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THE HOPE OF IMMORTALITY.

“If a man die shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come.” – Job 14:14.

THERE is a longing hope within men that death does not end all existence. There is an undefined hope that, somehow and somewhere, the life now begun will have a continuation. In some this hope turns to fear. Realizing their unworthiness of a future of pleasure, many fear a future of woe; and the more they dread it, for themselves and others, the more they believe in it.

This undefined hope of a future life and its counterpart, fear, doubtless had their origin in the Lord's condemnation of the serpent after Adam's fall into sin and death, that [R1878 : page 237] the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. This was no doubt understood to mean that at least a portion of the Adamic family would finally triumph over Satan and over death, into which he had inveigled them. No doubt God encouraged such a hope, even though but vaguely, speaking to and through Noah, and through Enoch who prophesied, "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints." But the *gospel*, the good tidings of a salvation from death to be offered to all mankind in God's due time, seems to have been first clearly stated to Abraham. The Apostle declares: "The *gospel* was preached before to Abraham, – saying, 'In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'" This at least was the basis of the Jewish hope of a resurrection; for since many of the families of the earth were dead and dying, the promised blessing implied a future life. And when Israel was scattered among the nations at the time of the Babylonian captivity, they undoubtedly carried fragments of their hopes and promises everywhere they went.

Sure it is, that whether it came as a result of an admixture of Jewish thought, or because hope is an element of man's nature, or both,

the whole world believes in a future life, and almost all believe that it will be everlasting. But such hopes are not proofs of the doctrine; and the Old Testament promises, made to the Jews, are too vague to constitute a groundwork for a clear faith, much less for a "dogmatic theology," on this subject.

It is not until we find, in the New Testament, the clear, positive statements of our Lord, and afterwards the equally clear statements of the apostles, on this momentous subject of *Everlasting Life* that we begin to exchange our vague hopes for positive convictions. In their words we not only have positive statements, to the effect that the possibilities of a future life have been provided for all, but the philosophy of the fact and how it is to be attained and maintained are set forth there as nowhere else.

Many have not noticed these points, and hence are "weak in the faith." Let us see what this philosophy is, and be more assured than ever that future life, everlasting life, is by our great and wise Creator's provision made a possibility for every member of the human family.

Beginning at the foundation of this New Testament assurance of Life Everlasting, we find to our astonishment that it first of all assures us that we have nothing ourselves which would give us any hope of everlasting life; – that the life of our race was forfeited by the disobedience of our father Adam; that although he was created perfect and was adapted to live forever, his sin not only brought to him the wages of sin – death – but that his children were born in a dying condition, inheritors of the dying influences. God's law, like himself, is perfect, and so was his creature (Adam) before he sinned; for of God it is written, "His work is perfect." And God through his law approves only that which is perfect, and condemns to destruction everything imperfect. Hence the race of Adam, "born in sin and shapen in iniquity," has no hope of everlasting life except upon the conditions held out in the New Testament and called the *gospel*, – the good tidings that a way back from the fall, to perfection to divine favor and

to everlasting life, has been opened up through Christ for all of Adam's family who will avail themselves of it.

The key note of this hope of reconciliation to God, and thus to a fresh hope of life everlasting, is laid in the statements (1) that "Christ died for our sins" and (2) that he "rose again for our justification;" for "the man Christ Jesus gave himself a *ransom* [a corresponding price] for all." Adam and his race, which when he sinned was yet in him and shared his sentence naturally, have been [R1878 : page 238] "*redeemed* [bought] by the precious blood [death] of Christ."

But although the Lord's provision is abundant for all, it is not applicable to any except on certain conditions; namely, (1) that they accept Christ as their Redeemer; and (2) that they strive to avoid sin and to thenceforth live in harmony with God and righteousness. Hence we are told that "Eternal Life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 6:23.) The following Scripture statements are very clear on this subject: –

"He that hath the Son hath life [a right or privilege or grant of life as God's gift]; but he that hath not the Son shall not see [perfect] life."

