**Practicing Living and Dying While Tasting Eternity**

By Lynn Warner

After the Fall, Adam and Eve were prevented from eating of the Tree of Life. As we read in Genesis 3:22-23a: *“And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden”* (KJV). From this verse we learn that by eating from the tree of life, a human may live forever.

In the Garden, man was in the Presence of God – but man was sent away from the Presence of God and the tree of life. Death, or separation from God, had entered the world because God had said in Genesis 2:17, *“of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”* (KJV notes: lit. in dying you will die.)

In a sermon, someone once stated there are 2 things to learn on earth: how to live and how to die. We get lots of daily practice “living” and “dying.” The world teaches one way of “living” and “dying.” But Scriptures teach another way. We are to follow the Way of Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. How did Jesus teach us about “living” and “dying”? First, He defined the terms; then He lived as our example as *“the firstborn of many brethren”* (Romans 8:29b, NASB). Here, Jesus is the firstborn of those who have eternal life.

Jesus defined “eternal life” in John 17:3: *“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”* So we see that in living we are to begin knowing our great God, and our Savior, Jesus.

He already knows us intimately: *“I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me”* (John 10:14). Those who believe hear His voice, and He gives them eternal life: *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand”* (John 10:27-28). God allows us, in a way, back into “the Garden,” to the place where He dwells, and to the tree of life. We are allowed back into His presence.

There have been records of orphaned babies who died from lack of the nurturing presence of a mother – from the experience of being known and loved. If that presence is there, the baby begins to know and love in response. Jesus didn’t leave us to be orphans, but gave us another Comforter, the Holy Spirit. We are strengthened and comforted, and our spirits are quickened by His Word: *“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh prolifeth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63, KJV). We have the experience of being known and loved, and in response, are enabled to know and love God and others in a new and living way. Our spirits are relationally alive.

Jesus also defined “dying.” For example, in Matthew 10:38-39 He states: *“And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”* We are to “die to sin,” and “die to self” (the flesh or old nature). We know our bodies are mortal and will die, but our spirits are alive to God and will live in relationship with Him eternally. When we die, we will be eternally separated from sin. Our bodies will be changed at the resurrection, and we will have a resurrected body, eternally present to God.

So what attitude should we have toward death? We can read Jesus’ attitude toward death. For example, returning to John 10:11, we read, *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.”* Verses 14-15 say, *“I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so I know the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”* (Remember also Psalm 23, which is often read during situations regarding death, especially verse 4: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: FOR THOU ART WITH ME; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”*) The focus in death is laying down our lives for others, and being in God’s presence, for He is with us.

We also have Paul’s attitude in facing death. We read in Philippians 1:21, 23-24: *“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain…For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”* Again, the focus of Paul’s life as a follower of Jesus, was laying down his life for others, and being in the presence of the Lord.

Is this our outlook, as Believers today? Perhaps we Christians in America have too much of the world’s culture in us, because we seem so afraid of death. Engraved on old tombstones, I have seen phrases like these: “Died in Jesus Christ,” “entered into glory in Dec. 1842,” and “went home to be with the Lord.” Is that our attitude? Unfortunately, the world often succeeds in captivating us with its culture, and we focus on the disease, the symptoms, the doctors, medications, and money, while losing our courage and focus on God. How can we speak and use language to glorify God more, and strengthen each other more in this area?

In conclusion, death entered the world because of man’s sin in the Garden of Eden. God had said if Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, *“in dying, you will die”* (Genesis 2:17, literally). Death is “separation from.” Adam and Eve died spiritually – they were separated from the presence of God. Thus began lifetimes of separations and losses of many types and many deaths. Those who are not in Christ when they die also experience the second death – eternal separation from God, because there is an eternal death, or hell, *“where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”* (Mark 9:48).

Life and death are the two issues we must face here on earth: How do we live? How do we die? The world and God are enemies on these questions, because the world is in rebellion against God. The world defines everything differently from God, including “life,” and “death,” and suppresses the truth of God. It does not give Him the glory. We, as Christians, are witnesses of His grace, mercy, and love in life and death, as well as His judgment against sin. Most of all, we celebrate being accepted in the Beloved, being known by God and knowing Him, enjoying His presence in this life, and looking forward to entering into eternal glory.