

Religion without Zoe

by Victor Hall

visionone
[] .org.au

Religion without zoe

Victor Hall – Brisbane Christian Fellowship

1st Edition: February 2009

Published by **visionone**

© Vision One Inc. 2009

c/- Toowoomba Christian Fellowship

10 Old Goombungee Road

Toowoomba Qld 4350

Phone +61 1300 885 048

Email: info@visionone.org.au

For a full catalogue of our Christian music & publications,
please visit:

visionone

.org.au

Contents

Introduction	1
The terror of a resurrection without zoe.....	1
A season of heat and pressure	2
Born from above or natural religion.....	3
Reproached as fundamentalists.....	4
Understanding abundant life	5
His zoe in our flesh	5
Reconciled in His body of flesh	6
Born from the dead by the word.....	7
Messengers with no message of hope	7
Hold on to the hope or be leavened	8
If moved from the hope we will die	8
Members of His fleshly body, the church.....	9
Pre-evangelism.....	9
Hearing the word of you.....	10
Brought into a process	11
Changed at the last trumpet – something new.....	11
Religion without zoe – the harlot church.....	12
Suffering so righteousness may increase forever	13
Our destiny under pressure	13
Walking after the flesh.....	13
Rest and cease from striving.....	14
Peace comes from feeding the inward man.....	15
Seasoned by stress.....	15
Outward perishing – inward renewed.....	16
He wipes away our tears	17
The place of everlasting crying	17
A brief pilgrimage of dying to enter into life	18
Christ our life	18

Introduction

While travelling overseas recently, I had cause to think again about why we exist as a congregation in the body of Christ here in this city. As I interacted with church folk in various places, I was reminded of the horror of living a religious life without access to the eternal life that comes from above – *zoe* life. So, in this short meditation I will seek to refresh us in our understanding of these basics of the gospel. And I ask as you read this, ‘What is your view of the Christian religion? How established are you in this most fundamental aspect of the gospel – *zoe* life?’

The terror of a resurrection without *zoe*

While I was staying with friends in Italy, we visited some graveyards together and I took note of the procedures that governed the management of those places. What really struck me about the implications of all the religious procedures was the terror of a resurrection without *zoe*. I noted that there was certainly a promise of a resurrection, but it is a resurrection without *zoe*; a resurrection without being born from above. I saw the fear, the terror and the horror of a religion that is Christian by name but does not deliver new creation, the eternal life that comes from above. Gal 6:15. Instead, it delivers the things of this world repackaged in religious trappings.

Let me sound a warning to some in our own congregations who think that church attendance is enough to secure eternal salvation. We can come along to all of the meetings and still not participate in new creation. We must never be deceived into thinking that it’s only those ‘out there’ who

have a problem. Let us remember, there are many in Christendom who have received *zoe* life, not only today, but also throughout the centuries of the church's pilgrimage.

A season of heat and pressure

It is only when our faith is placed under pressure through reproach and accusation that the subject of the hope of the gospel is raised and we show where we stand. Such a season has been upon us.

Recently in the media, the whole issue of what it means to be born of God was brought into the spotlight. It was implied that those who claim to be 'born of God' belong to a 'cult' because they believe that God reveals Himself to individuals and that they can know Christ personally. One media commentator made the suggestion that the most dangerous people in the community today are those who believe in an absolute God and claim to have a personal relationship with Him.

Ours and other fellowships were identified by the media in relation to this point. At the same time, and in direct contrast, World Youth Day was portrayed as an acceptable religious expression. So, what do our own youth know and what do you know? We can know and experience what it means to be born again. And we can understand that this life from above is something that is more than just finding religion through an internationally sanctioned body such as the World Council of Churches, or some other body that lays out a normative code of religious belief.

Born from above or natural religion

We understand that there are basically two sources of religion – that which is from above, and that which is from beneath. For ourselves, we have found that illumination *does* come to a person, confirming the need to be born from above. And then, with the illumination, we found God's enabling power to receive such an experience. Have you had that experience where the Lord communicated with you about your need to be born from above?

On the other hand, without an illumination of the need to be born from above, the only religion we can have is 'natural religion' – that which is sourced from this world. It is not from above, from God; it therefore can only be 'of the earth, earthy', from 'beneath'. 1 Cor 15:47,48.

The hope of the gospel is that we can be a child of God here and now, and be raised to immortal life on the day of resurrection. This resurrection is only attained if we appropriate Christ's *zoe* life here and now. On the other hand, a resurrection without *zoe* is a resurrection to an eternal mortality and corruption; a resurrection where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. Isa 66:24.

