

THE ULTIMATE GIFT

By

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Not only Christians, but people who have no attachment whatever to the faith, like to sing that “He has the whole world in His hands.” It is like saying that God, somehow, is going to make everything come out all right for everyone whether or not they honor and obey Him. **But His promises and gifts are conditional.**

There is great comfort and consolation to the Christian in reading the words of Jesus recorded in John 10:27–28). “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.” But the promise is limited to those who hear His voice and follow Him! In verse 26 Jesus said to the Jews, “But you believe not, because you are not of my sheep.” Where do we find His voice?

Hearing and following sums up the whole of life for one who is committed to Christ. It means not only paying close attention to His commands so that we “hear” His voice with regard to every facet of life, but that we also “follow” up on what we have heard by obeying Him. Jesus said, **He that rejects me, and receives not my sayings, has one that judges him: the words that I spoke, the same shall judge him in the last day** (John 12:48).

All who hear and follow are safe in the hands of the Father (verse 29) to receive the discipline He chooses in order to train us as faithful and mature servants, fitted for His presence, and ultimately to receive immortal life.

That there is no mistake about the crucial difference between His sheep and those who refuse to hear, Jesus sets forth in plain and simple words the ultimate destiny of each person, “and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.”

No one could mistake the clear meaning of His words that those who do not have eternal life are to perish. Christ promises to “give life” to His sheep, which clearly indicates that we do not already have it by some intrinsic quality of immortality. The doctrine of innate immortality, i.e., the “immortal soul” theory, first introduced by the Egyptians and made popular by Plato, is never found in the teachings of Jesus. He promised life as a gift, conditioned on one’s faith in Him. “I give unto them (His sheep) eternal life.”

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he will” (John 5:21). “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone that beholds the Son and believes in him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).

These and all other references to eternal life, insist upon one single truth, that only those who have a saving faith in Jesus will receive the life that is immortal—everlasting. These are the sheep for whom Christ the Good Shepherd gave His life for, and no outsider is able to “snatch them out of His hand.”

“And they shall never perish.” To suggest that all sinners will live on for eternity, only in a state of perpetual torture, as the traditional creeds state, empties Christ’s promise of any meaning. If no one ever actually perishes, then all must go on living in

one way or another! It is as though He said, “I give my sheep a more comfortable and blissful kind of eternal life, but the rest must live in great misery.” The attempt is often made to have “perish” mean “ruin” in the sense that the person’s hopes and happiness are ruined! He goes on in some kind of life, but it is a ruined life.

There are several things wrong with that explanation. First, it destroys the meaning of what Jesus said, Jesus put life as the opposite of perish. The term for perish is used often in scripture to refer to death—the cessation of life, as in the case of the flood, wherein all except those in the ark “perished.” If perish means living eternally under bad conditions, then what does Jesus mean by “eternal life” for the sheep? The plain substance of the remark is that the sheep will have life (forever) but the non-sheep will perish (forever)!

Also, that perish means final and utter loss of life is consistent with some 31 other Greek words used in the New Testament to describe the final state of the unsaved and 26 Hebrew words used in the Old Testament to describe the same thing.

When Jesus promised to give life by a resurrection from the dead, he was not merely affirming something generally accepted by the populace of the first century. Had that been the case, He would have stirred up little excitement and opposition. Rather, he was cutting asunder the Greek philosophy of natural immortality and affirming the fact that man is mortal and can have eternal life only as a gift from God, upon the condition that one believes in Jesus.

Being “in His hand” can be no comfort at all the unbeliever. The Hebrew writer, in considering the condition of the rebellious, warns that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). This is in connection with the statement about God’s judgment, “and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries,” typified by the death sentence under the law of Moses (Heb. 10:26–30). The sheep in God’s hands look forward to eternal life, but those who reject Him can look forward only to their own eternal death in the fire of judgment.

Life is given and sustained by the Creator. Jesus claimed that He had received from the Father power over life (John 5:21), and scripture says that He sustains all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3). He speaks of the unredeemed being burned up like weds (Matt. 13:40), of being burned up like a dead branch (John 15:6) and slain as rebels (Luke 19:27). In the clearest way possible in human language Jesus and the apostles set forth eternal life as the gift to the saved and death as the final and eternal state of all others. Granted that there are some scriptures that are hard to understand, surely we must not take the position that Jesus and the apostles said the opposite of what they meant by the words they used!

The common idea that everyone has a “soul” that will live forever is not found in the Bible. Christ died to give life because that is the only way it can be had. “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 6:23).

Christ is worthy of all our devotion and praise, precisely because we owe our hope of eternal life to Him. “My sheep hear my voice...and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.”

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