

How do we take hold of eternal life?

Last Sunday, we asked the question: /What is eternal life?\

Jesus gave us the answer. He defined eternal life by equating it to coming to know the One True God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

John 17:3 "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

And we learned that every believer has eternal life now. It is his or her present possession.

/Believers HAVE eternal life now.\

/And eternal life is something we can also LIVE IN now.\

Not only that, but we learned that we can grow in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ.

/And that means we can GROW in our capacity to live in eternal life, now, in time.\

Today, we are going to ask the next logical question.

It's the question, "How"?

/How can we take hold of eternal life now, in time?\

How can we reap eternal life in this life on earth? How can we grow in our capacity to live in eternal life? How do we enter into real life?

A rich young man posed that very question to Jesus.

Matt 19:16-17

*16 And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, **what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?**"*

*17 And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, **keep the commandments.**"*

/Jesus gave him a simple, straightforward answer: Keep the commandments.\

But like so many of us at times, the rich young man wasn't satisfied with the simple answer to his question. He wanted more. He really wanted wiggle room to escape the implications of the straightforward answer that Jesus gave him.

So he asks another question.

Matt 19:18-22

*18 Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; 19 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" 21 Jesus said to him, "**If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.**" 22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.*

A piece of advice: never debate the law with the one who wrote the law!

When the young man questioned Jesus' answer, Jesus changed the question.

Not – what good thing shall I do to obtain eternal life?

/Rather, how do I become complete?\

The young man is stunned by the answer. It knocks him off his feet.

It's another simple answer.

/Sell your possessions and give to the poor, and come follow Me.\

Here, becoming complete, or living in eternal life, involves the proper use of riches. Where your heart is, there your treasure will be.

/A heart that covets the world's riches is not complete or mature. That is not the way to enter into life. \

/Back to our question: How do we take hold of eternal life during our lives on earth? \

As we investigate this question in the scriptures, keep in mind the simple answer Jesus gave:/ Keep the commandments of the Lord. \

So, we can grow in eternal life! Now. During our lives here on earth! This is confirmed in the epistles.

/Even though we already have this life, the epistles tell us that we can also take hold of this life!\

1 Tim 6:12

12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

We have eternal life, and we can also take hold of it.

Those two statements are not the same. If you are a believer in Christ, you already have eternal life.

/You can have eternal life, yet never take hold of it. You can fail to reap eternal life.\

This doesn't mean that we can lose our salvation.

/It means that we don't grow in our capacity to live in eternal life in time. \

That's the negative side. But the great news is that we can take hold of eternal life now. We can experience more and more eternal life now, in our mortal bodies.

/We can grow in our capacity to live in eternal life NOW.\

And the question is: How?

/To begin to answer that, we need to check out the neighborhood in 1 Timothy 6.\

1 Tim 6:8-19

8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

11 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, 14 that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which He will bring about at the proper time — He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

How do we take hold of eternal life according to 1 Timothy 6?

/Well, the first thing is to flee from anything that is the opposite of that.\

Flee from youthful lusts. Flee from wrangling about words. Flee from the love of money. Turn and run in the opposite direction as quickly as you can!

/Flee....and then pursue the things that make for living in eternal life.\

What things?

/and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

/How do you take hold of eternal life? Pursue the things that are pleasing to God.\

Rom 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

/Imitate His character: His righteousness, His love, His gentleness. \

and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

/These qualities fit us for living the life that God has called us to live. They equip us to serve others – especially believers.\

When we pursue these things, we grow in our capacity to obey the commandments that the Lord has given us as Christians. We prove what God's will is.

Now remember our rich young man. He was in love with money. Coveting is the opposite of taking hold of eternal life.

/So, what should a rich man do to take hold of that which is life indeed?\

1TI 6:17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

/Do good. Be rich in good works.\

That expression comes up again and again in connection with taking hold of eternal life in time. How do we reap eternal life?

Gal 6:6-10

6 The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him. 7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

We reap eternal life by sowing to the Spirit.

/We reap eternal life by not losing heart in doing good to all people, and especially to believers.\

Remember what Jesus said to the rich young man? Keep the commandments.

/Jesus summed up all the commandments with a single word: love.\

Matt 22:35-40

35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

That they may come to know you, the one True God , and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. This is eternal life. And God IS love. There's another equals sign.

/And Jesus has given us – the body of Christ - a new commandment:\

John 13:34-35

34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

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/And love involves giving. Love means doing good for others. It means doing good works for others.\

1 John 3:14-18

14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

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/Love means living for others. Laying down our lives for the brethren. THIS is what it means to reap eternal life.\

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Now, the beauty of our definition of eternal life as equaling coming to know the One True God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent..

Since one is the same as the other, we get to ask the How question about each side of the equation.

How do we live in eternal life now?

Is synonymous with

How do we come to know the One true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent?

How can I grow in the knowledge of the One true God, and Jesus Christ?

Now in order to do a good job answering the second question, we have to search the scriptures to find out :

What does it mean to come to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent?

[ie, intimate relationship, ...]

And

What are the things we can come to know about the One true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent?

[Jeremiah , Paul in Philippians]

So we are going to work this out on both sides of the equation.

But there's more. Hold onto your hats because this next part is mind blowing.