During my travels, I sensed something of the terror of that kind of state. I saw the horror of those who are alive trying to reach beyond the grave through special church services to help their loved ones who had died, find peace with God. I also saw that where religion without life from above operates, a saint appears to be a 'super' human Christian, instead of the biblical definition of one who is simply born from above of the life of God.

In the resurrection to mortality – the resurrection of the damned – there is no hope of resolution, no movement. There is only eternal consciousness where everything is in conflict with itself. Those who are part of this resurrection will be imprisoned in this present universe, which becomes the everlasting lake of fire, and which has a kind of eternal mortality under wrath, in corruption and in total silence. Every knee will have bowed and every tongue will have confessed to the rightness of their judgement. Can you begin to see the horror of a religion without *zoe* and the terror of a resurrection without being born of the *zoe* life of God?

Reproached as fundamentalists

Good news has been proclaimed to us! Can we hear the gospel of God as it breaks upon our ears? ‘Except one is born from above ...’. John 3:3. In this present season while suffering reproach, we might well ask, ‘For what are we being reproached?’. One church leader said of us, ‘They’re not a cult, they’re fundamentalists’. I suspect there were negative connotations in the use of that word. However, by definition, Christian fundamentalists are people who believe the Bible is true and that it is God’s letter written to all men. A fundamentalist should be someone with *zoe* life; someone who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and knows it. Sadly, some media reports portrayed this as delusional and therefore dangerous!

We have nothing of which to be ashamed. Unless we have *zoe* life by which we demonstrate personal relationship with the Lord, we are of all men most miserable.

1 Cor 15:19. History has recorded for many hundreds of years, the horror of religion without *zoe* life. It is important that we now understand the terror of a resurrection without *zoe*. The Bible is emphatically clear on what that resurrection will be like. 2 Peter 3:7; 1 Cor 15:21-26.

Understanding abundant life

As we live the Christian life, it is important for us to understand the absolute impossibility of having abundant life without being born of *zoe* life from above. John 10:10. We cannot have abundant life by just believing, by being positive. We need to study our Bibles and see where life is referred to as either *psuche* (soul life) or *bios* (biological life). Then we need to understand what *zoe* life is, for it is very different from either of these.

His *zoe* in our flesh

When did this *zoe* life first come to mankind? It was manifested in the womb of the virgin Mary. Christ is the pattern and substance of each individual's resurrection body. This is in accordance with the promise that God made to Abraham that in his seed, Christ, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Through the suffering of Christ on the cross, His life was given to us so that we could be included in the corporate body of Christ. This was promised to King David by prophecy and called 'the sure mercies of David'. This *zoe* life is now resident within our hearts but is not yet manifested in our mortal physical bodies in resurrection power.

Zoe life is a treasure in an earthen vessel, the mortal body. 2 Cor 4:7. It is in the soul and spirit awaiting the day of resurrection when the voice of the Son of Man will call to all those in Christ and will change their lowly physical bodies and fashion them to be of the same substance as His own resurrected body. And He does this by His *word*. At the last trumpet, the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of Man. 1 Cor 15:52. And on that day, the dead in Christ will stand up with physical bodies changed to be exactly like His immortal body. Those who are alive and remaining on the earth will be transformed to the image of Christ while they are yet alive. 1 Thess 4:17. This is the hope of the gospel.

Let us not be moved away from this hope, for this is the hope of the gospel. Let us take care not to forget when we are put under pressure, that this is our hope. Let us not become caught in arguments over these issues. It is encouraging to see congregations standing in the midst of pressure, keeping their counsel and keeping their eyes on the goal of the upward call in Christ Jesus. Eph 6:13; Phil 3:14.

Reconciled in His body of flesh

‘Although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body.’ Col 1:23. In this verse Paul reflects on the way of the world. We are not of the world, and are not to live in a worldly way.

Remember, the body of Christ is not some ethereal concept. It’s His *fleshly body* in which we now participate

and will partake of physically. On the resurrection day, we will receive the actual substance and ability that belongs to His resurrected body. He has reconciled us in His fleshly body, the body of His flesh. We are members of His body, of His flesh, of His bones. Eph 5:30. We eat His flesh, the substance of His body; we drink His blood, the reality and power of His life, when we participate in the communion bread and wine. John 6:53.

