

DEALING WITH ETERNITY

Study 1

GOD



Psalm 90; John 1: 1-24

Have you ever thought of those things which will never end? We are so used to the limits of time that perhaps we can be forgiven for finding it difficult to understand timelessness. You have, no doubt, heard people say, 'All good things come to an end.' This is a common expression and sometimes folk add 'and bad things too!' In these four studies we are going to try to take our minds into the realm of the qualities which do not 'come to an end' but last for ever. It will do us good to get away from time and space and the things of earth and to think of values that are higher and more permanent. We have called the lessons, '**Dealing with Eternity**'. This is the beauty of Christianity, it takes us into the realm of the everlasting. You will find that your Bible is full of such great things.

In thinking of eternity and everlasting things, we are bound to think of God first. Have you read **Psalm 90** carefully? If you have, you will have noticed how the writer is drawing a contrast between feeble man and his link with time, and God who is everlasting. It is, in my opinion, one of the finest Psalms. It seems from reading it, as if the psalmist is trying to encourage himself with things that are trustworthy. He wants values that do not fail. So in **verses 1 & 2** he thinks of the Lord as a dwelling place in which those of all generations who trusted in God have dwelt. The ageless God - One who is "**from everlasting to everlasting**". I wonder if you understand the importance of this? The writer is trying to describe, as best he can, the idea of timelessness. He looks back as far as he can imagine, "**from everlasting**". How far back; how far forward? It is impossible to say in human terms. Yet for this immeasurable span - "**YOU ARE GOD.**" We, as people of time, cannot fully grasp this; it is beyond our comprehension. We can easily get lost in trying to put into words the real meaning of the everlasting nature of God.

Shall we then, to begin with, think of the meaning of time? Perhaps there are four things that describe its qualities:

1. **Ending.** All time stretches between a beginning and an end. Every birthday we celebrate tells us this. We may be nine or ninety - however many we are allowed to enjoy. But each one reminds us that we had a beginning and we shall have an end. We spend our days like a well-told story (**verse 9**), but however good the story, it is bound to end. **Verse 10** speaks of the length of life allotted to us. Yes, everything earthly is destined to have an end.
2. **Limited.** However much we have of things there is certain to be a limit to them for we can never possess everything. You may be very intelligent, yet you will never

be able to say that you have all knowledge. It may be you will become famous and make a name for yourself, but you can never reach the ultimate of fame. Everything in the world is limited and can never fully satisfy.

3. **Changing.** We all know how changeable life is. Think of the number of things that change in your life during just one week. The weather, fashions, circumstances, your mood, the attitude of people around you. Everything in our world is marked by change. This results in insecurity and strain.

4. **Imperfect.** Everything we attempt in life is marred in one way or another. Even the very best things are spoiled by failure and sin. When we think of living in time we think about that which could be so wonderful. If only there were not so many influences that soil and spoil our lives. So much for time!

Let us now look at what we mean when we say that God is Eternal. All that we have said, concerning what is true of us as people of time, is the very opposite of what is true of God. If God is Eternal, then He is:

1. **Endless.** God had no beginning and He will have no end. You will find this difficult to understand, but it is the only way to put into words what we mean. Like an absolutely perfect circle where you cannot find the join - God is complete. He will never end. This gives us tremendous confidence as we commit our lives to Him. Notice how insignificant time in years is to God according to **verse 4**. This makes nonsense of our longest ideas of existence. When all time is ended, God's programme for eternity will have only just begun!

2. **Limitless.** Whatever God has, He has to the full. Whatever He does, He does with unlimited power. Have you ever had the frustration of trying to do something beyond your powers? At the end of it you have to say 'I can't.' God never has to say this! Because He is eternal there are no limits to what He is, or can do. Think of the potential of this in us, when we allow Him to have full control of our lives!

