

When we think of eternal life, we usually think of our life after we die. But let's stop and consider when does eternal life begin.

*But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take **hold of the eternal life** to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

1 Tim. 6:11-12 (NIV)

We often forget that there is another aspect of eternal life - the eternal life that starts now in the present. The changed mindset that takes us from working to gain the things of this world – the short term material needs of today (making money, eating, storing goods, etc.) – to a mindset of working in this world to learn and develop the things that are of eternal value. Our focus then becomes to invest in eternal things like sharing the gospel, deepening our relationships, and helping others in need.

Jesus answered, *"Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for **food that endures to eternal life**, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."* John 6:26-28 (NIV)

When we make that good confession that Jesus is our Lord, our eternal life begins and our mindset begins to change from the things that are of earthly value to things that are of eternal value. Not that we cannot work to feed and clothe ourselves but our focus should now be on matters of eternal importance. In other words living now as if we were already living in eternity.

Jesus makes one comment about eternal life that makes little sense without a knowledge of his Jewish context. The rabbis considered the study of the Scriptures (Torah) truly living out one's "eternal life" - rising to a higher reality beyond everyday life by contemplating God's eternal truths. Jesus said: *"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."* John 5:39-40.

Jesus is speaking to some of his fellow Jews who did not see that the Scriptures ultimately pointed toward him. Clearly Jesus was saying that while the study of Torah is useful; Eternal life is not had in studying the

Scriptures, but in finding in them that Jesus is our Lord, and that we can know and serve him.

Paul also spoke about eternal life. He points out that just as Christ died and rose again into eternal life, if we partake in Christ's death through baptism, we now have this eternal life as well. We have been brought from death into life, and this eternal life is very much in the present world.

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... For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. Romans 6:4, 6-13

Paul is saying that if we now are living in our "eternal life" we should not let sin reign over us, but live the way God designed us to live. Just as Jesus now has eternal life, we have it too, here and now, and extending after we die. Paul exhorts us to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; **take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.** 1 Tim 6:11-12. We need to *take hold* of our eternal lives and live them well now, not just wait for them in the future.

Jesus made another statement about wealth and eternity that can also give us direction for today. He says, *"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."* (Luke 16:9) We are not obligated to give all our money away, but our focus should be to use it to invest in eternal things – nurturing friendships, showing hospitality, raising children, and loving others, sharing the gospel, deepening our relationships, and helping others in need. We have Jesus' blessing to spend our money extravagantly on things that will show God's love.

Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* (John 10:10) not at some future time, but in the here and now. Jesus is what gives our lives here eternal meaning and purpose.