

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.
(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)*

#05-1124

Passed Out of Death into Life

January 24, 2011

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life [eonian life; Life of the Ages; age-during life], and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. (John 5:24 NASB [CV; WNT; YLT])

This is a very interesting verse, especially the phrase *passed out of death into life*, that can be, and probably is, misinterpreted to support the doctrine of an afterlife *in* death, as if one will never truly die even though the body does, or even a spiritual resurrection when one first believes, as if one will not require a physical resurrection of the body. Neither of these interpretations is correct.

So, the question is posed: What did Jesus mean by *passed out of death into life*? When does one not come into judgment, but passes out of death into life? I will give the answer, then explain it.

The answer is discovered in the verses that follow (5:25-29) that speak of the second or general resurrection. Simply, Jesus was not referring to the first resurrection that will occur at the end of our present eon, but to the second resurrection of the rest of the dead that will be raised up to appear before the **Great White Throne** judgment at least one-thousand years from now (Revelation 20:5; 11). Thus, verse 24 is explained by verses 25-29.

(25) "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. (26) "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; (27) and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. (28) "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, (29) and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. (John 5:25-29 NASB)

We need to be clear that Jesus was presenting the Jewish view of one resurrection (i.e., **a** resurrection) of the dead, not **the** resurrection from among the dead of which Jesus is the firstborn (Colossians 1:18). As you might recall, Jesus' disciples were puzzled when He first mentioned the phrase *rising from the dead* (Mark 9:9-10). They were puzzled because they had been taught that there was only one general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. This view is supported by Paul when Ananias the high priest, along with some elders and an attorney, brought charges against Paul before Felix the governor.

(14) "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; (15) having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. (Acts 24:14-15 NASB)

Notice that *these men* refer to the Jews that brought the charges against him. Paul clearly acknowledged that their hope was **a** (i.e., one) resurrection that will include two groups of people. This resurrection will occur in *an hour*, that is, at one moment in time, when the dead, all those in the tombs, will hear the voice of the Son of Man who has been given the authority to execute judgment. There is only one judgment that fits this description; it is the Great White Throne judgment of John's Patmos vision (Revelation 20:11-15), at which time the righteous will be **saved, yet so as through fire** (1 Corinthians 3:15), and the wicked will face judgment that leads to the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death [of deeds] (Revelation 20:14; 21:8). The righteous are the believers who will receive the promise of immortal life but who are disqualified from participating in the *out*-resurrection because they did not conquer while in mortal bodies. The wicked are the unbelievers.

Now, let us return to verse 24 and explain it based on the second resurrection.

The first thing to note is that Jesus did not state that one had to believe in Him but rather had to believe Him, God the Father, who sent Him. Prior to this, it is recorded that the Jews sought to kill Jesus for claiming equality with God (John 5:18).

In response to His claim that God is His Father, Jesus told the Jews that were listening: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner** (John 5:19 NASB).

Notice how Jesus did not try to defend His position; He simply stated the fact of His relationship with His Father. We could say that, when Jesus told them to believe Him who sent Him, it was His way of stating: Believe God the Father who said: **This is My beloved Son, in whom I well-pleased, listen to Him** (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35).

The second thing to note is that *eonian life* is given to all who believe in the Father's declaration and identification of His Son. I realize that most translations use the term *eternal* life, but, as I have stressed many times in previous writings, concordantly speaking, the word *eonian* is more accurate. As noted above, other translations use the word *age*, which has the same meaning as *eon* or *eonian*. See issues #03-09131, June 15, 2009, *Eon (Age), Not Eternal or World*, and #03-0982, November 23, 2009, *Immortal Life & Eonian Life*.

All of us who believe in this age have the promise of immortality or, if you will, an immortal life, that is, the promise of a new body that is no longer subject to death and in which sin has no place. Eonian life speaks of having immortal life in an age. The question is in which age one will come into immortality. Will it be at the end of our present wicked age, meaning one's immortality will come through the first or **out-resurrection and transfiguration**, or will it come through the second resurrection to appear before the **Great White Throne** judgment that follows the completion of the **Kingdom Age**?

In light of verses 25-29, Jesus was not referring to eonian life during His coming Kingdom Age but to life in the age after this in what Peter called **God's Day** or **the Day of God**, when righteousness dwells on a new earth (2 Peter 3:12), which I believe is either a series of ages or one long age that ends with what Paul called **the consummation of the ages** [eons] (1 Corinthians 10:11 CV). Contextually, in John 5:24, *eonian life* refers to the promise of immortal life that comes through the second resurrection at the Great White Throne and not the *out-resurrection* that Paul sought (Philippians 3:11).

The third thing to note is that one who has eonian life will not come into judgment. For those who know their Bibles, this should cause at least a pause. After all, according to Paul, **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ** (2 Corinthians 5:10), which he also calls **the judgment seat of God** (Romans 14:10). Do Jesus and Paul contradict each other? No; they are in complete agreement. Paul spoke in general terms without specifying which judgment; however, Jesus specified the judgment as the Great White Throne that leads to the second death, without naming it directly.

There is more than one judgment, just as there is more than one resurrection; the question is in which judgment one will be. Actually, there are three judgments: 1) the judgment of the conquerors at the *out-resurrection* that leads to reigning with Christ in the coming Kingdom Age; 2) the judgment of the righteous believers at the Great White Throne that leads to life in God's Day; and 3) the judgment of the wicked at the Great White Throne that leads to cleansing in the lake of fire, which is the second death.

Finally, this leads to the phrase *passed out of death into life*. In a general sense, this hope applies to all mankind, but especially to believers. However, in the context of John 5:25-29, there is only one group in view, that is, the righteous believers who received the righteousness of Christ and the promise of immortal life when they first believed. They are excluded from the *out-resurrection*; nevertheless, they are saved, yet so as through fire. They will not have a part in the second death but will pass out of death of all kinds and into the life of the Son of God, **for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable** (Romans 11:29).