

Laying Hold on Eternal Life

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"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called ..." ~ I Timothy 6:12

"... That they may lay hold on eternal life." ~ I Timothy 6:19

Paul encourages Timothy to take hold of a very valuable possession – “*eternal life*.” Many miss the true meaning of this exhortation because of a confusion of “*eternal life*” with *immortal life*.

The Greek word translated “*eternal*” in our phrase “*eternal life*” is “*aionios*,”¹ meaning “age-abiding.”² *Aionios*, or *eonian* life is that life which is active and productive *currently* – in this present age. Rather than duration, “*eternal life*” has the quality and nature of life in view.

Since “*eternal life*” comes from God, it is best understood and defined by looking to Him. Paul, in Romans 16:26, speaks of the “*everlasting God*” (i.e., “*the eonian God*”). This word “*everlasting*” is the same word as “*eternal*,” also being the word “*aionios*.” That He is the “*everlasting God*,” or the “*eonian God*,” does not refer to the fact that God will never die. This is a truth that is taught elsewhere in Scripture by other terms, such as:

“His years shall have no end” (Psalm 102:27).

The issue of “*everlasting God*” is not whether or not He will ever die, but whether or not He is removed from His universe at this time. The question at hand is if He is actively involved in this age? What is the answer? Why, the answer is, Yes! It is answered by the Scriptural fact that He is the “*eonian God*.”

That He is the God of the *now* – the great God of the present – the “*I am*” – is not intended to place any limitation upon His duration. He is just as much the God of the past and the God

1. Strong's Greek Lexicon #166 (*aionios*).

2. Joseph B. Rotherham, *Emphasized Bible*, 1872; G. Campbell Morgan, *Studies of the Four Gospels*, 1929; Charles H. Welch, *Berean Expositor*, Vol XLII, 1963; Randall T. Pittman, *Words and Their Ways in the Greek New Testament*, 1942.

of the future as He is of the now. In the same way, that He is “*the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*” places no limitation upon Him being our God.

We now have “*eonian life*.” We are sons of God now. We have this life of God now, ahead of time, rather than later. Though we are not yet immortal, we do not need to await the resurrection-life to enjoy the fullness of life in God now – in this age.

We have the blessed privilege of possessing the *age-abiding* life of God our Father.

God made the ages (“*worlds*”³ – Hebrews 1:2). He framed them (Hebrews 11:3) for the accomplishment of His “*eternal [eonian] purpose*” (Ephesians 3:8-11; 1:9-11).

The statement “*from everlasting to everlasting⁴ thou art God*” (Psalms 90:2), means that “*from age to age*” He is God. He is the God of EVERY age. There is no age in which He is not the supreme and sovereign God.

During the present evil age (“*present evil world*”⁵ – Galatians 1:4), sin reigns, Satan – “*the god of this world [age]*”⁴ (II Corinthians 4:4) – blinds and deceives mankind, and death overtakes all mankind (I Corinthians 15:22). Nonetheless, God is absolutely over all and is in supreme control. He is the “*eonian God*.”

Sir Robert Anderson confirms this understanding of “*eternal life*.”

“The solemn language of Scripture, which declares *aeonian* life to be the peculiar blessing of the believer, loses all its significance, unless we understand the word to describe the quality of the life, and not duration merely.”⁶

“*Eternal life*” is the reigning quality and nature of life that we are already blessed to possess as a gift from God. It is the glorious privilege of living in the *now*. “*Eternal life*” is living *now* in Christ, in this present evil age; and it is the full and confident expectation of living and reigning with Christ “*in the ages to come*” (Ephesians 2:7).

“*Eternal life*” is defined in Romans 5:21; John 17:3; I John 5:20, and is not to be confused with the “*immortality*” which accompanies our future resurrection-life when we are raised, incorruptible, from our physical graves. Immortality is obtained in the resurrection. Death has no power over immortality.

“*Eternal life*” is not the promise of unending life. Unless Christ comes before we die, we will in fact all die. Rather, the promise of *unending* life is expressed in the truth of immortality.

3. Strong's Greek Lexicon #165 (*aion*).

4. Both words translated “*everlasting*” are Strong's Hebrew Lexicon #5769 (*owlam*) and corresponds to the Greek word *aion/anionios*.

5. The English word “*world*” is “*aion*” – Strong's Greek Lexicon #165.

6. Sir Robert Anderson, *Human Destiny*, 1913, page 65.

In our texts, Paul was not encouraging Timothy to acquire “*eternal life*.” He was encouraging him to take hold of it. The simple fact is that *eternal life* already belonged to Timothy. It was his present possession. All he needed to do was walk in it richly as his daily life. As believers we have been called of our Father into a wonderful possession, that of “*eternal life*.” This life is nothing less than His Own Life – the very Life of God Himself. It is Divine Life.

God planned for us to be incorporated into His life before the world began.

“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2).

Eternal life is God’s free gift to us through the finished work of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*“For the wages of sin is death; but **the gift of God is eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 6:23).

Not only do we have this life as a present possession, we are called (“*whereunto thou art also called*”) to *engage* this life. We have been called of God to actively possess our possession. It is one thing to have divine-life as a present possession, and yet still live day-by-day a mere human existence. It is quite another to actively *engage* divine life, which outwardly manifests itself through the moment-by-moment details of our lives. Paul calls this heavenly process *reigning in life*.

This is our divine calling!

God’s design is that through His very own righteousness granted to us, His grace would reign in our lives.

*“That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness **unto eternal life** by Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 5:21).

God has equipped the believer to reign unto “*eternal life*.” He desires that we reign in His life – that we exercise divine life – that we really live.

Here is the root of the whole matter. Shall we continue to live as mere mortals – existing in the vanity of human life, or shall we live out the divine life already given to us by God?

*“And this is **life eternal**, that they might **know** Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent”* (John 17:3).

Today we can walk in fellowship with God, in the righteousness of His Son. We can walk in peace, and in the joy of “*eternal life*.” This is all about a life that is centered in the *knowledge* of the Father, and His Son. It is the foretaste of things to come. This is our *special* position as a believer.

“... **Specially** of those that believe” (I Timothy 4:10b).

“Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with **eternal glory**. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also **live with Him**” (II Timothy 2:10-11).

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