

Examining Christian Doctrine

Lesson 29: The Doctrine of Salvation Part 6 – Receiving Salvation and Eternal Life

In continuing the doctrine of salvation, we will explore the concept of eternal life as taught in the Gospel of John and the epistle of 1 John.

The End Result of Salvation: Eternal Life

In our previous lesson, we mentioned that the condition of fallen humanity is one of ‘Spiritual Death’: Spiritual separation from God, spiritual blindness/hardness of heart, bondage to sin, condemnation and judgment (penalty) for sin, and the effects of sin such as guilt, shame, fear, etc.

The remedy for spiritual death is spiritual life:

- Ephesians 2:1-5 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*

The teaching of Eternal life is found primarily in the Gospel of John. John writes his gospel with a stated purpose, and that purpose is that people would believe in Jesus. The word "believe" appears nearly 100 times in John, showing its centrality. Belief is portrayed as the pathway to eternal life, and this belief entails trust in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and the source of life:

- John 20:30-31 *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

The essence of salvation is *receiving eternal life through Jesus Christ*. In church, we often use the term ‘give your life to Christ’ but the true power of the gospel is that Jesus ‘took’ your (old) life through His death, so that you might ‘receive His life’. Salvation is about receiving the life of Christ.

Eternal life in the Gospel of John

1. **Eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ:** Eternal life, according to Jesus, is not just about living forever. It is about having a personal relationship with God and experiencing the fullness of life in fellowship with Him. John 17:3: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."
2. **Eternal life as a present reality:** Eternal life begins when one believes in Jesus, meaning that those who trust in Christ are already living in the fullness of this life. John 5:24: "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."
3. **Eternal life is a future hope:** Jesus declared that he was the resurrection and life, and thus Jesus gives victory over death. John 11:25-26: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'"
4. **Eternal life is a gift from God through belief in the Son:** Jesus teaches that eternal life is a gift given by God to those who believe in Him. It is not something that can be earned through works, but rather a gift that comes through faith. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."
5. **Eternal life is a life of joy and abundance:** Eternal life is described as abundant life. This life, though fulfilled in the age to come, begins here and now, characterized by joy, peace, and purpose. John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

6. **Eternal life is a life free from condemnation:** Those who believe in Jesus are no longer under condemnation but have passed into life. Eternal life brings freedom from judgment and death. John 3:17-18: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Eternal Life in 1 John

Not only does the Gospel of John teach us about eternal life, but so does the Epistle of 1 John:

1. **Eternal Life is in Jesus Christ:** 1 John 5:11-12: "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."
2. **The Purpose of John's Writing is to Give Assurance of Eternal Life:** 1 John 5:13: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."
3. **Eternal Life as the Promise of God:** 1 John 2:25: "And this is what he promised us—eternal life."
4. **Jesus is Eternal Life:** 1 John 1:1-2: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us."
5. **Abiding in God Leads to Eternal Life:** 1 John 2:17: "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever."
6. **Eternal Life is Associated with Love and Obedience:** 1 John 3:14-15: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him."
7. **7. Jesus' Sacrifice Brings Life: 1 John 4:9:** "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."

Regeneration: The New Birth

Regeneration is the theological term used to describe the process by which God imparts new spiritual life to an individual bringing them from spiritual death into life:

- *John 5:24: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life"*

Regeneration, in simple terms, means "new birth" or being "born again." It is a supernatural act of God, where He renews and transforms a person's inner being. The heart, mind, and will are renewed by the Holy Spirit so that a person can enter into and enjoy a personal relationship with God. Regeneration is essential because it marks the beginning of the Christian life and the believer's experience of eternal life.

This concept comes from the teachings of Jesus in John 3 during His conversation with Nicodemus, where Jesus emphasized that being born again is necessary for entering into God's kingdom.

- *John 3:3-7: "Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again... You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"*

In this passage, Jesus explains that regeneration (the new birth) is a spiritual rebirth. It is not about physical birth, but a transformation brought about by the Holy Spirit. This spiritual rebirth is the entry point into the life of the kingdom and into eternal life. The new birth involves not only a new start but a complete change in spiritual orientation and status before God. Just as a physical birth brings a person into the world, the new birth brings a person into the spiritual life of God.

