

**Demonstration of Errors in the New Teaching
as affording opportunity for presenting the Truth**

6. AS TO ETERNAL LIFE.

There was a time when greater patience, a truer endeavour to see each other's standpoint, and a more gracious disposition to appreciate and explain one another's difficulties, might have averted secession, but that is past for ever, for the divergence seems to become greater and greater as the years pass by. *Together*, the one might have mutually counterbalanced the other to the benefit of all; but *apart*, the breach has increasingly widened, because one side is as thoroughly wedded to its present-possession-affirming and sphere-denying course, as the other is to its sphere-affirming but present-possession-denying one. Hence until each came to realise its being right in what it affirms and wrong in what it denies, so as to abandon that indefensible position, there could be no hope of a return to true scriptural lines, where, it is clear, there must be the holding of *both*. Unless eternal life is looked at in all its bearings, instead of everything made of one aspect, and this misused to the setting aside of others equally important, no proper understanding of the subject as such could possibly be arrived at.

God forbid I should cast a stone at my neighbour. This is not done in any such spirit. Every one has to confess his part, and how far his own individual lack of power and grace has contributed to what has occurred. Yet I feel I owe it to the Lord and His own to notice the departures from the word which God has given one eyes to see, and as eternal life is the pivot round which the so called new teaching revolves, it behoves one humbly yet faithfully to state the truth on the points raised, while showing the error which is so patent in the following:—

It used to be commonly said I know that I have got eternal life. Why? Because the scripture says "He that believeth hath everlasting life. I say you have thus the faith of eternal life, but that does not prove you have the thing itself. Many a person has had a promise, but not the thing promised, that was the case largely with the Old Testament saints. (American Notes, p. 54)

Eternal life is there, and it is in God's mind for you to be in it, but there is a gulf between you and it, and you have to pass over that gulf (p. 56).

Everybody claimed to have it but nobody could give an account of it. Another brother asked me, "Have you got eternal life?" I did not know how to answer it exactly because he simply meant resting on a statement of Scripture (p. 107).

I think thousands have title to it who are not in the good of it. Eternal life is God's purpose for you; God gave His Son to that end. I have the light of this, and hence it is mine in title, but to say I have it is another matter. (p. 107-8)

You don't begin with eternal life?

You end with it, at least if scripture is right, "The end everlasting life." A man gets to eternal life on earth. He may not get it until resurrection, but get it he will. Every believer will certainly get it (p. 164).

The Spirit is the real beginning of life for God in the believer. "The Spirit is life" (p. 184).

If he is going to die how can he say he has actually got eternal life? It is an enigma to me (p. 374).

That the believer has or possesses eternal life is here flatly denied.

It is surely a spectacle for men and angels to behold! Such numbers of professed Christians, saints of God, sitting down to remember the Lord in His death, and, on their own showing, not one of them has eternal life. If they can believe this of themselves, we certainly cannot believe it regarding them, for we know on the authority of God's word that they have eternal life as to their souls *now* as well as we, and will have it as to their bodies by and by. After the Lord's sure utterances, if the present possession of that unspeakable blessing is doubtful, there is no absolute certainty on anything. Let the truth of God tell its own tale.

"That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but *have* eternal life" (John iii. 15). "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life" (ver. 36). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but *is passed* from death unto life" (Chap. v. 24). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me *hath* everlasting life" (Chap. vi. 47). "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood *hath* eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (ver. 54). "And I *give* unto them eternal life and they shall never perish" (chap. x. 28). "And this is the record that God *hath given* to us eternal life" (1 John, v. ii.) "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God that ye may *know* that ye *have* eternal life" (ver. 13).

