

Eternal Life Is in the Son – 1 John 5:9-13

Dub McClish

Introduction

John gives the infidelity of the Gnostic heretics, which apparently constitutes the setting of John's first epistle, one final broadside in 1 John 5. In verses 1-8, the apostle discussed some of the practical implications of belief in the Sonship of Christ, as well as some of the evidence of His Deity. In the section to which this manuscript is devoted the following important topics are discussed:

1. The Father's testimony concerning His Son
2. The obligation to receive the Divine testimony
3. A consequence of denying the Divine testimony
4. The gift of eternal life and the sphere in which it is found
5. The certainty of God's promise of eternal life

When students consider these and related topics with some diligence, they render rich spiritual rewards. Numerous weighty implications of these topics are worthy of our careful attention. This study will begin with a brief exegesis of 1 John 5:9-13, followed by an exposition of some of its prominent themes.

Exegesis of 1 John 5:9-13

1 John 5:9

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning his Son.¹

John reasoned from the lesser to the greater (*a minori ad majus*). If men accept the lesser testimony of their fellowmen, how much more ought they to accept the greater testimony of God. While faithful men have given (and continue to give) testimony concerning the Son of God, beyond that, God Himself has “borne witness concerning his Son.”

This testimony has been borne through the promises, prophecies, types, and shadows of the Old Testament. God bore witness in the angelic announcements of the birth of His Son to both Joseph and Mary (Mat. 1:20-23; Luke 1:26-33). He did so at Jesus' baptism in the well-known words: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat. 3:17). The Father was bearing witness to His Son in all of the marvelous miracles Jesus performed (John 20:30-31). At the Lord's Transfiguration, God bore powerful testimony to His Son with the same

words He uttered at His baptism, but with the additional imperative, “Hear ye him” (Mat. 17:5; cf. 2 Pet. 1:17–19).

It was by the “glory of the Father” that Jesus came forth from Joseph's new tomb (Rom. 6:4), and this resurrection is the climactic assurance to all men that His Son will judge the world (Acts 17:30–31). The Ascension of our Lord to the Father was further testimony from God concerning His Son. All of the mass of testimony which the Father has borne concerning His son is recorded in that great book of testimony, the Bible – the revealed, inspired Word of God. This is the agency by which the Holy Spirit bears witness (1 John 5:8). By this means men have had access to all of the Father's testimony since John laid down his Spirit-directed pen on Patmos to pick it up no more. Verily, the witness of God is greater because He is greater than the best of men whose testimony is believed. Furthermore, the testimony God has given is greater than that which men **can** give – in quality as well as in quantity.

1 John 5:10

He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son.

One's faith is proof that he has learned of and listened to the evidence concerning the Christ at some time in the past. More than this, however, John was saying to Christians who already had come to believe (as the perfect tense forms indicate), that one who **continued** to believe in Christ **continued** to have the witness in himself. The Word of God is the basis and source of our faith: “So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). The believer demonstrates that he continues to rely upon the evidence (God's Word) which abides in him. The wonderful Word of God is the continual witness of the Son by both the Father and the Spirit.

Those who reject the evidence of the Deity of Jesus Christ reject the testimony of God. Such is tantamount to saying that God is a liar. God testified that Jesus of Nazareth is His Only Begotten Son. When one refuses to believe what God said about Jesus, he has implied that God's testimony was false. The infidel by his unbelief says, “God lied about Jesus.” Scripture says, “...It is impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:18). The unbeliever not only makes God out to be a liar concerning His Son, but since belief in the Christ is the very foundation of Christianity, God is made out to be a liar in every utterance, testimony, prophecy, and miracle that relates to Christ

and His kingdom. No wonder Jesus declared, "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me" (John 12:44).

1 John 5:11-12

And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life.