None can obtain everlasting life except from Christ the Redeemer and appointed *Life-giver*; and the truth which brings to us the privilege of manifesting faith and obedience, and thus "*laying hold* on eternal life," is called the "water of life" and the "bread of life." – John 4:14; 6:40,54.

This everlasting life will be granted only to those who, when they learn of it and the terms upon which it will be granted as a gift, seek for it, by living according to the spirit of holiness. They shall *reap* it as a gift-reward. – Rom. 6:23; Gal. 6:8.

To gain this everlasting life we must become the Lord's "sheep" and follow the voice, the instructions of the Shepherd. – John 10:26-28; 17:2,3.

The gift of Everlasting Life will not be forced upon any. On the contrary, it must be desired and sought and laid hold upon by all who would gain it. – 1 Tim. 6:12,19.

It is thus a *hope*, rather than the real life, that God gives us now: the hope that, because God has provided a way by which he can be just and yet the justifier of all truly believing and accepting Christ, we may ultimately attain it.

By God's grace our Lord Jesus not only bought us by the sacrifice of his life for ours, but he became our great High Priest, and as such he is now "the author [source] of eternal salvation to all them that *obey him*." (Heb. 5:9.) "And this is the promise which he hath promised *us*, even eternal life." – 1 John 2:25.

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life [now by faith and hope, and by and by actually, "when he who is our life shall appear"], and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." – 1 John 5:11,12.

This everlasting life, made free to Adam and all his race, by our Creator through our Redeemer, but intended for, and promised to, only the faithful and obedient, and which at present is only given to these as a *hope*, will be given to the faithful actually in the "resurrection."

It will be noticed that the explicit promises of God's Word differ widely from the worldly philosophies on this subject. They claim that man must have a future everlasting life because he hopes for it, or in some cases fears it. But hopes and fears are not reasonable grounds for belief on any subject. Neither is the claim that there is *something* in man which must live on and on forever, – when no such part of the human organism is known or can be proved or located.

But the Scriptural view of the subject is open to no such objections: it is reasonable throughout to consider our existence or life as therein presented – as a "gift of God," and not an inalienable

possession of our own. Furthermore, it avoids a great and serious difficulty to which the idea of the heathen philosophies is open; for when the heathen philosopher states that man cannot perish, that he *must* live forever, that eternal life is not a *gift* of God, as the Bible declares, but a natural quality possessed by every man, he claims too much. Such a philosophy not only gives everlasting existence to those who would use it well, and to whom it would be a blessing, but to others also, who would not use it well, and to whom it would be a curse. The Scripture teaching, on the contrary, as we have already shown, declares that this great and inestimably precious *gift* will be given only to those who believe and obey the Redeemer and Life-giver. Others, to whom it would be an injury, not only do not possess it now, but can never get it. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The wicked (all who, after coming to a clear knowledge of the truth, wilfully disobey it) shall be cut off from among God's people, in the second death. They "shall be as though they had not been." "They shall utterly perish." "Everlasting destruction" shall be their doom – a destruction which will last forever, from which there will be no recovery, no resurrection. – Psa. 37:9; Job 10:19; Psa. 37:20; 2 Thes. 1:9.

God's gift of life eternal is precious to all his people, and a firm grasp of it by the hand of faith is quite essential to a well-balanced and consistent life. Only those who have "laid hold on eternal life," by acceptance of Christ and consecration to his service, are able to properly and profitably combat the tempests of life now raging.

A DISTINCTION AND A DIFFERENCE.

But now, having examined the hope of Immortality from the ordinary understanding of that word (everlasting life) and having found that everlasting life is God's provision for those of Adam's race who will accept it "in due time" under the terms of the New Covenant, we are prepared to go a step farther and to point out that Everlasting Life and Immortality are *not* synonymous terms, as people in general

suppose. The word "immortal" means more than power to live everlastingly; and, according to the Scriptures, millions may have everlasting life, but only a very limited "little flock" will be made immortal.

Immortality is an element or quality of the divine nature, but not of human or angelic or of any other nature [R1879 : page 238] than the divine. And it is because Christ and his "little flock," his "bride," are to be partakers of the divine [R1879 : page 239] nature that they will be exceptions to all other creatures either in heaven or on earth. – 2 Pet. 1:4.