Than these plain declarations of the Lord Himself and His Apostle, no language could possibly express in more decided and unequivocal terms that eternal life is possessed by the believer now. Anyone who could deny or try to explain away these, would deny anything. When God distinctly and explicitly says "you have," it is a fearful thing to say it means "you have not." It is giving Him the lie. Read carefully these passages of scripture and say whether there is a syllable about the "faith of eternal life," the "promise" of it, the "title" to it, the "light" of it, or that it is in "God's purpose" for you. Are these not rash human alterations and additions which falsify the truth that came from the very lips of Him who *is* the truth as well as *spoke* it? In the face of the definite "hath," "hath," "have," "have," and even "*know*" that you "have," it is hard to realise how expressions so destructive of the plain force of the Lord's words could have been framed. They eliminate the very meaning of what He takes such special pains to emphasise, for surely if the Son of God has undeniably pronounced on anything it is the believer's *having* now eternal life. To turn His assurance of a positive *fact* into a "promise," His statement of the *thing itself* into mere "title" to it, His declaration of the present *reality* into a "purpose," or in the teeth of His solemn affirmation that "he that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life," to reply against God, "I say you have thus the *faith* of eternal life," or "to say that I *have* it is *another* matter," is extremely serious.

The possession, the certainty, the consciousness, and the enjoyment of eternal life *now* as to the *soul*, are all insisted on in the truth of God as the *present* portion of the believer on the Son. He has it not yet as

to his *body*. That is a sure hope, however, but as to the *soul*, eternal life is an undoubted reality for the Christian, and as true here as ever it will be hereafter, except for the body of glory and the surroundings; but the *life* I have now will be the life I shall have there, only in its fulness.

The thoughts of many are exceedingly vague and indefinite on what eternal life is. Some take it for living for ever or undying existence. Others see no more in it than the final security of the believer or that he will never perish. Yet others make it synonymous with new birth. Life is of various kinds, and it is important to remember that Christ, the Son, is the source of life to all living creatures from the lowest to the highest. "For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers, all things were created by Him and for Him, and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Col. i. 16, 17). Accordingly whether it be vegetable, animal, human, or angelic life, Christ is the *Life-giver* as to all. Nay more, each of these particular kinds, bears just that *character* of life which has been stamped upon it by the Creator. In the case of vegetable and animal life, it has both beginning and end. In the case of human or Adamic life, that has beginning but no end, for though there is temporal death, which is the separation of the soul from the body, it is not ceasing to exist. The spirit lives for ever. In the case of Angelic life, that also had a beginning but no end, for the Angels "die no more." But eternal life, as taught in the scripture, transcends all other kinds of life, and is different from every one of these. It is that special *character* of life, which has no beginning as well as no end, and cannot be had apart from Him who is Eternal life. It has a beginning in the believer, but the life itself had no beginning, and the wonder is that such a life is communicable to us at all. It is receivable only by having the Son, and cannot be known except through the revelation of the Father and the Son. "And this is eternal life that they might know Thee (the Father) the Only true God, and Jesus Christ (the Son) whom Thou (the Father) hast sent" (John xvii. 3.)

Our Lord takes special care in John iii. to distinguish between new birth and eternal life. New birth is necessary for even the earthly things, but something more is needed for the *heavenly* things. It was after He had fully expounded new birth that He said, "If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things" (ver. 12). Therefore new birth does not of itself necessarily introduce into such, whereas it is in distinct connection with the unfolding of the heavenly things, that for the first time the designation "eternal life" is given to that blessing which the believer receives now as the result of the Son of Man being lifted up. Mark the Lord's words, they are full of instruction. "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"—What? Have new birth? No. "Have eternal life" (ver. 15). He will not call it new birth, though nowhere does He enlarge on new birth as in that chapter, but when He comes to describe that which is the fruit of His own being lifted up, He employs an expression which invests it

with another and richer character of blessedness indicative of personal community with Himself. You cannot apply new birth to Christ. It is not *common* to Him and to me; but eternal life is. Hence to make new birth and eternal life equivalent in their scope and extent is to miss the whole point of what Christ was graciously opening out as the consequence of His own blessed work.

But eternal life has more than one aspect in the Word of God, and each must be seen, and kept in its place, otherwise the divine revelation as to it is thrown into confusion. Some, for example, contend for the present possession-aspect and deny the sphere-aspect, while others are all for the sphere-phase and refuse the having it now. *Both* these, no less than the *other* aspects, must be accepted in order to have the truth, and neither those who are all for one, nor those who are all for another, can be right. The wrongness of using any one phase to deny another equally true, ought to be apparent to all.

If scripture be followed the aspects are simple enough. (1). Christ Himself *is* Eternal life; (2), it is something *given* now; (3), it is something *passed* into; (4), it is something *to be enjoyed* for ever in glory; (5), it is something we *live*; (6), it is something we *lay hold of*, and (7), it is something we *reap*.

