

“LAY HOLD ON ETERNAL LIFE!”

NO. 2226

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S-DAY, OCTOBER 18, 1891,

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 19, 1891.

“Lay hold on eternal life.”

1 Timothy 6:12.

PAUL was very anxious about Timothy, his own son in the faith. He loved him greatly, and he had much confidence in him, but still he felt that the work of preaching the gospel was such a responsible undertaking, that he could not be too prayerful for him, nor too earnest in exhorting him to continued steadfastness in those things which he had received. So “the old man eloquent,” whose very pen seems to have borrowed some of the burning fervor of his heart, pours out his very soul to young Timothy in the earnest desire that he may find in him a true successor; one who, when he is compelled to lay down his trusteeship, will take it up, and be faithful to his Lord and to the gospel, when his father in Christ is taken away from him. We cannot be too anxious about our young brethren who are to preach the gospel of the grace of God. Pray for students always. Let them continually be mentioned in your private prayers, that, when those who have borne the burden and heat of the day shall rest with their fathers, God may raise up better men than they, who shall yet more faithfully proclaim His Word.

This passage of Scripture, “Lay hold on eternal life,” is suggestive from its connection. In the same verse Timothy is told to “Fight the good fight of faith.” From this it is evident that if he lays hold on eternal life, he will have to fight for it and that if he has to fight, he can only fight by laying hold upon eternal life with a tenacious grip. Every Christian man is a soldier, and no man will war a good warfare unless he lays hold upon eternal life with all his heart and soul. A man may fight the battles of earth with the life of earth, but our warfare is of a different kind, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” With such foes we can only contend successfully when we are made invulnerable by the reception of the life of God within our souls. In classic story we read of one who was dipped in the river Styx before he went forth to the battle, so that the arrows of the foe might fall harmless upon him. That fable becomes a fact for us when we “lay hold on eternal life.” The fiery darts of the wicked are quenched by our shield of faith.

The whole chapter forms a sort of preface to the text. Three classes of people seem to have existed in the community where Timothy was called to labor, each with different views of the best method of teaching those around them. First of all, there were some who intermeddled with social politics. They told the slaves that they might conspire against their masters, and try to rectify the unquestionable wrongs which existed in that day. Paul desires, as much as anybody could do, that injustice should come to an end, and that slavery especially should be swept off the face of the earth, as it has largely been by the influence of the gospel. But, taught of God, and seeing that it was by the proclamation of the gospel that these evils would be most surely overcome, rather than by any hasty social change, he says to Timothy, “Leave that matter alone. Lay hold on eternal life. You are not sent to cleanse the Augean stable of politics, and to set things right socially; let it be sufficient for you to lay hold on eternal life, and to call upon the people to do the same. Every man to his own calling and that is yours. “Lay hold on eternal life.” Many a young preacher today, and perhaps some of the older ones, would do well to take heed to this advice of Paul given by the Spirit, for while every real social improvement, based on the principles of right and justice, must have the sympathy of all Christian men, depend upon it that, in the long run,

the surest way to raise men is to preach the gospel to them. This will change their character, and regenerated lives will soon result in altered social conditions.

Round about Timothy, too, there buzzed a set of men full of questions and difficulties, and discoveries of a false science, which Paul calls “profane and vain babblings”; these were in a most unhealthy state, “sick about questionings and disputes of words,” as the apostle’s language in verse four may be literally rendered. Concerning such he says to Timothy, “Do not answer such wrangling of men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth. Do not worry yourself about them. Let the bees or the wasps buzz as much as they like; as for you, lay hold on eternal life. Stick to your business. Go in for the one thing for which God has called you, the glorious work of saving souls. Let those who like such questions fight them out to the bitter end, but, as for you, lay hold on eternal life.”

Then Paul had noticed that, at Ephesus, there were certain men who were striving to be rich, certain even of the members of the church who seemed to be sacrificing everything else to gain, counting that gain was godliness, and that if they could get rich they really were the better men for it. But Paul says to Timothy, “Leave money alone. Having food and raiment, let us be content with that. Your hand is not big enough to lay hold of two things. Therefore, since you can only have one, see that it is the vital thing. Lay hold on eternal life.” To use the rough old proverb, “Let the cobbler stick to his last.” “Timothy, stick to your business; lay hold on eternal life; that is your main concern; ‘Whereunto you are also called, and have professed a good profession before many witnesses.’”

