

ETERNAL LIFE:

AND

What it is for Christians.

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PREFACE.

THE first edition of this pamphlet being exhausted, it has been suggested that it would be useful, if issued in a different form, and with some alterations for general readers. The author in consenting to this proposal has thought well to omit the more strictly controversial parts. With this omission and a few minor corrections, this statement of truth remains as originally published.

May God graciously be pleased to use it for His glory and the help and blessing of His children.

ETERNAL LIFE:

AND

WHAT IT IS FOR CHRISTIANS.

WE may consider this life—first, in its source and manifestation in the Person of the Son of God ; and secondly as given to believers.

It was in the Person of the Son from eternity ; and what was characteristic of Him as with the Father eternally. *He is eternal life*, and this has been manifested in Him as man in this world. Here was a new thing, a man on earth, seen in the fulness and blessedness of this relationship with God, which had never been known by man before, neither by Adam in his unfallen state, or by any favoured of God afterward. The Father was a new name for God to take in relation to man, and sonship was a new condi-

tion for man in relation with God. God had never been pleased so to reveal Himself before. In the case of the Lord this relationship was publicly acknowledged by God, first when He took His place in public service and testimony after His baptism, when the Spirit descended and abode upon Him, and the voice from heaven was heard saying, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee have I found my delight." Again, likewise on the mount of transfiguration, by the voice which came out of the excellent glory. In John i. 33, 34, John the Baptist says, "I knew him not," but seeing the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him, he bore witness that "This is the Son of God." The Spirit's descending and abiding on Him, was the seal, not only of His personal perfection as man, but of the relationship in which as man He stood to the Father. He also constantly spoke of Himself as in this relationship to the Father. He ever dwelt in the bosom of the Father. The apostles beheld His glory as of an only

begotten with a Father. The One who ever was the object of the Father's delight, was manifested as such here on earth, a man walking in full and uninterrupted communion with the Father, so that in all the activities of His life He perfectly expressed the effect of this communion.

Moreover, in Him we see how entirely it is *heavenly* in character. He was the Son of man which was in heaven. He was the contrast of him who had his origin in the earth, and was of the earth. He was the heavenly Man on earth. All His springs were in the Father, as He said, "I live by the Father." When we contemplate Him who ever was with the Father, revealed in this character, whether as man in this world walking through it in all the intimacy, blessedness and communion of this relationship, or as the Son now glorified with the Father—we can say, "That is our life." Such is the life into which we are introduced through redemption. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This life was *manifested* in Him in this world, when in incarnation, He was revealed as the Word of Life—the apostles could say, “It has been manifested to us.” “*We* have heard.” “*We* have seen.” This manifestation must therefore refer to the life and ministry of the Lord among His disciples, whom He called into association with Himself while here on earth, and who were born of God, in order to receive Him, and the testimony He brought from heaven, so that they might communicate the truth to us. What he was, He made manifest by His words, works and ways, and to this the apostle evidently refers when he says—“That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we contemplated, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life.” It was manifested to them in the Person of the Son of God, in order that they, as apostles, might bear witness and report it to us, that is, to Christians.

It is important not to confound the

manifestation of eternal life with the fact that He was "God manifest in the flesh." And moreover the expression of all that was perfect as Man. In Him God was fully and perfectly presented to men, and in Him likewise, perfect humanity was presented to God. He was very God, and very man. Moreover, as to sonship, He was not only Son as begotten in time, He was the Son in eternal Godhead. The Word, who was God, He was never less than God over all, blessed for ever. But scripture does not confound these truths with the manifestation of eternal life to His disciples.

"If He manifested this eternal life, He manifested God *too*."—J. N. D., "Collected Writings," Vol. XXVIII., p. 312. "Jesus Christ is God Himself, the true God. He is *also* eternal life."—Ibid, p. 494. "But He is the true God—the veritable God. Nor is this all ; but we have life in Him. He is *also* the eternal life, so that we possess it in Him."—Synopsis, Vol. V., p. 474.

Nor is it correct to speak of the

manifestation of the divine nature, as the manifestation of eternal life. Divine nature and eternal life are not equivalent terms, although divine nature is inseparably connected with eternal life. We could not have the latter without the former, as the greater includes the less.

