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## ON ETERNAL LIFE, AND THOSE WHO RECEIVE IT.

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"I give unto them eternal life."—John x.

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It is the high privilege and blessing of those who have believed in the Lord Jesus, that they have "eternal life." He speaks of this in the statement of the gospel of the grace of God in John iii., "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have *eternal life*; for God so loved the world," etc. (verses 15, 16). And so, too, when the Lord speaks of the blessing actually bestowed upon His people, "I give unto them *eternal life*, and they shall never perish," etc. (John x. 28.)

How fully are our souls thus met in grace! The blessing is wholly *through* and *in* another, and yet we come into the possession of it. Every step tells us of what that depth of mercy must be, which was in God's heart, to provide salvation, and *such* salvation for lost sinners. Although a soul that the Holy Ghost has awakened to some apprehension to what sin is as before God, and what the awful consequences of sin are to the offender himself, has formed some estimate of what it really is, and what the *mercy* must be which could reach

it in such a condition, yet all that estimate is faint and feeble, when compared with the ability of the same soul to judge of these things, when once the Spirit has truly taught the preciousness of the blood of Christ in putting away sin.

It is thus that we learn what we are redeemed *from*; we see that the wrath of God is declared from heaven against sin—as sinners we are obnoxious to that wrath—but mercy has come in and provided one capable of bearing the wrath in our stead; and this one, the only one capable of meeting the infinite requirement, is the blessed Son of God—Himself “ God over all, blessed for ever.”

It is possible for us so to contemplate the love of God as to overlook in a manner His wrath against sin: if we do this we fail in rightly valuing the love, for we let go the true apprehension of *what* the love has done, and

- *where* the mercy has met us;—let us have our eyes rightly opened to discern the *lessons* which God sets before us in the cross; for it is only thus, that, as believers, we can form an estimate of sin as before God, and mercy meeting the sinner: we thus see what we have been redeemed *from*. Every question about sin is taken up by God, and met in the person and the work of His blessed Son—every thing by which the conscience could be troubled is answered by His precious blood once shed, with which he has entered into the presence of God, and by His living person is appearing there for us.

In order, however, rightly to apprehend our blessings, we must know what the character is of that life which we have received; it is *eternal* life, but what is its value? What do we learn about it in the word? Now if we knew that it was given to us by God—that it came to us in virtue of the precious blood of Christ—that it stands in contrast to that condemnation which belongs to us through nature and practice; if we learned these things about it, we might well deem its value to be utterly

beyond what we could have asked or expected that God could bestow upon us sinners.

But is this the whole truth as to its value and character? In the first epistle of John, chap. i., the Lord Jesus is spoken of as being the eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; he is spoken of as the life that was manifested and that was seen. This then we must bear in mind, that the Lord Jesus, the blessed Son of God, who was with the Father before all worlds, is Himself the "eternal life" as well as the "true God." When he came into the world and became man, there was then eternal life brought before men and amongst men.

If we had life communicated to us by an act of God's power, it might have a great and indeterminate value; but we should have nothing, so to speak, by which to estimate that value. If we looked on life as a thing *purchased* for us by the blood-shedding of the Lord, we might form some truer thoughts as to its value; but here we surely have something deeper still, even the eternal life that was in Christ, given to us, made ours—the life that was essentially in Him, having now likewise flowed into our souls.

I believe that the thought of eternal life, as a thing *purchased* for us, has so held a place in the thoughts of many Christians, that they have failed to perceive what it is wherewith they are actually endowed. It is wholly a different thing to say, that the death of Christ was that which purchased or procured the *communication* of this life, from regarding it as that which brought the life into being.

Thus, then, the life which we have is the eternal life which was in Christ—which was manifested—and which He laid down that He might take it again; and not take it by Himself alone, but that His people might take it with Him. Death has done its worst upon this life, for it has done its worst upon Christ; ours is a life which

has passed through death, and which is now securely set in resurrection : our life is hid with Christ in God, because Christ Himself is there—and our true place now is there above, because our life is there.

We may thus take the idea of eternal life, not as merely some vague thought of great and unknown blessing, but we may, as it were, trace its *history* ; we may see it as manifested in Christ, found in all its preciousness in Him—we may see how it flows forth, and what it is as flowing forth to our dry and lifeless souls.

The whole supply of the life was in Him ; He was the fountain of living water—the cistern in which the whole was enclosed. His death was the opening of the cistern so as to let the living water flow forth freely into the parched channels, the water ever being the same, whether found in the cistern, or as received by the channel.

How cheering to the believer is the word of his Lord, “ Because I live ye shall live also,”—Christ the pledge of our life, His life being so connected with ours, and He with us.

Our other blessings as forgiven sinners are closely connected with the eternal life which we receive ; as having the life of the Son given to us, we too are made sons, heirs of God, united to Christ, with the promise of sharing His glory and reigning with Him, made like to Him in body and in spirit.