Born from the dead by the word

On that day, the day of resurrection, when He comes to proclaim your name to the dust of the earth, you will come with Him. If you are one of the dead in Christ, you are joined with Him in calling forth your name, the name of your resurrection body. And this body will be re-composed in its material substance by the word of God. For 'the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of Man' and they shall live and stand up from the dust. John 5:25. They're born from the dead. This is a great miracle, but no greater miracle than the birth of any child from the womb of a mother.

This is our hope and we should not be moved away from this hope.

Messengers with no message of hope

There is religion that belongs to the natural man who is not born again, which only offers a resurrection to mortality. Many follow this religion, not understanding the hope of the gospel. I grieve for the thousands of young people who attended the recent World Youth Conference, seeking life from those who are called messengers, but who have no message of hope.

If the message is not about being born of eternal *zoe* life, then what is the message?

Among us also there are some who don't understand the message. They have a kind of 'believism' and they hope that will be enough. They live in the Christian community and try to follow the polite social interactions of Christian living. At the end of their lives, complimentary words will be spoken about them at their funeral service. They trust that will be enough to get them to heaven.

Hold on to the hope or be leavened

So I make the point again. It is impossible to participate in abundant life without being born of eternal *zoe* life from above. If we are moved away from that hope, then there is only a regression to legal, religious living in a vain hope of eternal life. And the alternative to demonstrating Christ's life is to be stirred by issues of all kinds, which is an indication of the operation of some kind of religious leaven that is causing ferment in our lives. The only way we can avoid this is to receive the hope of the gospel, come to peace, and stand steadfast and firm to the end.

If moved from the hope we will die

What a marvellous hope this is! 'He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body.' Col 1:22. Christ the Head of the body is in heaven and we are reconciled to Him when we become members of His body on earth. His life is in our mortal bodies. He as the Head is *immortal*; and in our mortality, because we are joined to Him, we receive even now, life from His immortality.

‘Yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him [the Father] holy and blameless and beyond reproach – if indeed [now here is your condition] you continue in the faith.’ Col 1:22,23. This refers to the faith for a resurrection to immortal sonship that God has promised to us in the body of Christ, for which we are now born from above as sons. Don’t be moved from this faith, because if you follow the way of fleshly religion, you will die. You *can* lose your hope.

Members of His fleshly body, the church

‘If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved [or removed] away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation [that means the creation of mankind] under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.’ Col 1:23,24.

In these verses, Paul refers to that fleshly body of Christ as the church. Now, we are members of that body and participate weekly in the elements of it by eating and drinking the communion. So, as we participate in *zoe* life, we need to consider how we are to share this life with others.

Pre-evangelism

While meditating on these matters, I have also been thinking about a concept that I call ‘pre-evangelism’. We are to bring people to faith, but we have to go beyond that.

I was in a wonderful church recently where there was an evangelist preaching a pre-evangelistic word. A number of people there were not yet born again and he was preaching to them on the parable of the seed and the sower. Matt 13. The preacher had a bottle of sand and a bottle of seed, and he threw sand and seed onto the floor of the church and then compared sand and seed. He talked about what the word is and what it would do for them and then he called them to come and 'meet the word'. But he didn't actually tell them what the word was. His ministry was very good, very evangelistic, and people came weeping, crying, kneeling and rejoicing that they had heard and been illuminated by his preaching. They rejoiced that there *was* a word for them.

Hearing the word of you

However, some of the Christians from that church were saying to me, 'But from here – the pre-evangelistic word – where do we go?' At present, in the programme of that church, those who have been illuminated by this pre-evangelistic word are invited to participate in a house group where it is hoped they will receive the necessary consolidation. That same weekend, I spoke in a seminar and presented something to them of the word of their eternal life; the word of their hope. So, I also taught on 'the seed and sower'. I was teaching on 'the word' and how it multiplies through offering; how 'the word of you' can come *to* you. There is a necessity for all of these approaches to be taught, so that Christians can receive and grow in Christian life and understanding.

Brought into a process

In most churches today, there is a need for an effective pre-evangelism word to be preached – but then we need to move beyond pre-evangelism. The word preached has to bring us to the word of *zoe* life. It can't just be an illumination; there must be a *word* that comes to each individual – their word, the word of their new creation. It's not just an anointing that falls upon us. We must be born from above and come into the context of the body of Christ where we can grow into the full stature of our sonship.

So, remember, when folk are coming into our meetings, they're hearing a word of pre-evangelism. Perhaps this is so for you as you read this today. If so, seek out someone who can discuss with you 'the word about you' – the word of your *zoe* life. They will be able to introduce you by prayer into the experience of being born again and then you can be nurtured in fellowship and begin to 'grow up'. Come and be built together in a local church; come into the body of Christ.

