

## Lecture IV.

# The Scriptures Reveal Eternal Life Through Jesus Christ

John v. 39—"Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." Eph. ii. 20—"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

As in darkness there is need of a lantern without and the light of the eyes within—for neither can we see in darkness without some lamp though we have never so good eyes, nor yet see without eyes, though in never so clear a sunshine—so there is absolute need for the guiding of our feet in the dangerous and dark paths to eternal life (that are full of pits and snares,) of the lamp, or word written or preached, without us, and the illumination of the Holy Ghost within us. These are conjoined, Isa. liv. 21, "This is my covenant," "The Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, will not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed," &c. There are words without, and there must needs be a spirit within, which makes us to behold the truth and grace contained in these words. There is a law written without, with pen and ink, and there is a law written within, upon the heart, with the Spirit of the living God. The law without is the pattern and exact copy, the law within, is the transcript or the image of God upon the heart, framed and fashioned according to the similitude of it, 2 Cor. iii. 3, Heb. viii. 10. So then, there needs be no more question about the divine authority of the scriptures among those who have their senses exercised to discern between good and ill, than among men who see and taste, concerning light and darkness, sweet and bitter.

The persuasion of a Christian is fetched deeper than the reasons of men. Their faith is “the evidence of things not seen.” It is an eye, a supernatural eye whereby a soul beholds that majesty and excellency of God shining in the word, which, though it shine about the rest of the world, yet tis not seen, because they cannot know it nor discern it. Wonder not that the multitude of men cannot believe the report that is made, that there are few who find any such excellency and sweetness in the gospel as is reported, because saith Isaiah, liii. 1, the arm of “the Lord is not revealed to them.” The hand of God must first write on their heart, ere they understand the writings of the scriptures, his arm must create an eye in their souls, an internal light, before it can behold that glorious brightness of God shining in the word. The word is God’s testimony of himself, of his grace and mercy, and good will to mankind. Now no man can receive this testimony, unless it be sealed and confirmed by the Holy Ghost into the heart, saith Peter, “We are his witnesses of these things and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey him,” Acts v. 32. The word witnesses to the ear, and the Spirit testifieth to our spirits, the truth and worth of that, and therefore the Spirit is a seal and a witness. The word is the Lord’s voice to his own children, bastards cannot know it, “but my sheep know my voice,” John x. 4, 16. You know no difference between the bleating of one sheep from another, but the poor lambs know their mother’s voice, there is a secret instinct of nature that is more powerful than many marks and signs, even so those who are begotten of God know his voice,—they discern that in it which all the world that hear it cannot discern—there is a sympathy between their souls and that living word. That word is the immortal seed they are begotten of and there is a natural instinct to love that, and to meditate in it, such an inclination to it, as in new born babes to the breasts, so the children of God do desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby, as they were born of it, 1 Pet. ii. 2. In those scriptures which we

read in your audience, you have something of their excellency, and our duty. There is a rich jewel in them, a precious pearl in that field, even Jesus Christ and in him eternal life; and therefore we ought to search the scriptures for this jewel, to dig in the field for this pearl, the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, as a sure foundation whereupon souls may build their eternal felicity, and the hope of it. Jesus Christ is the very chief stone in that foundation, whereupon the weight of all the saints and all their hope hangs. And therefore we ought to lean the weight of our souls only to this truth of God, and build our faith only upon it, and square our practice only by it. [018]

We shall speak something of the first, that it may be a spur to the second. The Jews had some respective opinion of the word of God; they knew that in them was eternal life; they thought it a doctrine of life and happiness, and so cried up Moses' writings, but they would not believe Christ's words. They erred, not understanding the scriptures, and so set the writings of Moses' law at variance with the preaching of Christ's gospel. What a pitiful mistake was this! They thought they had eternal life in the scriptures, and yet they did not receive nor acknowledge him whom to know was eternal life. Therefore our Lord Jesus sends them back again to the scriptures:—"Go and search them; you think, and you think well, that in them ye may find the way to eternal life; but while you seek it in them you mistake it; these scriptures testify of me, the end of the law, but you cannot behold the end of that ministry, because of the blindness of your hearts, (Rom. x. 3; 2 Cor. iii. 13, 14.) Therefore search again, unfold the ceremonies; I am wrapt in them, and life eternal with me. Dig up the law till you find the bottom of God's purpose in it,—till you find the end of the ministration,—and you shall find me, 'the way, the truth, and life;' and so you shall have that eternal life which now you do but think you have, and are beguiled. While you seek it out of me, in vain you think you have it, for it is not in the scriptures, but because they testify of me, the life

