

Sailing With Paul

Simple Papers for Young Christians

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Chapter 5

Eternal Life

Of those who in this spiritual sense sailed with Paul, no one was dearer to him than the young preacher Timothy; and to him he writes, "**Lay hold on eternal life**" (I Timothy 6:12). The inspired exhortation is for us likewise; but if we would lay hold on life eternal, it is important that we understand the teaching of Scripture regarding it.

John is, properly speaking, the apostle of eternal life. He it is who fully unfolds it; but it is Paul who ever presses it as a practical thing.

The Gospel of John presents the Lord JESUS as the Eternal Life which was with the FATHER, and was manifested here for a time on earth. The first Epistle presents that same life now manifested in the children of GOD. In both Gospel and Epistle, again and again it is insisted on that this everlasting life is the present portion of all who believe in the Lord JESUS CHRIST. **He gives eternal life to all His sheep, and assures us that they shall never perish. Indeed, they could not, or the life would not be eternal, but simply probational.**

Let there be any doubt or difficulty as to this in the Christian's mind, and true, unselfish service for the Lord JESUS CHRIST there can scarcely be. If I have any lingering fear of being possibly lost at last; or if I suppose that I maintain my salvation by my faithfulness, genuine faithfulness there cannot be, for I shall ever have before me - not purely the glory of CHRIST - but the selfish thought of making my own soul secure.

But all this is rebuked wherever life eternal is taught in Scripture. In the very nature of things a

life that is eternal can not come to an end. And every believer has this life - a life that has no beginning and shall have no ending; for it is the very life of the Son of GOD. By human generation he obtained natural life - a life that was already forfeited. By new birth - divine generation - he becomes the possessor of eternal, inalienable, non-forfeitable life.

It is thus we are enabled to apprehend divine things and have fellowship with divine persons. **"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent"** (John 17:3).

But in addition to the doctrine of present possession of eternal life, the Word of GOD presents that life as a goal and as an experience subjectively apprehended and enjoyed. This is Paul's special line. He who reads only Paul on this subject might lose sight of the truth we have just been considering; but there is no need so to do. John's truth comes first. Then that committed to Paul follows. Eternal life is ours now, but it is also our hope. **"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began"** (Titus 1:2).

This is the Christian's goal. He now has eternal life in Him. He looks on with eager, glad expectancy to the time when, in the fullest possible sense, he will enter into life, and will be in the scene to which eternal life belongs. Now he has eternal life in a decaying body and in a crumbling scene. Then he will possess a body radiant with eternal life, and fully fitted for its display in a **"city that hath foundations,"** and amid scenes that **"that cannot be shaken."**

Take a simple illustration: A child possesses life - natural life - from the moment of birth. But for that child there is a long period of discipline and education ere he really enters into life, fulfilling his chosen vocation. So with the believer. From the moment of new birth he has eternal life; and yet he daily lives in hope of eternal life; and when at last earth's discipline is over and the soul's education complete, he goes away **"into life eternal"** (Matthew 25:46).

But Paul's exhortation to Timothy suggests a third application.

He is to **"lay hold on eternal life."** In the same chapter, verses 18, 19, the **"rich in this world"** are charged **"that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life";** or, "life in reality." The word used here is quite distinct from the ordinary term for eternal life.

But the one passage throws a clear light upon the other. We lay hold on eternal life as we realize in our souls that we do not belong to this sphere; when we discover what JESUS spoke of in John 10, **"life... more abundantly";** that everything for us is connected with the scene to which we are going. Hence we learn to look very differently upon the things of this life from what we once did. We realize that the true life is life in fellowship with GOD, and so we are enabled, in the SPIRIT's power, to use this world without abusing it, walking as CHRIST walked, who alone fully manifested eternal life in this scene of death. This is, for us, to lay hold on eternal life, or to use it for GOD's glory.

It is most sorrowful to hear people glibly talking of having eternal life and being forever saved, when they are really trying to "make the best of this life" like men of the world who make no

profession. If I have eternal life, I am to make it known by living it out, and acting now in the light of the coming day of the unveiling of JESUS CHRIST.

This was what Paul desired for Timothy, and what he would see in all who sail with the beloved apostle, whose whole life-purpose was expressed in these words: "**What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ**" (Philippians 3:7, 8).

This is to display eternal life in a body of clay, an earthen vessel, while pressing on to the scene to which that life belongs.

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