we fulfill the righteous requirements found in His laws, those who attempt to produce their own righteousness will never truly sense that their inner nature is right.

We must receive the "gift of righteousness" that enables us to "reign in {"zoe"} life through the One, Jesus Christ." (Rom 5:17) He is the One who has a life of "true righteousness and holiness." (Eph. 4:24) It is by putting on His life and living through His Spirit that we can have the inner witness of being partakers with Him in His divine nature.

The one thing we must do is choose whether we are going to be led by our own desires or by the Spirit. If we will simply live by Christ's Spirit, He will lead us into all truth and reveal His eternal "zoe" life within us.

"But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (2 Cor. 11:3)

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh {do not live by the "psuche" life}, to fulfill its lusts." (Rom. 13:14)

"I say then: Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh... But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." (Gal. 5:16, 18)

It is by dying to the complex strugglings of the flesh, which includes trying to make ourselves righteous under law {by human effort}, and learning to receive life from Christ in the heavenly realms *by faith*, as a branch receives life from the vine, that we can begin naturally producing the divine fruit of His Spirit. Our highest glory will be found in living as mere vessels that the Spirit uses to express the Son's life of righteousness in our daily walk. We are to be vessels of His Kingdom-life of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17)



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