1. **The highest view of eternal life** is that Christ Himself, or the Son, *is* it; such as, "He is the True God and eternal life" (1 John. v. 20), or "That eternal life which was with the Father" (1 John. i. 2.), or "I am the life" (John xiv. 6.) This is its personality aspect. Christ alone *is* Eternal life. We are said, when He gives it, to *have* eternal life, but no believer can say he *is* it. There is an equally exalted view of eternal life spoken of in connection with the Father, namely, "Hath life *in* Himself." This is life in a self-existent and fountain head sense, which is applicable to no creature. "For as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself" (John v. 26). It is in this sense that we neither can, nor have, eternal life *in ourselves*, because it is the prerogative of a Divine Person alone, and great misapprehension has arisen from not seizing the true force of this. It is the greatest mercy for us that eternal life is so bound up with Christ the Son, who is it, that we can only have it by having Him. "He that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Adam lost the life he had, but there is no possibility of losing this, for it is a life that is not in our keeping. Still though I have not eternal life "in myself," in the sense of self-existently or as a source independently, yet I have it *within* me like a *stream* dependent on the source; when Christ the fountain of life gives it to me. The Lord says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye shall have eaten the flesh of the Son of Man, and drank His blood ye have no life *in yourselves*" (John vi. 53), that is to say *within* you. If a man has no life in himself in the sense of *within* him, he is dead. Consequently I have not life *in myself* in the sense that "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself," but when He *gives* it, I have it *within* me, for, "Christ (who is it) liveth *in* me." The Son is like the reservoir and the believer may be likened to the pipe. As the same water that is in the reservoir is in the pipe, so the same eternal life that is in Christ is

communicated to him who believes on the Son, only it is limited by the size of the vessel. The water is *within* the pipe as soon as communication is established. It does not remain in the reservoir until the pipe is taken to where the reservoir is, but made to flow into, and through, the pipe there and then.

This fountain-head aspect is the most vital of all, namely, Christ Himself being eternal life, because all the others depend on it.

2. Eternal life as something given now. This aspect is clearly taught in scripture. It is life as *life, given* or communicated on God's part, and *had* or possessed on *our* part. The latter we have already noticed, namely, the "hath" side. This is the "gift of God" side; something that he *gives*. Christ said, "And I *give* unto them eternal life" (John x. 28). "As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh that He should *give* eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him" (John xvii. 2). "And this is the record that God *hath given* unto us eternal life" (1 John v. 11).

Now why reject this as a present thing dwelling in the one to whom it is given? When it is said, "God gave them the like gift as He did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xv. 17); or "Giving them the Holy Ghost even as unto us" (Acts xv. 8); or, "The Holy Ghost which is *given* unto us" (Rom. v. 5) is there a doubt in any one's mind that "given" means the Holy Ghost *indwelling* us, that we *have* Him *in* us, so that our bodies are His temples? Why then, when it says, "And this is the record that God *hath given* unto us eternal life," and "I *give* unto them eternal life," this *refusal* to believe that "hath given" and "give" mean, in the same way, eternal life truly possessed as an *indwelling* life? If the gift of the Holy Ghost is a subjective reality within the believer, then certainly so is the gift of eternal life. The "given" in the one case means present possession of the Spirit, and "given" in the other case means as emphatically the present possession of eternal life. There is no getting over this, and the unaccountable thing is that any one wants to get over it.

3. Eternal life as something passed into. This is eternal life, not only as a life-principle which you *possess*, but eternal life in the sense of a life-sphere into which the believer is said to have *passed*. We do not mean sphere like "with the Father" in a *past* eternity, which was peculiar to the Son, nor in the sense of its own proper sphere in a *future* eternity, its own *eternal* scene; but a present spiritual sphere of life into which the Lord declared the believer to have passed *now*. It is to be found in that remarkable epitome of divine truth, John v. 24, where so much is contained within the compass of a single verse. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My (the Son's) word and believeth Him that sent me, (the Father) *hath* everlasting life," that is the present possession of eternal life as a life-principle, but does it stop there? No. "And shall not come into condemnation" (Romans). Is that all? No. "But is passed from death unto life," that is, out of the death-sphere into the life-sphere and gone over to the new creation (Ephesians). Now why should people have kicked against this sphere aspect of eternal life? It is plainly enough laid down here. It is just as great a mistake to deny this clearly taught sphere-aspect as it is to deny the present possession-aspect. They are both in this

