

This is Life Eternal

“There are subjects which in themselves are not of much importance, while in their bearings upon other subjects they are of vital importance. For example, the belief that the dead are immortalized in the process of resurrection or immediately upon their emergence from the grave, would be almost harmless apart from its bearing upon the doctrine of the judgment-seat of Christ. It is in its nullifying bearings its danger becomes apparent; and a comprehensive view reveals it as one of many "traditions which make the word of God of none effect.”” Thomas Williams, Rectification Pg. 2, Mortality, its origin and meaning

It is for this reason that we address this fundamental doctrine of Eternal Life this morning. Not because what we are addressing, when considered independently, is of any great offense, but due to the effect the doctrine has when compared with “all the counsel of God”. (Acts 20:27)

For most of us it is true that “from a child” we have known that “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:” (2 Tim. 3:16). Each of us, in attempting to prove that it does matter what we believe, have found strength in reading “God is not *the author* of confusion” (1 Cor. 14:33) and Gal. 1:6-9.

We have recently considered the assertion of some that we currently possess “eternal life” in a “legal” or “positional” sense. This has been easily dealt, due to the absurd nature of the suggestion. There has, however, arisen of late a seeming capitulation to this suggestion in a popular Christadelphian periodical. This is the error which we wish to examine and rectify this morning.

The following quotes represent Christadelphian belief concerning Aionian life over the past 160 years.

“We can be assured that to receive eternal life is to receive immortality”

“In the resurrection, this mortal shall put on immortality; and at the same time "eternal life" is received; therefore "immortality" and "eternal life," doctrinally and in essence, mean the same.”

Both from Rectification Pg. 11; Immortality and eternal life

“Eternal life is not a present possession of the natural man. It is something that will be granted when Jesus returns to this earth to establish His Kingdom. Life eternal is reserved for those who know the only true God, and His Son Jesus, and who are judged faithful when he comes” Things Concerning, Pg. 119 J. Millay

This morning we intend to affirm the long held belief that we have the hope of aionian life, deny the suggestion that we in any way possess it presently, and explain passages seemingly contradictory to the two preceding objectives.

The recent error concerning “eternal life” is based upon the definition of the Greek word for “eternal” in the AV. This word is “Aionios” or “aionian” and Strong’s defines it as “*perpetual (also used of past time, or past and future as well)*”; Young’s uses the term “*age-lasting*”.

Hence, “eternal life” is taken to simply mean “age-lasting life”, and the time from baptism to judgment is asserted to be the age to which some of the verses which use this term refer to. For the sake of continuity, we will use the phrases “Aionian life” and “life of the Olahm” when referencing “eternal” or “everlasting” life.

The root of the problem

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We can identify as misguided philology. Webster defines this as:

*“1. Primarily, a love of words, or a desire to know the origin and construction of language. In a more general sense,
2. That branch of literature which comprehends a knowledge of the etymology or origin and combination of words; grammar, the construction of sentences or use of words in language; criticism, the interpretation of authors, the affinities of different languages, and whatever relates to the history or present state of languages. It sometimes includes rhetoric, poetry, history and antiquities.”*

An understanding of the Hebrew and Greek languages can be a great help to the student of Yahweh’s word, but it is no alternative to the study of the scriptural teaching on a matter. We are very blessed to have such easy access to concordances and dictionaries of the original languages, but Dr. Strong did not know the truth. A correct understanding of any part of the truth requires more than literacy in Hebrew and Greek, it requires the comparison of scripture with scripture. All of the Word agrees with itself, therefore when we find seeming contradictions by a surface reading, we must endeavor to harmonize all the testimony concerning the matter.

Primary scriptural teaching concerning Eternal Life

Most of the references to eternal or everlasting life throughout the NT describe it as a future object to be obtained or a hope.

Mat 25:46 *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*

Mar 10:30 *But he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*

Rom 2:7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life:

1Ti 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Tit 1:2 In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

- God promised Aionian (Kingdom) life to Abraham before the (Mosaic) aion began. Aionian life itself was not given to Abraham, though he was in covenant with Yahweh, and is certain to be raised.