3. **Changeless.** God never changes. "**Yesterday, today and forever**", (**Hebrews 13: 8**) He is the same. The Hebrew people knew God by the name "**I AM**" (see **Exodus 3: 14**) - not 'I was' or 'I will be', but "**I AM**" - thus speaking to us of His constant, unchanging character. Another Psalm which also tells us this clearly is **Psalm 102: 25-27**. All creation will come to an end, and be folded up like a garment. Yet God is the same, He is the unchanging God. Like a rock that can never be moved, God can be relied upon to remain forever the same.

4. **Perfect.** Everything God does is perfect. Sin has spoiled so many things in creation that perhaps we are apt to forget this. Yet beauty, order, completeness and harmony all belong to God. The writer of **Psalm 90** was

no doubt aware of this when he asked for **“the beauty of the Lord” (verse 17)** to be upon him. Because God is perfect, eternity is going to mean absolute perfection for all who, through the Lord Jesus Christ, have made God their own. All that sin has spoiled will vanish away and God will make a new heaven and new earth where everything will be perfect, and without a flaw.

We have just touched on this great truth of God and Eternity. Think it out carefully and see what the Bible really says about it.

Study 2 SALVATION



Romans 5: 6-11;
1 Thessalonians 5: 8-11;
Hebrews 5: 7-9

We have looked at the fact that God is Eternal, the Everlasting God. It may have left you a little bewildered or baffled. As we said, it is one of those truths, that the more we try to explain it the less we are able. This is where faith comes in. **Hebrews 11: 6** tells us that those who come to God must believe that He **IS**. This means, among other things, that He always **'IS'**. But it can have tremendous practical blessings for us too. Think of a verse like **Deuteronomy 33: 27**, which says **“the Eternal God is your refuge”** and His everlasting arms are under us. This is truly a wonderful verse! Because God is Eternal we can find salvation, or a **“refuge”** in Him. If we are weak and failing, the picture language of Hebrews tells us that we can find support in His strength and power. The New Testament takes up this idea and tells us that through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we can find Eternal salvation.

Are you saved? I expect from time to time people have asked you this question. The Christian life begins, of course, when you can say: 'Yes, praise the Lord, I am saved.' By the way, don't be afraid to say: "Praise the Lord", for it is a wonderful thing to be saved. In this lesson we are going to think of salvation in the light of Eternity. Sometimes, in our lives, it is possible to possess valuable things without knowing really how much they are worth. In other words, we take them for granted. This is often so with our health. We enjoy good health and strength and find that life is great. Yet possibly we never stop to think what good health means until we meet someone sick or disabled. As an African once said to a missionary, 'I used to grumble that I had no shoes, until I met someone who had no feet!'

Let us suppose that you are out at sea in a fishing boat. You decide to have a swim from the boat, and dive overboard. But because of inexperience, you get into difficulties. As you cry for help, a friend from the boat, a strong swimmer, dives in and brings you to safety. You are saved! But supposing you were walking along by the water's edge, several weeks afterwards, and you fell in, and this time there was no one to save you and you drowned. You were saved once, but now you are lost.

Now think of God's Salvation. The point of our lesson is to learn that once God saves you and me, it lasts forever; it will never end, and you can never be lost. The New Testament tells us quite a lot about why this is so. If you really learn this lesson it will bring you peace and assurance.

1. **How does it come about?** **Romans 5: 6-11** shows how this great salvation was made possible. **Verse 6** tells us that

we were weak, **“without strength”** and helpless. But then just at the right time, **“Christ died for us.” Verse 8** reminds us that we were **“sinners”**, those who had missed the mark. It was for such distorted lives that God in His love gave Christ to die. But it does not end there for **verse 10** tells us that **“we were enemies”**, as rebels who opposed God, the death of Christ brought us into harmony with God - **reconciled** us. It is obvious then, that humanly speaking, we are not worth much to God. We may say, not worth saving! But God did not think that way. In spite of our weakness, waywardness and rebellion, He paid the highest price for our salvation when the Lord Jesus died on the Cross.