one verse. The very mention of the sphere-aspect was supposed by some to be taking everything from them. On the contrary it was *giving* them something in addition to the one aspect of which they were making everything. In fact its refusal means the loss of what is incalculable to the one who remains impervious to it, for there is an "out of the world heavenly condition" aspect of eternal life *in Christ objectively* no less than the *Christ in us* side *subjectively*. Yea verily, there is such a thing as eternal life in the sense of a sphere, into which we have passed, characterised by the One who fills it with Himself, where it may be lived, breathed, and enjoyed in *spirit* (though not in *body*) even now in the spiritual atmosphere peculiar to it. Thus the objective aspect of eternal life has its true and necessary place. But so has the subjective. We cannot afford to dispense with either, nor can the position of any set of Christians be according to God where they do not hold *both*. This has to be faced by us all.

4. Eternal life as something we have to get. This is an aspect of eternal life which all admit, namely, in its future and final sense, when it will be applied to the body as well as the soul and enjoyed in its fullness for ever in eternity. Eternal life in this acceptation we have *not* at all yet. It is with and like Christ in eternal glory, and this is to come. It is the *prospective* aspect of eternal life, as true in its place as either the present *subjective* or *objective* aspect is. "The end everlasting life" (Rom. vi.) "Heirs according to the *hope* of eternal life" (Titus iii. "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude). In this sense we are only expecting it. In the Old Testament, eternal life is never spoken of except in regard to the *future*. The only two instances, Dan. xii. and Ps. cxxxiii. both point on to the *earthly* glory of Messiah's coming millennial reign. They refer to the earthly things, while eternal life according to its New Testament revelation by the Son in connection with the *heavenly* things is not so much as alluded to, yet there seems an effort in the New Teaching to spoil its true blessedness by lowering it to an Old Testament level and getting its apprehension of what it means from that source, surely anything but a credit to those who have lent themselves to it.

5. Eternal life as something you live. That is life, not in the sense of *having* life; but when given, in the sense of *living* life. For example, "As the living Father hath sent Me and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, even he shall *live* by Me" (John vi. 57). "If Christ be in you . . . the Spirit is life" (Rom. viii. 10) that is, in the sense of *living* life, not of getting life, but for the production of *practical* "righteousness." The living and enjoying life is undoubtedly an aspect of life as, when one has finished his education, we say, he goes to commence *life*. Some seem to insist on calling nothing life but this, though it is plain no one can *live* life till he *has* life. What causes so much misunderstanding is taking up an unreasonable attitude like this.

6. Eternal life as something you lay hold of. This we find in 1 Tim. vi. 12 "Lay hold of the eternal life to which thou hast been called," that is, to apprehend it now spiritually. It does not mean striving to get it, for "eternal life is the gift of God;" but the present

spiritual apprehension of eternal life prospectively as part of the hope of God's calling, being one of the things to which the christian has been called, and according to which in life and walk he is practically to be conformed. Though so translated, the expression "eternal life" is not in ver. 19. It is "laying hold of what is really life," in contrast with "uncertain riches" and the like.

7. Eternal life as something you reap. "He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. vi. 8). This may apply either to *present* enjoyment or *future* eternal fruition, or to both. In the former, you *sow* now and you *reap* now. In the latter, the *present* would be the sowing time, and the *future* the reaping time. Both, however, are true, for we enjoy it in measure here, and shall *enjoy it fully* hereafter.

Now keep all these aspects in their places and they are an education for the soul, pit the one against the other, as has been done, and the effect is baneful. Is it possible that the truth as to eternal life in its comprehensiveness as unfolded in God's Word could be had unless *all* these are recognised and each retained where God has put it? Some have been unwise enough to use the present possession-aspect to deny the sphere-aspect. Others on the opposite side have as unwisely used the sphere-aspect to deny the present possession. Passages, that speak of eternal life as yet to come, are deliberately picked out and placed alongside others that declare you *have* it now. Then the false reasoning is resorted to, "Eternal life in this scripture is clearly *future*, how then, can you possess it now?" Thus simple souls are deceived, as if I cannot have eternal life as to my *soul* here and now, and eternal life as to my *body* by and by without any contradiction whatsoever, the one being quite as true as the other. This is not fair dealing either with souls or scripture and ought not to be allowed.