I like this plain dealing of the apostle. He seems to say, “Come to the all-important point, Timothy, and keep to it. Let others go in for this, and that, and the other; as for you, set before yourself the highest aim. Say to them, as I wrote to the Philippians last year from Rome, ‘This one thing I do’; ‘Lay hold on eternal life.’”

The great complaint which we have to make against many is that they seem to be looking after the odds and ends, the paraphernalia, the minor affairs of life; but they do not seem to aim at this point—eternal life. Is it not so in praying? Is there not much that passes by the name which is not real prayer? We might often say, “Come to the point, man, and ask of God what you want. Come to real prayer, and downright grips with the angel; wrestle with Him, and prevail.” Paul seems also to hint that there was in the preaching, even in his day, a great deal that was extraneous, ornamental, superfluous, and so he says to young Timothy, “Aim at the center of the target. Go in for this, the main business, first of all. Lay hold on eternal life.”

How much there is of our prayer which is only language; how much of our praise which is only music! How much there is in our churches which is something that may have to do with the betterment of the people, but is not salvation, not winning souls for Christ! How much there is of teaching which may be Christian teaching, but is not the teaching of Christ! But we clearly see here that the apostle focused everything to this one point, and brought Timothy to this one thing—that he should “lay hold on eternal life”; and having laid hold on it himself, should then set it forth before others with such vehemence and strong emphasis, that they also might be persuaded to lay hold on it, and be saved.

Oh, my dear hearers! What does it matter what I have preached to you unless you get eternal life? What does it matter how I have said this or that to you, unless you have received, at the hand of my Master, that life-giving stream, which shall be in you “a well of water springing up into everlasting life”? With all your getting, I beseech you, get the understanding of the great mystery of godliness, and become wise as to the life which is life indeed.

I am going now to take this exhortation, and press it upon each one here present, asking God to bless it. “Lay hold on eternal life.”

I. First, then, WHAT IS ETERNAL LIFE?

In attempting to answer this question, I remark what should be perfectly obvious; it is *a gift of God*, the fruit of a divine operation upon the heart. One of the first works of the grace of God is to put within us eternal life. No man can create it, either in himself, or in his fellow men. Just as our physical life was bestowed upon us apart from any effort of our own, the divine life cannot be evolved by any device of man; it must be imparted by the Spirit of God. At first, God created man, “and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul;” and when, in Christ, man becomes a new creation, the work is as wholly and as really God’s. Eternal life is what no man has by nature, for he is dead in sin. No man can earn it, for carnal works cannot purchase a spiritual gift, and if a man toiled for a whole

eternity, he would be no nearer the possession of eternal life than when he began. That it does not come by effort is clear, for how shall the dead, by any kind of effort, if effort they could make, attain to life thereby? It does not come by outward ceremonies; these could never purchase that which God bestows freely. Yet how natural it is to the proud heart of man to seek to make payment for that which is to be obtained without money and without price! It is strange that men should expect God to take their gift, when they refuse to accept His. If they would but remember that all their giving cannot enrich God; that they cannot give Him anything that He does not already possess; it would be quite evident to them that eternal life can come in no other way than by the gift of God. It is foolish to try to fill an already full vessel; it is profane as well as foolish to seek to be saved by giving to God instead of receiving from Him, or by anything we can bring to attempt to buy this life eternal. This is to imitate Simon Magus, to whom Peter said, “Your money perish with you, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.” Neither with money nor with ceremonies can it be purchased. It is purely and solely the gift of God by Jesus Christ. “The wages of sin is death; but the gift”—the free gift—“of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—

*“Life is found alone in Jesus,
Only there ‘tis offered thee—
Offered without price or money,
‘Tis the gift of God sent free;
Take salvation,
Take it now, and happy be.”*

This eternal life, given thus freely, is a *present possession*. “Eternal life” may sometimes be employed to set out the glories of heaven, but not often; it is a thing possessed here. In the day in which we are regenerated we receive the first germs of this life everlasting. When we are born again, it is “not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever.” It is a gift of God, a gift not reserved for the future, but given now, the moment a sinner believes in Christ. One of the first tokens of eternal life being given is the cry of prayer, and then come repentance of sin, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This is eternal life—the gift of God, and a present possession. Have you received it? I do not ask you whether you know exactly the day or the hour when you received it, but are you alive unto God with a life you had not by nature, but which has been planted in you by God the Holy Spirit?

