

H Y M N S

Concerning the Experience of God as Life

- 1 O how glorious! O how holy!
God is the eternal life!
Full, unlimited, and pow'rful,
Pure, and merciful, and bright!
In this life are all His riches,
All His nature, love and light.
- 2 O how loving! O how gracious!
God Himself is life to man!
He in man hath made a spirit
That He might fulfill His plan.
'Tis His heart's delight and longing
E'er to be received by man.
- 3 O what love and grace unbounded!
God as life to man doth flow!
He no more is hid in secret
But Himself to man doth show,
First in flesh and then as Spirit
That His life all men may know.
4. How approachable! How near us!
God in Christ our life to be!
Christ is God in flesh incarnate,
Manifest for man to see.
Died and risen, now He enters
Into man, his life to be.
- 5 O what wonder! As the Spirit
God as life to man is shown!
'Tis His other transformation,
He as Spirit thus is known;
Men convicting and inspiring,
He within them makes His home.
- 6 O how glorious! O how precious!
Thus the Triune God to know!
First the Father in the Son came,
Now the Son as Spirit flows.
When in man the Spirit enters
God as life He doth bestow.
- 7 How mysterious, yet how real!
God Himself now flows in me!
In my heart, with me in oneness,
He has come my life to be.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
I will praise unceasingly!

heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). With a sense of exultant joy, Paul thus began his description of all of the blessings that have been bestowed on the believers in Christ. All of the blessings are according to the mystery of His will, the good pleasure of His heart, and the purpose of the One who works everything according to the counsel of His will (vv. 9-11). In verses 4 through 14 Paul presents the exceptionally rich blessings with which God has blessed us. He divides the subject into three parts corresponding to the blessings given to us by the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In a manner comparable to the writing of Paul in Ephesians 1, this hymn reviews all that the Triune God has done to impart His life into man. The subject of the hymn is not simply God or merely eternal life; it is God Himself as life. And this God who is life desires to become the very source of eternal life in man. The feeling of this hymn, like Paul's blessing in Ephesians 1, is one of praise with exultant joy.

Stanza 1 declares that eternal life is just God Himself. This life is both glorious (expressing God in His person) and holy (representing God in His intrinsic nature as separate from all that is common). God's life is unsearchably rich in His divine attributes of unlimited majesty, unparalleled purity, inestimable power, and unmatched love and light. He "alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen nor can see, to whom be honor and eternal might" (1 Tim. 6:16). God is God. We are His creatures, and we sense a great gulf between us. It seems as if we could never touch the life of such a high and holy God.

But stanzas 2 and 3 lead us into His unsearchable love and grace in which He reaches man. In His love and grace God Himself becomes life to man. The eternal life of God has become the portion of the believers in Christ. In order to become life to man, God first created a spirit in man to receive God as life. As believers, we receive the Spirit of God into our human spirit. This Spirit of God is the life-giving Spirit who transmits into us the life of God (1 Cor. 15:45). In this way God fulfills His plan which is according to "His heart's delight and longing" (cf. Eph. 1:9-10). Stanza 3 declares further that His love and grace are unbounded in view of the fact that God as life is neither fixed nor stagnant, somewhere off in the unreachable heavens: "God as life to man doth flow! / He no more is

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the

hid in secret / But Himself to man doth show.” God is no longer hidden in secret—no longer dwelling in unapproachable light. He has revealed Himself to man first as the incarnated Son and then as the life-giving Spirit “that His life all men may know.”

“How approachable! How near us!” The One who once dwelt in unapproachable light is now available to man. Through the wonder of incarnation, God has become accessible to us. The apostle John spoke of God’s incarnation in terms of unimaginable intimacy: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1). When he speaks of “that which was from the beginning,” John refers to the Word who was in the beginning and who was God. Later he says that the Word was life and the life was the light of men (John 1:4). Then he speaks of the Word becoming flesh and tabernacling among us (v. 14). It was this incarnated Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was from the beginning. John and the other apostles had heard, seen, and beheld Him; they had even “handled” Him—the eternal God became touchable in the way of intimate fellowship. “Christ is God in flesh incarnate, / Manifest for man to see.” Through years of familiarity, many hearts have become dull of feeling, unable to sense the sweetness and intimacy of our dear incarnated Savior. He is God the Son as the Shepherd seeking us, the lost sheep, finding us, and bearing us on His shoulders to His house rejoicing (Luke 15:4-7). Stanza 4 continues, “Died and risen, now He enters / Into man, his life to be.” The incarnated God has passed through the process of death and resurrection. Not only before His death and resurrection did men touch Him, but even after His resurrection, in His spiritual body, the eternal One was so approachable: “Then He said to Thomas, Bring your finger here and see My hands, and bring your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing” (John 20:27). Through incarnation God as life has come to man that man may contact Him and receive Him through believing.

The focus of stanza 5 is the practical and actual way in which man is able to receive God as life: “O what wonder! As the Spirit / God as life to man is shown! / ’Tis His other transformation, / He as Spirit thus is known.” Paul highlighted this “other transformation” in such a simple yet profound utterance in his first Epistle to the Corinthians: “The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit” (15:45). Clearly the last Adam refers to the Lord Jesus Christ who in resurrection became the life-giving Spirit. He, as the incarnated God, was the last Adam in the four Gospels. Then in the Epistles we meet Him as the pneumatic Christ, the Spirit, who now transmits the life of God into man. The revelation of the Bible thus indicates that Christ and the Spirit are one for the carrying out of the divine purpose. The Triune God flows Himself into man as life

by means of the Spirit. First the Father comes in and with the Son to make the eternal life available to man. But this life cannot be given to man as an external element; it must be introduced into man by spiritual birth. The Lord spoke to Nicodemus of such a process: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Without knowing that the last Adam became the life-giving Spirit, we do not know how this transaction can be accomplished. We are helped further to understand this process by 1 Corinthians 6:17: “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” The Spirit of God brings life into man by entering into man and becoming one with him. God’s purpose for the human spirit is clearly revealed in Romans 8:15-16: “For you have not received a spirit of slavery bringing you into fear again, but you have received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father! The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.” The Spirit of God now indwelling our human spirit carries out a dual function: First “convicting” us of all of the negative things in our being that distract us from God’s life, and then “inspiring” us with all the positive aspects of the life of God in us. “Men convicting and inspiring, / He within them makes His home.”

“O how glorious! O how precious! / Thus the Triune God to know!” Stanza 6 is a jubilant synopsis of the foregoing verses. The Triune God has passed through a long and wonderful process to complete His eternal purpose of giving Himself as life to man. “First the Father in the Son came, / Now the Son as Spirit flows.” When this flowing Spirit enters into man, He bestows God as life into man. This is glorious and precious! God comes and tabernacles with us. He has passed through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. He now comes as the Spirit to enter into our being to mingle with us and to be our life, our life supply, and our everything!

The first six stanzas of this hymn are full of rich and vivid utterance expressing how the eternal Triune God becomes life to man. Nevertheless, they are somewhat objective and doctrinal. In stanza 7 the author makes everything personal and experiential. When we sing this hymn, this verse should lift us into a triumphant exultation of praise and thanksgiving. “How mysterious, yet how real! / God Himself now flows in me!” There is no longer an objective presentation of the glorious plan and purpose of God. There is now an intense proclamation of one who is experiencing the unutterable joy of God flowing within. He is enjoying an extraordinary encounter of the divine with the human in which divinity mingles with humanity. Now his heart has become the dwelling place of Christ (Eph. 3:17). God and man are one! “Hallelujah! Hallelujah! / I will praise unceasingly!”

by Gary Kaiser