2. **What does it mean?** Look at **1 Thessalonians 1: 9-10**. It is obvious that those believers to whom Paul wrote had a new experience when they turned to God from their idols. To be saved, for them, meant a new way of life. They began to serve God and wait for His Son from Heaven. A new occupation and a new expectation became theirs. For them, Jesus was a living Saviour and their salvation was bound up in Him. This is why the qualities of the Christian life are so very wonderful. It is really like beginning life all over again. We call it **'new birth'** and it certainly is that. We know that Jesus only needed to die once for us on the Cross. He completed the work of salvation forever. The fact that He lives proves this. So we learn that unlike our illustration, we only need to trust in Christ once for salvation and we are saved once for all, and can never be lost. When Jesus comes again, as **verse 10** suggests, we shall be able to enjoy forever all that salvation means.

3. **How long, then, will it last?** Does **'Eternal'** really mean forever? We can say without doubt - as long as God lasts, our salvation will endure. In **Hebrews 5: 7-9** we are told that Jesus became **“the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”**. Salvation begins in Christ; He is its author, or founder. What He is, gives quality to that which He gives to us. He is a perfect Saviour in every way. We could say much more about this, but **'FOREVER'** really means what it says - for ever - it will never end. There are certain things in life that after a while lose their appeal and we grow tired of them. God's Salvation is so wonderful that although it never ends, we never shall grow tired of it; or rather, we shall never grow tired of Him, the Lord Jesus Christ. As a Christian, you can begin to enjoy salvation NOW. Every day, as you obey the Lord, you will find your life gets better and more satisfying. Then in Heaven, you will enjoy the very best that God can give; you will be with the Lord Jesus forever.

Study 3

LIFE



1 John 5

We have tried to understand what it means for God to be Eternal. No doubt, existence, or duration of being, must play an important part in our concept of this. From **Psalms 90** we noticed the contrast between God, who is **“from everlasting to everlasting”**, and man, who is just like the grass - alive one day but withered and dead the next. Yet this existence, that we enjoy as humans, we call life. Ever since we began to form concepts in our minds, we knew that life had a beginning and life had an end. This is an elementary idea confirmed by experience. How many babies have you seen just in the first days of their appearance in the

world? You have looked at them, maybe admired them, but never questioned the fact that they are alive. But at the other end of the scale - how many of your family or friends have died? As we get older this experience becomes more common - we lose more of those we know and love. This is all part of life - human life. James, in his practical letter, describes life as a vapour, that appears for a little time and then vanisheth away. (**4: 14**) Earthly life is transient, we're just passing through. We are now going to study from the chapter something of the meaning of **ETERNAL LIFE**. At once, we must understand that this is not just living forever, although of course this is one aspect of it. But realise that every person that has ever lived, for however short a time, will exist forever. In our next study we shall see what this means for those who do not accept Christ as Saviour. We use the word 'immortal' to describe the fact that human existence never ends. This is why Christians believe that physical death is not the end. There is something beyond death that is not the end. There is something beyond death that we must recognise and prepare for.

When we say that we have **ETERNAL LIFE** we are talking about a special kind of life. If you take a Concordance and trace through your New Testament, all that it says about it, you will find it is a very full subject. It will be a rewarding study if you can do it, and will bring you much joy. This life, is the very life of God in the experience of man and every Christian possesses it, see **John 5: 24**. We will look at a few facts about it from **1John 5: 11-21**. Look up all these verses.

1. It is a gift from God. (verse 11)

Here John tells us clearly and definitely that God has given unto us Eternal Life in His Son, God's most wonderful gift to us is not a new law but a new life. We can never earn it by our good works. **Romans 6: 23** states this very clearly. This is why the Lord Jesus had to speak to Nicodemus about the need for a new birth. (**John 3**) He, as a great doctor of law, was trying to earn Eternal Life. Jesus soon put him on the right road when He told him clearly that he must be born again. (**John 3: 7**) So, everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour receives, as a free gift, Eternal Life. While it is true they will never die, it also means that their life has about it a new quality altogether. See **John 11: 25-26**.

