

KNOWING WE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13).

The tender regard the Lord has for us is apparent in this expression. Here is a book that has been written to persuade those in Christ that they have eternal life. This is, then, something the Father desires for us. It also is something inherent in salvation – something Christ’s atonement brings with it. We may also conclude the knowledge of eternal life is required for us to live triumphantly in this present evil world. It is axiomatic that God makes no provisions that are not practical and essential.

BELIEVING ON THE NAME OF THE SON OF GOD

The language is strange to those with a propensity to law, for it is higher than he can reach. Believing on the name of the Son of God is being convinced in the heart that He is precisely the One declared by God. The Gospel, in its essence, is “the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11). The “name” of the Son of God is the Person declared in that “record,” or testimony. In this instance, the word “name” does not denote an appellation or designation. It rather speaks of personage, celebrity, and reputation. It is WHO Jesus is and WHAT He has accomplished according to the will of God and in the behalf of the people. The individual believing on the name of the Son adheres to Him in that capacity, trusting wholly in Him for salvation in all of its varied aspects. The believer leans totally upon the Son for deliverance, guidance, tutelage, intercession, and strength.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

In his Gospel, John had a similar objective. “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). It is thought by many John’s Gospel was written to those who are not in Christ. There is, however, no Scriptural evidence to support this. It is more likely that it was written to fortify the faith of believers against the barrage of false teaching that was being leveled at them. That marvelous Gospel lifts high the Divinity and glory of Christ as a shining beacon in the midst of erroneous views of the Savior being perpetrated by men.

I can tell you from experience that it requires considerable effort to extricate ones self from the restrictive notion that Christ’s main attention is devoted to the lost. It is true that Jesus presented Himself as the Good Shepherd that left the ninety and nine sheep to seek and save the lost one (Luke 15:3-7). However, His primary residence was the sheepfold. And, when He found the lost sheep, that is where He returned. The shepherd did not live in the mountains. His primary identity is with the sheep.

THE CENTRALITY OF BELIEVING

The necessity of a strong faith, and of the knowledge we have eternal life, are central in spiritual life. The burden of the Apostolic writings is focused on producing these results. The awareness of this revolutionizes our approach to Scripture.

A FEW EXAMPLES

As believers, we are told God's own righteousness will be imputed to us "IF WE BELIEVE on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom 4:24).

Those in Christ are not addressed as though they were already in heaven. Rather, we are told we will be saved "IF THOU SHALT . . . BELIEVE in thine heart that God hath raised Him (Christ) from the dead" (Rom 10:9-10).

The matter of being joined together with those who have gone on to be with the Lord is also tied to believing. We are told God will bring those departed saints with Jesus, to be joined to us "IF WE BELIEVE that Jesus died and rose again" (1 Thess 4:14).

In this very Epistle, not taking our faith for granted, the Spirit reminds us that God's commandment is "That we SHOULD BELIEVE on the name of the Son of God" (1 John 3:23).

How is it that believing on the name of the Son of God is so rarely the subject of contemporary preaching, teaching, and writing? Why does it seem to be taken for granted that those who wear the name of Christ have reached the pinnacle of believing, which suggests there is no further need to believe? Why have some demeaned believing by viewing it as a mere "step" in a series of responses culminating in initial salvation?

Is it not true that every sensitive soul feels the need for stronger faith? Who is the trusting soul that sees no need for a more firm persuasion of the truth of Christ Jesus as declared in the Gospel?

The Western church has, indeed, fallen upon hard times. In a massive departure from the faith, little effort is being devoted to maturing and stabilizing the faith of the saints of God. Churches are filled with spiritually immature people, and most everyone knows it. Strong confidence, rejoicing in hope, and stability of soul are admittedly scarce. Rarely will you hear a word addressed to those who "believe on the name of the Son of God," in order that they might "know" what they possess in Him. But this is the mind and manner of the Spirit, as made abundantly clear in the text before us.

WE ARE BEING CHANGED

Those who "believe in the name of the Son of God" are in the process of being prepared for glory. They are being "conformed to the image" of God's Son (Rom 8:29), and being changed "from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of our God" (2 Cor 3:18). Jesus has finished His earthly work, but they have not finished their's. He has been glorified, but they have not. He is in heaven, but they remain in the world. It ought to be apparent that there is no room for indifference in them. That is why great volumes of teaching are directed to the saints – those who believe on the name of the Son of God. There remains in the best of us remnants of unbelief that must be expelled.