The word *Immortal* signifies *not mortal* – death-proof, indestructible, imperishable. Any being whose existence is dependent in any manner upon another or upon conditions, such as food, light, air, etc., is not immortal. This quality inheres in Jehovah God alone, as it is written, – "The Father hath life *in himself*" (John 5:26); *i.e.*, his existence is not a derived one, nor a sustained one. He "only hath immortality" (1 Tim. 6:16) as an innate or original quality of being. These scriptures being decisive authority on the subject, we may know beyond peradventure that men, angels, archangels or even the Son of God before and during the time he "was made flesh and dwelt among us" were not immortal – all were mortal.

But the word "mortal" does not signify *dying*, but merely *diable* – possessing life dependent upon God for its continuance. For instance, angels not being immortal are mortal and could die, could be destroyed by God if they became rebels against his wise, just and loving government. In Him [in his providence] they live and move and have their being. Indeed, of Satan who was such an angel of light, and who did become a rebel, it is distinctly declared that in due time he will be destroyed. (Heb. 2:14.) This not only proves that Satan is mortal, but it proves that angelic nature is a mortal nature – one which could be destroyed by its Creator. As for man, he is "a little lower than the angels" (Psa. 8:5), and consequently mortal also, as is abundantly

attested by the fact that our race has been dying for six thousand years and that even the saints in Christ are exhorted to seek for immortality. – Rom. 2:7.

So then, Adam did not become mortal by reason of sin, but was created mortal – by nature he was subject or liable to the death penalty. Had he been created immortal nothing could have destroyed him; for, as we have seen, immortality is a state or condition not subject to death, but death-proof.

What then was Adam's condition before he sinned? and in what way did the curse affect him? – What life had he to lose if he was created mortal?

We answer, that his condition in life was similar to that of the angels: he had life in full measure – lasting life – which he might have retained forever by remaining obedient to God. But because he was not death-proof, because he did not have "life in himself," but was dependent upon conditions of divine pleasure and favor for its continuance, therefore God's threat, that if he disobeyed he should die, meant something. Had he not been *mortal* God's sentence would have been an empty threat. But he did die.

Jehovah God, "who only hath immortality" of himself, or "life in himself" innately, and of whom are all things, having created various orders of beings, angelic and human, in his own moral and rational likeness, but mortal and not of his divine nature, has declared that he designs a new creation, – an order of beings not only morally and rationally in his resemblance, but in "the express image" of his person and partakers of his own divine nature – a prominent constituent or element of which is *immortality*. – 2 Pet. 1:4.

With amazement we inquire, Upon whom shall this high honor and distinction be conferred? – Upon angels, or cherubim, or seraphim? No; but upon his Son – his specially first-born and only begotten Son, that he who was always his obedient Son should in all

things have the preeminence. But before he could be so highly honored he must be tested, proved "worthy" of so great a distinction and so high an exaltation "above his fellows." This test was in view when the sentence of death was pronounced upon Adam and all his children in his loins: it was that he, Christ, should lay down his life as a ransom price for the life of Adam and all who lost life in his transgression. And he was equal to the test and gained the prize of "the divine nature," "life in himself," "immortality."

Consider him, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now in consequence set down at the right hand [place of favor] of the throne of God. He was rich, but for our sakes he became poor. Inasmuch as the man and race to be redeemed were human, it was needful that he become human so as to give the ransom or corresponding price. He therefore humbled himself and took the bondman's form; and after he found himself in fashion a man, he humbled himself even unto death – even unto the most ignominious form of death – the death of the cross. "Wherefore God hath highly exalted him [to the promised divine nature at his resurrection], and given him a name that is above every name [Jehovah's excepted – 1 Cor. 15:27]. – Heb. 12:3,2; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:8,9.

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." – Rev. 5:9-12.