This life is, in fact, *the life of God in the soul*. The Holy Spirit comes and breathes God’s life into dead men. There is nothing everlasting in itself but God, and there is no life that is everlasting except that which comes from the everlasting One. The gift of God is not only the gift God gives, but God is the gift that is given. He it is who breathes into us this eternal life, which is really Christ living in us. He Himself is “that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.” The Holy Spirit comes and dwells in the man. “We will come to him,” says Christ, “and take up our abode with him.” The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each, in a certain way, come and dwell within the man; he becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, and so he is alive unto God.

Again, eternal life is a *life which never dies*. We speak very positively here. Eternal life cannot have an end. If it can come to an end by any process whatever, then it is not eternal. This is as clear as words can make it. The life, then, which God gives to every soul in its regeneration, can never die out. Hear these words of Christ, “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, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.” We do not teach that if the life of God in a believer were to die out, he could nevertheless be saved. No Scripture teaches that. But we teach that if there is the life of God in a man, it is eternal; not only that it is going to be eternal, but that now in its nature and essence it is eternal, and can be nothing but eternal life, and therefore can never come to an end. It may be lessened; it may be sick; it may be obscure; but if it is there, since it is eternal life, it cannot come to an end. If it did, it could by no possibility be correctly said to be eternal life at all. Do you see, then, what a blessing is yours if you have received the gift of God? If by grace you have received life through Jesus Christ, you have a life which will never die, a life which will outlast the sun and moon. You will see this world turned to a black coal; you will see all things else expire, but your life and the life of God shall run on forever and ever. Well might Paul urge Timothy, and well may we urge you, to lay hold on such a life as this. So—

*“Take, with rejoicing, from Jesus at once
The life everlasting He gives:
And know, with assurance, you never can die,
Since Jesus, your righteousness, lives.”*

Once more, this eternal life is *the life that is perfected in glory*. It goes on developing, and matures, even in this world, to a very high degree. There is a very great difference between the new-born babe and the full-grown man, and there is a great difference between the believer who has just received eternal life and that riper saint who has come to the fullness of the stature of a man in Christ Jesus, but it is the same life. It is the same life that says, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” which afterwards says, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” It is the same life, but a fuller measure thereof. One is life; the other is life more abundant. As certainly as the life eternal begins, even in the tiniest bud, so will it blossom and become fruitful, until it comes to its full perfection in glory. The life of believers in heaven, the life that never sins, the life that is absolute obedience, the life that is undiluted bliss, is exactly the same life that is in the believer now. The same life that God gave him when he first believed is that with which he beholds the face of God, without a veil between, as he treads the golden streets of the New Jerusalem.

This, then, is eternal life—a new principle, a divine principle, an inexhaustible, unquenchable, immortal principle. He that has it is blessed indeed among the sons of men. He that has it not, is dead while he lives.

Having thus considered the nature of this possession, we come back to the question we have asked already asked: Have we this eternal life? Have we received it as God’s gift? Is it within our hearts, a lamp burning there, never to be put out? Do we know its present power and reality, and have we joy therein? Yes, do we delight ourselves in God, who has brought us out of death into life; out of the region of the valley of the shadow of death into that great light which is the beginning of heaven, the dawn of the day that shall never end? If we do, let us unitedly lift up our hearts in praise and say, “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!” Can we ever cease to adore His name, since He has bestowed such a treasure upon us? But if you have not yet become a possessor of it, I beseech you at this moment to hold out your empty hand, and take the gift so freely offered. “And this is the record that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that has the Son has life, and he that has not the Son of God has not life.”

II. In the second place, the apostle tells us to “lay hold on” eternal life. That is the main point of my present discourse. How DO WE LAY HOLD ON ETERNAL LIFE? There are degrees in the reception of this life, but happy is the man who fully apprehends that for which he is also “apprehended of Christ Jesus.” The Spirit of God lays hold of us, in order that we may lay hold on eternal life; how we are enabled to do this is our present subject for consideration.