2. It is a present possession. (verse 12)

John tells us that if we have the Son we have life - if we do not have the Son of God we do not have life. This is very plain speaking. There is no apology for the distinction between the two, for all mankind belongs to one or the other of these groups. Either they have the Son and have life; or they have not the Son and have not life. Life and Christ go together. Remember, this is what makes the Christian a different person from the rest of society. He possesses a different kind of life. Do you really understand this? There should be a very marked difference in the way you live, if only because you possess this quality of life. If you let the Lord Jesus have full control of your life, there will be a tremendous difference in you, as a person.

3. It is something of which we can be sure. (verse 13)

John stated that he was writing to believers that they may **know** that they had Eternal Life. The key word in this verse is the word **know**. The great truth behind this is to know with assurance by experience. To know the real meaning of life will help us to live it to the full. Paul meant this when he said: "**for to me to live, is Christ**". (**Philippians 1: 21**)

If we are willing to surrender our lives absolutely to the Lord Jesus Christ then, by the Holy Spirit, we will prove that it is satisfying, useful and worthwhile. The Lord Jesus, Himself, told His disciples that He had come, in order that believers might have a more abundant life. (**John 10: 10**) As you work at this study, just ask yourself, 'am I really living life to the full as God intends that I should?'

4. It is life that will endure. (Verses 18-20)

It is worth underlining the "**we know's**". Confidence just leaps out of these verses. John must have been in a triumphant mood when he wrote them. "**This is the true God and Eternal Life.**" I wonder if you experience a thrill as you read this verse! It is as if he says that you can try any other kind of life you like, but this is THE life. It is beyond comparison with anything else. We can easily believe, as we read of such qualities, that it lasts forever - it will never end. God and life and you and I are all bound together in the Lord Jesus Christ. It just has to be a 'more abundant life'.

Study 4

JUDGMENT

Read **John 3: 16-21; John 5: 19-30; Acts 17: 30-31; Revelation 20: 11-15**

In our final study this month we are going to look at the most serious side of Eternity. We have already said that when God created human beings, He did so with the intention that they should enjoy life forever. However, because of sin, things were drastically changed. Man has in himself the ability to exist forever. The mode of existence depends upon one vital factor; his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us refer again to a verse we looked at in **1 John 5: 13, The Christian - the one who believes in the Lord Jesus - has Eternal Life**. This, as we saw, is a certainty and nothing can alter it. When we speak of God's judgment we are talking about His judgment upon all those who do not possess Eternal Life. This leads us into some very serious considerations and yet we need to know very clearly what it all means.

We are going to build up our lessons by asking several important questions:

1. Who will be the objects of God's judgment? Look at **John 3: 16-19**. This passage has the very heart of the gospel message in it. "**God so loved the world**" - what could be more wonderful than that? We know that **John 3: 16** contains the 'gospel in a nutshell,' so to speak. It reaches out to everyone and those who believe on the Lord Jesus "**should not perish but have everlasting life**". But perhaps you are asking the question: 'Can God judge or condemn those He loved so much?' **Verse 18** provides the answer. Those who are condemned are those who do not believe in the Name of the Son of God. These verses make it so very clear. To be judged by God is a tremendously serious matter, see **Hebrews 10: 31**. Those who refuse to believe will be, indeed are already, condemned.

2. Who will be the Judge? We are not left in any doubt as to who will judge unbelievers. Look at **John 5: 26 & 27**. This tells us that God, the Father, has entrusted the work of judgment to the Lord Jesus. He has the authority to dispense judgment. So then, the One who died on the cross that all might be forgiven, is the One who will

eventually judge those who refuse Him. Another Scripture which makes this fact even more clear is **Acts 17: 31**. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the evidence that He will one day appear to righteously judge the world. Think about this carefully for it contains a lesson that is vitally important to learn. To Christians the fact that Jesus is alive is the most wonderful thing in the world. It is the greatest inspiration to true Christian living. To the unbeliever, however, it must be the most terrible fact of all, to know that Christ is alive and will eventually be the judge of all men.

