

Do You Really Want Just Any Eternal Life?

God's Testimony, the Gift of Life In Christ, and the Essence of Christian Life

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Tomorrow is the Day of Pentecost, depicting the church as the firstfruits of salvation, the first to be spiritually begotten and born into God's Family, and the first to receive eternal life!

Romans 8:18-23 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

We associate this "redemption of our body" with eternal life. That is, in a sense, our ultimate goal or desire, and we focus on this, and look forward to it. We should be eagerly waiting for it. But, is any type of eternal life worth getting excited over? Do we really want eternal life regardless of the circumstances surrounding it? That is a question to contemplate.

The world has its many views of life after death. Generally, all religions have their theories of what happens to people after they die. Some believe we live on and in our next life we are reincarnated as an animal. There is a movie coming out soon that apparently is going to portray this silly notion. It is a take-off of the comic strip character 'Cat Woman'. I really do not know anything about it, other than what I have seen in the advertisements. But, apparently a woman is murdered and comes back as a cat, so that she can rectify things. Reincarnation seems to be more in the forefront of entertainment within our society.

For most of humankind's history, we see the world groping for answers to this very popular subject of eternal life. According to our history books, Ponce de Leon searched for the fountain of youth in Florida. His pursuit was, in reality, a search for eternal life.

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Some pursue eternal life through science and technology. Cloning is a hopeful interest for many. Then there is the dream of nanobots, to repair deteriorations within the human body. In the 1980s, cryogenics was a very popular life-lengthening procedure to head off early death. Maybe it still is popular among the very wealthy, but we do not hear much about it in the news like we used to. You might say, "Just deep freeze me until you find a cure for death." That seems to be the attitude behind cryogenics.

Generally, human beings will try to preserve their lives at any cost. Many are terrified at what might await them after death.

Does anyone want to live forever with severe pain and suffering? Any sane person absolutely would not. Some of the elderly, who have gone through very serious operations, are finding themselves wondering, "Do I really want to live on through all of this pain and suffering?" As their pain and agony increases beyond what already seems intolerable, many people, especially the very elderly, begin to believe that they would rather die than suffer any longer. Even still, most people would like to have eternal life. That is, they would like to have eternal life with vibrant health.

I know that I do not want to live forever if it means having to live with conflict, war, frustration, bitterness and hatred. And I do not think you do either! That is why I ask the question "Do we really want to have just any kind of eternal life?"

God has taught us to shoot for a much greater life—and He has shown us the way to get there!

I John 5:9-10 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.

What is that testimony and what is its purpose? The purpose of the testimony that God has given, of Jesus Christ, is to stir up faith in Christ. Receiving the testimony leads naturally to believing in, and following, the One to whom the testimony is borne. It means, not only following and believing in Him, but doing and living as He lived and developing the character that He has.

The results of belief and disbelief are plainly contrasted. We should have this testimony in our hearts. That is, we are given a deeper assurance by the inward testimony through

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the Spirit that we were right to trust in Christ. An outstanding example of this spiritual principle, is that everyone who has will be given more.

Testimony is both the cause and the consequence of belief. Belief is the stepping-stone between God's first and further testimony. The unbeliever, on the other hand, who has not believed, forfeits the possibility of receiving any further testimony from God, because he has rejected the first testimony and in so doing has accused God of being a liar.

Unbelief is not a hardship to be pitied; it is a sin to be deplored. Its sinfulness lies in the fact that it contradicts the word of the one true God, and thus attributes falsehood to Him, or frankly calls Him a liar.

I John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

In verses 11 and 12, John summarizes the blessing granted to the believer who receives and responds to the testimony of God. "This is the testimony" is the same expression as that in the middle of verse 9, which most translations (other than the King James Version or New King James) translate as 'it is the testimony' of God.

This testimony looks back to the three things that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Here it seems to include the testimony that, according to verse 10, we receive in our hearts and minds.

