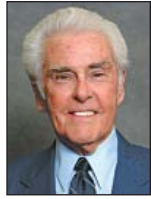


# God's promise of eternal life

If you open a concordance of the New Testament to look up the term “eternal life,” you will find that the Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John have more references to



**John Howell**

eternal life than any of the other New Testament books. Probably one of the most familiar references is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (RSV).

**The author of the epistle.** Even though the authorship of 2 and 3 John is included with his name, there is more scholarly evidence that they are not by him. However, ancient tradition ascribed the Gospel of John to the authorship of the apostle of Jesus whom Jesus said “he loved” (John 19:26). As New Testament scholar David Smith points out, “it hardly admits of reasonable doubt that the Gospel and the Epistle are from one pen. They agree in style, language, and thought.

“Even though the Epistle is anonymous, if the Fourth Gospel is the work of the apostle John, our Epistle also belongs as indubitably to him” (Expositor’s Greek Testament, Vol. 5, 153).

**The purpose of 1John.** Two major themes are apparent in the letter. The first is John’s intent to combat a heresy that was affecting Christian faith. The heresy was being spread among the believers by a philosopher named Cerinthus. His theory was predicated upon a Greek perspective that all matter is inherently and necessarily evil, therefore Jesus whom the Christians worshipped could not be the Son of God. He was the natural born son of Mary and Joseph who became more

righteous and wise as he grew up in their home. After he was baptized, “the Christ descended into him from the Sovereignty which is over the Universe, in the form of a dove.”

Jesus taught about God and did mighty works, “but at the end the Christ withdrew from Jesus,” according to Cerinthus. He could not believe that the holy one could suffer on the cross so he took Christ (the Son of God) away from Jesus. The human Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected but did not accomplish human conquering of the evil of matter. By Christian belief this could only be accomplished by shed blood of the cross, and Cerinthus denied this reality. John encountered Cerinthus in Ephesus and strenuously rejected his error about Jesus Christ.

The second purpose of the letter was to encourage the Christians in their faith. The blood of the cross John included in his threefold witness: “the Spirit, the water, and the blood; these three agree” (1 John 5:8). “It’s the message of the love and forgiveness of the cross that melts our resistance and independence. At the foot of the cross we know how much God loves us” (Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *When God First Thought of You*, p. 144). John’s discussion of eternal life is the application of his encouragement of love to the Christians.

**Life immortal and eternal life (1 John 5:13-17).** Human immortality is sometimes interpreted as the quality or state of being exempt from death. However, Paul indicates that immortality is not the same condition as eternal life when he writes, ‘to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he (God) will give eternal life’ (Romans 2:7). Only God has immortality.

Eternal life is the quality of life

## Bible Studies for Life

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Scripture: 1 John 5:6-13

including the promise of the resurrection which God gives to those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. John places significant emphasis on eternal life but the term is found in the other gospels and in Paul.

Eternal life is a present possession beginning at conversion. The present tense of the verb “has” indicates that eternal life begins when one accepts Christ as Savior and continues through life and death. “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11). The emphasis in eternal life is on quality rather than on quantity of life.

Lloyd Ogilvie shares a beautiful story of a woman dying from cancer. “Tonight she is dying. But death seemed strangely powerless in that hospital room. When I took her hand, she said confidently, ‘I’m going home soon, you know, but I’m not worried. Christ lives in me. Death will be a comma in the story of my life. I’m not afraid for I know I’m alive forever!’ I left the hospital with the Hallelujah Chorus sounding in my soul. Everything I try to live and preach is validated in this victorious woman. I said to myself, ‘It’s true! People can hear the gospel and respond. Christ can take up residence in our souls. Eternal life is sure in those who belong to Christ!’”

It is as John said, “And this is eternal life, that they may know thee the only God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

*John Howell is academic dean emeritus at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.*