First, if you would grasp this gift, *believe in it as true*. The very beginning of our hope is when the Lord leads us to believe that there is such a thing as eternal life, and that it is a tangible thing, not a dream or a vision, but a reality to be laid hold of. I certainly believe in the existence of a thing that I can lay hold upon. If “seeing is believing,” laying hold is even a more thorough mode of believing. Believe, then, that there is a higher life than nature can ever create. If unconverted, you do not know anything about this in your own experience, but there is such a thing. There is life in Christ, which He can give you. There is life by the Holy Spirit, which He can work in you. He can strip you of those grave clothes of sin, and raise you from your tomb. The words which Christ once addressed to Martha sound still in our ears, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” Answer this question of my Master, “Do you believe this?” If you do, there is hope that you shall yet be a partaker of His grace. Nothing can hinder when He begins to work. Though you feel as if you did not feel at all; though you seem paralyzed, and unable to repent or to believe; this life shall be given to you, and it shall be given to you now, if you look unto Him who was lifted up upon the cross, that “whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Believe, my brethren, you that have this eternal life, in the power and reality of it, and whenever Satan tempts you to think that it is a fiction, a dream, a piece of enthusiasm, an idea born of fanaticism, resist him by the plain testimony of the Word of God, and the abundant witness of those who have gone

before you, rejoicing in the power of it. Every child of God has times when he questions himself, but he can still truly say, “I am not what I used to be. I have feelings both of pain and joy that come not of the old life, but of the new, which has come to me by God’s gracious gift.”—

***“Lord, I was dead: I could not stir
My lifeless soul to come to Thee;
But now, since You have quickened me,
I rise from sin’s dark sepulcher.”***

If any of you have not yet experienced such a change, begin as I have told you, by believing that there is such a thing as eternal life. I wish that you who have not yet obtained this blessing would make a point of regularly attending some place where the gospel is preached, saying, “It is to be had, and I will have it. It is to be had by faith. ‘Faith comes by hearing.’ I will be an earnest hearer. ‘Hearing comes by the Word of God.’ I will take care to read and hear only the Word of God, so that faith may come to me, and life may come by faith, for there is such a thing as receiving a new and spiritual life that shall make me far other than by nature I am. I believe it is true.” That is the first way of laying hold.

But you do not lay hold of a thing by simply believing that there is such a thing. You must go farther. *Appropriate it.* There is a book, and I believe that it is there, but if anybody told me that it was a present for me, and said, “All that you have to do in order to have it is to lay hold upon it,” I should understand that he meant, not only that I was to believe in its existence, but that I was to take it up, and carry it home with me. That is how you are to “lay hold on eternal life.” Strange as it is, this is a thing which, though it is so simple, we cannot make awakened sinners understand. That eternal life is God’s free gift put within their reach, and that they are to take hold of it for their own salvation, seems harder for some to grasp, than if it were the most intricate puzzle. Yet this is, perhaps, the clearest aspect of the great matter of salvation. It was Dr. Chalmers, I think, who used to say, that he had no such comfort in the gospel as when he viewed it as a simple offer on the one side, and a simple acceptance on the other. God gives, and we take. The Lord who has been chastening you, making you feel your sinfulness, and showing you that you are condemned, and only fit to die, says now, “Lay hold on eternal life. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Take Him to be yours. Accept Him as your Substitute, bearing the death justly your due, and having given His life *for* you, now giving it *to* you. Make the exchange. Christ took your death; take His life. He bore your ill; take His good. *Appropriate it.* Lay hold on eternal life.” When people are sinking in the water, and there is a life buoy or a rope near, they do not need much exhorting to lay hold upon it, or any elaborate explanation of the way. They simply grip anything that gives them half a hope of being saved from the devouring deep. Now, soul, you are not to bring anything with you. That would be to fill your hand, and then you could not lay hold of anything else. You are to come empty-handed, just as you are, to Christ, who is set before you. Be bold enough to take Him, and let Him be yours. You need no worthiness. How could you be worthy of Him? He gives Himself freely to your unworthiness and sinfulness. Confess these, and lay hold on eternal life; appropriate it to yourself.

