

We who believe in security are sometimes so motivated to find verses that support our belief that, in the process, we fail to comprehend what the Scriptures teach concerning the concept of eternal life.

When we take every occurrence of the phrase “eternal life” to be a reference to eternity in heaven, with an emphasis on duration of that existence, we fail to comprehend the full meaning of this phrase in the Scriptures. In the majority of occurrences, the emphasis of the phrase “eternal life” is not the granting of a positive eternal destiny. Rather, it is the addition of the capacity for communion with God.

Let’s first understand the truth behind this life which is eternal in its duration. The Lord Jesus, in John 17:3, gives us the following definition of eternal life: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent".

Likewise the Apostle John gives us a similar definition eternal life in I John 5:20; And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life”

Eternal life is the capacity to commune with God. In the garden of Eden, man forfeited this purpose for which he was created, i.e. to enjoy the communion of

God. All men since Adam are now brought into the world possessed only with a nature and perspective which is incapable of communion with God (Romans 8:7) God's ultimate goal in saving us is to bring us to the place where we can commune with the perspective of God.

Now, make no mistake about it, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as one's Savior does guarantee one's eternal well being. The following verses identify for us the duration of this gift of eternal life:

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 5:24 " Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

Believing upon Jesus as one's Savior produces a life which is eternal in its duration because it bears the image of God at the core of its being. When a person is born again he is now in possession of a life which is eternal in duration, because the new man on the inside is made in the image of God in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:24). This new man is now the believer's eternal identity before God.

However, just because this new person exists on the inside doesn't mean that this new person is directing the ambitions of the believer. When a believer is operating by the power of a mind renewed in the Scriptures, that believer is experiencing eternal life.

A great deal of confusion can result in our interpretation of Scripture if, in every context, we focus only on the duration of eternal life and not the purpose for that life.

For example, in 1 Timothy 6:12, Paul exhorts Timothy to "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life". Does this suggest that maybe Timothy's security is not yet certain? If we define eternal life as eternity in heaven, then we might conclude from this text that Paul was calling Timothy's security into question. However, if "laying hold of eternal life" speaks of Timothy's consistently exercising his heart in communion with the will of God, then Paul's exhortation to "laying hold on eternal life" in no way challenges the doctrine of security.

Consider also Galatians 6:7-8. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life".

Once again, if we take this above occurrence of everlasting life to be a reference to eternal existence

in heaven, then, according to this context, eternal existence in heaven is reaped as a result of sowing to the Spirit. And that would mean that a home in heaven is secured on the basis of the choices you make after you are saved. But if eternal life in this context is experiencing communion with God through the knowledge of Christ, then that would be consistent with the meaning of this verse.

This approach to the concept of eternal life also better accommodates some of those passages in I John, which, on the surface, present a challenge to free grace teaching. For example, 1 John 3:14-17, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death.¹⁵ Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.¹⁷ But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

Is this above context teaching us that it is impossible for a believer to hate his brother?

No not at all. Verse 17 of this context is clearly an example of a believer hating another believer. In the Scriptures, hatred is not necessarily viewing another with disdain or wishing harm upon another. Hatred is

often as passive as neglect, as demonstrated by this context.

If eternal life in this context means eternity in heaven, then the person who fails to meet the needs of a brother in Christ needs to question whether or not he is on his way to heaven. If, however, we understand eternal life to be communion with the perspective of God, then this context need not call into question a person's eternal destiny, rather, this passage calls into question a person's communion with the Father. This understanding lines up precisely with the primary purpose of the epistle of I John which is this test of fellowship, a fellowship which I John refers to as eternal life.

A believer is experiencing communion with the Father when God's perspective as gleaned from the Scriptures is serving as that believer's functioning frame of reference. Being saved does not automatically establish God's frame of reference in the heart of the believer. Gaining God's perspective as the believer's functioning frame of reference is a life-long process which takes diligence and consistency in the application of Scripture.

When the believer is consistently judges events in his life from God's perspective, it can be said that he has laid hold on eternal life. Like the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:12 "I press on, that I may lay

hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me”.

When the Father gives us to Christ in the New Birth, Jesus is said to have laid hold of us for eternal life. When God’s perspective becomes the believer’s functioning frame of reference, that believer is said to have laid hold of eternal life.