Other Key Scriptures on Regeneration and Eternal Life

1. Titus 3:5 – The Washing of Regeneration

- *“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”*
 - This verse explains that salvation comes through God’s mercy, and specifically through the “washing of rebirth” (or regeneration) and the renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

3. 2 Corinthians 5:17 – New Creation in Christ

- *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”*
 - Regeneration brings about a new spiritual reality. The believer becomes a new creation, which is another way of describing the new birth. This new life is part of the eternal life that begins now and continues forever.

4. 1 Peter 1:3 – Born Again to a Living Hope

- *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”*
 - Peter speaks of the new birth as the means by which believers are brought into a living hope. This hope is directly tied to the resurrection of Jesus and to the promise of eternal life.

5. Ezekiel 36:26-27 – The Promise of a New Heart and Spirit

- *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees.”*
 - This Old Testament promise foreshadows the work of regeneration. God promises to replace the heart of stone (spiritual deadness) with a heart of flesh (spiritual life), which corresponds to regeneration and the new birth.

6. Romans 6:4 – Walking in Newness of Life

- *“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*
 - This verse connects the new birth to Christ’s resurrection. Believers are raised **to newness of life** through regeneration, and this new life is the beginning of eternal life.

Receiving Salvation and Eternal Life

In Luke 18:18 a ruler asked Jesus, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Of course Jesus responded to this Jewish ruler living under the law, in a way that would show him that there’s nothing that he could ‘do’ to inherit eternal life. In answering this same question from a Philippian jailer (“what must I do to be saved” Acts 16:30), the Apostle Paul responded, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

In speaking to the rulers and elders of Israel, the Apostles declared: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

It is evident from the teaching of the whole New Testament that salvation and eternal life is found in Christ, not by our own righteousness, nor by keeping the law or from moralism and religious legalism. So what can we conclude from the New Testament teaching on how one can receive salvation and eternal life?

1. Salvation is by God's Grace: Salvation is not something we can earn through good works or merit; it is entirely by God’s grace. God, in His love, offers salvation to humanity despite our fallen state. Grace comes in the form of ‘Prevenient Grace (grace that precedes human decision), Saving Grace, and Empowering Grace.

- *Ephesians 2:8-9* – “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

2. Salvation is a Gift: Salvation is offered freely by God as a gift. It is not something we can purchase or achieve on our own but something we receive from God’s generosity. Salvation is receiving something God has already done for you through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

- *Romans 6:23* “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

3. Salvation is the Work of God: Salvation is initiated and accomplished by God, from drawing us to Himself to the final transformation of our lives. It is God's redemptive plan that brings us into relationship with Him.

- *John 6:44* "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day."
- *Titus 3:5* "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."
- *Ephesians 2:4-5* "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."

4. Salvation is Based on Repentance: Repentance is the Greek word 'metanoia' and means 'to change ones mind'. This change of mind often involves a turning away from sin and a turning toward God. It is a vital part of receiving salvation because it signifies a change of heart and mind, aligning with God's will.

- *Acts 3:19* "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

5. Salvation is Appropriated Through Faith: Faith is the means by which we receive salvation. It is by trusting in the work of Jesus Christ—His life, death, and resurrection—that we are saved. Faith is more than 'head knowledge' but involves a reliance and trust in Christ's atoning work for us, rather than our own abilities.

- *Romans 10:9-10* "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."
- *Romans 3:23-25* "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished."

6. Salvation is a Divine Exchange: Salvation involves a profound exchange where Christ took upon Himself our sin and its consequences, allowing us to receive His righteousness. This divine transaction reflects the depth of God's love and grace, providing us a restored relationship with Him. We literally exchange our 'old nature' (Adam) for our 'New Nature'.

- *2 Corinthians 5:21* "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

7. Salvation is a Finished Work: Jesus' atoning work on the cross is complete and fully sufficient for salvation. Nothing more needs to be added to His sacrifice—it is finished. This means that those who are saved are fully secure in Christ's work.

- *John 19:30* "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."
- *Hebrews 10:12* "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."

8. Salvation Provides for Us Every Spiritual Blessing: Through salvation, believers are not only forgiven but also receive a wealth of spiritual blessings in our lives that declare our new identity. We are forgiven, righteous, holy, justified, redeemed, reconciled, born again, made new, chosen, gifted, and saved from wrath/judgment.

- *Ephesians 1:3* "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

9. Salvation Leads to Sanctification: After salvation, the believer enters a process of sanctification, where the Holy Spirit works within them to conform them to the image of Christ. This ongoing transformation is part of living out salvation in daily life. It is the outworking of what God is working in us.

- *Philippians 1:6* - "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
- *Philippians 2:12-13* "...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."