and the light of men.” May not this now commend the word to us? eternal life is in it. Other writings and discourses may tickle the ears with some pleasing eloquence, but that is vanishing; it is but like a musician's voice. Some may represent some petty and momentary advantage, but how soon shall an end be put to all that? So that within a little time the advantage of all the books of the world shall be gone. The statutes and laws of kings and parliaments can reach no further than some temporal reward or punishment; their highest pain is the killing of this body; their highest reward is some evanishing and fading honour, or perishing riches; but “he showeth his word and judgments unto us, and hath not dealt so with any nation,” Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20. And no nation under the whole heaven hath such laws and ordinances; eternal life and eternal death is wrapt up in them. These are rewards and punishments suitable to the majesty and magnificence of the eternal Lawgiver. Consider, I beseech you, what is folded up here,—the scriptures show the path of life; life is of all things the most excellent, and comes nearest the blessed being of God. When we say *life*, we understand a blessed life, that only deserves the name. Now this we have lost in Adam. Death is passed upon all men, but that death is not the worst: 'tis but a consequence of a soul-death. The immortal soul—whose life consisteth in communion with God, and peace with him—is separated from him by sin, and so killed, when it is cut off from the fountain of life; what a life can it have more, than a beam that is cut off by the intervention of a dark body from the sun. Now then, what a blessed doctrine must it be that brings to light, life and immortality? especially when we have so miserably lost it, and involved our souls into an eternal death. Life is precious in itself, but much more precious to one condemned to die,—to be caught out of the paws of the lion,—to be brought back from the gibbet. O how will that commend the favour of a little more time in the world! But then if we knew what an eternal misery we are involved into, and stand under a sentence binding us over to such

an inconceivable and insupportable punishment as is the curse and wrath of God; O how precious an esteem would souls have of the scriptures, how would they be sweet unto their soul, because they show unto us a way of escaping that pit of misery, and a way of attaining eternal blessedness as satisfying and glorious as the misery would have been vexing and tormenting! O that ye would once lay these in the balance together,—this present life and life eternal! Know ye not that your souls are created for eternity; that they will eternally survive all these present things? Now how do ye imagine they shall live after this life? Your thoughts and projects and designs are confined within the poor narrow bounds of your time. When you die, in that day your thoughts shall perish. All your imaginations and purposes and providences shall have an end then; they reach no farther than that time. And if you should wholly perish too, it were not so much matter. But for all your purposes and projects to come to an end, when you are but beginning to live, and enter eternity, that is lamentable indeed! Therefore I say, consider what ye are doing, weigh these in a balance,—eternal life and the present life; if there were no more difference but the continuance of the one, and the shortness of the other,—that the world's standing is but as one day, one moment to eternity,—that ought to preponderate in your souls. Do we not here flee away as a shadow upon the mountains? Are we not as a vapour that ascends, and for a little time appears a solid body, and then presently vanisheth? Do we not come all into the stage of the world, as for an hour, to act our part and be gone; now then, what is this to endless eternity? When you have continued as long as since the world began, you are no nearer the end of it. Ought not that estate then to be most in your eyes, how to lay up a foundation for the time to come? But then, compare the misery and the vexation of this life with the glory and felicity of this eternal life. What are our days? But few and full of trouble. Or, if you will, take the most blessed estate you have seen and heard of in this world, of kings and rich

