

ETERNAL LIFE

WHEN TIME WILL NOT EXIST

Busyness and the feeling that there isn't enough time is characteristic of our time, whereas in eternity, time will have ceased to exist entirely. Then, all the clocks will have stopped, and no one will be tearing pages from a calendar. No one will be in a hurry. Although time-schackled man has difficulty comprehending eternity, it has always fascinated him and occupied his mind. The understanding that when the shackles of time are broken, death loses its grip on him, has heightened man's interest.

SCRIPTURE'S REVELATION ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE

The Triune God is eternal. He has neither beginning nor end. "The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal" (The Athanasian Creed). Isaiah prophesies about Christ's birth, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

Only God has life in His control. When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and sent him to be the leader of His people, Moses asked God for His name. God answered, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exod. 3:14). Only God can name himself in this manner, for only He has life and only He can give life. Unless God gives life, no one can say, "I am."

God created man in His own image. He gave man life and made of him an eternal being. The God-given life was eternal. Man lost this gift in the Fall into sin and came under the power of death. The Son also had life as the Father did, as He, himself, states, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26). By His redemption work, Christ reopened the broken connection to life. "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" (1 John 5:11,12).

The believing person lives eternal life already in time, but looks at it as if through a mirror. Only when he has reached the destination, will he actually comprehend how great a gift Christ has merited for him. "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 5:10,11).

Scripture speaks much about the reality of eternal life, but little about what eternal life is like. No one, who has reached the destination, has returned to relate to us about it. The rich man, having gone to torment, hoped that Lazarus would be sent to relate to his brothers about the importance of repentance, but this did not happen (Luke 16:19-31). Isaiah states instead that, God, himself, excepted, no one has heard or seen what happens to those who wait for the Lord (Isa. 64:4).

Paul, nevertheless, wrote the words to the Corinthians that have been quoted often and applied to heavenly joy, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:9,10). In spite of the similarity of the words, Paul did not quote the previous quotation from Isaiah, but, according to the church father Origen, from the revelation of Elijah, which has been left out of the canon of the Old Testament. Paul apparently did not mean with his quotation the beauty of heaven, but the grace kingdom upon earth, which can be seen only through faith. On the other hand, the Spirit reveals to us that it will be good to be in heaven.

LUTHER'S THOUGHTS

In his book, *In the Battles of Life*, Luther relates that, when he was gravely ill during 1537–1538, he pondered eternal life. He did not fear death, but left himself and his life in God's hands. He was sure that he already owned eternal life, for he believed in Christ. During his illness, he spoke many beautiful words about the life to come and its unspeakable joy, which the human mind, however, cannot comprehend.

Neither did Luther know when God will create a new heaven and a new earth. He was of that opinion that we should not even ask for that knowledge, since we do not even comprehend the first creation, though we have seen nature and studied it. He pondered how one can get time to pass in eternity as there will not be change or work. Then he realized that there would be enough to study for all of eternity when God opens His secrets. To support his concept, he took Philip's plea, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (John 14:8).

Once Luther pondered with his family and friends whether they would know each other in heaven. He answered favorably to the pondering, since Adam knew Eve when he awoke from his sleep, although he had not met her before. Adam did not ask, "Where did you come from?" He realized, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Luther supported his understanding, "Adam was full of the Holy Spirit, and he had the true recognition of God. We will be renewed into this sense and image of God in our coming life in Christ, so that we will know our father and mother and each other better, as Adam knew Eve."

SIN AND DEATH ARE GONE

If this temporal world created by God is good, although sin has badly corrupted it, how good then will be the new heaven and new earth, where righteousness dwells. Sin and death shall be gone; pain, suffering, and distress will be gone. Joy, peace, and love will be present permanently. The sun and the moon, "the timekeepers," will no longer be seen. They won't be needed, when Christ, himself will be as the sun. What more could we wish for! It pays to believe.

"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying" (Isa. 65:17–19).