We must come past the first stage of the gospel where we began to touch the cross. The word preached has to be that which brings us into the body of His flesh so that we can be processed for the whole of our life and grow up into sonship. We must persevere. To inherit sonship, being born from above, is the very essence of the gospel.

Changed at the last trumpet – something new

We need to come to the place where, in spite of all that comes against us, we are not moved away from the hope

but are growing up into the measure of the stature of the fullness of our immortal Head, Christ. Eph 4:13.

And on the day of resurrection, we are changed and become as Christ our Head is. He is immortal; we are yet mortal, but the inward man is being renewed as we grow up. 2 Cor 4:16. Then, on that day, at the last trumpet, the outward man is changed. 'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye ... at the last trumpet.' 1 Cor 15:52. It is a special feast day; a resurrection day. The trumpet always proclaims something new. It proclaims the entry into something, not the end of something.

Religion without zoe – the harlot church

But religion without the *zoe* life from above is the hallmark of the 'harlot church' of Revelation chapter seventeen. The harlot church is false religion and it uses Scripture to establish its validity, but does not bring the *zoe* life of God to its hearers. It misappropriates the promises of the Scriptures that belong to the new creation, which is both individual and corporate.

It seeks to take from us our right to participate in the divine nature that belongs to Christ, reducing salvation to only a removal of the penalty of sin. Its message will perhaps promise to put us back into 'a garden of Eden', like Adam. This gospel restores us back to what Adam had – and there are others that do not even do that!

Suffering so righteousness may increase forever

No! We are going to a new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells, where we're part of the administration of the Son of God. 2 Peter 3:13. There will be a huge multitude called 'the bride of Christ' married to Him. Rev 21:2. They are an administrative New Jerusalem, the headquarters of the new heaven and new earth from which righteousness will increase forever and ever. This is why we are suffering. We have joined the fellowship of Christ's suffering so that we may also fellowship in His coming kingdom.

Our destiny under pressure

We are all under pressure, stress and affliction. But we believe in a new heaven and new earth and accept that we are to suffer pressure and stress in this life. We learn patience through grace in the midst of these pressures. We learn that we must fulfil our destiny *under* pressure. Yes, I too cope with a great deal of pressure but there is grace; and, yes, I do sleep well every night. Am I under any special stress? No. It's just the volume of things coming my way; and they come my way because it's part of my destiny for them to do so. Do we as Christians expect to 'float over' everything in some 'ethereal, non-stress' mode? No, of course not! Things *do* wound and bruise us.

Walking after the flesh

There are those who live by 'believism' and trying to be perfect by the law of their own flesh. Jesus said, 'That

which is born of flesh is *flesh*'. John 3:6. Then, 'You must be *born again*'. John 3:7.

Where, in Scripture, do we read about walking religiously after the flesh? We read of the wretchedness of the 'other law' in the book of Romans chapters seven and eight. This law is active when we try to apply everything of Scripture by the strength of our own flesh. This causes another 'fire' to be lit. The law of sin becomes active. The tongue becomes a world of iniquity and it is set on fire by the flames of hell itself. James 3:6. When this happens, our behaviour becomes wretched and comes under judgement.

What is born of God has the capacity to love and not sin. 1 John 3:9; 4:7. We need to put off behaviour that does not belong to our new creation. As we walk by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome sin.

Rest and cease from striving

People ask me, 'What is the secret to life that you have found?' It is to rest and cease from our own striving; to cease from our own machinations and arguments, our own rights and wrongs. When abused and accused, when injustices happen, we have to put the day behind us lest a root of bitterness spring up. Heb 12:15. So, let's put yesterday behind, forgetting what is behind and reaching out to what's before us. Phil 3:13. And, remember, we don't have to endure for twenty-four hours; we can go to bed and sleep – be at peace and rest.

Peace comes from feeding the inward man

And if you are not able to sleep, fall to your knees, pray and commit the day and your life to God. You are a son of God. Let Christ's *zoe* life work, and you will come to rest.

Some escape to the television, but that only causes agitation. We are better to take time out to pray and find peace. We find peace by feeding the inward man. Read the Scriptures, wait on God, and enter into rest. 'Labour to enter into rest.' Heb 4:11.