This becomes plainer when we consider how the testimony is described here, mainly that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The phrase 'eternal life' underscores the divine character of the life described, not its length. The emphasis, when we read of eternal life in God's inspired written word, is not a length of time, but it is a character and quality that is referred to.

Historically, God's testimony concerning Jesus is not only that He is the divine-human Christ, but that He is also the life-giver, the Savior of the world. Not only that He is the Son, but that in Him is life.

The testimony is that God gave us eternal life in giving His Son. But the testimony is not

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only objective to Christ as the life-giver, but subjective in the gift of life itself. Eternal life is a free gift of life that God gives to those who believe in His Son, and it also includes the experience of fellowship with God through Christ.

Eternal life is God's final testimony to His Son. While His Son was alive here on earth as a human being it was the knowledge of and fellowship with God and His Son.

John 17:1-3 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, "as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

John has previously written: 'anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart.' In I John 5:12, as we already read, he puts the same truth in these words: 'He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.' There is no mention of length of time in these scriptures.

Eternal life is in God's Son, and may be found nowhere else. It is as impossible to have life without having Christ, as it is to have Christ without thereby having life also. This is because the Son is the life we seek.

There are three important truths that are taught in I John 5:9-13 about eternal life:

1. It is not a prize that we have earned or could earn, but an undeserved gift.
2. It is found in Christ, so that in order to give us life, God both gave, and gives, us His Son.
3. This gift of life in Christ is a present possession, not in the way that the world believes, in that we have already possessed length of life, but it is that quality and character of life that we already have possession of, by Jesus Christ dwelling in us.

The Greek word *aionios* has been distantly related to *eon* which means age basically, but it does not have that meaning. This Greek word *aionios* is translated "eternal" in John 17:3 and is sometimes used in the futurist signification. But, often it is concerned

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with the quality, than with the quantity, or duration, of life.

John sums this up briefly in one verse of the Gospel:

John 20:31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

The Gospel, recording the words and works of Jesus, was John's testimony to Him as the Christ—the Son of God. The purpose of this testimony was 'that you may believe', and the result of faith is 'that by believing you may have life in His name'.

I John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

The way to life is faith, and the way to faith is testimony. The sequence of thought is the same here. God has borne witness to His Son, in order that we may believe in Him, and that we may have eternal life.

Verse 13 forms a fitting conclusion to what John has written about having eternal life in the Son. Here, John tells us the apparent purpose of his letter, now drawing to a close.

The letter was written 'that you may know that you have eternal life'. The Gospel was written so that we could read the testimony of God to His Son, believe in Him to whom the testimony pointed, and thus receive life through faith as the gift of God.

This letter was written so that we, having believed, may know that we have received, and therefore continue to have eternal life abiding in us in the presence of Jesus Christ, who abides in us. So we have quality of life dwelling in us in the form of Jesus Christ, and in the mind, through the Holy Spirit.

The phrase 'that you may know' means, both in word and tense, not that we may gradually grow in assurance, but that we may hold, here and now, a present certainty of life we have received in Christ. So, we see that the subject of eternal life always points back to Christ being in us.

John wrote to God's church at a time of unsettlement by false teachers and insecurity of their spiritual state. Throughout his letter, John had been giving the church doctrinal,

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moral, and social criteria by which to test themselves, and others. By examining their own lives against these criteria, they could tell how well their character was forming and shaping, and how God was working in them.

His purpose was to establish their assurance. John told the church, 'This letter is to assure you that you are guaranteed of eternal life, and even now you have eternal life abiding in you in Christ'.

Putting together the purposes of John's Gospel and letter, John's purpose is in four stages, mainly that we may hear, in hearing may believe, in believing may live, and in living may know. So those four were hear, believe, live and know.

John's emphasis is important, because there are those who dismiss any claim to assurance of salvation as presumptuous. The certainty of such a promise of salvation, and the humility to believe that it is God who will accomplish it, go hand in hand with one another. If God's revealed purpose is not only that we should hear, believe and live, we certainly should know at the end of this process. Presumptuousness lies in doubting His word, not in trusting it. This is a promise that God has given us of eternal life and to doubt it is calling Him a liar.