The Holy Ghost is given to us as the Spirit of adoption, and as the one by whom we are to know the things that are freely given to us of God ; if we know Him as the testifier to that glory into which Christ has entered, it is our privilege to know, that in testifying to this He teaches us what our true place in spirit *now* is, and what our hope is, even that He will return and receive us unto Himself, that where He is we may be also.

In order that we rightly know “ the things that are freely given us of God,” we must not stop short (as some would think of doing) at the contemplation of what

we have been redeemed *from*, but we look likewise at what we have been redeemed *unto*, closely connected as it is with the person of the Redeemer.

In looking onward to the blessed hope of resurrection, we have to remember that our resurrection is said to be unto eternal life ; it is called " the resurrection of life," John v. 29 ; so that our having right thoughts about what the character of life truly is, will aid us materially in the contemplation of the blessing which is before us, when we shall have this life as a thing communicated to our bodies, even as it has been already to our souls through the quickening power of the Holy Ghost.

These things are the common portion of the people of God, for they are part of the essential inheritance of all who are born from above. If we did not see the character of such blessings as being a *common* portion of the saints, how utterly unable should each of us be of grasping them as our own ; they belong to us severally, because *eternal life* in all its fulness of meaning is that which belongs to the saints because they are such.

It is well for us to see how, in the essential blessings of the Redeemed, there is common participation ; our minds may so rest on dispensational differences, and the peculiar characteristics of particular periods, as to overlook or (perhaps) deny that which is of deeper importance, namely, the essential blessings which utterly surpass all characteristics of any dispensation. This error (which I regard as being serious in its nature) has (as we know) been committed. Let us not confound things which differ greatly ; characteristics are not to be confounded with blessings and privileges. One man may have such and such characteristics, which make him differ from another man ; there may be the monarch and the beggar, the intellectual and learned, and the dull and illiterate, yet all these would differ less from each other than any of them differs from a brute—in other words, their respective characteristics would be

things less in themselves than what they possessed in common. So is it with regard to individual Christians now living ; each may have his own particular characteristics, and yet that which they have in common is much more important, and goes much deeper. So too is it with regard to dispensations ; the objects of grace in different periods have of course different characteristics according to their particular dispensations ; but that which is essential is of much greater value and importance. If I had to speak of the characteristics of this dispensation, it would be useless to mention what is common to saints in all ages, or that which is common to this and any other dispensation ; that which is distinctive is the only thing which could be rightly brought forward.

Now it is the common portion of all the objects of grace that they have eternal life. This cannot, I suppose, be really questioned. But the life thus given to the objects of grace is nothing short of the life of the Son communicated to their souls now, and to their bodies by-and-bye. Whatever the dispensation may be, we read of no communication of *life* except this ; and the reception of this life involves many important consequences : all who receive it are united to Christ, for it is His life that is communicated to them ; they are children of God as having the life of the Son and being united to the Son, and all the essential blessings which they possess are (through God's mercy) identical.

This follows from the full apprehension of what the character is of the life which is given to us ; and the testimony of the Scripture is most plain as to direct statement of the same things.

In the case of those who lived before the coming of Christ, some might ask, How could the life of Christ be communicated to them before he had died and risen ? This is answered by the similar truth as to forgiveness. Sins were forgiven through the blood of Christ ere that blood had been shed, because God, who calleth things

that are not as though they were, could anticipatively minister the forgiveness and cleansing which would depend upon the shedding of that blood. And so too as to eternal life. It is unquestionable that the saints of old had life as well as forgiveness, and this was by anticipative use of the result of Christ's laying down His life; this is clear from the simple fact of no other life being mentioned in the word of God as being given, except the eternal life which was manifested in the person of Christ. The disciples, when the Lord was upon earth, were spoken of by Him as possessing union in life with Him, "I am the vine, ye are the branches," though this was but the anticipative result of His sacrifice.

As to those who will be converted to God after the first resurrection, if it were supposed that they had any different standing, it would be the place of those who would introduce such a thought to show what that standing in life would be:—on the contrary, we find said of Israel then, "whose is the adoption" (Rom. ix. 4); and the argument which the Holy Ghost supplies us is, "If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). It is said of the whole company of the elect, "whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. viii. 29). Thus, although we have the blessing of believing in Christ before His manifestation in glory, and our portion is the *first* resurrection, yet the portion of those coming after us will be, as to essential blessings, the same, and their ultimate glory essentially the *same*, namely, full conformity to the image of the Son. The reception of eternal life involves these things—the soul when set in grace receives it now—the body receives it in resurrection—and they are to be raised in their own time, "in Christ" (1 Cor. xv.), as truly as we shall be in our time.

Let not this be thought an unimportant matter; it

relates to what grace does for the soul apart from all dispensational distinctions: the point really is this—do the *essential* blessings of the redeemed result from what they are made in Christ, or do they in some measure flow from what they may be severally in the Spirit? If I say the latter, I (at the least) *obscure* the fulness of grace; but the more I see blessing held as a common portion, the more can I apprehend that communion of saints which unites those past, present, and future.

S. P. T.

*September 17, 1845.*

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