The exhortation means more than that, however. Having appropriated it, keep it. *Hold to it*, and never let it go. Hide it in your heart as a choice treasure, and, if any would rob you of it, or frown you out of it, or laugh at you because you prize so highly what they so lightly esteem, lay hold on it still more. This is the work of the grace of God, which enables you, first to take, and then to keep it. Oh, what efforts will be made, from within and from without, to get you to give up eternal life! But here comes in the exhortation, “Cling to it. Hold fast by it constantly. As with a death grip, grasp it with new energy. If you have held it with one hand, hold it with both hands. Yet more and more lay hold on eternal life.”

And then, furthermore, *keep yourself upon it.* According to the text, you have to “Fight the good fight of faith.” Every now and then you will get an ugly knock, a bruise, a bleeding wound from your enemy. What are you to do? Always lay hold on eternal life again, and it will strengthen you, stanch your wounds, and make you once more strong in the day of battle. I would have you think much of this. If you believe in Christ, there is a life within you, like the life of God, which will never die; a life within you which will bring you to stand before the glorious throne of Christ, “without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” Do not, therefore, ever give up hope. Do not be staggered by what you may have to suffer here. In the midst of all the agony of the way, keep your heart upon God, and upon the gift He has given you. “Lay hold on eternal life.” If between here and heaven you could be burned as a martyr every day, it would be worth your while to bear it, laying hold on eternal life—

*“The King above in beauty,
Without a veil is seen;
It were a well-spent journey,
Though ten deaths lay between!”*

If between here and heaven you had nothing to bear but the cruelty of men, and the unkindness of the enemies of Christ, you should bear it right manfully, and even joyfully, because you can say, “I know in myself that I have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Even here I have a life which the world did not give me, and cannot take from me; therefore I hold to it still, and I comfort myself with this sweet thought, that it is mine, the gift of God to me. It bears me up amid seas of grief. ‘My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.’”

Further, I think that the apostle, by the exhortation, “Lay hold on eternal life,” meant, *let other things go*. Here is a brother, lately converted, who has been accustomed to keep his shop open on Sundays. He lives in a street where the best business is to be done on that day, and if he closes his shop, he will very likely be a great loser. What should he do? I thank God that the man has not asked anybody what he should do; he has done the right thing, and trusted in his God. The apostle seems to say, “Let anything else go, let everything else go, but lay hold on eternal life. Hold to that.” “Oh, but I should lose a living!” Yes, but if you lost a living and saved your life, what would you lose? Have you ever heard of the one who had a bag of gold on board a ship coming home from Australia; the ship was sinking, and he went down to his cabin, put as much gold as he could into a belt, and then fastened the belt around his waist. When he leaped for the boat, and missed it, it was not possible to pick him up, for he sank with the weight of his own gold round his loins. There was no hope for him; his treasure was his ruin. And many a man, in like manner, is by all his toil but preparing sure destruction for himself; toiling and working hard only that he may effectually ruin his own soul. Let these things go. “For what is a man advantaged, if he gains the whole world, and loses himself, or is cast away?” Even for the fleeting life of the body, a man will sacrifice all, thankful if he can get out of the burning house alive, though all his worldly goods are destroyed; glad to escape from the hands of the brigands, though they strip him of every possession. “All that a man has will he give for his life.” If this is wise for a transient life, how much more for the life which is eternal! We shall be gainers by losing everything, if by the loss we gain everlasting bliss. Let all that opposes go—friends, kindred, comfort, this present life; let them all go, if by the sacrifice we may more firmly lay hold on eternal life. To keep that, and hold fast to it amidst the stress of temptation, is the main business of the Christian man. “Lay hold on eternal life.”