What follows I John 5:11-13 is, John's postscript to his letter. It states that the essence of the Christian life is eternal life.

The word for "eternal" is *aionios* [*eoneos*]. It means far more than simply lasting forever. A life that lasted forever might well be a curse, and not a blessing, an intolerable burden, and not a shining gift. *Aionios* may also refer to endless qualities such as God's power, His glory, and life in Christ.

There is only one person to whom *aionios* can be applied, and that is God. In the real sense of the term, it is God alone who possesses and inhabits eternity.

Eternal life is, therefore, nothing other than the life of God Himself. What we are promised is that here and now we can be given a share in the very life of God. But, what does this mean with regard to eternal life for us?

Let us look at five aspects of the life of God that impact the quality of eternal life.

1. In God there is peace and, therefore, eternal life means serenity. It means a life liberated from the fears that haunt us. As mortal human beings we are exposed to all sorts of fears. We are anxious people, given to phobias. Some people are afraid of

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spiders and snakes, and still others are afraid of crowded places or excessive heights. These phobias gnaw at us and disturb our inner peace. As we go through life, not constantly in fear necessarily of these things, but when the subject comes up, or the situation comes up, we have an unreal fear.

There is a certain kind of phobia from which we all suffer. It is called xenophobia. Xenophobia is a fear of (and sometimes hatred) of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign. That just about covers everything that is not normal in our lives. God is the ultimate object of the world's xenophobia. He is the ultimate stranger to them. He is the ultimate foreigner. He is holy and they are not.

We fear God because He is holy. Our fear is often not the "fear of the Lord" that the Bible describes. Sometimes, it is a servile fear, a fear born of dread. God is too great for us. He is too awesome and He makes difficult demands on us. In His presence, we would shake and tremble. I think, even we in God's church, if we were to appear before God right now, would definitely shake and tremble, and probably fall flat on our faces.

But the righteous have no reason to fear God, other than in the form of respect and awe. To those who live God's way of life He promises peace, not just now, but for eternity.

Isaiah 32:17-18 The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, In secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places,

We see here the close association with living a righteous life, and receiving peace for eternity.

The Hebrew word 'shalom', usually translated peace, means: health, prosperity, and welfare. Generally, it denotes quiet and tranquility, public or private; but also often prosperity and happiness of life. It is an all-encompassing word that represents a whole way of life. We see here, that peace is a major part of eternal life.

In the New Testament, peace often refers to the inner tranquility and poise of the Christian, whose trust is in God through Christ. This understanding about the coming Messiah was originally expressed in the Old Testament writings. The peace that Jesus Christ spoke of was a combination of hope, trust, and quiet in the mind and soul, brought about by a reconciliation with God.

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Job 22:21 "Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you.

So, we see that we have our work to do to arrive at that point of peace, if we want to have eternal life.

Generally there are three kinds of peace, at least in this context.

'Social peace' is mutual agreement one with another, whereby we forbear injuring one another

Psalms 34:14 Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

'Ecclesiastical peace' is freedom from contentions, and rest from persecutions. For example, when the church is persecuted in the last days.

Revelation 12:13-14 Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

'Spiritual peace' is deliverance from sin, by which we were at enmity with God. This will result in peace in our conscience and our way of life.

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Our bodies being washed with pure water represents the sin and evil of this world being washed from us. This peace is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ. It is a blessing of great importance, and it is denominated perfect, inexpressible, permanent, and eternal.

The peace that Christ brought, is primarily spiritual peace from and with God, peace in the heart.

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Jesus Christ said that He did not come "to send peace on the earth, but a sword," referring to the searching nature of His call and the divisions it would create. But, of course, the spirit of the written word of God, and of the Christian, is one of peace, and it is our duty to try to bring peace everywhere we go. "A soft answer turns away wrath" is a form of taking peace wherever we go. This is represented as the ultimate result of the gospel and Spirit of Christ. Universal and permanent peace can come only as the spirit rules in our hearts. There must be a change there.