There are other alarming statements in the quotations given which call for notice, for they show, after all the talk and noise about eternal life, how little it has been truly grasped as taught in Scripture.

One stands aghast at the assertion "The Spirit is the beginning of life for God in the believer. The Spirit is life." What is the supposed authority for anything so utterly baseless? It is the "Spirit is life," and where is the quotation from? Would you believe it? Just four words extracted out of the middle of a verse without any regard to what goes before it or what comes after it, and a whole train of false issues made to hang on this mutilation of the passage. There is no such expression as "the Spirit is life" taken by itself. It is a complete falsification of what is said. Read Rom. viii. 10, and see. So far from "the Spirit is life" being the beginning of life for God in the believer" it declares the direct opposite. It says "If Christ be in you the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit life because of righteousness." It is "If *Christ* be *in* you" that "the Spirit is life." In other words it is; if you *have eternal* life, if Christ (who is eternal life) be *in you*, the 'body is held 'dead,' for if will is allowed to work, it is "sin," but in contrast with the body held dead, the Spirit is life, life *practically*, so as to produce practical "righteousness." It has nothing whatever to do with "the beginning of life for God" in any one. It is surely known *that is*, when he is "born of God." Then see how the Spirit's

operation in new birth is confounded with the Spirit Himself as a divine person indwelling the believer. Scripture says, "And because ye are sons" (not to *make* you sons) "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6). Has a son no life till the Spirit is sent forth into his heart crying Abba, Father? The reception of the Spirit to indwell the believer is over and above life. Has this truth also been lost? But mark the crop of errors that has grown from this egregious misuse of "the Spirit is life." It has been employed (1) to deny that you have eternal life now at all (though the very passage says the contrary), (2) to assert that the Spirit's coming to indwell the believer is the "beginning of life" in him, and (3) that the Holy Ghost's presence there is a substitute for eternal life until the time that you get it by and by. The fact is "life" had been spoken of in Rom. v. as connected with justification—"the justification of life"—"Grace" had also been said to "reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord," while it is said "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (chap. vi.) which links on to Rom. viii. 2, "For the law (principle) of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me from the law (principle) of sin and death." This was what Christ breathed on the disciples after He rose from the dead, something over and above new birth which they already had, and the reception of the Spirit to indwell is something over and above that again, which they did not get till Pentecost.

Again it is said "He may not get it until resurrection but get it he will. Every believer *will* certainly get it." It is not that the believer *has* it as the Lord says, but "*will* certainly get it." Then "he may not get it until resurrection." Eternal life is here mistaken for mortality being swallowed up of life as to those who are alive and remain, and for the reunion of the soul with the body as to the dead in Christ at His coming.

Once more it is said, "If he is going to die, how can he say he has actually eternal life? It is an enigma to me." What proper conception of eternal life could any one have who says the like of this? Does temporal death affect eternal life? One who has eternal life dies like other men. This is to confound eternal life with deathlessness or undying existence. You have only to apply this strange statement to Christ in order to see its folly. He manifested eternal life when here and yet he was "going to die" and did die.

Just one remark, while John refers eternal life to the "Son," the "Son of God" and the "Son of Man," Paul refers it to Christ both "by" and "in," that is, subjectively and objectively.

Then as to eternal life having no meaning in heaven.

I think eternal life refers to earth. I don't think we should talk about eternal life in heaven . . . I don't think the term will have much force there . . . I don't see much sense in connecting the idea of eternal life with heaven. (American Notes, p. 116).

Eternal life "refers to *earth*," yet no one is allowed to *have* it here, and then, if there is not "much sense in connecting the idea of eternal life with *heaven*," when or where is it to be had? Where was "that eternal life which was with the Father in a past eternity? In *heaven*. Where is eternal life now? In Christ at God's right hand, or in *heaven*. Where are we to enjoy eternal life with Christ for ever? In *heaven*.

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