Tit 3:7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

- Justification=Baptism. Why doesn’t Paul declare here that “being justified by his grace,” we have aionian life?

1Jn 2:25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, *even* eternal life,

There are numerous references to support the proposition that aionian life is a matter of hope, not possession, but these should suffice to establish the fact.

Now let us consider these verses declaring aionian life as a hope with the following in mind.

Rom 8:24-25 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for **what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?** But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*.

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Philip. 3:11-14

Cp. Pressing toward the mark and the prize to Rom. 2:6-7

Pressing toward the mark = patient continuance in well doing, seeking for glory and honor and immortality; The prize = Aionian life---This not yet apprehended

Old Testament Testimony

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is because there is no light in them*” Isa. 8:20

Jn. 5:39-all their scriptures consisted of was the OT, so therein may be found the doctrine of eternal life.

Believers throughout the ages have always based their faith upon Old Testament principles, and realize that the New Testament is essentially an exposition and expansion upon these principles. The references to eternal life are few, but insightful for the conversation.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word “Olahm”, for all intents and purposes, is the equivalent of the Greek “aion”, the root of “aionian”. The most appropriate definition would be “a time concealed in the past or hidden in the future”. In the Septuagint the word “aion” is used for “olahm”.

Gen 3:22 And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever:

Here, in the first reference to the life of the olahm in scripture, the stipulation for obtaining it is defined as partaking of the tree of life. Rev. 2:7 discloses to us who shall partake of this tree, and when.

Dan 12:2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* everlasting contempt

In this place Daniel informs us that the life of the olahm is given subsequent to the resurrection.

Psa 49:7-9 None *of them* can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul *is* precious, and it ceaseth forever:) That he should still live forever, *and* not see corruption.

The psalmist equates the life of the olahm and incorruption.

These three verses summarize Old Testament teaching on the subject. The law and the prophets declare:

- We must partake of the Tree of life to obtain the life of the olahm
- Aionian life is bestowed subsequent to the resurrection
- Aionian life = incorruption

Surely no one will affirm these things as having already taken place or present possessions.

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We must therefore conclude that this teaching of present possession of aionian life is excluded from being revealed in the OT, and unique to one author in the NT. If this be true, we must remember Gal. 1:8-9.

Aionian Life Removed

Keeping in mind that the primary argument for this suggestion of present possession of aionian life is that those who have it will appear before the judgment seat, let us consider a few passages.

1Jn 3:14-15 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

- John informs us that a man who hates his brother does not have aionian life remaining with him. If the aionian life which was with him was this age lasting life, guaranteeing him a resurrection to judgment, has this man, by his hatred escaped the resurrection?

Rom 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Cp. 1Jn 5:12 He that hath the Son hath life: *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

If we understand our life in Christ to be “aionian life”, then these two verses lead us to the following conclusions:

The brother who does not have the disposition of Christ is not one of Christ's
He that does not have Christ does not have life
He that does not have life will not appear at the judgment seat
those who do not have the disposition of Christ will not be resurrected.

The preceding should be sufficient evidence to show the untenable position one is placed in upon affirming the present possession of aionian life. We shall henceforth endeavor to plainly illustrate the truth concerning Aionian life.

This is Life Aionian

Aionian life, though etymologically rendered “age lasting life”, in its true import signifies the “life pertaining to the Aion”. Aionian life, in all occurrences, is speaking of the life related to the aion, that is, the Kingdom Aion. Aionian life is not a term used to define the duration of the life, but to define what the life is related to, namely, the Kingdom aion.

Consider the relation of aionian life to the Kingdom of God in the following passages.

Matt. 19:16-23 (pp. Mk. 10:17-25) What must I do to inherit aionian life? When the man leaves, Christ discusses entering the Kingdom. Was he not speaking of synonymous matters?

Mark 10:29-30 In the Aion to come, Aionian life
What is the “aion to come” other than the the Kingdom aion?