In God there is peace and, therefore, eternal life means serenity.

The second aspect is that in God there is power, and so eternal life means the defeat of frustration. It means a life filled with the power of God and, therefore, victory over all circumstances.

Power, or the ability of performing, is an essential degree and attribute of Deity: God is emphatically all-powerful. Sometimes power signifies a right privilege, or dignity. Power can signify absolute authority; sometimes the exertion or act of power, as of the Holy Spirit, of angels, or of human governments—and it may include the idea of dignity and superiority.

Since power is the ability, or strength, to perform an activity or deed, it is sometimes used with the word authority. If power usually suggests strength, authority suggests a moral right or privilege. One can have power to perform a task, but not authority to do it. Jesus Christ had both the power and the authority, and He bestowed some of this upon His followers.

Luke 10:17-20 Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

This power, given to the seventy saints that Jesus sent out two by two, was limited by the amount of authority that they were given to use that power. They were not given authority to call lightning down from heaven, nor to heal the sick.

The power that they received was authority to represent Christ as witnesses. They

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received power to boldly preach the gospel. They also received power over Satan and his demons.

We receive power, with limited authority, through the Holy Spirit to resist Satan, our enemy, and the world.

II Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

These are all aspects, qualities and characteristics of people with eternal life. This is power to face enemies and dangers; power to bear up under trials; power to triumph in persecutions. Verse 7 is a short list of qualities or traits, starting with the negative, and continuing on with the positive. Here, the negative trait is fear (or timidity), and the positive traits are power, love, and a sound mind.

Power here is not physical, but refers to the spiritual strength that enables us to be victorious over adverse circumstances, and to remain faithful to God. It is a powerful strength in our hearts and minds. It is manifested in the spiritual product of self-control.

Eternal life means the end of all frustration. We experience more failures than successes in this physical life. We certainly remember our failures, and learn powerful lessons from them. We do not learn as much from our successes. Actually, we barely remember most of our successes, unless they are truly substantial. When things are going well we seem to not even realize in many cases, and we even neglect to thank God that they have gone well. Another reason why we do not notice our successes is because our failures so often overshadow our successes. We work day after day, trudging ahead, feeling like we make little or no headway. Human life is burdensome.

We certainly would not want to have eternal life in a human way that is burdensome. Would you want to live forever ever burdened with seemingly unsolvable problems? Of course not! No one wants to spend eternity in constant frustration. Look how tiring and exhausting frustrations are.

Eternal life means the power, and the authority to use it, to solve or prevent anything according to God's will. It means nothing is impossible. And it means good always prevails. In God there is power, therefore, eternal life means the defeat of frustration.

The third aspect associated with eternal life, through the characteristics of God, is that in God there is holiness. Therefore, eternal life means the defeat of sin. It means a life clad

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with the transcendent purity of God and armed against the soiling infections of the world.

There is more than one way the word 'holy' is used in the Bible, which makes it more difficult to define in simple terms. There is a sense in which the bible uses 'holy' in a way very closely related to God's goodness. It has been customary to define 'holy' as: "pure, free from every stain, wholly perfect and immaculate in every detail."

Purity is the first word most of us think of when we hear the word 'holy'. But the idea of purity, or of moral perfection is at best, the secondary meaning of the term in the Bible. When the seraphim sang their song that God is 'holy', 'holy', 'holy', they were saying far more than that God was "purity, purity, purity." 'Holy' 'holy' 'holy' has so much greater power to it and meaning, but purity is contained within its meaning.

The primary meaning of holy is "separate." It comes from an ancient word that meant, "to cut," or "to separate." To translate this basic meaning into contemporary language would be to use the phrase "a cut apart." Perhaps more accurate would be the phrase "a cut above" something. When we find clothing or another product that is outstanding, that has superior excellence, we use the expression that it is "a cut above the rest."