And it means, in my text, more than that. Fight, and as you fight lay hold upon the victory. While you are running for heaven, often *anticipate the joys of heaven*. I think you and I do not go to heaven often enough. “Well” says one, “I thought we should go there when we died.” Yes, if you are a believer in Christ, that is secure, but why not go there now? The Christian’s position is unique; he is in two worlds at once. Our Lord has quickened us, “and has raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ.” Do you not know that the lower ends of all the streets of heaven are near here? Victory—that is heaven; well we even now overcome through the blood of the Lamb. Peace with God—that is heaven, and at this moment, “Being justified by faith we have peace with God.” Holiness—that is heaven; yes, but we are made holy now by the work of the Spirit of God in our hearts. Communion with God—that is heaven, but even today, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Is it not good sometimes to sit down, and anticipate the day when you will come into your inheritance? You have heard of the young prince, who, when his father wakened one morning, was found putting on the king’s crown. It was awkward in his case, but your Father will not object to your often putting on your crown. Try it, and see how it fits you. You will have a new song to sing; begin to sing it here. You will have holy work to do, “They serve God day and night in His temple,” serve Him here. Christ is to dwell among us in heaven; let us know that He dwells among us here. I like that verse of our hymn—

*“I would begin the music here,
And so my soul should rise:
Oh, for some heavenly notes to bear
My passions to the skies!”*

It was said of an old Puritan, that heaven was in him before he was in heaven; that is necessary for all of us; we must have heaven in us before we get to heaven. If we do not get to heaven before we die, we

shall never get there afterwards. An old Scotchman was asked whether he ever expected to get to heaven. “Why, man, I live there,” was his quaint reply. Let us all live in those spiritual things which are the essential features of heaven. Often go there before you go to stay there. If you come down tomorrow morning, knowing and realizing that heaven is yours, and that you will soon be there, those children will not worry you half so much. When you go out to your business or to your work, you will not be half so discontent when you know that this is not your rest, but that you have a rest on the hills eternal, where your heart has already gone, and that there your portion is in the everlasting dwellings. “Lay hold on eternal life.” Get a hold of it now. It is a thing of the future, and it is a thing of the present, and even your part of it that is future can be, by faith, so realized and grasped as to be actually enjoyed while you are yet here. “Lay hold on eternal life.”

I have not explained my text so fully or as clearly as I could wish. The life of which it speaks is beyond all language, but if you will obey the exhortation of the text, that will be the best exposition of it. Let him that has not this eternal life, believe that it is to be had. Let the man whose heart aches for it, grasp it and appropriate it now; he need not be afraid that he will be repelled. Let him that has it, hold it fast as a jewel, for which, sooner than part with it, he would sell house and home. Let him that has it, enjoy it even now. God help you in this manner to “lay hold on eternal life”!

III. Now I have to finish with just a special word. WHO ARE THE PEOPLE THAT OUGHT CHIEFLY TO LAY HOLD ON ETERNAL LIFE?

First, *those who are called*. This is the reason the apostle gives to Timothy, “whereunto you are also called.” Beloved, there are some of you that have been called. A boy, who had come upon an errand, stood at my window this afternoon. Suddenly he ran away, and I thought, “What made him go?” I found out that, though I had not heard the voice, someone had called him, and therefore he was gone. Imitate that boy. Go about this world as men who have been called by a voice that nobody has heard but you. Has God called you to Himself? He means you to, come away from your old self and cease to live the old life; He would have you lay hold on eternal life. God never singles us out in this way unless He means to bless us. He never says, “Seek you My face,” in vain. Has God called you out from among men? Do you feel what your parents and friends at home do not feel? Is there a call to you like that call, “Samuel, Samuel,” and have you responded, “Here I am, for You did call me. Speak, for Your servant hears”? Oh, if God has favored you with a special and effectual call, then lay hold on eternal life with your whole heart and soul, and never let it go! Come what may, resolve that you will hold to this gift of God in life, in death, and throughout eternity.