He ever was, and is, eternal life. It can never be separated from His Person. (John xi. 25 ; xiv. 6 ; Col. iii. 4 ; 1 John v. 20.) But it is important to remark that scripture does not reverse these statements. While eternal life is inseparably connected with His Person, it is important to distinguish between it and the personal glory of the Son of God, or we shall confound the *incommunicable glory of His Person* which no creature ever can share, with that which He gives to us, and in which we are one with Him. "Godhead is absolute and incommunicable, whilst eternal life is that which is in relation to men (saints) and is communicable, so they are in nature quite distinct, although found for us in the

same Person." In the glory of His Person He ever stands alone—anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions—on account of this glory He must in all things have the pre-eminence. The glory He received as man, as the fruit of His service and obedience, and of that work in which He glorified God—this He gives us to share with Him. (John xvii. 22.) But besides this, there is His own proper eternal glory, which we never shall share, but only behold. (John xvii. 24.)

It has been said that eternal life given to us, is not the same thing as the eternal life which is spoken of in 1 John i. 1-2, as manifested in the Son of God. But in 1 John v. 11-12, we read, "God has given to us eternal life, and *this life is in His Son*; he that hath the Son hath life;" again, "*Christ is our life.*" (Col. iii. 4.) "We are born of God, but the life which we have received *is that eternal life which was manifested in Christ.*" (1 John i. 1-3.) — "Col-

lected Writings," by J. N. D., Vol. XXVIII., p. 424. Scripture, while undoubtedly shewing that eternal life is inseparable from His person, yet at the same time, carefully distinguishes what He is in Himself, from that which He confers upon us. "He is the true God, *and* eternal life." (1 John v. 20.) It may be well here to remark, it is of Him alone, that it can be said, "He *is* eternal life." We have it in having Him. We are not it.

In John x. 28, He speaks of giving eternal life, and surely the Giver must be greater than the gift. None less than the Son of God could confer such a gift. Does He confer His own Godhead glory? Most surely not. In John i., when declaring the full glory of His Person, what was ever true of Him before He became a man, it says, "*In* Him was life." And again, "This life is *in* His Son." (1 John v. 11.)

What then was in the mind of God, when He promised eternal life before the ages of time? (Tit. i. 2.) What

was in the mind of the Lord, when He spoke of giving to His sheep eternal life? (John x. 28.) When we speak of having eternal life, what does it convey to our minds? I have often said to persons, you say you have eternal life, *what* have you got? The reply generally shews how little souls have been exercised, as to the nature of their possession, how little they understand the character of the gift, their knowledge going little further than the fact that according to scripture, the believer has it, that it will continue for ever, and can never be lost, conveying to their minds little more than the fact of eternal security, or at most, of a new nature or new spring of existence imparted to the soul.

In considering these questions it is necessary to remember that the word life is used in different senses. 1. It is used to express the vital principle by virtue of which a being lives, it is that *by which* a creature enjoys the position in which it is placed. 2. It is also used to signify the conditions *in which* a

being lives : the relationships, objects, pursuits, and sphere, which characterise its existence ; this is life in the active sense. 1. Subjectively, life is that *by which* a being lives. 2. Objectively, it is that *in which* the being lives. In scripture the word includes both these aspects of life. We find that eternal life is presented in various phases in the word of God, and what might be said of it in one aspect could not be said of it in another. It is, therefore, important, in hearing a person speak of it, to consider from what point of view he is regarding the subject. Thus the Spirit of God, by the apostle Paul, regards it as a *future* state, for which we still hope ; and, as thus viewed, it may truthfully be said we have *not* yet possessed it ; we are exhorted to lay hold of it. (1 Tim. iv. 12.) But in the writings of the apostle John it is regarded in its essential and characteristic features as a *present* thing for the believer, and, as so regarded, we are said to have it : “ He that believeth on the Son, *hath* eternal life.”

The blessed Son of God came to *give this life* to others. He gives to His sheep eternal life. As He said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." But in order to do this He must die, nothing less could meet the state in which we were through sin, according to the claims of the glory of God, nothing less could clear us from that state, so that we might have life in Him. By faith we appropriate His death in order to have part in His life. (John vi. 51, 53, 55.)

"The Son of man must be lifted up." He gave His flesh for the life of the world. "Except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Until His death, He was alone in the perfection of that life which was found only in Him. He died in order that we might become partakers of that life. Now every one believing on Him has eternal life.

