

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



St. Paul's Mission in NE Washington

This is eternal life

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One of my favorite portions of scripture is in the gospel of John from Chapters 13-17. This section is where the disciple that Jesus loved, recorded major portions of the last teaching Jesus gave to his disciples before He went to the cross to die for the sins of mankind, securing the justification of sinners to enter into restored communion with God.

This relationship, as it is portrayed by most of the evangelical church, is a remarkable blessing not only in this life, but also the witness that one indeed has the promise of eternal life. That having been said, much of this Protestant dogma stops here, without teaching the marvelous richness that the relationship entails. That shallowness thereby limiting the growth of the potential disciple, to that which they can perceive with their senses.

Romans 12:1-2 states: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

The ways of the world, so too mimic this call of discipleship. "No pain, no gain." Just as we said last week, this country intends to fight and win a war with Iraq without sacrifice. Also the church, many times leading by example, makes claims of discipleship without any sacrifice, or any service for that matter. From that lowly position, it is quite difficult to move beyond the written precepts of these chapters in John, into the provision of a glimpse into the substance of the gospel's mind renewing power.

In that account, the third verse in Chapter 17 gives us a transition from the relationship or "friendship" Jesus has with His disciples in the world, into the relationship or communion He also had with His Father on earth. That brief context of verses 1-5 follows:

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*Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. **And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.** I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

It is only recently I have been struck with this present tense description of eternal life. Not only is this construction present tense, what follows is the means by which this eternal life can be entered into. Not in the sweet by and by, but in the present also. The scripture definitely states that to the extent you know God (the Father) and Jesus Christ, is the extent you get the opportunity to enjoy the foretaste of eternal life.

So looking at this beauty of these last few hours of Jesus, once he sends Judas Iscariot out to perform his work, from Chapter 13:31 and onward, Jesus begins a discourse on how His disciples are to relate to one another, other people in the context of service, and with God by His Spirit. All of these can be summarized by the term service, or a loving servant, but only in the context of relationships within the natural world. We should notice that this worldly context changes as we enter into Chapter 17.

Most study Bibles break Chapter 17 into sections, Jesus prays for himself, Jesus prays for His disciples, Jesus prays for all believers. But if we just leave these prayers in their natural nature, we miss their real implications as the first fruits of eternal life. What gives us the problem is that in our preconception of heaven, we miss the real focus of eternity, which is the communion with God, now mostly through prayer.

We have been conditioned to think of heaven (eternal life?) as good stuff made better, or made perfect. But really, while the biblical context has limited references to perfect or perfected stuff, eternity's emphasis truly is the communion of God with His people, and the stuff takes care of its own.

But from that, many times it only follows in our simplistic teaching, that the stuff is not important and that heaven is made of clouds or disembodied spirits. That is the heresy of gnosticism.

Job in Chapter 19 verses 24-26 states:

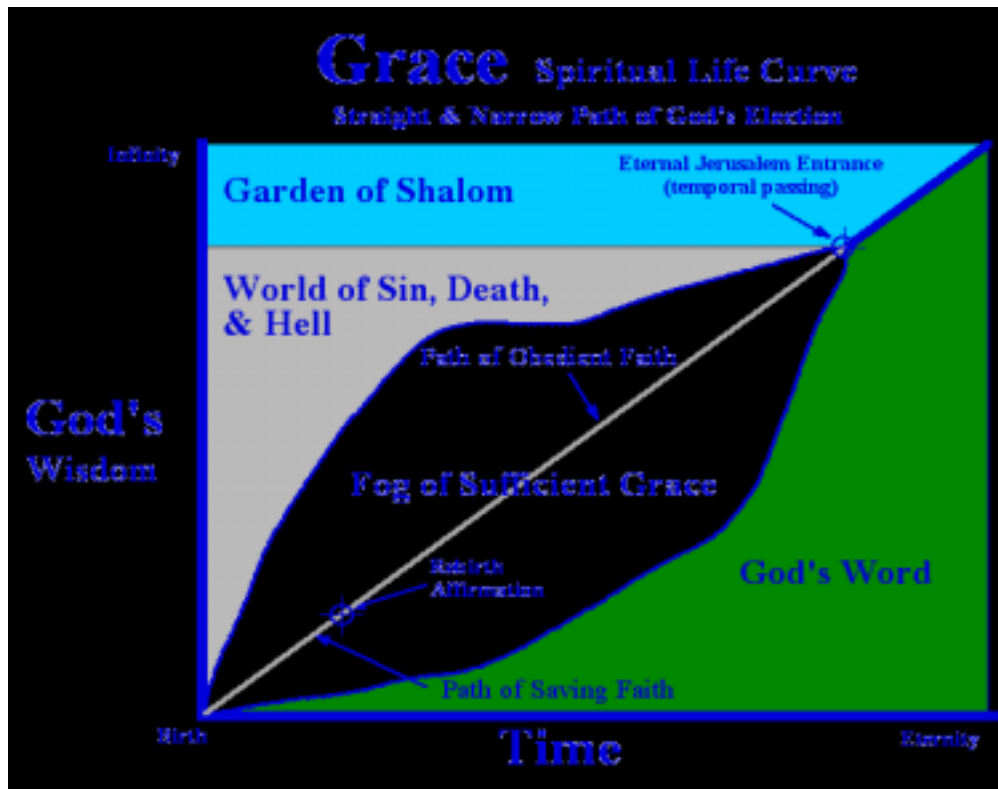
*That they were engraved on a rock
With an iron pen and lead, forever!
For I know that my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;
And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
That in my flesh I shall see God,*