men, and help all the defects of it by your imaginations; suppose unto yourselves the height and pitch of glory and abundance and power that is attainable on earth; and when your fancy hath busked up such a felicity, compare it with an eternal life: O how will that vanish out of your imaginations! If so be you know any thing of the life to come, you will even think that an odious comparison,—you will think all that earthly felicity but light as vanity, “every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.” Eternal life will weigh down eternally, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. O but it hath an exceeding weight in itself,—one moment of it, one hour's possession and taste of it! but then what shall the endless endurance of it add to its weight? Now there are many that presume they have a right to eternal life, as the Jews did. You think, saith he, that you have it; you think well, that you think 'tis only to be found in the scriptures; but you vainly think that you have found it in them: and there is this reason for it, because “you will not come to me that you might have life,” John v. 40. If you did understand the true meaning of the scriptures, and did not rest on the outward letter and ordinances, you would receive the testimony that the scriptures give of me. But now you bear not me, the Father's substantial Word, therefore “ye have not his word abiding in you,” ver. 38. There was nothing more general among that people, than a vain carnal confidence and presumption of being God's people, and having interest in the promise of life eternal, as it is this day in the visible church. There is a multitude that are Christians only in the letter, and not in the spirit, that would never admit any question concerning this great matter of having eternal life; and so by not questioning it, they come to think they have it, and by degrees their conjectures and thoughts about this ariseth to the stability of some feigned and strong persuasion of it. In the Old Testament the Lord strikes at the root of their persuasions, by discovering unto them how vain a thing it was, and how abominable it was before him, to have an external profession of being his people, and to glory in

external ordinances and privileges, and yet to neglect altogether the purging of their hearts and consciences from lust and idol-sins, and to make no conscience of walking righteously towards men. Their profession was contradicted by their practice, “Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and yet come and stand in my house?” Jer. vii. 9, 10. Doth not that say as much as if I had given you liberty to do all these abominations? Even so it is this day; the most part have no more of Christianity but a name. They have some outward privileges of baptism and hearing the word; and, it may be, have a form of knowledge, and a form of worship; but in the meantime they are not baptized in heart,—they are in all their conversation even conformed to the heathen world,—they hate personal reformation, and think it too precise and needless. Now, I say, such are many of you, and yet you would not take well to have it questioned whether ye shall be partakers of eternal life. You think you are wronged when that is called in question. Oh that it were beyond all question indeed! But know assuredly that you are but Christians in the letter,—in the flesh and not in the spirit. Many of you have not so much as “a form of knowledge”—have not so much as the letter of religion. You have heard some names in the preaching often repeated,—as Christ, and God, and faith, and heaven, and hell,—and you know no more of these but the name. You consider not and meditate not on them, and though you know the truth of the word, yet the word abideth not nor dwelleth in you. You have it in your mouth, you have it in your mind or understanding, but it is not received in love, it doth not dwell in the heart. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,” Col. iii. 16. You have it imprisoned in your minds, and shut up in a corner where it is useless, and can do no more but witness against you, and scarce that. As the Gentiles incarcerated and detained the truth of God, written by nature within them, in unrighteousness, (Rom. i. 18) so do many of you detain the knowledge of his word in unrighteousness. It hath no place in the heart, gets no liberty and freedom to walk

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through the affections and so to order the conversation of men, and therefore the most part of men do but fancy to themselves an interest and right to eternal life. You think it, and do but think it, it is but a strong imagination, that hath no strength from the grounds of it, no stability from any evidence or promise, but merely from itself, or it is but a light and vain conjecture that hath no strength in it because there is no question or doubts admitted which may try the strength of it. But then I suppose that a man could attain some answerable walking, that he had not only a form of knowledge, but some reality of practice, some inward heat of affection and zeal for God and godliness, yet there is one thing that he wants, and if it be wanting will spoil all, and it is this, which Christ reproveth in the Jews, “you will not come to me to have life, the scriptures testify of me, but you receive not their testimony.” Suppose a man had as much equity and justice towards men, piety towards God, and sobriety towards himself, as can be found amongst the best of men, let him be a diligent reader of the scriptures, let him love them, and meditate on them day and night, yet if he do not come out of himself, and leave all his own righteousness as dung behind him, that he may be found in Jesus Christ, he hath no life, he cannot have any right to the eternal. You may think this is a strange assertion, that if a man had the righteousness and holiness of an angel, yet he could not be saved without denying all that, and fleeing to Christ as an ungodly man, and you may think it as strange a supposal, that any person that reads the scriptures, and walks righteously, and hath a zeal towards God, yet are such as will not come to Christ and will not hear him whom the Lord hath sent.