The possession of eternal life by Christians involves three things. First:

The impartation of a new spiritual life—or source of being to the believer, in the Son, and by His quickening power : a life derived from Christ, the last Adam,—and possessed in Him,—in contrast to the natural and sinful life which we derived from the first Adam. It is Christ *in us*, as it says, “He is *in* all,” and again, “I in you.” This supposes not only that the believer is born again, but also the reception of the Holy Ghost as the power and energy in us of this life, by which Christ lives in us, is formed in us, as it is expressed in Romans viii. 2 : “The law of the *Spirit of life*, in Christ Jesus hath set me free from the law of sin and death.” The teaching of scripture does not connect eternal life with being born again, but with faith in the Person and work of the Son of God. A soul is born again in order to receive Christ, *in receiving Him* by faith it receives all that God gives in Him. It does not say, “He that is born again has eternal life,” although to have eternal life a soul must be born again, only the possession

of eternal life implies much more than that. It is, doubtless, true that when a person is born again, a new principle of life is created in the soul: "That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit," but until redemption is known and the Holy Spirit is received there is no formative power, there is no liberty, or enjoyment of life—such a soul is alive, but not in liberty, and that is not eternal life according to the thoughts of God. "And though we must be born to have life, and have life if born, yet eternal life is only known in redemption and the scene and state into which redemption brings."—J. N. D. "Life and Eternal Life," p. 35.

The Lord declares that He came that His people might not only have life, but have it more abundantly, that is in full power and enjoyment by the Holy Spirit. When the Lord appeared to His disciples (John xx.) and breathed into them, He did not say "Receive ye Life," He said, "Receive ye (the) Holy Spirit." As a living principle in their souls, they had

already received life in being born of the Spirit, but they had not yet received it in full christian condition, until the Lord imparted to them the Spirit, not here as personally indwelling them, but as the Spirit and power of life in them, "The Spirit is Life."* To this the Lord refers John iv., when He speaks of the living water, which should be in the believer a well of water springing up unto eternal life. This is much more than being alive ; it is the energy, enjoyment, and outgoing of eternal life, which results in worshipping the Father in Spirit and in truth.

Life, in this *subjective* aspect in which we are now contemplating it, is the *capacity* of knowing God, of receiving that which is of God, and enjoying Him in the relationship in which He has revealed Himself to us

* At the present time this cannot be separated from the personal indwelling of the Spirit ; though these two parts of the truth may be distinguished. The Spirit is received in these two senses at one and the same time.

in His Son. It is the capacity for communion with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Without it man has naturally no capacity for understanding or receiving anything of God, or having one thought in common with God ; in that sense he is dead. Therefore, having life is in contrast with man's natural state of spiritual death.

But what would this capacity of enjoyment profit us unless with it we are brought into a sphere and relationships with objects suited to this life to be actually enjoyed, in which and by which we live ? This brings us to the second thing involved in the gift of eternal life, viz. : the *new and heavenly position and relationships* into which the believer is brought in the Son. This is what the Lord announces to His disciples (John xx.) when having risen from the dead, He said, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." It is a life which makes the believer one with the *ascended*

Christ.* It associates the recipient of it with Him in that place which is its own proper sphere. In John xvii., He connects the giving of eternal life with His being glorified, as He said, "Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son may also glorify thee : As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that as to all thou hast given him, he should give them eternal life." For us it is from glory that He gives this life, so that its realisation connects the believer with Him in glory. It is a divine and *heavenly life*.

We are His brethren, one with Him in all the blessedness of His relationship to the Father, and of His present position as man before God. He has declared the Father's name to us so that the love wherewith the Father had

* REMARK—The Spirit by the apostle John does not speak of *union* with Christ that is revealed through the apostle Paul. John speaks of *oneness*, of our being one with the Son, as a risen, ascended, and glorified Man. These two truths must not be confounded.

loved Him might be in us, and He in us. (John xvii. 26.) Such is our present portion—a heavenly one—outside this world, and all that the natural man knows and lives by. The possessor of this life is not of the world, even as He is not of the world. (John xv. 19 ; xvii. 14, 16.) Earthly mindedness and worldliness are incompatible with the enjoyment of eternal life. It can only be known and enjoyed in its own proper sphere, though its effects will be manifested, in the midst of our present earthly circumstances and duties.

Our life as Christians is not only having capacity of enjoyment, but the actual enjoyment in the power of the Spirit of those heavenly relationships into which we have been introduced, and of all the blessings which flow from them. In this sense the Lord could say, “This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” (John xvii. 3.) This is what properly characterises the life we live as Christians, it is realised in communion