The end of all of God's testimony concerning His Son is the provision of eternal life for those who become His children. The sphere in which God's gift of eternal life may be found is "in his Son." Without Christ and outside of Christ men have "no hope" and are "without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). John's words here are the strongest and clearest possible statement of the exclusiveness of the religion of Christ—the religion prophesied in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament. The so-called "great religions" of the world (e.g., Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, et al.) exist only because of human imagination and upon human authority. One cannot believe the Bible and believe that there is any spiritual validity in any of them. They can be considered "great" only in the sense that they have many devotees and wield considerable influence in various parts of the world. Likewise, those religious groups which profess "Christianity," but pay little or no attention to Scripture (e.g., Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and assorted other cults) are excluded. To reject the Word of Christ is to reject Christ (John 12:48) and to reject Christ is to reject the only source of eternal life.

Hardly a more persistent theme exists in the New Testament than that salvation is found in Christ alone. The angel announced to Joseph that Mary's son would be named "Jesus," which means "Savior" (Mat. 1:21). Jesus declared Himself to be "the way, and the truth, and the life," apart from Whom "no one cometh unto the Father" (John 14:6). It is "in Christ" alone that

- Divine condemnation is removed (Rom. 8:1),
- One becomes a new creature (2 Cor. 5:7),
- One may be redeemed (Rom. 3:24),
- God expressed His love for mankind (Rom. 8:39),
- One is sanctified (1 Cor. 1:9),
- One may be reconciled to God (Eph. 2:13-16),
- One has a Mediator with the Father (1 Tim. 2:5),
- One receives grace (2 Tim. 2:1),
- And one is saved (2 Tim. 2:10).

Indeed, every spiritual blessing is found in Christ (Eph. 1:3), which means that none are found apart from and outside of Him.

One of the great energizing principles of the religion of Christ has always been that it and it alone is approved of God. It is upon the complete and exclusive authority of Christ that we are to preach the Gospel to the whole creation (Mat. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15). The Gospel is not to be taken to all men merely because it is one good way among other good ways. Just as Christ is the only way to the Father (John 14:6), so the Gospel is the only way of salvation (Acts 16:17). It alone contains God's saving power (Rom. 1:16). The apostles and other dedicated saints of yore fanned out across the ancient world with the zeal of a people who understood that the message they bore and the Author of it were the one and only hope of salvation from sin. They were bold to proclaim, even before rulers, “And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). There is no eternal life apart from the Christ!

1 John 5:13

These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you. that believe on the name of the Son of God

This verse states the purpose of the entire epistle. It bears a striking similarity to John's statement of purpose in writing his account of the Gospel in John 20:31: “But these things are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name.” One will note, however, that while the statements are similar, the stated purposes are not. The Gospel account was written to establish belief in the Christ. The epistle was written to assure Christians of the consequences of their belief in Christ (eternal life).

The apostle said that saints may “know” that they have eternal life. Gnosticism is generally believed to be the major factor in the background of 1 John. *Gnosticism* (literally, “the knowing ones”) is based upon the Greek word, *gnosis* (“knowledge”). Such individuals claimed to have a superior, “inside” knowledge of certain spiritual matters, enabling them to sin without guilt. They considered themselves the spiritually “elite.” Their doctrines were erroneous and damnable, and they led to utter debauchery and licentiousness in application. Thus, John's reference to knowing things (both here and elsewhere in this letter) is an example of biting irony and sarcasm directed at the Gnostic heretics. John seems to be saying, “I write that ye may know with a true knowledge, not a ‘knowledge falsely so-called’ (1 Tim. 6:20), such as the Gnostics claim.”

John introduced the subject of “eternal life” in the immediate context in verses 11 and 12. God testified that He gave unto us eternal life in His Son; *the Son* and *eternal life* go together — one cannot have one without the other. These verses clearly show that eternal life is conditional upon being “in the Son.” Furthermore, “having the Son” is also conditional. One comes “into Christ” when one obeys His terms of pardon, the last of which is baptism in water (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). One continues to “have Christ” by faithfully following His Word as a Christian (1 John 1:6; 2:3; 2 John 1:9). Verse 13 itself shows that eternal life is conditional by indicating that it is given only to those who “believe on the name of the Son of God.” That God's election of men to eternal life is conditional exposes the error of John Calvin's dogma of “unconditional election.” Also, the conditional nature of eternal life exposes the doctrine of “Universalism” as utterly baseless and false.