But the first is the very substance of the gospel. “There is none other name whereby men may be saved, but by Jesus Christ,” Acts iv. 12. Life eternal is all within him. All the treasures of grace and wisdom and knowledge are seated in him, Col. i. 19, ii. 3. All the light of life and salvation is embodied in this son of righteousness, since the eclipse of man's felicity in the garden.



Adam was a living soul, but he lost his own life, and killed his posterity. Christ Jesus, the second common man in the world, is a quickening spirit. He hath not only life in himself, but he gives it more abundantly, and therefore you have it so often repeated in John, who was the disciple most acquainted with Christ, “in him was life, and the life was the light of men,” John i. 4. And he is “the bread of life, that gives life to the world,” John vi. 33, 35. He is “the resurrection and the life,” xi. 23, and “the way, the truth, and the life,” xiv. 6. The scriptures do not contain eternal life, but in as far as they lead to him who is life, and whom to know and embrace is eternal life and therefore, saith he, “these are they which testify of me.” Man lived immediately in God when he was in innocency, he had life in himself from God, but then he began to live in himself without dependence on God the fountain of life, and this himself being interposed between God and life, it vanished even as a beam by the intervening of any gross body between it and the sun. Now man's light and life being thus eclipsed and cut off, the Lord is pleased to let all fulness dwell in his Son Jesus Christ, and the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily, Col ii. 9, that since there was no access immediately to God for life (a flaming fire, and sword of divine justice compassing and guarding the tree of life, lest man should touch it) there might be access to God in a mediator like unto us that we might come to him, and might have life from God by the intervention of Jesus Christ.

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Look then what is in the Holy Scriptures, and you shall find it but a letter of death and ministration of condemnation while it is separated from him. Christ is the very life and spirit of the scriptures by whose virtue they quicken our souls. If you consider the perfect rule of righteousness in the law, you cannot find life there, because you cannot be conformed unto it, the holiest man offends in every thing, and that holy law being violated in any thing will send thee to hell with a cure. “Cursed is he that abideth not in all things.” If you look upon the promise of life, “do this

and live,” what comfort can you find in it, except you could find doing in yourselves? And can any man living find such exact obedience as the law requires? There is a mistake among many. They conceive that the Lord cannot but be well pleased with them if they do what they can. But be not deceived,—the law of God requires perfect doing, it will not compound with thee and come down in its terms, not one jot of the rigour of it will be remitted. If you cannot do all that is commanded, all you do will not satisfy that promise, therefore thou must be turned over from the promise of life to the curse, and there thou shalt find thy name written. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that Jesus Christ be made under the law, and give obedience in all things, even to the death of the cross, and so be made a curse for us, and sin for us, even he “who knew no sin.” And thus in him you find the law fulfilled, justice satisfied, and God pleased. In him you find the promise of life indeed established in a better and surer way than was first propounded. You find life by his death, you find life in his doing for you. And again, consider the ceremonial law,—what were all those sacrifices and ceremonies? Did God delight in them? Could he savour their incense and sweet smells, and eat the fat of lambs and be pacified? No, he detects and abhors such abominations! Because that people did stay in the letter, and went no further than the ceremony, he declares that it was as great abomination to him as the offering up of a dog. While they were separated from Jesus Christ, in whom his soul rested and was pacified, they were not expiations, but provocations; they were not propitiations for sin, but abominations in themselves. But take these as the shadow of such a living substance; take them as remembrances of him who was to come, and behold Jesus Christ lying in these swaddling clothes of ceremonies, until the fulness of time should come, that he might be manifested in the flesh, and so you shall find eternal life in those dead beasts, in those dumb ceremonies. If you consider this Lamb of God slain in all these sacrifices, from

the beginning of the world, then you present a sweet smelling savour to God,—then you offer the true propitiation for the sins of the world,—then he will delight more in that sacrifice than all other personal obedience.

