

ETERNAL LIFE OR THE WRATH OF GOD!

"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." John 3:36.

In a small hotel in Paris, on the morning of December 20, 1946, a maid was cleaning the room of a guest when she noticed an apple in his open suitcase. She began to eat the apple and discovered that it had in it the famous missing Conde Diamond, stolen from a French Museum. The diamond was worth two million dollars.

More startling than discovery of diamonds in apples is the contrast set forth in the words, "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." Appalling contrast! Eternal life or the wrath of God! What a vivid contrast! What scripture verse is more full of glory in the first part and more full of dark despair in the last part of it? It presents God's alternatives, which are open to all. It leaves each one of us to choose which we shall have, eternal life or the wrath of God.

One of the most meaningful and glorious phrases that was ever uttered is that which was so often upon the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ, "eternal life"; and one of the most awful and appalling phrases ever uttered is that other one which occurs in our text, "the wrath of God." Words cannot express, and the mind cannot imagine, all the wealth of glory there is wrapped up in those two words, "eternal life." Neither can it be put into words, nor conceived by the human imagination, the depth of horror, shame, and woe that are wrapped up in that expression, "the wrath of God." It is between these two, the unutterably glorious "eternal life" and the unspeakably awful "wrath of God," that each of us is called to make his choice.

Which shall it be? Which will you choose, eternal life or the wrath of God? That should not be a difficult matter to decide. Surely any sensible person will say, "Give me eternal life." But that is not the choice that some of you really are making. You are deliberately turning your backs upon eternal life, and have been doing so for years. Some of you are deliberately choosing the wrath of God, and have been doing so for a long time.

God says that all have sinned and are therefore guilty before Him. The universal testimony of Scripture is that man by nature is guilty under the indictment of God. History and human experiences reveal our common depravity. "We are by nature children of wrath." Sin singles out each member of the human family as its chief protagonist. No member of the human race has escaped sin's corruption. And Christ Jesus was not guilty of the unparalleled folly of coming from heaven to the cross for innocent creatures, to reprieve persons uncondemned, to redeem free men, to revoke the death sentence where it was not, to expire under the wrath of God to save from hell people in no danger of going to hell.

I. Eternal Life.

What is eternal life? It is not what many call life. It is not a life of worldly gaiety. Paul said, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" I Timothy 5:6. Eternal life is not the life of fleshly carousals, of pleasures plentiful as bacteria in bad butter, of fame, of political backgrounds, of social life, of military kingdoms, or of banking worlds. What, then, is eternal life?

1. It is real life.

Paul said, "Lay hold on eternal life" I Timothy 6:19. The Revised Version translates it, "Lay hold on the life which is life indeed." Eternal life is life indeed, life in reality. Much that we call life is not really life at all. Many

a young person has plunged into a life of gaiety, worldliness, and sin saying, "I am going to see life for myself." Instead of seeing life such a one has chosen to see death. Anywhere and everywhere a life of sin, of selfishness, of worldliness, and of pleasure is death. No one really knows what life is who has not received eternal life. It is life indeed.

2. It is a full life.
It is life abundant. Christ said, "I came that they might have life, and may have it abundantly" John 10:10 R. V. Eternal life is full of peace, of joy, of power, of beauty, and of glory. It is abundant life, abounding life, overflowing life.
3. It is a satisfying life.
Only eternal life can ever satisfy the longing and capacity of these souls of ours. No life that is purely earthly, that we have inherited from our ancestors, no matter how refined in character, no life but the one we derive directly from God when we receive Christ as our Saviour, can satisfy the infinite yearnings of these spirits of ours. One says, "Give me wealth and I shall be satisfied." Another says, "Give me power and I shall be satisfied." Another says, "Give me pleasure and I shall be satisfied." No, you will not be satisfied, with any of these nor with all of them. You should say, "Give me eternal life and I shall be satisfied." Many, to whom this world seemed to have given all that it had to give, were not satisfied. Many others, to whom this world had given very little, were satisfied, because they had God and eternal life.
4. It is a complete life.
All other life than eternal life is partial, fragmentary, unbalanced, and incomplete. Eternal life is life perfectly balanced, filled out, and complete. One obtains complete life only when he received eternal life.
5. It is an endless life.
Endlessness is not the most essential characteristic of eternal life. Its quality is more than its duration, but nevertheless it is endless. Thank God because He offers us a life that is not only infinite in its quality but endless in its duration. We cannot be satisfied with that which comes to an end. Thank God for something that never ends, something that always has in it the freshness of the dawn, something that ever stretches on and on into the illimitable spaces of ever-increasing glory before you.

The great authority on life is Jesus Christ. To see life we must see Him. If we leave Him out of our calculations we can never see life, whatever else we may see.

Christ had life within Himself. "In Him was life." He did not have to go about looking for it; He took it with Him wherever He went, and that is one of the great things that Jesus has taught us about life. How did He interpret life? Take two characteristic utterances of His. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things he possesseth." "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent." There you get the essence of Christ's teaching about life. It is not a question of things. The most that things can do is to minister to life, and they do not always do that even. They sometimes choke and stifle it by their dead weight.

