



Gaining
Christ

first in a new series

ETERNAL LIFE

AT THIS POINT IT IS DEEPLY INGRAINED IN OUR SOCIETY. From the hallowed halls and cloak-rooms of Washington D.C., down to the picket-fenced neighborhoods of Small Town, U.S.A., our culture is saturated with the virus of self-serving gain. The politician initiates and nurtures a connection with someone—not for the sake of the relationship, but for what can be gained either for his or her district, or for expanding re-election coffers. The wholesaler wines and dines a new client—not because he likes the guy, but to obtain a new account. And the homeowner buddies up to a neighbor—not for the purpose of establishing an enduring friendship, but because the neighbor has some useful tools he'd like to borrow from time to time.

PRESENT TENSE

Many people come to Christ—or are introduced to Him—with one predominate motive: eternal life. Uppermost in their mind is the acquisi-

tion of a ticket to heaven, or paradise, and the eradication of any possibility they might end up in hell. For them, eternal life is synonymous with “security,” and by our society’s standard, the whole benefit of security is peace of mind: that is, secure it once and for good, then forget about it. If my property is secured with perimeter alarms, then I can sleep better at night, secure in the knowledge that I will be forewarned if an intruder crosses the barrier. I don’t have to worry or wonder; it’s taken care of. If I place my savings in the hands of an insured bank instead of inside the uninsured tick of my mattress, I needn’t concern myself about the safety of my money. It will be there when I need it.

Actually, this perception of eternal life is not inaccurate.

Peter said, “Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You.” And He said to them, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life.”

Luke 18:28-30

It is not inaccurate—just incomplete. The Lord Jesus, in His high priestly prayer shortly before He went to the cross, made it clear that “eternal life” encompasses far more than just a ticket into heaven.

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

John 17:1-3 (emphasis added)

To know God and His Son Jesus Christ—**that** is eternal life. Jesus repeatedly taught that eternal life with God—that is, the triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit—takes place in the here and now. It is not restricted to some future promise of bliss, but is something active, breathing, **alive** in the believer still treading the soil of this earth.

“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.”

John 5:24

Our eternal life, according to the One who died to secure it, is present tense: “has”—not “will have”—eternal life. Beyond that, in Christ our temporal life has changed places: we have already exchanged a dying life for a living life. From the moment of his birth, man is on a path to death. If nothing changes, if the Holy Spirit never draws that life to Christ, the

steady progress of dying will continue toward its inevitable end.

But Jesus says that once we believe on Him—believe that what God says about the Son is true and turn our lives over to Him—we immediately and forever veer off that congenital glide slope to perdition. We are now on a **new** path, one that does not just have a different destination, but a wholly different progress. Our new eternity (for even the lost face eternity) begins the moment Christ enters our heart.

KNOWING CHRIST JESUS

So if our eternal life has already begun, what does it look like? If it is an initiated **process**, what is the nature of this process? How do we really define this present eternal life?

Jesus defined it Himself in His prayer: to know the only true God and His Son, Jesus Christ. And the apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, referred to this acquisition—not the acquisition of a secure future, but of the knowledge of Christ—when he wrote,

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...

Philippians 3:8a

Paul then expands this, detailing what he means by “knowing” Christ Jesus:

...[that I] may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:9-11

The apostle Paul encapsulates this proposition in two simple, monosyllabic words that nevertheless contain the fulness of what should be every believer's life-work:

...that I may *gain Christ*.

Philippians 3:8b (emphasis added)

This issue of Reflections by the Pond begins a new series in which we will be discovering what it means to truly “gain Christ” in a meaningful, life-changing, eternal way.

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