

Bottom Lines: He That Has the Son Has Life

1 John 5:12

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We continue on in our summer series *Bottom Lines of the Bible*. Today's may be the simplest and most profound of all of them.

I remember reading Walter Isaacson's biography on Steve Jobs,¹ who was the founder of Apple. Jobs continues to fascinate both because of the success of Apple and because of his idiosyncrasies, which in some ways contributed to his business success. One that stands out to me was his belief that *simplicity is the ultimate sophistication*. This belief explains much of Apple's designs and even packaging which are clean, uncluttered, and really simple. I was amazed how quickly my daughters at two and three years old figured out to how to navigate my iPhone, which is somewhat frightening. They could do that because of this philosophical design. Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.

Our bottom line today is Apple-esque. Simple. Clean. Uncluttered. Yet truly profound and eternal in its consequence.

"Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12 ESV). This verse is wonderfully assuring in the first half, terrifying in the second. *"Whoever has the Son has life"* urges us to make sure we have the Son of God and life in him. *"Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life"* warns us of the eternal consequences of NOT having the Son and this is our bottom-line truth. While a simple statement, there are two key possessions urged here: The Son, and life.

The Son

This one's easy as it clearly is referring to Jesus. The previous verse IDs him, *"And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son"* (1 John 5:11). While this may seem obvious in a Christian church, let's make it clear that the Son is the second person of the Trinity, who in obedience to the Father, was incarnated fully human, birthed by the virgin Mary, and given the name Jesus by his earthly father Joseph.

This Jesus displayed his divine nature as the true Son of God by miracles he performed over nature and disease, and even resurrected dead people back to life. As the Apostles' Creed says, *"he suffered under Pontus Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried...On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead."* The Son in 1 John 5:12 is Jesus Christ.

Life

More challenging is the term "life." *"Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life"* (1 John 5:12). What is "life" describing here?

¹ Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs: The Exclusive Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

The spiritual life and vitality of God within

Many people suppose eternal life is God merely keeping you alive spiritually when you die. *It's just that I continue to exist in conscious awareness.* Eternal life is much more than ongoing existence, it is the very life of God in us. God's life is given to us by the Holy Spirit when we believe in Jesus. It is called "born again" for a reason. Romans 6:13 (NASB) describes it as "*alive from the dead.*" Remember, we are born spiritually dead. We are born without spiritual life.

Through regeneration, God makes us alive by and with the life of God. That may sound strange because the modern person doesn't think this way. But remember in Genesis 2:7 (ESV), when God made Adam, the text says that "*God...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*" What did God place in him? His "breath." His life. Sin brought death to all of us. Physical death certainly, but even more tragically, eternal, spiritual death.

In salvation, God breathes life into us again—the very life of God. Through union with Christ, we are connected to this life of God forever. We are in an indissoluble union with Christ. We *have* the Son. And with that "having," we have life. Since that relationship cannot be broken, we will be connected to this eternal source of life and vibrancy forever.

The Christian's present possession

1 John 5:12 says, "*Whoever has the Son has life.*" Every word here is inspired and trustworthy. It doesn't say, *Whoever has the son will have life.* It is present tense: **has** life. If there is one misconception, it is this one: eternal life is someday and is mostly about the duration of life; it never ends.

"*Whoever has the Son has life.*" If you are a Christian, you have the life of God now. God is certainly interested in your future experience of it but it is a *now* experience. This new life is also eternal life. The same spiritual vibrancy that is sustaining me in trials, and changing my sinful habits, and delighting in God to worship, and seeking to live to the glory of God, and striving to love my neighbors, and seeking a God-centered home—that is the same life as eternal life. New life is eternal life. Eternal life is transformational life. It is the joy and power of God at work within me.

The guarantee of unending life after physical death

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). We cannot talk about eternal life and not rejoice in this truth. Not in a church that regularly is burying loved ones who die in the faith. Not in a group of people who know that someday it is our turn. *Jesus is the resurrection and the life.*

The promise is that we will die physically but we will never ever truly *die die*. The real me—the me in terms of my personhood, memories, heart, loves, and passions, the me of a whole life lived—the real me will never end because I am united to Christ and his eternal life is my ongoing forever possession.

