

Series: John's Letters
Title: New Life is Mine
Text: 1 John 5:11-13
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Verse 11

In verse 11, John described the eternal life the real believers of verse 10 enjoyed. He said, "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:10). The phrase "God has given" appeared in the aorist tense in the original language. It depicted, as one has said, the "great historic fact of the incarnation."¹ Again John gave a rebuttal to his Gnostic opponents who denied the in-the-flesh appearance of Jesus. He reminded them of the "testimony" that had been handed down, appealing to "concrete and objective information" about Jesus' appearing. His purpose in defending the incarnation was to uphold the "eternal life" that was available in Jesus.

Many are familiar with the concept of "eternal life," but few know what it really means. Most would equate it with simply "living forever." The word translated "life" in 1 John 5:11 had an emphasis on quality, not quantity. Eternal life is not just about the continuation of life, life unending. It is concerned with a character and quality of life. It involves an experience that is altogether different than the common experience of ordinary humanity. According to Jesus, it involves much more. In John 17:3, He said, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ."

Eternal life isn't primarily concerned with the continuation of life. Everyone will live somewhere forever (1 Corinthians 15:22). Eternal life isn't about the quantity of one's life. It is about the quality of one's life. One has said, "It is to be understood as referring not only to duration, but more so to quality." That is, it is not merely a life that is eternal in duration, but is primarily something different from the natural life of man."² According to Jesus, the concept is concerned with whether or not one knows the one, true God and His Son Jesus. Eternal life is significant because it is life marked by an intimate acquaintance with the eternal one, the only eternal God. Scripture consistently promises that those who are in Christ are recipients of such life. In 1 John 2:25, John said, "And this is the promise that he himself made to us: eternal life." In Romans, Paul said, "But now, since you have been set free from sin and have become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification—and the outcome is eternal life! For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:22-23).

John made sure he further qualified the exact nature of the eternal life he promoted. At the end of verse 11, he said "and this life is in his Son." As most false teachers do, the Gnostics liked to use Christian terms in their teaching. The problem was that they had a different dictionary by which they defined those terms. They used words that Christ and His apostles used, but they meant something different when they used them. It is for this reason that John qualified his meaning of eternal life by saying "and this life is in his son." As one has said, John's words were "probably directed against a claim by some antichrists that the readers did not really have eternal life through God's Son."³

John wanted his readers to know that they had eternal life in and because of Jesus. The special knowledge of the Gnostics was of no profit for a true knowledge of the only true God.

¹ Robertson, [CD-Rom].

² Zodhiates, [CD-Rom]>

³ Walvoord and Zuck, [CD-Rom].

Life is only found in Jesus. One commentator has said, “God’s testimony is that his Son is the only means by which one can receive the gift of eternal life...John is clearly and convincingly a ‘theological exclusivist’ with respect to salvation.”⁴ No religion, philosophy, creed, or custom of man can produce the life of God. There is no knowledge of God apart from Christ. He alone is our path to knowing God.

Verse 12

Contrary to the boasts of the Gnostics, the humble believers of Asia Minor were the ones with real life. They had such life because of their trust in Jesus. John said, “The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). John’s words in verse 12 provided a continuation of his discussion from verse 11. Through them, he elaborated on the life that was available in Christ. The word translated “has” at the beginning of the verse appeared as a present active participle. As a result, it depicted a state of continual possession. One has said, “The word is used to describe our personal possession of the Father through confessing the Son.”⁵

The genuine converts of Asia Minor were undoubtedly a bit insecure in their faith because of the criticisms of the false teachers. John wanted to assure them that they had “life” in Jesus. In the original language of the text, the syntax of John’s sentence placed emphasis on the word “life.” No matter what others said, John’s readers had life. They knew God and they would never not know Him. The words of Jesus were true: “Truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24).

Verse 13

Verse 13 is often seen as a theme for John’s entire epistle. Perhaps it encapsulates his intent in writing better than any other verse in the letter. In it, John said, “I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). The word translated “I have written” formed what Greek scholars call an epistolary aorist. The phrase pointed back to the entirety of John’s letter, encapsulating his entire purpose in writing.⁶ It revealed that John’s main purpose in writing was to give his readers assurance regarding their salvation. The Gnostic heresy had been wreaking havoc, causing many to doubt their standing before God.

Notice that John’s words in verse 13 were directed to “you who believe in the name of the Son of God.” Since the Gnostics denied the Sonship of Christ, they had no claims to eternal life. The word translated “believe” is the one that was often used of faith in New Testament times (Ephesians 2:8). Used by John in the context of our current passage, it served as a reminder that salvation came by trusting in the work of Christ on the cross, not by following the philosophies of Gnostic teachers.

Altogether, the mention of “you who believe” indicated that John’s words were aimed at those who professed Christ. The fact that his words were aimed at real believers demonstrated that even true Christians can have doubt regarding their salvation. None are exempt from doubts. All need the ability to gain blessed assurance in Christ.

⁴ Aiken, [CD-Rom].

⁵ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 599.

⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 599.

John spoke of the assurance all Christians need by using a word translated “know.” The word was a favorite religious term of the Gnostics. It meant “to know with intuitive knowledge.”⁷ John implemented it for orthodox purposes. He wanted his readers to realize that they could have an intimate certainty that they were truly saved. The devil deals in doubt, the Lord deals in assurance. No Christian will ever be spiritually strong if he or she doesn’t have a degree of certainty concerning his or her state before the Lord.

⁷ Robertson, [CD-Rom].