3. When will it take place? The Scripture is quite clear as to when this Judgment will take place. **John 5: 28** says: **“the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice.”** **Revelation 20: 11-15** tells us that this **“hour”** will be at the Great White Throne, at the very end of time. Notice that all who do not know Christ will be there. No one who knows Christ as Saviour will have to appear before that Throne. This is important for it means that, for the Christian, all judgment is past. It is also evident that there will be no escape for those who reject the Lord Jesus. The dead, small and great, those whose bodies are in the sea - all will be there. There will be no leave of absence! You will notice that books are opened and judgment is according to their works. This assures us that God is absolutely fair and just. Sometimes people worry, because they think that God may make a mistake, but **Genesis 18: 25** and **2 Timothy 4: 8** remind us that God is a righteous judge. This picture of the day of reckoning only confirms what the whole Bible teaches. God knows all and He will judge rightly. Did you notice the special Book in this passage? The Lamb's Book of Life - those whose names are not there will receive God's final judgment. Is your name there? Make sure it is by accepting the Lord Jesus as Saviour, if you have not already done so.

4. What will judgment mean? It will mean that all will **“stand before God”**, **Revelation 20: 12**. Many people today live as though they will never have to meet God. Here we see that God will judge all who live without the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. Then you will notice that judgment will also mean that all the sins of life will be laid open before God. **“According to their works”** would indicate this. Finally, it will mean banishment from God for ever. Notice carefully **verses 14 and 15**. **“The Lake of Fire”** sounds terrible and pictures for us the severity of eternal punishment. Yes, just as Eternal Life is everlasting, without end, so is Eternal Death - the second death. So this picture of Hell would make it very clear to us that God means business when He invites us to put our lives under the control of the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows that sin will ruin our lives and that if we go on to the end without Christ, we shall be separated from Him forever. He does not want this to happen because He loves men and women so much. But as a holy and just God, He has no alternative, if we will not accept His free gift of Eternal Life. Therefore, let us take **Hebrews 2: 1&3** as a timely warning, for **“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”**

So we end our studies on Eternal things - things that last forever, God - Salvation - Life - Judgment. As an additional exercise, look through your Bible and see if you can find other 'eternal' things mentioned. It will make a helpful and interesting study.

Questions

Study 1 GOD

1. What contrast does the writer of **Psalm 90** make?
2. What has **Psalm 90** to say about the significance of time in relation to God?
3. What verse in the latter part of **John 8** would tell us of the eternal nature of the Lord Jesus?
4. What does the fact that God is changeless mean to the Christian?
5. a) Why are we apt to forget that everything that God does is perfect?
b) What will vanish away when God makes the new Heaven and new earth?

Study 2 SALVATION

1. How would you explain **“Underneath are the everlasting arms?”** (**Deuteronomy 33: 27**)
2. What truth, regarding our salvation, can bring us peace and assurance?
3. What was our position before God when Christ died for us?
4. a) What did trusting Christ mean to the Thessalonians?
b) Can it mean this to us?
5. What does 'Eternal Life' mean? (**John 17: 3**)

Study 3 LIFE

1. What does James tell us about life?
2. What does the word 'immortal' mean?
3. Why should a Christian be different from the rest of society?
4. How can Christians be sure that they have Eternal Life?
5. What aspect of Eternal Life do you, personally, find most thrilling, and why?

Study 4 JUDGMENT

1. What part will the Lord Jesus Christ have in the judgment of the world?
2. Who will stand before God at the Great White Throne for judgment?
3. What will eternal judgment mean for those who reject the Lord Jesus?
4. We know from **John 3: 16** that God loves men and women. Why then will He send some people to everlasting punishment?
5. Express in your own words the warning of **Hebrews 2: 1 & 3**.