

Now, perhaps, that may startle you ; for, I think, that is the prevailing conception of it. Eternal life presupposes immortality, but when you say of this kind of life simply that it is endless, you do not convey any very adequate idea of what it is. If a plant were to live and bloom forever, would it have eternal life ? If a bird were to live and sing forever, would it have what the Scripture calls eternal life ? No ! Those angels which kept not their first estate, whom God hurled headlong from heaven, have they eternal life ? It is rather eternal death. Eternal life is not merely heaven.

It is the preparation for heaven. There certainly will not be heaven for anyone without it. The drunkard, or the selfish or envious man in heaven, if it were possible for them to get there unchanged, could not be said to have eternal life. The imagery of Scripture which calls up heaven, the eternal city to our imagination is very beautiful, and we are told that into that city there can enter nothing that is unclean. Those fruits of the Spirit which the apostle enumerates must be cultivated here in order for us to enjoy their development in heaven.

Eternal life is not adequately expressed by saying that it is enjoyment. It carries enjoyment in the heart of it, but it implies something more. God has been pleased to annex pleasure to all kinds of life. The bird and the insect have their sensations of joy. There are pleasures of intellect, pleasures of activity, and pleasures of repose. God has so constituted things, that all forms of activity, with health, carry with them a certain amount of enjoyment of life. This thing called eternal life will be no exception to this rule. It will rather possess richer enjoyment and felicity, which should be called by that stronger expression, "blessedness." But for all that, we must get away from the mere conception of enjoyment as constituting the essence of eternal life. It is the possession of eternal life that gives enjoyment, and not enjoyment that makes eternal life. The fragrance does not make the rose, it is the rose that makes the fragrance. It is the peculiar structure and endowment by God of that plant that gives it its fragrance and beauty. You must not reverse the order. You cannot take away those subtle elements of interwoven being by which the rose is distinct from the lily. In the same way, it is not the song that makes the bird, but the bird the song. Wherever you find any type of pleasure and enjoyment, it results from the healthful and normal use of some faculty with which God has endowed that sentient being.

I know it is a little difficult to carry you with with me in this somewhat metaphysical line of thought, but I trust I have made it apparent that we are to seek for something inward and spiritual before we begin to expect to reap real enjoyment. If you will but think of it for a moment, you will easily see that that which is most beautiful and grand and thrilling in human life and character does not come along with scenes of enjoyment, much less does enjoyment constitute it. If you will recollect what you have read of history, and view these things in the light of Scriptural teaching, you will see that that which fills your heart with admiration and thrills you with enthusiasm does not come from scenes of festive enjoyment and delight. You do not make any man your hero merely because he has a well-spread board and a pleasurable means of existence. Such a man does not fill your soul's imagination as your ideal of the highest form of