

WHAT IS EVERLASTING LIFE?



What does the Bible mean when it talks about eternal life? Someone might say, "Eternal life is living forever." But that's not it. No one ceases to exist when they 'die'. Everyone lives forever in either heaven or hell. "Well then, eternal life must be living forever in heaven instead of hell." That's not it either.

John 3:36 says, "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."

Everlasting life is a present-tense possession. It's not something that begins when we get to heaven. There are a number of scriptures that speak of everlasting life as something we possess in this life (John 4:14; 5:24; 6:27; 6:40, 47).

So, the question remains, "What is everlasting life?" This is very important. **John 3:16 says this is the reason that Jesus came.**

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Many have mistakenly thought that the goal of salvation is the forgiveness of sin to avoid hell. That's not what John 3:16 is saying. Sure, not perishing in hell is an important part of what Jesus came to do. He accomplished that by paying the debt for all our sins.

If that's all there is to salvation, that's more than any of us deserve and it would still be worth preaching. But salvation is much, much more than getting our sins forgiven so we can go to heaven instead of hell.

Let me say it this way. If all you did was ask Jesus to forgive your sins so you wouldn't perish in hell, then you are missing out on eternal life.

Sin was a barrier that stood between us and a Holy God. It had to be removed. That's exactly what Jesus did, and He did it well. Sin is no longer standing between God and man (II Corinthians 5:17). But to what does that entitle us?

Sure, it entitles us to live forever with God in heaven. That's wonderful. But there are tremendous benefits right here, right now, on earth. Eternal life is one of those benefits.

Jesus defined eternal life for us in **John 17:3**. That verse says, **"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."**

Eternal life is knowing God. You may be disappointed with that definition. You think you know God and you still aren't satisfied. You want there to be something more. The key lay in understanding what the Bible means by the word "know." The word know here is speaking of much more than just intellectual knowledge. It can be seen in hundreds of Bible scriptures, like, **"Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain" (Genesis. 4:1)**. Adam didn't just know Eve intellectually. That won't produce children. He had an intimate, personal experience with her. This was speaking of a knowing between a man and a woman in the most intimate way possible.

Likewise, when Jesus said eternal life was knowing God, He was speaking of having an intimate, close, personal relationship with God. That's awesome!

There are those who believe Jesus died to forgive their sins, but they still don't have a close, personal, intimate relationship with their Father God. They think that is reserved for heaven. They are content to muddle through life singing songs about how, when we all get to heaven, what a day that will be.

That is not to take anything away from heaven, but we are supposed to have eternal life (close, intimate, personal relationship with God our Father and Jesus Christ His Son) **right now**. It's not "pie in the sky by and by" but rather "steak on your plate while you wait."

Jesus said in John 3:16 that God loved the world so much, He gave His only begotten Son so those who believed on Him wouldn't perish but have everlasting life. If all you have done is believe on Jesus so you won't go to hell, then you are missing out on the everlasting life the Lord wants to have with you right now.

Why is this so misunderstood? It is because many churches have changed the message of salvation. They have placed a period after the word "perish" in John 3:16. They have told the world that the reason God sent His Son to die for their sins was so they wouldn't perish, PERIOD. That excludes the true message of eternal life and intimate relationship with God as the goal of salvation.

Faith comes from hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17). If we don't hear that Jesus came to bring us back into intimate relationship with God, then we won't have faith for that and we won't experience it. This describes some modern-day churches to a tee.

We have many people who have come to the Lord and received the forgiveness of their sins, but they are **saved and stuck**. They are just waiting for heaven so they can really start living. That is missing the main point of salvation.

If there was no afterlife, if there was no heaven or hell, John 3:16 reveals that Jesus would still have come and died for our sins so we could once again have an intimate relationship with

Him and His Father right now, in this present evil world (Galatians. 1:4).

This was one of the main differences between the first-century church and today's church. Those people knew God intimately. They had a relationship with the Lord that wasn't waiting to start in heaven, but was working in them while they were still in this world.

They didn't have the advantages of radio, television, internet, or any other modern means of communication. They never even put a bumper sticker on a camel. Yet, these believers turned the known world upside down with the truths of the Gospel in just thirty years (Acts 17:6). They impacted their world much more than we are impacting our world today. Why?

They had such a depth of relationship with a Living God that it was contagious. In Rome, Christians knew their God so intimately that they sang His praises as they were burned at the stake. There are historical accounts of Nero the emperor sticking his fingers in his ears and saying, "Why must these Christians sing?"

They had much more than a doctrine and a hope. They had a present-tense relationship that allowed them to endure with joy terrible atrocities. There are historical accounts of Romans, when witnessing the joy of these Christians who were being martyred, jumping out of the stands and rushing to them. They knew they would be doomed to the same fate, but they willingly accepted death so they could know God in the same close, intimate, and personal way as these Christians.

Let me ask you this question. It's not intended to condemn you, but to enlighten you. How many people would die to have what you have? Is anyone envious of your relationship with the Lord? If not, then may I suggest to you that you aren't experiencing eternal life as the Bible describes it and as our Lord Jesus died to give you.

This isn't something for the select few. This is normal Christian living. In fact, if this isn't your experience, you aren't really living. This is what drove the Apostle Paul (Philippians 3:10) and all the early Christians. It's still what drives victorious Christians today. It's all about personal relationship with a Person, not just some doctrine.

There is so much more I would like to share with you about this. It's the foundation of everything I teach. And the good news is that our Lord wants you to have this more than you do.

Once you understand that true eternal life begins with a personal relationship with the Lord, it leads to a question: "How do I begin?" That's an important question with an important answer. I will share that revelation with you soon!