An amazing thing happens when we enter rest. The new creature within – that which is born from above – begins to be manifest. The new creature is at peace; it is not hating, but is loving. It is not arguing, it's not complaining. It's coming to peace. There is quietness and confidence; faith is operative. We commit all to the Lord and lie down in peace to rest and sleep.

This is the fruit of the Spirit, and if we are walking by the Spirit in the way we should walk, our life and work will be what it should be. Where we are suffering unjustly, then we commit our soul to Christ who is our faithful Creator. Our lives are in His hand.

Seasoned by stress

As I said to a manager who was under a great deal of stress in his work, 'Do you want to escape from it now? This is the work that God gave you. This job came by a word of prophecy to you when it seemed impossible for this door to be opened.' There was a time of affliction and trouble because of the word and then the Lord opened the door.

Now, in his work he suffers the stress of a manager. It doesn't matter what kind of stress we have. The tribulations and stresses we endure as we do God's work on earth are seasoning us for our work as sons of God in the new heaven and new earth.

So I'm not expecting to 'retire' from stress. And for those who have retired from the work force, join the team of workers in the body of Christ and you will suffer some stress, but your work will be rewarded.

Outward perishing – inward renewed

As we grow older, our outward man is perishing, and that brings a degree of stress. 2 Cor 4:16. Be in faith, for our times are in the hands of God. Only the day we are to die, is the day we *will* die. So every day before that, we are *living*. And we need to live those days in faith, for He has numbered them for us to live and to fellowship in Christ's sufferings. Is this not the *zoe* proposition? The inward man is now being renewed. The outward man is perishing.

It's only in this world, on this planet, in this life, in mortality, that we participate in the sufferings of Christ. For on that day – the day of resurrection – there is no more suffering, no more death, no more sorrow, no more sighing or crying, for the 'former things have passed away'. Rev 21:4. So, let us see the process in this 'vale of tears', as necessary. Psa 83:7. The pressures and the stresses are formative, and they are Christ's sufferings.

He wipes away our tears

I remember years ago reading something of the sufferings of the martyrs in the middle-ages and of a sister in Christ who was terribly tortured for her faith. And the Lord was there with her in her sufferings, wiping away her tears but not alleviating her pain. He bore all of our pain, so why would He not save her from her pain, I wondered? Why would He stand by and wipe her tears? It is an interesting thought. He wipes away our tears every day but He lets us cry our tears. The Old Testament records that He takes every tear and puts them in a bottle. He remembers our tears. Psa 56:8.

What does He mean by ‘preserving the memory of our tears’? We will look back upon this vale of tears through which we walk and we will remember and rejoice. The memory will not be lost but we will weep no more, we will cry no more. There will be no more pain, no more suffering. Rev 21:4. This is the final result of *zoe* life.

The place of everlasting crying

For the dead in Christ, the *zoe* resurrection is the beginning of the millennium. Rev 20:6. But there *is* terror and horror for those without *zoe* who are raised at the end of the thousand years. However, at the end of that ‘day’ there is a resurrection to mortality and damnation, where there is everlasting crying, weeping, pain and grief. And there would be a constant confession, if only the mouth could open, ‘He did all things well. My judgement is just. My punishment is absolute.’

A brief pilgrimage of dying to enter into life

Don't you be in that number. Don't be part of that, for He wrote your name on a seed, and that name was recorded in Christ when He came and took up residence in the womb of the virgin Mary. And He was with us after the resurrection, as the apostles bore witness. They were the church of the firstfruits, as it were, right then, and they saw His glory, full of grace and truth. They saw and handled the very essence of their resurrection body. They were invited to touch Him when He walked among them.

It's as if He said, 'Thomas, this is you. Handle Me and see. Continue in the fellowship of My sufferings'; and, 'Peter, you will die as a martyr for Me'. There is a brief walk, a brief pilgrimage of stress, pressure, reproach. Being marked out for death, we die daily. And then on *that* day, the day of our death, we enter into life.

Christ our life

Everyone needs to be saved. Everyone needs to be born again. He comes calling your name today as you read these words. If you are hearing this call, respond to this word that is appropriate for you. Talk to someone who you know is born again, or you may contact the church office and someone will talk to you about these things.

'Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision [being a Jew or a Gentile] avails anything.' Gal 5:6. Nothing avails except a new creation. He makes the two, Jew and Gentile, in the body of His flesh, one new man, thus making peace. Only in the body of Christ, in a local fellowship, can you grow up and find such peace. There is no legal salvation. There is

only a 'born salvation' in the context of participating in Him who is your *zoe* life. Christ is your life; your *zoe*. Col 3:4.