We are told in **Luke 1:33** “And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his Kingdom there shall be no end.” Of this kingdom aion, there shall be no end, hence it is necessary for the life which pertains to that aion to be without end, and this is what is intended by the Spirit when using the phrase “aionian life”.

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Luk 20:34-36 affirms this:

And Jesus answering said unto them, **The children of this world (aion) marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world(aion), and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.**

So those who are accounted worthy of THAT Aion (and all that pertains to it, life included)...Can die no more.

Hath Aionian Life

What the past tense usage of aionian life in relation to believers? How do we explain the following with our understanding that aionian life is always equal to immortality?

Joh 3:36 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.

Joh 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Joh 6:47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

Joh 6:53-58 Then Jesus said unto them, **Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.**

For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever.

1Jn 5:11-13 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, 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. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

We should first note that John's use of the present tense for things yet future is not reserved to the subject of aionian life. Consider the following:

- **Joh 3:35** The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. Ct. Paul, quoting from Ps. 8: **Heb 2:8** Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.
- **Joh 17:4** I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.
- **Joh 16:33** These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

We shall not focus on the explanation of these verses directly at this time, though the explanation to be offered concerning aionian life will apply to them also. We present them simply to establish that the use of the present tense for things yet future is laced throughout John's gospel. Shall we attempt to explain these verses as being actually true at the time spoken?

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The word “hath” in all the verses upon which this confusion falls, is in the “indicative” mood according to Strong’s Concordance with Tense, Voice and Mood. The Indicative mood is defined as: “A simple statement of fact. If an action really occurs or has occurred or will occur, it will be rendered in the indicative mood.”

So we see that this word “hath” is used when an action assuredly will occur. This interpretation allows us to find harmony with the rest of the scripture’s testimony concerning aionian life, and it is in harmony with the scriptural principle that God “callesh those things which be not as though they were.” (Rom. 4:17)

It is when the etymology of the words agrees with the plainly declared doctrines of scripture that a consideration of the Greek and Hebrew definitions is valuable. If the scriptures plainly teach that Christ had no physical existence prior to his birth by Mary, yet a Greek word can be interpreted to state that he did, we must look deeper into the matter and apprehend what we are misunderstanding. The same principle applies in this matter.

As the Jews were given the flesh of quail to sustain them through the dark night, until the dawn of the new day, and the evaporation of the dew revealed the manna on the ground (Ex. 16:12-15), so we are given the meat of “the Word”, which “was made flesh”, to ingest and assimilate into our lives, that we might be sustained through this dark gentile night. If we maintain our spiritual life in this appointed manner, then when “the day dawn, and the day star arises” we will be provided the hidden manna to partake of (Rev. 2:17). It is by constant consumption of the word and attention to its moral principles in our daily life that we remain related to “Christ” who is “our life”. It is in Christ that aionian life hath been deposited for us, for we are told “**as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;**” (Jn. 5:26) “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 Jn. 5:11), for “your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). As we must continually ingest the natural food to perpetuate our physical frame, so it is also true that “Except [we] eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, [we] have no life in [us].” But, “If we continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Col. 1:23), then “When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with him in glory” for “we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” (1 Jn. 3:2-3) Until that day, aionian life remains deposited in Christ, and it is by maintaining our relationship with him that we retain the “right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” (Rev. 22:14)

Let us rejoice in this wonderful hope, and “hold fast to the form of sound words”, never compromising to the pressures of the Mystery of iniquity, for “Love rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.”

Complementary reading:

Eureka Vol. 5 Pgs. 316-317 logos edition (A clear and concise explanation); see footnotes also

Eureka Vol. 1 Pg. 365 Logos edition

Things Concerning Pg. 119

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Rectification Pgs. 1-2, 10-11 (introduction, 1st paragraph of “Mortality, its origin and meaning”, “Live for ever”, and “Immortality and Eternal life”) Pamphlet found in “Selected works of Thomas Williams”

The World’s Redemption Pgs. 315-324 (eternal life and immortality promised, not possessed)

A discourse on eternal life, Pgs. 29-31 Found In “The Revealed Mystery” by Bro. Thomas

Wrested Scriptures-R. Abel Pgs. 157-158