But what if I should say, that the gospel itself is a killing letter, and ministration of death, being severed from Christ? I should say nothing amiss, but what Paul speaketh, that his gospel was “a savour of death” to many. Take the most powerful preaching, the most sweet discourse, the most plain writings of the free grace and salvation in the gospel,—take all the preaching of Jesus Christ himself and his apostles,—and you shall not find life in them, unless ye be led by that Spirit of Christ unto himself, who is “the resurrection and the life.” It will no more save you than the covenant of works, unless that word abide and dwell in your hearts, to make you believe in him, and embrace him with your souls, whom God hath sent. Suppose you heard all, and heard it gladly, and learned it, and could discourse well upon it, and teach others, yet if you be not driven out of yourselves, out of your own righteousness, as well as sins, and pursued to this city of refuge, Jesus Christ, you have not eternal life. Your knowledge of the truth of the gospel, and your obedience to God’s law, will certainly kill you, and as certainly as your ignorance and disobedience, unless you have embraced in your soul that good thing Jesus Christ, contained in these truths, who is the diamond of that golden ring of the scriptures, and unless your soul embrace these promises as soul-saving, as containing the chief good, and “worthy of all acceptation,” as well as your mind receive these as true and faithful sayings, 1 Tim. i. 15.

Thus ye see Jesus Christ is either the subject of all in the scriptures, or the end of it all. He is the very proper subject of the gospel. Paul knew nothing but Christ crucified in his preaching, and he is the very end and scope “of the law for righteousness,” Rom. x. 3. All the preaching of a covenant of works, all the curses and threatenings of the Bible, all the rigid exactions of

obedience, all come to this one great design, not that we set about such a walking to please God, or do something to pacify him, but that we being concluded under sin and wrath on the one hand, and an impossibility to save ourselves on the other hand, Gal. iii. 22, Rom. v. 20, 21, may be pursued unto Jesus Christ for righteousness and life, who is both able to save us and ready to welcome us. Therefore, the Gospel opens the door of salvation in Christ, the law is behind us with fire and sword, and destruction pursuing us, and all for this end, that sinners may come to him and have life. Thus the law is made the pedagogue of the soul to lead to Christ, Christ is behind us, cursing, condemning, threatening us, and he is before with stretched out arms ready to receive us, bless us, and save us, inviting, promising, exhorting to have life. Christ is on Mount Sinai, delivering the law with thunders, Acts vii. 38, and he is on the Mount Zion in the calm voice, he is both upon the mountain of cursings and blessings, and on both doing the part of a mediator, Gal. iii. 10, 20. It is love that is in his heart which made him first cover his countenance with frowns and threats; and it is love that again displays itself in his smiling countenance. Thus souls are enclosed with love pursuing and love receiving, and thus the law, which seems most contrary to the Gospel, testifies of Christ. It gives him this testimony, that except Salvation be in him, it is nowhere else. The law says, "It is not in me, seek it not in obedience, I can do nothing but destroy you, if you abide under my jurisdiction." The ceremonies and sacrifices say, "If you can behold the end of this ministry,—if a veil be not upon your hearts, as it was upon Moses' face, (2 Cor. iii. 13) you may see where it is, it is not in your obedience, but in the death and suffering of the Son of God whom we represent." Then the Gospel takes all these coverings and veils away and gives a plain and open testimony of him "There is no name under heaven to be saved by, but Christ's." The Old Testament spake by figures and signs, as dumb men do but the New speaks in plain words and with open face. Now I say, for all this that there