Col 1:9-10

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

/Can we grow in our knowledge of the one true God? Yes, we can!\

Col 2:1-3

2 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

/So....Can we also grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ?\

Yes, certainly. Peter uses those exact words at the end of his second letter.

2 Peter 3:18

18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Look at how Paul put it in Philippians. When he wrote these words, he had been a believer – and an apostle!- for over 20 years.

Phil 3:10

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Therefore....Bring in our equation:

/Eternal life equals knowing the one True God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.\

Here's where our equation goes into overdrive –

Since we can grow in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ....

/We can grow in our capacity to live in eternal life NOW.\

/Eternal life is a new kind of life. It's a new quality of life. \

Eternal life is the life that Jesus gives.

John 10:10

10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

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And here's an amazing thing.

Eternal life is this – that we may come to know more and more fully.

We CAN.

That word ginosko in John 17:3 is in the present tense active voice subjunctive mood.

Why should I care, you ask?

Three good reasons.

Present means that we are living in it now and will continue to live in it as we come to know more about God the Father and Jesus Christ His son.

Active voice means that we participate in the activity of this life, namely coming to know

Subjunctive mood means that we can continue to grow in this knowledge, or we can arrest our development as it were.

We can't lose eternal life. After all, it's a gift from God. But we can fail to grow in this life.

OK, I hope that grabs our attention.

This is an amazing life. It's an astounding opportunity. WE can either take advantage of this, or not.

If I can repeat a picture I gave last week,

Eternal life is like a secret garden. It's on your property. You have it. It's your present possession.

But it's hidden. So hidden that most people are barely aware that it even exists.

They think it's something that only exists in heaven .

Well, it's heavenly – but we already have received the gift of this garden.

But here's the thing: we get to decide how often we will go into this garden. And we get to decide how much of the garden to explore.

The garden has a sweet aroma , the aroma of all kinds of delightful flowers.

WE'll never enjoy the aroma and the colors and the miracle of living things growing before our eyes if...

If we never take the key we've been given and open the door and step into the secret garden!

Now here's the point of this illustration:

The secret garden is eternal life. We have it now.

We HAVE eternal life NOW. In this present life here on earth. We've had it since the moment we believed in Christ. And we'll always have it.

But here's the issue: will we live in it during our remaining days on earth? Will we reap eternal life? Will we take hold of this eternal life?

The key is faith in God's word.

And when we go into the garden, the one who gave us this garden also gives us instructions about how we are to act, how we are to live, in this garden.

We can come to know the many delights, the rich quality of life, in this garden.

Only with the garden of eternal life, we live in it by coming to know God the Father and Jesus Christ better.

And how do we do that?

What does it mean to come to know Them better?

Well, to get that answer, we need to take our key and open our Bibles!

John 17:1 Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,

2 even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. 3 "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

This is a remarkable definition of eternal life. Notice that Jesus says nothing about Eternal life begins the moment we believe in Christ. It is our present possession.

John 5:24

24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

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1 John 5:11-13

11 And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

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Eternal life is life with God. We possess this life in Christ.

God is not said to have eternal life. God grants eternal life to believers.

That we may know the one True God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

Eternal life is the life we receive when we are born again.

1 Peter 1:3-5

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

It is the life of the New Man. We are a new creation with a new life.

This eternal life is a life we live in our relationship with God. It cannot exist apart from Him, or apart from Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

In Christ was life, and the life was the Light of men.

That they may know You,

Knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. This IS eternal life.

TO know Him is to be living this new, eternal life.

Col 1:9-12

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

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Thus, as we get to know Him better, we reap eternal life, and in that sense we grow in our experience of eternal life.

Or rather, this life grows for us.

The relationship is the knowing, and the knowing is eternal life.

To grow closer to Him is to know Him better.

Let not a mighty man.....but that He understands and knows Me.

That is a far richer , more powerful life.

Eternal life is a life infinitely more wonderful than human existence.

Eternal life does not mean existing forever. A rock can exist a long time. Unbelievers will exist forever too. But with what quality of life?

Eternal life is greater than the human life of the unbeliever, qualitatively better than the life we were given when we were born.

Eternal life has a timeless quality. It is otherworldly.

And yet it is extremely practical.

In fact, Jesus describes several of its characteristics in His prayer in chapter 17.

John 17:13

13 "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

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One characteristic of eternal life is complete joy.

John 17:19

19 "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

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Another characteristic of eternal life is pure truth.

John 17:20-21

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

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Perfect unity is a quality of eternal life.

John 17:22-26

22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

The love of God is another aspect of eternal life.

Seeing Christ in His glory is the ultimate expression of eternal life.

24 "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

25 "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; 26 and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

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To know Him fully is the same thing as being glorified with Him.

He desires us to be with Him where He is so that we might see His glory.

Col 3:1-4

3 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is

hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

That is our destiny. That is our future.

So what?

Eternal life is like a secret garden. We possess it, but that is not the same as living in it.

For far too many Christians, eternal life remains a secret. They don't even know that they have it.

Consider the alternative to eternal life.

What life do people live who cannot live this eternal life because they do not know the one true God, since they have no relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ?

An alienated life.

A meaningless existence.

A life of slavery.

A life of fear.

A life of corruption.