RECEIVING A GREATER WITNESS

To “believe in the name of the Son of God” is to trust in Christ Jesus as He has been declared in the Gospel. It is to receive the greater “witness of God,” and to shape our lives around Christ’s Person and work. For some, this is not sufficient. They imagine that verbal commitment to Jesus is the highest and most notable achievement by men. But this is not the case, for commitment to Christ and labor for Him are dependent upon something else. They are the fruit, and not the tree. They both spring from faith, and the persuasion that we have eternal life! It is written, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10).

PAUL’S TESTIMONY

In explaining something of his involvements with the Lord, Paul spoke of his own persuasion. “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (1 Tim 1:15, NKJV). Where such a conviction is lacking, living for Christ will become a burden, and salvation will be easily neglected. This accounts for the instability and vacillation of many professed believers.

Knowing we “have eternal life” is more a necessity than a luxury. The Spirit did not move John to write in order that we might enjoy a sort of spiritual hors d’oeuvre. The nature of life in this world demands that we be certain about having eternal life. As is evident from our text, it is possible to have eternal life and not know, or realize, it. But this is not at all a favorable condition. Too, because of the warfare of faith, it is possible for such wonderful knowledge to diminish, and even disappear from our conscience. Therefore we must be brought to this knowledge, then have our comprehension of it fortified by Divine affirmation.

KNOWING THAT WE KNOW HIM

Knowing that we have eternal life is knowing that we know Him. As it is written, “And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3). He does not say “obey,” but “keep,” which is an inward matter – something accomplished in the heart. This can only be achieved by faith.

INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE

This is what might be called a settled intuitive, or instinctive, knowledge. By intuitive, I mean a direct knowledge that is not based upon rational thought and inference. This does not mean there is no place for rational thought and inference. It rather emphasizes that they are confirming, not foundational, of what we instinctively have been brought to know. Such knowledge is more related to believing, resulting in confidence and assurance.

Rationality, or the ability to reason, is involved, but at a much higher level. In spiritual life, faith is the fountain of saving knowledge, not natural reasoning – and faith has a rationality of its own.

To put it another way, knowing we have eternal life is actually believing it more firmly, for faith is the root of true spiritual knowledge. Knowing we have eternal life is being persuaded, or convinced, that we possess it. There really is only one reason for believing, or knowing, we have eternal life – God has said so! Again, these clear affirmations are in order. “He who believes in the Son HAS everlasting life” (John 3:36). “He who hears

My word and believes in Him who sent Me HAS everlasting life” (John 5:24). “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me HAS everlasting life” (John 6:47). “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood HAS eternal life” (John 6:54). “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life IS in His Son” (1 John 5:11).

LIVING IN PERSUASION

Knowing we have eternal life involves living in a full persuasion of that reality. Such wonderful knowledge brings with it confidence and hope. It enables the soul to stand in trial, and wax strong in spiritual battle. It dissolves the power of delusion, and empowers us to run the race, casting off every weight and the sin that so easily besets us. How marvelous is this knowledge!

IT CANNOT BE PROVED IN THE FLESH

What sort of external or fleshly evidence could any person assume to present to confirm they have eternal life? What form of human rationality can be brought forward that can bring us to such a conclusion? Such wonderful knowledge is acquired by believing what the Lord has declared – such as is provided in this Epistle.

Religious sophists boast of the effects apologetics, archaeological finds, and tangible evidences have had upon their faith. But which of them will say that the dead sea scrolls have confirmed to them they have eternal life? Let the person step forward who has been convinced he has eternal life through an apologetic argument. Which archaeological discovery has persuaded men they have everlasting life, or are in fellowship with the Living God through Christ and by the Holy Spirit? The very notion is so utterly absurd there is no further need to deal with it. Even those ascribing inordinate value to such things will not say that they made them sure they possess eternal life.

THE MEANS OF KNOWING

There are two means employed in this Epistle for the accomplishment of the intended knowledge—i.e., knowing we have eternal life.

THE ROLE AND POWER OF JESUS

First, the indispensable role of Jesus is powerfully declared. He is absolutely central in our salvation. Consequently, there is no point in spiritual life where He recedes into the background, is given second place, or is to be taken for granted.