This verse states what is essentially the major theme of the New Testament, namely, that only those who believe in Christ have eternal life. A parallel exists between the necessary conclusions from John's statement here and from Luke's in Acts 2:41, 47. John stated that those to whom he wrote had eternal life and that those to whom he wrote believed “on the name” of Christ, so we correctly conclude that only believers in Christ have eternal life. Luke stated that those whom the Lord added to the church were those who were baptized (Acts 2:41) and that those who were added were the saved (v. 47), so we correctly conclude that only the baptized were (are) the saved.

What is meant by the phrase, *unto you that believe*? Does this mean that all one has to do to have eternal life is merely to give an affirmative nod to the historical and miraculous evidence proving the Deity of Christ? Many so understand this and similar passages from John (e.g., 1 John 5:1, 10), and their conclusion is that men are saved at the point of mere belief, without obedience. However, this cannot be John's meaning unless he contradicts himself. John taught that one cannot know Christ unless we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3). He also taught that one cannot abide in Christ without keeping His commandments (3:24). There is no proof of our love for God apart from keeping His commandments (5:3; cf. John 14:15). Since John did not contradict himself, we must understand him to be using *believe* to mean more than mere mental assent to evidences and facts.

Believe is used here in the same sense that *believeth* is used in John 3:16 and several other passages. In stating only the single requirement of belief, John employed a synecdoche, a figure of speech frequently employed in the New Testament, in which a part stands for the whole of

its class or kind. By this figure of speech Luke referred to both elements of the Lord's supper when he said the disciples met on the first day of the week "to break bread" (Acts 20:7). Paul employed a synecdoche when he told the Athenian philosophers that all men must repent (Acts 17:30), not at all implying that faith, confession of one's faith, and baptism were unnecessary. John used *believe on the name* here in the same way, including both intellectual faith in Christ and appropriate obedience to the will of Christ demanded by that faith (cf. Jam. 2:20–26).

It will also be helpful to notice that the word for "believe" (*pisteuousin*) is a present tense, active voice participle, meaning a belief that had a beginning and was still active – in progress – when John wrote. The sense is: "These things have I written...even unto you that are believing on the name of the Son of God." John did not write in this passage of a mere one-time, momentary exercise of mental assent to evidence. Rather, only such as continue to express their faith by their works or obedience are the ones who may **know** that they have eternal life. John's own commentary on saving faith in a child of God is found early in the epistle: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). The foregoing comments have demonstrated that this passage teaches that eternal life is conditional and also that said conditions involve a continuous expression of obedient faith rather than a momentary intellectual faith standing alone.

To what does *the name of the Son of God* refer? *Name*, like *believe*, is a synecdoche, used by John (and other inspired writers) to stand for all of the qualities, traits, and characteristics summed up in *Son of God*. Men can be saved in no other **name** (Acts 4:12). Sins are forgiven through His **name** (1 John 2:12). Gospel preachers go forth for the sake of the **name** (3 John 1:7). John's reference in this phrase was to those who began to believe and continued to express their faith in who Christ is and what He did for them. This they did through their loyal obedience to His will. This phrase is thus a description of Christian fidelity. The Lord's own statement of this phrase of the verse is in John 8:24: "Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." In contrast to the Gnostics who claimed that Jesus was not the Son of God as He claimed to be, John wrote that one who refused to so acknowledge Him in word and deed did not and could not have eternal life.

Expository Notes on 1 John 5:9–13

1 John – an arsenal against both Gnosticism and Agnosticism

John made continual thrusts against Gnosticism and its alleged superior "knowledge" by pointing out various truths that all the Lord's people could know. John wrote about things one can know no fewer than 38 times in this epistle:

- He used *ginosko* (in various cognates), the verb form of *gnosis*, which refers to knowing by experience (i.e., “I have been there”), 24 times.
- He used *oida* (in various cognates), which refers to clear, absolute mental perception (i.e., “I see, I understand”), 14 times.