Since God is holy, He transcends us. The word "transcendence" means literally "to climb across." It is defined as "exceeding usual limits." To transcend is to rise above something, to go above and beyond a certain limit.

When we speak of the transcendence of God, we are talking about that sense in which God is above and beyond us. It tries to get at His supreme and absolute greatness. The word is used to describe God's relationship to the world. He is higher than the world. He has absolute power over the world. The world has no power over Him.

Transcendence describes God in His consuming majesty; His exalted loftiness. It points to the infinite distance that separates Him from every creature. He is an infinite cut above everything else.

When the bible calls God holy, it means primarily that God is transcendentally separate. He is so far above and beyond us, that He seems almost totally foreign to us. To be holy is to be different in a superior way. As we live God's way of life, and we have faith in Jesus Christ, and God works His work in us, we do not feel as much the stranger as we do when we are first called. The same basic meaning is used when the word holy is applied to earthly things. For example: holy Sabbath, holy convocation, holy nation, holy people and so on. We see that the word holy is applied to all sorts of things besides

God.

In every case, the word 'holy' is used to express something other than a moral or ethical quality. The things that are holy are things that are set apart, separated from the rest. They have been consecrated, separated from the commonplace, to the Lord and to His service.

None of the things I mentioned above is holy in and of itself. To become holy, they must first be consecrated or sanctified by God. He alone is holy in Himself. Only God can sanctify something else. Only He can change something from commonplace, to something special, different, or apart.

Where does purity fit? We are so accustomed to equating holiness with purity, or ethical perfection, that we look for the idea when the word holy appears. When things are made holy, when they are consecrated, they are set apart to purity. They are to be used in a pure way. They are to reflect purity as well as simple apartness.

Purity is not excluded from the idea of the holy; it is contained within it. But the point we must remember, is that the idea of 'holy' is never exhausted by the idea of purity. It includes purity, but is much more than that. It is purity and transcendence. It is a transcendent purity.

When we use the word 'holy' to describe God, we face another problem. We often describe God by compiling a list of qualities or characteristics that we call attributes. We say that God is a spirit, that He knows everything, that He is loving, just, merciful, gracious, and so on.

The tendency is to add the idea of the 'holy' to this list of attributes as one attribute among many. But when the word 'holy' is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute. God is 'holy' because no sin dwells in Him.

On the contrary, God is called 'holy' in a general sense. It is the word that is used as a synonym for His deity. That is, the word 'holy' calls attention to all that God is. It reminds us that His love is holy love, His justice is holy justice, His mercy is holy mercy, His knowledge is holy knowledge, and His Spirit is Holy Spirit.

Therefore, since there is holiness in God, eternal life means the defeat of sin. It means a life clad with the transcendent purity of God; and it means being separated from, and armed against, the soiling infectious sins of the world.

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Jesus Christ's purpose for giving Himself for His church is so that it may be holy, pure, and perfect in every sense. It is for this purpose that He continues the different ordinances which He has appointed, and particularly the preaching of the word—the doctrine of reconciliation through faith in his blood.

It is in this life that all of this purification is to take place, for no one will be presented to Christ who has not been sanctified, cleansed, washed, and made glorious—having neither spot, wrinkle, blemish, nor any such thing.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

The Greek word translated 'present' here, also carries with it the meaning 'dedicate' or 'prove'. That Christ may dedicate the church to Himself. That He may prove the church to be a worthy bride. Maybe the word "prepare" would also express the sense here—that he may prepare it for Himself as a holy church.

This puts a great obligation and responsibility on the church.

I Peter 1:15-16 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

The fourth aspect having to do with eternal life that is an attribute of God is that in God there is love. Eternal life means the end of bitterness and hatred. It means life that has the love of God at its inner being and at its heart.

