

Eternal Life

Do we presently "have" eternal life, or do we have the "promise" of eternal life based on whether we remain faithful to God? There are two groups of passages.

The first group:

John 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;" (cf Jn. 3:16; I Jn. 5:13)

These passages are in the same category as God's statement to Joshua and Israel about Jericho. Before they had ever taken the city, God said to them, "See, I have given into thine hand Jericho" (Josh 6:2). This was said before God gave them the commands about marching around the city, etc. God's will and word was so secure and sure that he could use the past tense in connection with his promise, even though it had not been actualized.

Also, in the same category is the statement God made to Abraham in Genesis 17:5, "a father of many nations have I made thee." Notice the past tense verb. Isaac had not even been born at this time. God's promise was so sure and certain that such a statement could be made by Him.

In the same way, the Lord's promise of eternal salvation is so sure that he can say that we have it. But even this promise is contingent on our being faithful to death. I know of people who have lost their promise of eternal life, because of unfaithfulness. If they had actually possessed eternal life, how could they have lost it? (We are not speaking here of being saved. I am saved, and I know I am saved. But I also know that I can lose it, if I do not remain faithful. We are speaking here of being in heaven, and eating of the tree of life, and living forever.)

The second group:

Rom 2:4-7 Paul wrote to those who "seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:" (Notice we *seek for eternal life*. Why would one seek for something he already has?)

Titus 1:2 "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;" (Why would one hope for eternal life, if one already possesses it?) (cf. I John 2:25)

We cannot seek, hope for, or be promised that which we already have. To interpret the first set of passages as actual, present possession of eternal life is to put the two groups of passages in hopeless, irreconcilable conflict. To interpret the first group as having eternal life in promise harmonizes them perfectly.

Eternal means unending. If man, indeed, could possess eternal life in fact, not just in promise, then he could not fall from grace. But obtaining heaven is based on conditions. Not meeting these conditions can in fact cause us to fall from grace.

When the Lord returns, and he leads the saints back to heaven, THEN will we be able to eat of the tree of life and live forever. (Rev. 2:7; 22:14) If we have eternal life now in fact, why would we need to have access to the tree of life? We would already have what we need to have eternal life.

As long as we live in this mortal body, we do not have immortality. This mortal must put on immortality before we are suitable for heaven. I Corinthians 15:54.