Next, *those who have confessed Christ* ought especially to lay hold on eternal life, “whereunto you are also called, and have professed a good profession before many witnesses.” Timothy had been baptized, and probably there had been a great number of persons to encourage or watch him as he came forward to confess Christ. This, then, was a double reason why he should hold fast that on which he had laid hold. O, you that have named the name of Christ, and have put Him on by that wonderful symbol of death and burial and resurrection, “Lay hold on eternal life.” Do not play at baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Let these be stern, no, sweet realities to you. Lay hold, not on the symbol alone, but on what the symbol means. Have you been “Buried with Him by baptism into death”? Then, grasp the soul of the symbol. It is not a mere empty form, or only the badge of a sect, but a picture of the end of the old life of the flesh, dying to the world and sin, that we may rise in “newness of life” to walk before God in the land of the living. Of all men, he who has been baptized should “lay hold on eternal life,” for, in proportion as his baptism is true, he has no other life to lay hold of having died and been buried with Christ. Then, also, we come to His table, and there we eat His flesh and drink His blood after a spiritual sort, receiving not merely bread and wine as memorials, but Himself, by faith, into our hearts. “Lay hold on eternal life,” for profession without eternal life is a fearful mockery. Without eternal life, to come to the Lord’s Supper will be to eat and drink condemnation to yourself, not discerning the Lord’s body. You that have professed Him before many witnesses “Lay hold on eternal life.”

And, especially do I say this to *those who have been consecrated*, like Timothy, to the service of the Christian ministry. You that have been permitted in any way, even in the Sunday school, to speak of Christ to children; you to whom the Lord has committed His gospel, that you may impart it to others, “Lay hold on eternal life.” You will never do much in this work unless you have eternal life within your own soul. See to that first. A dead preacher—what is he but a mocker of dead souls? A dead teacher—

what can she teach? A dead instructor of a Bible class—how shall the word of life have free course and be glorified? A blind man discoursing of colors, or a mute man teaching music, is not more out of place than a man without eternal life trying to tell out the gospel. What can he do? “Lay hold on eternal life,” or else quit this false position; lest when the Lord comes He should say to you, “What have you to do to declare My statutes, or that you should take My covenant in your mouth?” Ah! I am speaking to myself now, and I will take it home. Will you also open your heart to whatever in the sermon belongs to you? And when it is done, and my voice is silent to your ear, I pray that you may hear, for many a day, a gentle whisper saying to you, “Lay hold on eternal life.”

You, poor sinner, as you go after your follies and amusements, may the call, “Lay hold on eternal life,” come to you until you shall obey it, and quit such trifles! And you, Christian man, when you get into the world, and are tempted to make gain by sin, while you will suffer loss by righteousness, may you hear a voice say, “Lay hold on eternal life”! And any of you who get the “cold shoulder,” and the rough side of men’s tongues, when you begin to think that you cannot bear it, may you hear the voice saying again, “Lay hold on eternal life.” Cling to that, for God, for Christ, for eternity, for heaven. The eternal life is the only life worth living for. God help you to live for it always; and, if you do, it will be of His own grace, and to Him shall be all the glory, forever and ever! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 TIMOTHY 6.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—567, 435, 538.

The following letter from MR. SPURGEON, to the congregation at the Tabernacle, will give the readers of his sermons the latest available information concerning him—

Eastbourne, October 10, 1891.

“Dear Friends—I was rightly directed to this place, for I have found a measure of appetite, and feel much better. I think I shall soon be able to reach a warmer clime. This is the great desire of my doctor. The deaths of others cause anxiety about a chill, especially as I have lost one skin, and the new one is exceedingly tender, and would feel the influence of cold most readily. However, I am in those hands which control temperature, and everything else. I am indeed happy in being borne up by the prayers of saints as by the hands of angels. I am relieved of great anxiety by the Lord’s plainly directing me to secure DR. PIERSON to fill the pulpit during my absence. He is a man after my own heart, and a great winner of souls. He will not aim at anything but the glory of God. He begs that the whole church will grant him the aid of their united prayers and efforts. He is just now quitting America, and will be ready to preach October 25, if the Lord will. I shall be among you as soon as I feel that it would be right and wise, and then he will be ready to return to his own land. He has set aside everything to serve us. I was guided to him at the same moment that he was led of God to think of helping me.

“May our Lord be with you, and grant you each one His presence, power, and peace! Oh, that many might yield to Jesus now, that all may see that the Lord saves by every instrument! When MR. NEWMAN HALL bids sinners, ‘Come to Jesus,’ may the Holy Spirit draw them, and the same in the evening! May you have a glorious day! MRS. SPURGEON’S company here makes me feel very happy; but when shall I meet with all the companions of my nearly forty years’ service, and feel that each one adds to my joy?

“Yours very heartily,
C. H. SPURGEON.”

(Brother Spurgeon died January 31, 1892)

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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