Christ says, "Do not interpret your life in terms of things: interpret it in terms of a relationship to God." This is life, to know God. The essence of life is a conscious relation to God, and we have to learn to begin there, right at the very

beginning. If you leave God out, you cannot find life. You are thereby cut off from the source. You get no inward strength and sustenance. You become superficial. Life is something that begins within and works outward. Apart from Christ we do not even "see life," but there is something more for us than the possibility of seeing life. We may have it. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." It is one thing to see life revealed in Christ; it is another to have it in ourselves.

Eternal life is a present possession. The text does not say "will have eternal life," but "hath eternal life", that is, he has it now. Eternal life is not simply continuity of existence, but it is knowing God through Jesus Christ. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent." John 17:3. Eternal death is not knowing God through Jesus Christ. One may exist in this world without knowing God, and he may continue to exist in the next world without knowing God.

II. The Wrath of God.

What is the wrath of God? This phrase points out awful woes. If you had not sinned, no wrath would have been revealed. Your sinful conduct is sufficient to justify the wrath of God against your doings. By unbelief you have hated God's love, broken God's commandments, and despised God's mercies. It is the wrath of the Lamb, the wrath of gentleness against brutality, truth against falsehood, light against darkness, holiness against sin. Any man who denies the wrath of God denies the Word of God.

God's wrath is His intense and settled displeasure. There is nothing more terrible than that. To have the infinitely Holy One displeased with you, to have the omnipotent and infinite ruler of the universe displeased with you, to have God displeased with you, to incur His Wrath, His intense, deep-seated settled displeasure, that is awful. "The wrath of God" is a terrible expression, and it remains so, after we have modified it by every thought which has been revealed about God. It is the wrath of virtue against vice, of chastity against unchastity, of meekness against brutality, of gentleness against cruelty, of righteousness against sin, of love against hatred.

Upon whom does the wrath of God abide? Those who believe not the Son of God. Out of infinite mercy He has come into the world, taken upon Himself our nature, and suffered, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. By reason of His sufferings, the gospel message is now proclaimed, and those who hear it are assured that "whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." The unhappy persons mentioned in our text are those who will not believe in Christ, who reject God's way of mercy, who hear the gospel but will not receive the Saviour. Because they believe not on Him, the wrath of God abideth on them. The wrath of God abideth on the man, whoever he may be that hath not believed in Christ, even though he may be moral, courteous, cultured, amiable, and admirable. One doom is common to all who will not believe in Christ. They must either receive Christ or be condemned--there is no other alternative. They must trust Christ Whom God has sent forth to be the propitiation for sin, or else they will never be admitted into the presence of God but will have to endure eternal punishment.

III. Which Will You Choose?

Before you are the two alternatives. On the one hand, there is eternal life, real life, full life, satisfying life, complete life, and endless life. On the other hand, there is the intense, deep-seated, settled displeasure of God, the Maker and Sustainer of the Universe. Which will you choose?

By what act does one determine whether eternal life or the wrath of God is to be his portion? Our text makes answer, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life;

and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." The one and only act by which one gets eternal life is the act of believing on the Son of God. The one and only act by which one loses eternal life and brings upon himself the abiding wrath of God is by refusing to believe on Christ. Notice that the wrath of God abideth, which is to say, it is upon you now.

What is God's plan of salvation for you? It is to believe in Christ. When you do, the curse is gone and you become a child of God. You will receive pardon, be counted righteous before God, and be free from condemnation. "He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life." John 5:24. Belief denies salvation by character, refutes salvation by works, contradicts salvation by culture, disproves salvation by feeling, and declares salvation through trust. Eternal life is through belief in Christ.

One of the saddest pictures in history is given us in the account of the destruction of the Bastille in Paris. That old prison had become so infamous in the estimation of the people that they decided to raze it to the ground. "Down with the Bastille!" was the cry of the multitude, and against it they went with all manner of implements. Finally the door was broken open, and the prisoners were released. In a dark inner cell there was found a man who had been there forty years. When it was announced to him that he was free, he refused to accept his liberty. He had begun to regard that dark cell as his home, and he stood in the door to fight away those who would take him into the bright sunlight and fresh air. He resisted them with the ferocity of a tiger. So it is with some who are in the dark cell of their own guilt. It is made possible for them to be saved; liberty is offered through Christ, but they stand in the door of their cell and fight against every effort to release them. God yearns to save them from its darkness and thralldom, but if they will not accept Christ and be saved, He can only let them remain in the condition they have chosen.

Everything hinges on the fact of a man's believing on Christ or his not believing on Him. The difference between these two is the difference between acquittal and condemnation. He that believeth not, whether he be serious or careless, whether he be the profane scoffer or the regular church-goer, is condemned already. To reject Christ is to reject the only possible means of escape from a doomed state. It means to remain separate and apart from God, that is, in a condition of death and condemnation.

Whosoever believeth on Christ gets eternal life. There it stands in God's sure Word in language a child can understand, "he that believeth on the Son hath eternal life," irrespective of who he is or what he is, irrespective of what he has been or what he has done. And you may get eternal life right now, if you will believe on Christ. There are two possibilities open before you now, one is infinitely glorious and the other is inconceivably appalling. Eternal life or the wrath of God, which will you take? Take eternal life.