In his repeated references to things every Christian **can** know John not only exposed the Gnosticism which was rapidly developing in his day; he also exposed the follies of the more rampant Agnosticism of modern philosophy. Our English word, *agnostic* (and its cognates), is from a compound Greek word, *agnosis*. The Greek letter, *alpha* (*a*), when prefixed to another word, becomes a negative particle, negating the remainder of the word thus formed. When placed before *ginosko* (i.e., to know), *aginosko* means *without knowledge, not knowing*). As Gnostics are the “knowing ones,” Agnostics are those who either do not know or who profess not to know. While the Gnostics claimed **to know** things which they did not and could not know, devotees of Agnostic philosophy claim **not to know** things they can and should with certainty know. In fact, the dedicated Agnostic avers that neither he nor anyone else can know anything for certain.

A semblance of the Gnostic spirit exists in some brethren today, particularly those who have adopted a liberal attitude toward Scriptural authority and those who are advocates of the Boston/Crossroads cult. However, the greater problem in the Lord's church presently may be a growing Agnosticism. The prideful pseudo-sophistication of modern philosophy boasts that it holds no absolutes, either in ethics or knowledge. Some brethren have sat at the feet of such philosophers for graduate and post-graduate studies and others have read their writings enough to absorb their Agnosticism. The following quotations will provide a small sampling of this growing phenomenon among brethren:

We are assuming that it [the Bible] is the inspired Word of God, though this certainly is also an area in which we should be open to whatever facts are pertinent. Any observer of religion is aware that our problem is a legitimate one.²

And faith, too, is a kind of risk. You can't perfectly prove there is a God. But as Donald Hartke said, “Faith is betting your life on God.” Now the odds do seem to some of us overwhelmingly on the side of faith, but the romance of real religion is the romance of a risk. And some of us have flung everything we have into it. Now there are only two alternatives here. God is or He isn't. You go one way or the other. And while it's no long shot, it is a risk to believe. But, come to think of it, it is quite a risk not to, isn't it?³

Man can use various scientific tools to understand and reconstruct historical facts, but there is no way by scientific method to verify or disprove the accuracy of theological interpretation by the various Biblical authors. This must be accepted by faith or rejected by unbelief. The Christian accepts the theological proposition that “all scripture (here meaning the O.T., JTW) is inspired by

God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16) The Bible claims to be inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16). There is no way to prove or disprove this claim absolutely, although arguments have been advanced on both sides of the issue. It must be accepted by faith or rejected by unbelief.⁴

Sensory knowledge (as, seeing a hole in the road and swerving to avoid it) is so reliable one usually takes it for granted. But if one ponders the matter, he would say that such knowledge is not absolute. It is based on assumptions, on steps of faith. Some scientists, spurning and ridiculing faith, boast that they make no assumptions, that they only walk by knowledge, never by faith. Actually, however, before they announce their first example of scientific knowledge, they have taken steps of faith, assuming without proof: (1) that the universe is real; (2) that human beings are real; (3) that the assumed human beings have minds; (4) that the assumed minds operate accurately; (5) that nature's laws will be the same tomorrow as today (continuity of uniformitarianism); and (6) that honesty in the laboratory is the best policy. On the personal level, the scientist walks by faith, not knowledge, in pointing out a certain woman as his mother. By knowledge he does not know that he was even born, much less who or what bore him, if anything did....

When Christians claim they have absolute knowledge they make the same mistake as do some scientists. Some are bold to assert that theism is not only the most probable explanation of the universe, but that it cannot possibly be wrong. They are claiming perfect knowledge, a quality belonging only to deity (Job 11:7-8; Psa. 147:5; Rom. 11:33-34). They put themselves in the class with young Elihu ("One that is perfect in knowledge is with thee" [Job 36:4]), and in the same class with the "infallible" pope. Intending to be standing forthrightly for the truth, they make themselves vulnerable to unbelievers' ridicule and hurt the cause they love so much.⁵

In the first three quotations such matters as the inspiration of the Bible and the existence of God are thrown up for grabs. Whether or not the Bible is inspired is said to be unprovable. It is left as something that must be accepted based on "faith," by which the writers mean "assumption." This is at least very near (if indeed it is not the same as) the *leap-in-the-dark* definition of faith by Neo-orthodoxy and Existentialism. Is it only a **probability** that the Scriptures are inspired? Is the very existence of God only a matter in which the odds "...seem to some of us overwhelmingly on the side of faith..."? If these brethren are so uncertain as to say that they only **assume** the Bible to be God's Word, but that they are open to any "pertinent facts" that might indicate otherwise on this "legitimate problem," then their faith is shallow and suspect indeed. How better could Agnosticism concerning God and His Word be expressed than these brethren have expressed it?