1. Jesus is “that eternal life” (1:2)
2. He is “the Son of God” (1:3,7)
3. He is “the Christ” (2:22; 5:1)
4. The blood of Jesus Christ “cleanses us from all sin” (1:7).
5. He is our “Advocate” with the Father (2:1).
6. He is “the Righteous” (2:1)

7. He is the “Propitiation for our sins” (2:2).
8. We shall be “like Him” (3:2).
9. He is “pure” (3:3).
10. He was manifested “to take away our sins”(3:5).
11. We “live through Him” (4:9).
12. He is the “Savior of the world” (4:14).

EVIDENCE OF AFFILIATION

Secondly, in this epistle of First John, the Holy Spirit holds before us the evidence of our affiliation with Christ. This confirmation is essential.

1. Keep His word (1 John 2:5)
2. Loving the brethren (1 John 2:10).
3. Doing the will of God (1 John 2:17).
4. Acknowledging the Son. (1 John 2:23).
5. Doing righteousness (1 John 3:7).
6. Keeping His commandments (1 John 2:23; 3:24).
7. Loving in deed and in truth (3:18-19)
8. When we hear and receive the word of the Apostles (4:6)
9. Dwelling in love (4:16).
10. Overcoming the world (5:4-5).
11. Believing on the Son of God (5:10).

You will notice that all of these are spiritual in nature. They are things that cannot be substantiated in the flesh. They can only be confirmed by faith. That condition does not diminish the power of the knowledge affirmed. Rather, it proves the knowledge to be superior.

All of these are matters that can become clearer to us – and the more apparent they become, the more we will be convinced we “have eternal life.”

THE APPOINTED OBJECTIVE

By saying we can know we have eternal life, the Spirit has revealed God’s objective for us. From the standpoint of our activity, our focus is to “believe on the name of the son of God” –to embrace Him more fully, see Him more clearly, and hear Him more precisely. The result of that is knowing we have eternal life. While the objective of this Epistle involves knowing we “have eternal life,” the Spirit does not simply restate this over and over. Rather, He makes strong appeals to our faith, grounding it in solid Divine statements.

It is no wonder that such powerful affirmations are made by the spirit regarding the

possession of eternal life. Although these have already been mentioned, they are worthy of reiteration. “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life . . . he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life . . . Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life . . . Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life”NKJV (John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47,54).

DEATH CANNOT TERMINATE IT

Further, this life will not be broken by death, which knowledge causes confidence to spring up in the heart. “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). Eternal life is not interrupted by death. Knowing God and Christ through vital union and fellowship is not suspended in death. If this is true, the “soul-sleeping” doctrine is nothing more than an old wives fable.” That is why it is written, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). But it is not enough to simply hear these words, they must be believed, else we will not know we have eternal life.

THE REASON FOR DEFEAT

Many a soul has been conquered by the devil because they did not know they possessed eternal life. Some have been subjected to such distorted and confused preaching and teaching that such knowledge is nearly impossible. However, if we do not know we have eternal life, and if we do not realize we are being fitted for glory and the possession of an “eternal inheritance,” there really is no reason for life. Religion thus becomes an encumbrance, and satisfaction is sought elsewhere. That is why people embrace religious folly.

In the salvation of God, there are realities outside the perimeter of human senses—i.e. abundant life (John 10:10), remission of sins (Acts 10:43), an abounding hope (Rom 15:13), everlasting consolation (2 Thess 2:16), the grace of God (Tit 2:11), all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3), reconciliation (2 Cor 5: 18-19; Col 1:21), the peace of God (Phil 4:7; Col 3:15), etc. The grand summation of everything that is received in salvation is “eternal life.” That means more than eternal existence. It speaks of reciprocity with God Almighty through Jesus Christ. It involves having “spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9) and being able to discern things that are themselves eternal. “Eternal life” has to do with understanding God (Jer 9:24), having fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and being able to live by every word of God (Lk 4:4). Eternal life has nothing to do with human senses, for there is nothing in it that can be detected by them. Men who do not possess eternal life only philosophize when they speak of spiritual things, for they are unqualified diagnosticians, having no ability to occupy the realm of which they attempt to speak.

The knowledge related to knowing we have eternal life is the knowledge with which God fills us. That is a knowledge that is part and parcel of salvation itself. As it is written, “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in

every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:9-10).

Obviously, it is not possible for a person who does not have eternal life to know that he possesses it. However, there are people who have eternal life, but do not know it. Such people are critically lacking in areas like hope, assurance, and confidence. Further, they are vulnerable to the wicked one, who seeks to exploit their ignorance.

If you do not know you have eternal life, and are among those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the Gospel, then digest First John. Envelop your study with prayer, and you will soon see

that John was effective in writing that you might know you "have eternal life."

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