Unless love is a free response it is not love. Had God been only law, He could have created a world in which people moved automatically, having no more choice than a machine. But, if God had made people like that, there would have been no possibility of a personal relationship between Him and mankind. Love is of necessity the free response of the heart; and, therefore God, by a deliberate act of self-limitation, had to endow human beings with free will. And so, we have a choice of whether we will abide in His love or not.

John 15:9-13 As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My

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love. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

I think that we are all in agreement that we would not want to live through eternity without there being love. Had God been simply mind, order, and law, He might, in a sense, have created the universe, wound it up, set it going and left it. I think this is the way that most people in this world think that God works, if they even believe that there is a God. There is equipment that we are urged to buy, because we can set them in place and mostly forget them. Their most attractive quality is that they can be left to run by themselves. We all have this equipment at home. For example: our heating, ventilating and air conditioning units, our refrigerators, stoves and dishwashers, to name a few. All we do is basically set them up, plug them in, and away they go.

But because God is love, His creating act is followed by His constant care. This same wonderful and reliable characteristic holds true for eternity. God is love forever!

If God had been only law and justice, He would simply have left people to the consequences of their sin. The moral law would operate; the soul who sinned would die; and eternal justice would inexorably hand out its punishments. But the very fact that God is love means that He had to seek and save that which was lost and provide a remedy for sin.

Our response to God must be the response of love; and for love, there is nothing too hard to overcome. That which we would never do for a stranger we will willingly attempt for a loved one. What would be an impossible sacrifice if a stranger needs it becomes a willing gift when love is involved. That is, when love is truly the center of our character, it does not matter whether it is a close relative or a stranger needing help, we are equally anxious and willing to provide help.

There is an old story that is a kind of parable of this. I know you have heard variations of it.

Someone once met a boy going to school long before the days when transportation was provided. The larger boy was carrying on his back a smaller boy who was clearly lame and unable to walk.

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The stranger said to the larger boy, "Do you carry him to school every day?" "Yes," said the larger boy. "That is a heavy burden for you to carry," said the stranger. "He is not a burden," said the larger boy. "He is my brother."

A similar story came out of the Vietnam War and was put into song. (Many of you remember it)—"He ain't heavy, he's my brother!" If I remember correctly, that was the story of a soldier carrying his badly wounded friend out of harms way. It is a touching song and video that goes with it.

The point is, that love turned the burden into no burden at all. It must be so with us, and Christ. Love must be the make up of our character and of our inner most being. It is of God and His Son. His commandments are not a burden, but a privilege, and an opportunity, to show our love.

The commandments of God are difficult, they are not burdensome. God never laid a commandment on a person without giving him the strength to carry it out; and every commandment that is required of us provides another opportunity to show our love.

The greatest gift is not eternal life; it is love. Love for a moment is far better than hatred for eternity.

I Corinthians 13:1-13 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

There you see what the greatest characteristic of eternal life is. Since God is love in totality, and God is the only one who can give eternal life, it is impossible for bitterness and hatred to exist in God. Therefore, bitterness and hatred are non-existent in the eternal Kingdom of God. Love never fails.

The fifth aspect I would like to give you today is, having to do with a characteristic of God and that will have a great impact on eternity. In God there is life, and therefore eternal life means the defeat of death. It means a life that is indestructible because it has in it the indestructibility of God Himself.

If God were simply creator, people might live their brief life span and die forever. The life that ended early would be only another flower that withered and died. But, the fact that God is love, and in Him is life, makes it certain that the demands and changes of life do not have the last word and that His love will sustain the balance of life.

Eternal life does not compare to natural life. Natural life is destructible and finite. But eternal life is a priceless treasure, the gift of God, and it is indestructible. It is not to be confused with mere endless existence. Christ said, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." This life is nothing less than "Christ in us, the hope of glory."

It is likened to a birth from above, and is dependent upon receiving Christ as Savior, as we read earlier in I John 5:12, "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."

Eternal life must not be confused with natural life. This form of life is subject to death and is derived by human generation. Spiritual life may have a beginning, but certainly no end.

