

THE LIFE PROMISED TO THE CHURCH

"This is the promise which He hath promised us, even eternal life." – 1 John 2:25.

FROM the standpoint of Christian thought in general, the words of our text would be practically meaningless; for the great majority of people believe that everlasting conditions are forced upon all humanity from the moment of birth, and that all must live forever somewhere. Therefore they argue that whoever does not merit Heaven must, at death, of necessity go to a Hell of eternal torment. This erroneous conclusion is based upon the assumption that every human being possesses everlasting life and cannot possibly rid himself of it, even if he tried. We are born, they declare, with a deathless nature, and whoever comes into being must continue to live somewhere to all eternity.

The Scriptures, however, teach to the contrary. They declare that no one can have life except as God gives it to him. When God created man, He gave our first parents perfection of life and organism. Then He informed them that they might have that life forever if they would obey His Laws; but that if they were disobedient He would put upon them the penalty of sin – death; that as soon as they had transgressed, the sentence, or curse, of death would go into effect – "Dying, thou shalt die." They disobeyed, and the penalty came upon them.

After nine hundred and thirty years of dying, Adam was dead. During all that period the penalty was coming upon him gradually. Daily he was dying, until finally he ceased to breathe. We see that the children of Adam could not share his perfect life; for he had lost it before any of them came into the world. Thus the world has been misshapen in sin and iniquity – a dying race.

NO LIFE EXCEPT THROUGH CHRIST

The Scriptures tell us that there would have been no future life for the human family had it not been for God's provision in Christ. "God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish" – lose life altogether. Even before God sent our first parents forth from Eden, He promised that eventually there would be a Redeemer. The Seed of the woman would at some future time bruise the Serpent's head.

Although death reigned from Adam to Moses, nevertheless there was a hope held out to mankind that one day the curse would be removed. This hope was transmitted through the family of Seth, afterwards through the family of Noah, and later through Abraham and his posterity, the children of Israel. This hope was merely a suggestion; no definite revelation was made respecting God's purposes. True, the Prophet Enoch, the seventh from Adam through the line of Seth, had prophesied, "Behold the Lord cometh with myriads of His saints, to execute judgment upon all," and thus had intimated that one day righteousness would be established in the earth. Even the Promise made to Abraham, "In thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," was not a clear, positive statement of everlasting life, although it implied a resurrection from the dead.

When the Israelites found that they could not gain life everlasting by keeping the Law of God, the Lord promised to send them a Deliverer, who would take away their stony heart and make a New Covenant with them. Their experience under the Law Covenant taught them that nothing they could themselves do would deliver them from the power of Sin and Death. Messiah would be their Deliverer. – Romans 11:26.

THE IMPORT OF JESUS' TEACHINGS

When Jesus came, He brought the words of eternal life, everlasting life. As St. Paul declares, Jesus Christ "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." (2 Timothy 1:10.) The fact that our Savior brought these to light demonstrates that they were not seen before. Although there had been an intimation of God's Plan given to Abraham, yet everything looked contrary to this. The death penalty which God had pronounced in Eden seemed to preclude all hope of life everlasting. Although God had stated more or less vaguely that He would one day deliver humanity from the curse of sin and death, no one could tell how this could be – how God could remit the death penalty and still be just.

But when Jesus came, He brought the whole subject to light. He showed that His redemptive work, provided by God's gracious arrangement, would eventually give life everlasting to all who would accept of it upon the Divine terms. He also brought immortality to light. He revealed the fact that God purposes not only to give the world of mankind life everlasting, but to give the faithful followers in Jesus' footsteps a higher kind of life – immortality. Thus a new thought was brought out – one never even dreamed of before.

Our Lord's statements respecting life everlasting and immortality are not so clear as are the statements made by His Apostles. We recall that these Apostles were promised that they should be especially guided in their utterances. Whatsoever they would bind on earth would be binding and obligatory in the sight of God; and whatsoever they would loose would not be considered binding in God's sight. But in what our Lord Jesus said there was a basis for all that the Apostles said and taught.

There was a reason why Jesus did not clearly specify things in respect to Himself. This He declared when He said to His disciples, "I have many things to say unto **[R5608 : page 13]** you,

but ye cannot bear them now." To have attempted to tell them all about the glory, honor and immortality to which the Church was being called would have been to give them more than they could have borne. The natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God – the deep things. Hence it was best for our Lord to leave those deep spiritual subjects. After Pentecost the spirit-begotten would be enabled to understand. – John 16:12-14.