To say that the case for the existence of God or the inspiration of the Bible is unprovable is to say that the evidence is insufficient certainly to warrant either conclusion. I strongly disagree with such a near-blasphemous conclusion! Numerous fields of evidence exist, involving both internal and external proofs, which demonstrate by all reasonable and

universally accepted criteria that the Bible is not and could not possibly be of human origin. Likewise, many fields of evidence are extant that prove the existence of God beyond any rational doubt.

One cannot read of any such theological mush in the statements of our Lord concerning either the existence of His (and our) Father or of the Bible, as is seen in the exceedingly weak statements on these fundamental matters which appear above. Have some of our brethren forgotten that agnosticism concerning God and the Bible translates directly into agnosticism concerning the Christ? Must we merely “assume” that Christ is the Son of God because the “odds seem overwhelming” that He is? Is not the evidence sufficient to provide proof and demonstration beyond mere assumption and a “wishful-thinking” sort of “faith”?

Had the Lord been like some brethren His words in John 17:17 might well read: “I assume thy word is truth, but I can neither prove nor disprove it. Unless pertinent facts are presented to show otherwise, I will continue in this assumption on this admittedly legitimate problem.” Again, if the Lord had possessed the kind of “faith” some of our brethren have expressed, He might have begun the immortal “model prayer” (Mat. 6:9) as follows: “Our Father who I think (but cannot perfectly prove) is in heaven, because the odds seem good that thou art and I am willing to take the risk of believing, hallowed be thy name.”

Are we still to “prove all things” and “hold fast to that which is good” (1 The. 5:21)? If so, there must be a proved and provable standard by which to test all things. If this standard is the Bible (which it is), then the Bible itself must be provable as the Word of God (which it is). If I could muster no more certainty of the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible than some brethren are now evincing, I think I would just close my Bible and fade quietly into the Secular Humanism that is devouring more and more men.

The fourth quotation above is from a brother whom I have both loved and esteemed for many years. In spite of my affection and respect for him, I believe he has made some statements that are ridiculous at best and confusing and hurtful to the cause at worst. In the article from which his lengthy quotation is taken he must have intended to set forth the means by which we can know that God is (for certainly I know this brother believes this beyond a doubt). Sadly, he ends up arguing the agnostic viewpoint!

According to him, we can only guess that we live in a real universe, that we ourselves are real and that we have minds. Further, we must merely assume that we were born and who

(or what) bore us, "if anything did"! Now I can't speak for all men, but I would consider one to be out of touch with reality if he said that he was not sure that he really exists in an actually existing universe, while he sits before a real computer typing on a real keyboard words which will soon be produced by a real printer on real paper. Does one just "make up" all these things by "assuming" their existence? Hardly! With all due respect to our brother whose words we are presently analyzing, those who cannot be certain about the existence of real things (including the universe, themselves, whether or not they have a mind, et al.), are poor souls that often have to be confined, both for their own safety and for that of society. Indeed, they need a keeper, a caretaker.

Yet our brother contends (if I have understood him, and I would never intentionally misrepresent him or anyone else) that all of us should hold even the existence of such an obvious and elementary thing as a pothole in the road as a matter of assumption. He suggests that if we "ponder" this matter we might decide that our knowledge of the pothole is not absolute but is based on assumptions. There is a small problem here: while one is pondering if the pothole is real or merely assumed, he may blow out a tire or lose a wheel in said "assumed" pothole. If we can only "assume" that a pothole is real, what are we to do when it "looks as though" a bridge is out? What does this brother do in such circumstances? We all know what he does.