The difference is that one possessing mere natural life will be separated eternally from God in the lake of fire, whereas the one possessing eternal life will be united and in fellowship with God for all eternity. Thus, separation from God is eternal death; union with God is eternal life.

The love of God and of Christ is only obtainable in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. That love is our lifeline to the eternal Kingdom of God.

Eternal life comes through Jesus Christ and in no other way. If eternal life is the life of

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God, it means that we can possess that life only when we know God and are enabled to approach Him and abide in Him.

I John 1:1-4 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

We can approach God and abide in Him only in Jesus Christ. The Son alone fully knows the Father and, therefore, only He can fully reveal to us what God is like, as it says in John 1:18. Jesus Christ alone can bring us to God. It is in Him that there is open to us the new and living way into the presence of God.

Hebrews 10:19-23 9 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Let me give you a simple analogy: If we want to meet someone whom we do not know, and who moves in a completely different circle from our own, we can meet that individual only by finding someone who knows him and is willing to introduce us to him. That is what Jesus does for us in regard to God. We can find that life only through Jesus Christ.

Christ Himself is the guarantee. He told Philip, "Because I live, you shall live also." That eternal life is the life of God.

Romans 5:17-21 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in

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condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The gift prompted by grace includes righteousness and eternal life.

A person's new and redeemed existence in Jesus Christ is granted by God, as a gift, to all believers. Eternal life refers to the quality or character of our new existence in Christ, as well as the unending character of His life.

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul here puts God up against sin, gift up against wages, eternal life up against death—crowning it all with the acknowledgment that the mediation of Christ Jesus our Lord accounts for the shift from the one camp of sin to the other camp of God. This refers to goodness of life rather than length of life.

The majority of references to eternal life in the New Testament are oriented to the future. The emphasis, however, is upon the blessed quality and character of the life that will be enjoyed endlessly in the future.

Jesus made it clear that eternal life comes only to those who make a total commitment to Him.

Matthew 19:16-21 Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have

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and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

The young man's question in verse 20, "What do I still lack?" refers to gaining eternal life, and Jesus' answer in verse 21 must be understood as answering that question. The basic emphasis of verse 21 is not "sell your possessions and give to the poor" but "come, follow Me." It is all encompassing; it is a way of life.

Perfection here suggests undivided loyalty and full-hearted obedience. This young man could not face that. He was willing to discipline himself to observe all the outward stipulations and even perform works above and beyond what was required of him. But, because of his wealth, he had a divided heart. His money was competing with God, and what Jesus demands as a condition for eternal life is absolute and unhindered discipleship. This painfully entails the surrender of self.

Only keeping the individual commandments is no substitute for the readiness for self-surrender to the absolute claim of God imposed through His calling. God's will is that we follow Jesus' teaching and example.

Absolute allegiance to Christ with the humility of a child is essential to salvation. The condition Jesus imposes not only reveals the young man's attachment to money but also shows that all his formal compliance with the law is worthless because none of it entails absolute self-surrender.

The witnessing testimony of God is that through His Son, He gave us eternal life. God's own testimony at the time of Jesus' baptism establishes that Jesus is God's Son. It is a testimony given through the Spirit and confirmed in the heart of the person who believes in and follows His Son.

The consequence of accepting this testimony from God is the fulfillment of the promise John made in I John 1:2 to bear witness and to testify to that eternal life that was with the Father and has now appeared to us in the Son.

The true witness has already been given. Eternal life—which is nothing less than fellowship with the Father, and His Son—is present in His Son. He who has the Son has access to this life. He who is without the Son is without life.

It is not an idea, or system of belief, nor even a fact, that is the ultimate object of faith; it is a person. That person is Jesus Christ. He is to live in us. His love is to abide and be

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made complete in us; and we are to live in Him as He lives. And this is life eternal!

I John 2:24-25 Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.

We are the potential firstfruits of the Kingdom of God that the day of Pentecost pictures. We have been promised not just a longer life, but a superior quality of life—eternal Life!