HOPE FOR THE WORLD

The whole subject matter of Jesus' teachings was this everlasting life. He had come for the very purpose of giving His life a Ransom for many, that men might have restored to them the favor originally enjoyed. The Scriptures nowhere teach that all have life inherently; on the contrary, they teach the very reverse. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

The Promise mentioned in our text we understand to refer particularly to the Message brought by our Lord Jesus: "Which salvation began to be spoken by our Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him." (Hebrews 2:3.) When Jesus came, He threw light upon the entire subject of God's Plan for human salvation from sin and death. He showed that there was to be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust – of those in a justified condition and of those not justified. He would raise them up at the Last Day, at the beginning of the great Seventh Day of a thousand years, during which His Messianic Kingdom would prevail and the blessing would be world-wide. As the long-promised Seed of Abraham, He and His Church would bless all the families of the earth.

SPECIAL PRIVILEGES OF THE CHURCH

Our text refers to a certain class only. It does not include the world. "This is the promise which He hath promised *us*." (1 John 2:25.) The promise is now to the Church, and to no others. All the promises for the world are made along the line of general principles. All the world are to be blessed, and the blessing that will come to them is an opportunity to gain life everlasting. God made everything dependent upon the Son: "He that hath the Son hath life" – no others. So only believers can have life now – and these not in the complete sense – only the beginning of that life which will be perfected in the resurrection. The world have no life in them, and cannot have it, except under God's arrangement.

Those who now come to Christ are the Church, the Bride class, and are an especially privileged class. They come into the life that is incorruptible. But there is a promise for the world, and only believers know about this provision for mankind. All shall have opportunity for attaining everlasting life. God has provided a trial Day, a Judgment Day, to demonstrate whether, when mankind shall have been brought to a knowledge of the Truth, they will accept His terms and thus attain everlasting life.

The Lord will make it quite possible for the world to gain life everlasting on the human plane, just as He is now making it possible for the Church to attain life on the Divine plane. The thing for the consecrated people of God to do, then, is to strive to be of the "us" class. This term applies to those who become disciples, those who believe in the Kingdom glory and honor offered them, and who, so believing, devote their lives to walking in the footsteps of Jesus, even unto death.

This "us" class includes not only the antitypical Priests, but also the antitypical Levites. But while both classes will have eternal life, everlasting life, "the crown of life" (immortality) is only for those who will prove themselves to be "more than

conquerors." The Scriptures hold out a special promise to all who will walk carefully in the footsteps of Jesus. This class are promised joint-heirship with Him, the privilege of sitting with Him in His Throne. – Revelation 3:21.

On one occasion our Lord said to the Jews, "For as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself." (John 5:26.) In this statement, doubtless, He touched upon the subject of immortality. As the Father has inherent life, so He gave to the Son to have this life; and as the Son had the promise of this life during His earthly ministry, so He had the actuality of it in His resurrection. This same [R5609 : page 13] promise is given to the Church which is His Body. – John 10:27,28.

On another occasion He said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." (John 6:53.) This would be inherent life – life in themselves. The difference between this life and ordinary life is that the former is inherent, and the latter maintained. All the angels have a life not forfeited, an eternal, everlasting life. It can cease if God so choose, but it is not a life that has a terminating period. We do not know how the angels are supplied with life, but the fact that the Scriptures declare that some of them will die is a proof that they do not possess immortality.

A WORD OF CAUTION

We should be very careful in our use of language. If we were to say to the majority of people that we believe that only the elect Church will have immortality, they would misunderstand us altogether – they would misunderstand us to mean that all the remainder of humanity were to perish like brute beasts. Therefore we should be sure that we make the thought clearly understood. Everlasting life is a life that needs to be sustained; immortality is that Divine degree of life that needs not to be sustained.

Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10.) It was *life* that Adam lost. That life was everlasting in the sense that it might have lasted forever. It was not a life granted for a fixed period – a year or even a million of years – but was to last so long as it was not forfeited. In this Scripture our Lord refers to two classes – the obedient of the world, who will have sustained life everlastingly, and the Church, who with Jesus will share the Divine nature will have life "more abundant" in the sense that it will be inherent life, not requiring to be sustained.

This is the promise, then, which He has promised us. If we would make our calling and election sure to glory, honor and immortality, we must exercise great carefulness indeed. Those who attain the prize will get the grandest blessing God has to give. All should understand that we have something to do in realizing the gracious promises of God to us. While God is both able and willing to perform His part of the contract, yet we must make sure that we co-operate in every reasonable way.

"And can we hope to gain, dear Lord, such wondrous bliss –
To dwell with Thee in light ineffable?
Oh, can we e'er attain such joy as this –
The life immortal, incorruptible?
Ah, yes! for Thou hast promised, and Thy Word is sure,
And thus inspired we press along the way;
The path is lonely, but the end is sweet,
And openeth into realms of perfect day."

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