Our brother sows further confusion by defining "assumptions" as "steps of faith." Biblical faith is not mere assumption. It is conviction resting upon adequate incontrovertible evidence. It relates to actual substance or assurance (Heb. 11:1). Liberal theologians have long defined *faith* as a mere "leap in the dark," which amounts to no more than an exercise in subjective wishful thinking. The faith men can have in God, His Son, and His Word is not akin to any such philosophical and theological tommyrot. Not only **can** man have an assured faith (conviction, knowledge) based upon evidence, he **must** have such faith: "And without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him" (Heb. 11:6).

John recorded evidence upon which men could have certain knowledge and assurance that Jesus was/is the Christ and thereby be saved:

Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

If we cannot know “beyond the shadow of a doubt” that Christ is the only begotten Son of God, how can we know that there are such things as sin, salvation, or damnation? Why even bother if it is all guesswork?

Agnostic brethren would have preached differently from Peter had they been preaching in Jerusalem on Pentecost. Their statement would have gone something like this: “Let all the house of Israel assume that the supposed God hath allegedly made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom (I guess) you may have crucified.” Rather, Peter (speaking by inspiration) conclusively declared: “Let all the house of Israel therefore **know assuredly**, that God **hath made** him both **Lord and Christ**, this Jesus whom **ye crucified**” (Acts 2:36, *emph. DM*). The *therefore* in this passage refers to the litany of irrefutable evidence to which the multitude had been exposed. They had witnessed the Holy Spirit baptism of the apostles and their consequent ability to speak in various languages they had never learned (vv. 1-13). They had heard Peter’s list of evidence, explaining the miraculous events they had seen as prophetic fulfillment (vv. 14-21), reminding the crowd of the vast array of “mighty works and wonders and signs” they saw Jesus perform among them (Acts 2:22), and declaring to them the undeniable fact of the numerous prophecies fulfilled by His resurrection, ascension, and coronation (Acts 2:24-35). Upon this body of evidence, they could not only **know**, but **know assuredly** that Jesus of Nazareth was/is “both Lord and Christ”! Yes, we can – we must – assuredly **know** at least some things!

Paul did not suggest to the Galatians that they could only **assume** that the Gospel which he preached was of Christ. Rather, he wrote: “For I make known (certify, KJV) to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man” (Gal. 1:11). Nor did he say that, while he could not be absolutely sure (after all, we must not claim “a quality belonging only to Deity”), he “supposed” his message did not come from men, but from Christ. Rather, he boldly declared: “For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:12).

Space forbids further multiplication of such statements of Scripture, but they are plentiful. I refer the reader to the chapter in this volume by Thomas B. Warren, which deals more fully with this subject. Suffice it to say, the Agnostic position is irrational, irresponsible, and absurd, if for no other reason than that it is utterly self-contradictory. It claims to **know absolutely** that no man can absolutely know anything! Let none be scared by the “red herring,” “smoke screen” tactic that accuses those who say they can certainly know some things of

claiming that they can or do know all things. Only a deranged human mind would claim to know all things; only God is Omniscient. However, one must deny some of the most obvious things pertaining to our existence and some of the most explicit statements of Scripture to deny that we can (yea, must) “know assuredly” some things.

“Eternal Life” – Present or Future?

1 John 5:11 states that “God gave unto us eternal life.” Verse 12 follows by saying that if one has Christ, he has this life and vice versa. Further, verse 13 continues by saying that believers may **know that they have eternal life**. To what extent (if any) do men have eternal life now? Some claim that God's children have possession of the fullness of eternal life in this present world. Based in part upon this view of this passage (and similar passages), John Calvin arrived at his doctrine of unconditional election and its necessary corollary, the impossibility of apostasy (i.e., if one ever has eternal life, he can never lose it). Several years ago, some brethren adopted the view that we have eternal life now with absolute certainty and that it is sinful to even entertain a fear that we might possibly be lost. I have difficulty seeing much difference in the two positions.

Other brethren, whom I love and respect for their soundness in the faith, hold the view that while the fullness of eternal life is yet to come, the Christian enjoys eternal life in some limited sense in this life. These brethren correctly understand (and teach) that there will be no future eternal life without one's living a faithful life on earth. While we continue to enjoy fellowship with them, we respectfully disagree with this viewpoint.