with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The apostle in 1 John i. writes that the object for which He declared this eternal life to these saints was, that they might be brought into the same fellowship with the apostles, and that in the realisation of it their joy might be full. Anything short of this is not proper Christian life. It is a *heavenly* thing. (John iii. 12, 31-34.) It is out of heaven ; belongs to heaven : and the objects by which it is nourished and sustained are all heavenly. It has no part in earthly things. It being in the Son, must connect the believer with Him in the place where He now is ; so that in the enjoyment of this life the heart and mind are necessarily abstracted from earth and the things of sight and sense, in being occupied with Christ where He is in that sphere to which the life belongs. Thus we are sanctified by the truth. (John xvii. 19.) It carries us outside all that belongs to the natural life of man, and outside the world—the sphere to which that life belongs. There is nothing in

common between the natural life of man—connected with this world and finding its enjoyment in it—and the eternal life, which belongs to heaven, and finds all its enjoyment in heavenly things. (John xii. 25.) And inasmuch as we still carry about with us the old and sinful life of Adam, we need continually to feed upon the death of Christ, (John vi. 56) that we may enjoy His life. It is only as we are dissociated from what is of man and of the world, that we can be in heart and spirit associated with Him—in the presence of the Father—so as to enjoy His things—to have part with Him. (John xiii. 8.)

This is what may be called the *objective* side of eternal life, what the believer is occupied with by faith, and enjoys outside himself. These two aspects of the life are linked together in John xiv. 20, “In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and *ye in me*, and *I in you*.” The Son is known as in the Father; we are *in the Son*; that puts us into His

position and relationship with the Father, gives us the sphere and objects of the life *in which* we live. In Him, through grace, and as the fruit of redemption, we participate in His blessing, and in His joy;—we have part with Him. Then He is *in us*, in the power of the Spirit, that is the life *by which* we live and enjoy the sphere into which we are brought.

It is important to observe how intimately in scripture eternal life is associated with the presence and indwelling of the Spirit. The *Holy Spirit is the power of this life*—by which alone we can know the things freely given us of God, and by which alone we are able actually to have communion with Him. There can be no enjoyment of life—or of what belongs to this life—but by the Holy Spirit; so that if the Spirit is grieved, communion is interrupted and the joy ceases. In John xiv., speaking of the time when the other Comforter should have come, the Lord said, “In that day ye shall *know* that I am in

my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." In 1 John ii., the apostle in addressing the babes in the family of God, speaks to them as having the unction from the Holy One, and knowing all things.

In John iv., the Lord spoke of the Holy Spirit as a well of water in the believer, springing up unto eternal life. He is the power whereby the life is enjoyed, so that it flows forth in worship to the Father, Who was seeking those who could worship Him as children, in spirit and in truth. In John vii., the Spirit is again spoken of as living water in the believer, flowing forth for the refreshment and blessing of others. It is clear, therefore, that eternal life cannot be separated from the presence and power of the Spirit.

These two aspects of the truth express what eternal life is as we possess it now. And it is important to remember that it is a *present* thing : it is ours now ; "He that believeth on the Son *hath* eternal life." It is not merely something which we

expect to have when we get to heaven, it is a life to be lived by faith now. While here on earth the joy of heaven is brought down into our souls by the Holy Spirit, who takes of the things of Christ, and shews them unto us, so that we may taste something of the joy of heaven in present communion with the Father and the Son, as the apostle says, "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." (1 John i., 4.) Such is the life we live even now, if walking in the truth.

Having eternal life is having the Son, and in having Him, entering into all that the Father has given to Him, and given to us in Him. "The Father loveth the Son, and has given all things to be in his hand: he that believeth on the Son hath eternal life." (John iii. 35-36.) "All that the Father hath is mine, therefore said I, He shall take of mine, and shew it unto you." (John xvi. 15.) "As he is, so *are* we in this world." (John iv. 17.) Knowing the Father and the Son, and sharing all the thoughts and feelings of the Father

and the Son—the Father's delight in the Son, and the Son's delight in the Father. Herein our joy is full. As has been said by another, "What can we have more than the Father and the Son? What more perfect happiness than community of thoughts, feelings, joys—communion with the Father and the Son, deriving all our joy from themselves?" Such is the present life and portion of the believer, and nothing can be greater or more blessed. God fully revealing Himself—His purposes and ways—and we called to share His thoughts, to have fellowship with Him in all His delight in Christ, and in all that He has revealed of His purpose for the glory of His Son, and for His own glory. Moreover, to have fellowship with His Son, sharing in the joy and blessing of His Son even now, while awaiting the time when we shall be like Him, and with Him to share His glory. That God should be pleased so to reveal Himself, and to bring us into such blessed and holy intimacy with Himself, and with His

Son, giving us the Son's place and portion before Himself—all this is infinite grace. One who knows nothing of communion with the Father and the Son, knows nothing of what eternal life is as the present portion of saints. Nevertheless such is the present calling of every child of God, whether it be realised or not. It belongs to every saint ; but every saint does not know what belongs to him. It is the life we possess, in virtue of which we walk in the light, as God is in the light.