From the oldest literature in the Bible we see that Job spoke of rock, iron pens, lead, the earth, skin and flesh. The implication, not the teaching, is that eternity consists of skin and bones, and real eyes and the whole host of stuff we call matter.

This is what makes the eternal life transition in this portion of John so important. It ties life on this earth to eternity. In that context it provides a tension in essentially Chapters 14-16 between this life in which death is the end, and the eternal state (Chapter 17), similar to this world, but in which God's presence is the source of everything.

In our world, God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth. We think therefore, in error, that God is without substance. God is Spirit, and He is in Substance, Holy. A reality that is a mystery to us living in a sinful and fallen world, for we really have no basis for understanding holiness, except through Jesus Christ.

On the next page you will see a graphic, which doesn't properly transpose in Pagemaker into PDF, showing a straight line depicting our life on this earth built on the promises in the word of God, through a walk of Obedient Faith. I use this graph in teaching Enterprise Symbiosis. This path is shrouded in a fog of sufficient grace. Hence, many times we are forced to take one step at a time, not sure of the footing beneath.



The slope of that line of Obedient Faith is determined by God's graceful understanding of our willingness to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, and for each of us it is different. Each of us has independent unique gifts and trials, and to some extent, a unique willingness to be used by God. But as our line ascends, just as climbing a mountain, the winds and storms become more violent and our position becomes more exposed. But the training in eternal life that Jesus is pointing to in Chapter 17 does not shake us completely, because as we climb higher, we climb further into His likeness, who by His nature can quiet all storms. Even the ultimate storm we all face, until He returns again, the storm of physical death.

So these present manifestations of eternal life are distinct within the children of God, in tension, or contrast with our relationship with the world. With the world we struggle and are at odds, but we grow through the Spiritual application of our eternal life essence, training, or from Romans, our renewing mind. Now only a sprouted seed, but alive none the less. It is that tension that is important, and it is that tension that is absent in the teaching of much of the evangelical church.

These thoughts are concluded with words of oneness and love in John 17:25-26, as Jesus Christ the son of God, the son of Man, closes out His prayer and begins that steep walk to Calvary to die for the sins of man, but also to be resurrected into eternal live. Our hope of glory, which is eternal life.

O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

Seeds for Prayer

My life has sort of taken on a holding pattern until my now scheduled operation on February 25th, to have my ascending aorta replaced with a synthetic one. I have other tests on February 13th, 19th, and the 24th, to make sure that the rest of me is capable of undergoing this operation, or if there is anything else they may want to fix since they have me opened up.

The plan as it has been described to me is after the operation I will spend about one day in intensive care, the rest of the week in the hospital, a week either at home, or somewhere with help, or in a convalescent center, and then another week or two to recover before I resume my new life.

Since the bad news of my needed operation on February 4th, I have made the decision to walk this path that the Lord has laid before me. On the fifth, I had a long scheduled appointment with the hand surgeon to look at my little finger that keeps popping out of joint. Because of the situation I almost canceled. When I told this doctor about how this minor frustration was not now near as important as it once was, he still assured me that, this frustration could also be fixed as an out-patient, once I was recovered from my surgery. The joy of this possibility, lifted my hope well beyond this simple solution.

Once back in the car on my drive home, and after seeing more doctors in the last month than I have in my entire life, I see just how sad the need for medicine really is, an expensive industry which is doomed to failure. God did not create life that way, and for the child of God this is only an important, but temporary need. The resurrection of Jesus Christ conquered the world of sin and death, but we still must function in that world until He returns again. The reason for that I find such a mystery, especially these last few weeks.

I don't remember what day it was, but I again realized that God can heal this problem by His power if He wills for His glory. God healed the cartilage in my football knee, which is more complicated than just reducing the size of my big blood vessel. And I have also received many other blessings that are in many ways more miraculous than this, so why not heal my aorta? As with my knee, “He made it, He can fix it!”

Along that line, there are a number of other things related to getting my life arranged for this approaching event. Please intercede for these as well as the remaining preparations, for the operation, and recovery as required.