They point out that God “gave” (aorist, past tense) eternal life to believers and that the believer “hath” (present tense) the life. While admitting all of this, I am not convinced when compared with like Scriptural phraseology. Numerous times Isaiah (Isa. 53) used both the past and present tense to speak of things pertaining to the Lord as if they had already occurred, when they would actually not occur for some seven centuries. They were so certain to occur that God's prophet could speak as if they had already occurred (“prophetic past tense”). Could this not be the case with 1 John 5:11–13 and similar statements (e.g., 1 John 3:15) concerning eternal life?

Some argue that the “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) which characterizes one after baptism embraces “eternal life.” However, this is merely an assumption. *Newness of life* may simply refer to the **new way of life** that results from the sinner's cessation from sin and to the fact that there

is a new relationship with God and Christ because of one's being cleansed from sin. The larger context (Rom. 6:1-11) would seem to warrant only this understanding of *newness of life*.

These brethren also argue that there is a parallel between one's being in God's kingdom now (cf. Col. 1:13) and yet expecting to be in it in a fuller sense later (cf. 2 Pet. 1:11). However, the parallel breaks down in the fact that Scripture definitely identifies the church as the kingdom on earth (Mat. 16:18-19; Heb. 12:23, 28; et al.), which Christ will eventually deliver up to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24) to be glorified (Rom. 8:17). There is no such definite identification of the present possession of eternal life, apart from the tenses of the verbs relating to its possession in 1 John 5:11-13 and similar passages. However, I believe I have already dealt adequately with the contention based upon the tenses. Indeed, all of the passages that would seem to make of eternal life a present possession of the believer may be understood in such a way as not to demand a present possession, and without doing violence to them. Many explicit passages (of which I will notice only a few) teach that eternal life is ours now only **in promise** and that it will only be realized after The Judgment. The Lord promised eternal life **in the world to come** (Mark 10:29-30). Flesh and blood cannot inherit the eternal kingdom **wherein is eternal life** (1 Cor. 15:50-54). We have an **earnest** of our eternal inheritance now, but not the inheritance itself (Eph. 1:13-14). We have the **hope** of eternal life because of God's promise (Tit. 1:2). The incorruptible (eternal) inheritance is not ours now; it is **reserved in heaven** for us (1 Pet. 1:4).

John clearly tells us in his first epistle that eternal life is a **promise** rather than a reality: "And this is the promise which he promised us, even the life eternal" (1 John 2:25). Again, he wrote: "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is" (3:2). That which is yet a promise is that which has not been received. That which is not yet made manifest is yet in the future. However, the promise of God is so certain to be fulfilled to the faithful that John could speak of it in 1 John 5 as having already been given.

Conclusion

What a marvelous God we have who sent His Son into this world for sinful men and gave sufficient testimony to provoke certitude or faith in Him to any honest heart! What a wonderful Savior we have, the One alone in Whom we may have eternal life! What precious certainty of eternal life we have if we faithfully serve Him!

Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. Harold Hazelip, Herald of Truth TV sermon no. 986 ("The Search for Truth"), quoted by B.G. Clinton, Hoyt M. Blodgett, Jim F. Harper, "Highland Report," *Contending for the Faith*, ed. Ira Y. Rice, Jr., 4 (November 1973): 7.
3. Lynn Anderson, tape of radio program (June 16, 1981), Abilene, Texas, quoted by Pat McGee, "Lynn Anderson on the Existence of God," *Contending for the Faith*, ed. Ira Y. Rice, Jr., 12 (November 1981): 1.
4. John T. Willis, *The World and Literature of the Old Testament*, ed. John T. Willis (Austin, Texas: Sweet Pub. Co., 1979), pp. 7, 11.
5. Hugo McCord, "Faith and Knowledge," *Gospel Advocate*, ed. Furman Kearley, (August 2, 1984): 457.

[**Note:** I wrote this MS for, and presented a digest of it orally at the 6th Annual Denton Lectures, hosted by the Pearl St. Church of Christ, Denton, TX, Nov. 8-12, 1987. I directed the lectureship and edited and published (Valid Pub., Inc.) the book of the lectures, *Studies in 1, 2, 3 John*.]

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