But there is yet another aspect in which eternal life is presented to us in scripture, another fact involved in the gift of eternal life, viz., our being *in the image of God's Son*, and *with Him* in glory for ever. "When He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1 John iii. 2.) This is eternal life in full fruition, the full result according to the purpose of God as manifested in Christ glorified as man. It is from this point of view the subject is regarded in the writings of the apostle Paul. He had seen it,

not in Christ down here, but in Christ as man glorified in heaven. It has been thus expressed by J. N. D. : "Eternal life is Christ, and that revealed as man in glory." In this aspect, it is a future state for us—the subject of promise and of hope. "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life." "Ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end eternal life." "In hope of eternal life." To the Apostle Paul eternal life for us, is being in the life of Christ and with Him in glorified bodies, perfectly conformed to His image ; a future state, and, therefore, the subject of hope. Thus viewed, we are exhorted to "lay hold on eternal life." So likewise is it spoken of in the end of Jude, "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." It is also presented in this way in the first three gospels, "In the age to come life eternal." (Mark x. 30.) "Shall inherit eternal life." (Matt. xix. 29.) In this sense we shall not have it until the Lord comes to change our

bodies of humiliation, and fashion them like unto His body of glory, then that which is mortal will be swallowed up of life. Then we shall be with Him, to live this life in its own proper sphere, where everything will be suited to it, and with nothing to hinder or distract ; then we shall drink of the fountain of the water of life freely. (Rev. xxi. 6.)

How all this proves that having eternal life is much more than simply being born again, or having a new nature. To confound these two things—to make them one and the same thing, would be to lower the calling and blessing of Christians to the level of Jewish or Millennial saints. When we remember how completely man has been ruined by sin, it is evident that no one could at any time since the fall, have to do with God in blessing, without being born again ; apart from a new nature, man has no capacity for receiving anything of God, and could not be in any vital relationship with Him. Saints of all dispensations must needs be born again, but none save

Christians—that is, those called in the present dispensation—possess, and enjoy eternal life in the form and conditions in which it is given to us : that is as in the risen and glorified Son of God. This puts the believer outside all that belongs to man in his natural life, and outside this world—the place to which man in his natural life belongs. (John xvii. 14.) So then eternal life is presented not only in contrast to the state of spiritual death in which man is by nature, but also in contrast to merely human and earthly life. “He that loves his life shall lose it ; and he that hates his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal.” (John xii. 25.) In the cross this natural and sinful life has, for the believer, been brought to an end by the judgment of God. Christ in dying glorified God in respect of all that we were by nature, and on this ground, God in infinite grace gives us eternal life in Him who is risen from the dead. The apprehension of this gives liberty to the believer, because if we have this life in Christ risen, it puts

us beyond the effect of sin : beyond death and judgment, and beyond Satan's power, in the new creation scene where all things are of God, and where Christ is all.

Eternal life in the proper christian character was not and could not be imparted to saints until after the death and resurrection of Christ. (John iii. 14 ; vi. 53, 54 ; xii. 24 ; xx.) In John xx. 22, we see the Lord after resurrection acting in the character and power of the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit. He was, no doubt, ever the source of life for all who lived according to God ; but until He rose from the dead, He did not quicken men after a *new* order, thereby originating a new race after His own order. It was in resurrection that He is revealed as the *beginning*—the first-born from among the dead — the beginning of the creation of God. The threefold witness in 1 John v. : the Spirit, the water, and the blood, agrees in this one thing—that God has given us eternal life in His Son *as dead, risen, and glori-*

fied. The blood and the water speak of His death, in relation to the claims of God as meeting His holiness and righteousness ; and in relation to our *state* as born in sin, the water shewing how we are cleared from that state *by death*, it being judged and closed for faith in Christ dying for us ; so that clearly life is not in the natural man. The Holy Spirit coming down after Christ was glorified, is the testimony that this life is *in His Son*.

If then this life is outside all that is of man, and all that belongs to sight and sense, it follows that it can only be apprehended and enjoyed by faith, and in the power of the Spirit. It is a life of faith now, until we are with the Lord, and then we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known.

This outline of the truth is sent forth in the hope that the Lord may graciously be pleased to use it to help souls in the patient and prayerful study of the word for themselves, to understand and know the truth, so that they

may not be tossed about with the teachings of men—but holding the truth in love, may grow up to Christ in all things.

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