But more, the opulence of divine favor does not stop with the exaltation of one, but has arranged that Christ Jesus, as the Captain, shall lead a company of sons of God to glory, honor and immortality (Heb. 2:10; Rom. 2:7), each of whom, however, must be a spiritual "copy" or likeness of the "first begotten." And as a grand lesson of the divine sovereignty, and as a sublime contradiction to all evolution theories, God elected to call to this place of honor (as "the bride, the Lamb's wife and joint heir" – Rev. 21:2,9; Rom. 8:17), not the angels and cherubs, but some from among the sinners redeemed by the

precious blood of the Lamb. God elected the number to be thus exalted (Rev. 7:4), and predestinated what must be their characteristics if they would make their calling and election sure, to a place in that company to be so highly honored; and all the rest is left to Christ, who worketh now as the Father worketh hitherto. – John 5:17. [R1879 : page 240]

The present age, the Gospel age, from Pentecost to the present time, is the time for the selection of this elect class, variously termed "the Church," "the body of Christ," "the royal priesthood," "the seed of Abraham" (Gal. 3:29), etc.; and the permission still of evil is for the purpose of developing these "members of the body of Christ" and to furnish them the opportunity of sacrificing their all in the service of him who bought them with his precious blood; and thus of developing in their hearts his spiritual likeness, that when, at the end of the age, they are presented by their Lord and Redeemer before the Father, he may see in them "the image of his Son." – Rom. 8:29.

As the reward of glory, honor and immortality, and all the features of the divine nature, were not conferred upon the "First-begotten" until he had finished his course by completing his sacrifice and obedience in death, so with the Church, his "bride," – counted as one and treated collectively. As our Lord, the First-born and Captain, "entered into his glory" at his resurrection; as he there became partaker of the divine nature fully by being "born of the spirit;" as he there was highly exalted to the throne and highest favor ("right hand") of God, so he has promised that his Church, his "bride," shall in her resurrection be changed by resurrection power from human nature to the glory, honor and immortality of the divine nature.

And so it is written respecting "*the* resurrection" of the Church: "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption [immortality]. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural [animal] body, it is raised a spiritual body." – 1 Cor. 15:42-44.

Although God's plan for the race of Adam is to extend to each member of it, during the Millennium, the offer of eternal life upon the terms of the New Covenant sealed for all with the precious blood of the Lamb, there is no suggestion anywhere that Immortality and the Divine Nature, will ever be offered or granted to any except the "elect" of the Gospel age – the "little flock," "the Bride, the Lamb's wife." For the others of Adam's race the offer will be "restitution" (Acts 3:19-21) to life and health and perfection of *human* nature – the same that Adam possessed as the earthly image of God before his fall from grace into sin and death. And when at the close of the age the willing ones shall have attained all that was lost in Adam and redeemed by Christ, – then all, armed with complete knowledge and experience, and hence fully able to stand the test, will be tested severely (as was Adam), but individually; and only those found in fullest heart-sympathy, as well as in outward harmony with God and his righteous arrangements, will be permitted to live and go beyond the Millennium into the everlasting future. All others will be destroyed in the second death, – destroyed from among the people. – Acts 3:23.

But although there shall be no more death, neither sighing nor crying, it will not be because the victors of the Millennial age will be crowned with Immortality, but because, having learned to judge between right and wrong and their effects, they shall have formed characters in full accord with God and righteousness; and because they shall have stood tests which will demonstrate that they would not wish to sin if the way were opened and no penalties attached. They will not have life in themselves, but will still be dependent upon God's provision of food, etc., for the sustenance of life.

Seen in this Scriptural light the subject of immortality shines resplendently. It leaves the way clear for the general "gift of God, eternal life," to be extended to all whom the Redeemer shall find willing to accept it upon the only terms upon which it could be a blessing; and it leaves the unworthy subject to the just penalty which always has been enunciated by the great Judge of all, viz.,

"The wages of sin is death." – Rom. 6:23.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die." – Ezek. 18:4,20.

"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God [the curse, *death*] abideth on him." – John 3:36.

Thus, again, we find on this subject as on others, that the philosophy of the Word of God is deeper as well as clearer, and more rational by far, than the heathen systems and theories. Praise God for his Word of Truth and for hearts disposed to accept it as the revelation of the wisdom and power of God! **page 240**

Let us consider, What is the Soul? and Can it die?
