**“Eternal Life” The Present Truth 3, 18.**

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From a study of the doctrine of the second advent, and the kindred doctrine, the resurrection, we have arrived at the necessary conclusion that if Christ were not to come there would be no hope of salvation for any of his followers. The leading place which is given to this subject in the Bible, and especially in the New Testament, is enough to convince any one of its great importance; and when we consider Christ’s words, that his second coming would be for the express purpose of taking his disciples to himself, we see why it is given so much prominence. We dare not regard our Saviour’s words so lightly as to say that his promises mean nothing; but if his followers can be with him before his second coming, then his promise in John 14:3 has no meaning whatever. So, as we said, we are driven to the conclusion that the people of God must wait for their salvation until the Lord comes. {PTUK September 22, 1887, p. 275.1}

Our reading of the Bible has also shown us that the resurrection is a “living *again*,” which implies a previous cessation of life between death and the resurrection; for a man cannot “live again” unless he has once ceased to live. And since there is no resurrection until the Lord comes, it follows that if he were not to come there would be no life for his people. There can be no escape from this conclusion; we will verify it by the declaration of Scripture. {PTUK September 22, 1887, p. 275.2}

There are no words of the Bible more familiar to the Christian, or more clear to him than these words of Christ to Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The love of God to man is beyond all human comprehension. Even the angels, we are told (1 Peter 1:12), desire to look into and understand the mystery of the plan of salvation. But none but God himself can comprehend the love that prompted that vast scheme. To all eternity it will be the wonder of both saints and angels. Human hearts know something of love, and some can perhaps imagine the anguish they would feel if called upon to give up an only child to suffer cruel torture and an ignominious death. But the love of an infinite God must be as much greater than that felt by mortals, as God himself is greater than man. Yet he gave his only begotten Son,-the one by whom all things were made, whom angels worship with reverence equal to that which they yield to God-that men might have eternal life. Then certainly men do not have eternal life, or, what is the same thing, immortality, by nature. {PTUK September 22, 1887, p. 275.3}

Men often work to no purpose, and spend time and strength for that which is wholly unnecessary; but it is not possible to imagine such a thing of God. Since he knows the end from the beginning, he knows what is necessary to be done, and what means are needed to accomplish it. Would God make such an infinite sacrifice to accomplish something entirely uncalled for? to give to man that which he already possessed? Certainly not. If left to themselves, men would never have had even a hope of eternal life. {PTUK September 22, 1887, p. 276.1}

And right here it is worth our while to consider what this wonderful thing is that was bought for us at such a price. There are few that value it as they ought. If men appreciated it then there would be a general ascription of praise to God for his love in bringing it to us. In the first place we must remember that it is eternal life and that alone that is brought within our reach by the gift of God’s Son. So Paul says, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:23. Eternal life is life to all eternity-life that has no end. Now what is life? It is simply existence. Nothing else is contained in the word. The poor man who drudges for a bare subsistence, the invalid who has no waking moment that is free from pain, the beast that possesses no moral sense, the idiot who is even lower in the scale of intelligence than the brute,-all these live just as certainly as does the man who possesses health, wealth, the keenest perception, and a sense of moral obligation. We can say of one that he has a happy life, and of another that his life is miserable, even a burden, but these ideas could not be conveyed by the unqualified term “life.” When we hear that a man lives, we know that he exists, and that is all that we know. He may be ill or well, wealthy or in the depths of poverty, enjoying perfect happiness or suffering extreme anguish, yet we can know nothing of this unless we are told something more than the mere fact that he lives. {PTUK September 22, 1887, p. 276.2}

What then is *eternal* life? Simply eternal existence. Then it is eternal existence that is brought within man’s reach by the sacrifice of Christ. We do not say that the redeemed will not enjoy perfect happiness, but that is not the primary thing that is given to the overcomer. The happiness of the redeemed is a secondary matter, growing out of the circumstances in which they are placed. That happiness should be the lot of men who spend an eternity in the presence of God and of Christ where nothing can happen to annoy, is a natural consequence. Unending existence, then, is what is promised to those who believe in the Son of God. {PTUK September 22, 1887, p. 276.3}

And now we notice that “whosoever believeth in him” shall have eternal life. What shall they have who do not believe in him? Shall it be eternal life? If it is so, that all men have immortality by nature, then what is gained by believing in Jesus? How much better off are believers than unbelievers? None at all. Is it reasonable to suppose that God would hold out to man unending existence as an incentive to him to accept of Christ, if he were already in possession of it, and if he had it so securely that God himself could not deprive him of it? There is no one who will say, No, to such a proposition. We repeat: If all men are by nature in possession of immortality, then the gospel holds out no inducement for man to believe in Christ. {PTUK September 22, 1887, p. 276.4}

It cannot here be argued by those who hold that man is essentially immortal, that the unbelievers will be worse off than the believers in that they will be doomed to hopeless misery, because, as we have seen, it is life pure and simple that is held out as the prize. The text does not say that God gave his Son in order that whosoever believeth in him should not be miserable, but have happiness. We must take the text as it reads, and not attach anything to it that is not contained in it. From John 3:16, we can reach no other conclusion than that those who do not believe in Christ will not have eternal life. And this fact is plainly stated in the thirty-sixth verse of the same chapter: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life.” {PTUK September 22, 1887, p. 276.5}

Eternal life is the grand object for which man was created. This present life is a period of probation, in which we are proved, to see if we would know how to use so great a boon. If we desire eternal life earnestly enough to comply with the conditions, it will at the last day be bestowed upon us; but if we squander this life, and dishonour God, what encouragement will he have to extend our life to all eternity? He will not do it. And since those who disobey God never get beyond this probationary state, the anteroom, as it were, of life, it can be truly said that they do not see life. How it is that they who have Christ have eternal life (John 3:16), will be considered in a future time. {PTUK September 22, 1887, p. 276.6}

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