is no salvation but in him, yet many souls—not only those who live in their gross sins and have no form of godliness, but even the better sort of people that have some “knowledge” and civility and a kind of “zeal for God,”—yet they do not “come to him that they may have life,” they do not “submit to the righteousness of God,” Rom. x. 2, 3. Here is the march that divides the ways of heaven and hell,—coming to Jesus Christ, and forsaking ourselves. The confidence of these souls is chiefly or only in that little knowledge, or zeal, or profession they have, they do not as really abhor themselves for their own righteousness as for their unrighteousness. They make that the covering of their nakedness and filthiness which is in itself as menstruous and unclean as any thing. It is now the very propension and natural inclination of our hearts, to stand upright in ourselves Faith bows a soul's back to take on Christ's righteousness, but presumption lifts up a soul upon its own bottom. “How can ye believe that seek honour one of another?” The engagements of the soul to its own credit or estimation,—the engagements of self-love and self honour,—do lift up a soul that it cannot submit to God's righteousness, to righteousness in another. And therefore many do dream and think that they have eternal life, who shall awake in the end, and find that it was but a dream, a night-fancy.

Now from all this I would enforce this duty upon your consciences, to “search the Scriptures” if you think to have eternal life, search them if ye would “know Christ, whom to know is life eternal,” then again search them, for “these are they that testify of him.” Searching imports diligence,—much diligence,—it is a serious work, it is not a common seeking of an easy and common thing, but a search and scrutiny for some hidden thing, for some special thing. It is not bare reading of the Scriptures that will answer this duty, except it be diligent and daily reading, and it is not that alone, except the spirit within meditate on them, and by meditation accomplish a diligent search. There is some hidden secret that you must search for that is enclosed within the

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covering of words and sentences. There is a mystery of wisdom that you must apply your hearts to search out, Eccl. vii. 25. Jesus Christ is the treasure that is hid in this field. O a precious treasure of eternal life! Now then, souls, search into the fields of the Scriptures for him “as for hid treasure,” Prov. ii. 4. It is not only truth you must seek and buy, and not sell it, but it is life you would search, here is an object that may not only take up your understandings, but satisfy your hearts. Think not you have found all when you have found truth there, and learned it, no, except you have found life there, you have found nothing, you have missed the treasure. If you would profit by the Scriptures, you must bring both your understanding and your affections to them, and depart not till they both return full. If you bring your understanding to seek the truth, you may find truth, but not truly, you may find it, but you are not found of it. You may lead truth captive, and enclose it in a prison of your mind, and encompass it about with a guard of corrupt affections, that it shall have no issue, no outgoing to the rest of your souls and ways, and no influence on them. You may “know the truth,” but you are not “known of it,” nor brought into captivity to the obedience of it. The treasure that is hid in the Scriptures is Jesus Christ, whose entire and perfect name is, “Way, Truth, and Life.” He is a living truth and true life, therefore Christ is the adequate object of the soul, commensurable to all its faculties. He has truth in him to satisfy the mind, and has life and goodness in him to satiate the heart, therefore if thou wouldest find Jesus Christ, bring thy whole soul to seek him, as Paul expresseth it. He is true and faithful, and “worthy of all acceptance,” then bring thy judgment to find the light of truth, and thy affections to embrace the life of goodness that is in him. Now, as much as ye find of him, so much have ye profited in the Scriptures. If you find commands there which you cannot obey, search again, and you may find strength under that command. Dig a little deeper, and you shall find Jesus the end of an impossible command. And when you

have found him, you have found life and strength to obey, and you have found a propitiation and sacrifice for transgressing and not obeying. If you find curses in it, search again, and you shall find Jesus Christ under that, “made a curse for us,” you shall find him “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes.” When you know all the letter of the Scripture, yet you must search into the spirit of it, that it may be imprinted into your spirits. All you know does you no good but as it is received in love, unless your souls become a “living epistle,” and the word without be written on the heart, you have found nothing. As for you that cannot read the Scriptures, if it be possible, take that pains to learn to read them. O if you knew what they contain, and whom they bear witness of, you would have little quietness till you could read at least his love-epistles to sinners! And if you cannot learn, be not discouraged, but if your desires within be fervent, your endeavours to hear it read by others will be more earnest. But it is not so much the reading of much of it that profiteth, as the pondering of these things in your hearts, and digesting them by frequent meditation, till they become the food of the soul. This was David's way, and by this he grew to the stature of a tall and well bodied Christian.