This week we had a powerful picture of this hope in the funeral of our church member, Tom Sawyer, as the law enforcement community gathered in mass. Hundreds of police and law enforcement were here. The whole south lot was filled with 200 squad cars. We had hundreds of American flags, and tributes from dignitaries. In the front row were Mary, Tom's wife, and his adult son and daughter, John and Hannah. Few, if any of us, will ever

have a funeral like what we witnessed. There was a two- or three-mile line of cars with flashing lights all the way to the cemetery. I've never seen anything like it.

Yet there in the front row were Mary, Hannah, and John. Wherein was their hope? Tom's service to our country in Operation Desert Storm? His service to our community or even our church? As special as each of those are, there's no eternal hope in them. I saw and heard a profound hope in Tom's identity as a follower of Jesus. As a Christian. If you have the Son, you have life. It makes all the difference.

A foretaste of the future kingdom and its indescribable joy

When God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, it was the life of the eternal age invading this present world. The power and vibrancy of life seen in the resurrection is the normal life in the future kingdom of God. But for us, it's shocking. Our world is death, not resurrecting life.

It is this same life through which the Christian experiences life eternal in the present world. That is why we can say that we have it now but it's not all that it will be. The future life will be the same, only greater and more wonderful. Fully expressed. It's like how the seed of a flower is the same as the flower but the flower becomes much more than the seed. We have the seed of eternal life now. But the full flower will be far more beautiful and wonderful than our present experience of it. You just wait and see.

Now with the terms understood, let's look back at the verse, "*Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life*" (1 John 5:12). What is clear is that there is a bundling of having the Son of God and having eternal life. If you get the one, you get the other. They always go together. There are other things like this in life:

- If you get struck by lightning, you'll get thunder with it. Get the one, you get the other.
- If you marry a Siamese twin—you get the one, you get the other.
- No matter who you marry, you get your spouse's family as a bonus. You get the one, you get all the others too. Amen?

And whoever gets the son, gets eternal life too. No one gets Jesus and misses out on eternal life. It is a package deal. They come together. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16).

The bottom line of this verse is the exclusivity of salvation and eternal life ONLY for those who have Jesus by faith. If I were a math nerd, this is how I would diagram this verse.

Me \neq ∞ Life (Me by myself does not equal eternal life)

Jesus = ∞ Life (Jesus equals eternal life)

Me + Christ \neq ∞ Life (Me plus anything other than Christ does not equal eternal life)

Me + X/Faith = UChrist (Me plus faith in Christ equals union with Christ)

Me + Christ = ∞ Life (Me plus Christ equals eternal life)

Some of you are like, I didn't like that stuff in high school and I still don't. I'm not excited about getting it at church. Hang with me. You will like this. Here is the math of 1 John 5:12:

Me + Son = ∞ Life, Me - Son of God = ∞ Life (Me plus the Son equals eternal life)

What is difficult for many is the absolute exclusivity of this statement. That's why it's a bottom line of the Bible. In the end, after all the religious shouting and preaching and philosophizing and living and dying, in the end, here's the bottom line: If a person has Jesus by faith as Savior they get—with Jesus—life eternal. If a person does not have Jesus by faith, they do not get life eternal. That is to say, they experience the opposite of life eternal, eternal death. Eternal destruction. Eternal judgment. Eternal hell.

This is why this verse jumps off the pages of the Bible. Some passages sound confusing or leave some ambiguity. The Bible can seem so confusing. Many people just hope for the best. Not 1 John 5:12. You either have Christ and eternal life or you don't. All humanity will forever be divided into these two categories. Life or death. Heaven or hell.

Sobering, isn't it? This room is presently divided the same way. We have lots of diversity here in lots other of categories. Varying ethnic backgrounds. Male and Female. Young and old. White collar, blue collar. On and on we could go. But the only diversity that truly matters in the end is this one. This is the one that determines your eternal destiny. It's cut and dry. There's no middle ground. It's so absolute.

I read this story about the old faithful theologian Dr. Gresham Machen and it stuck with me over the years. As he ended one of his lectures on sin and humanity from the Bible...

"A woman reporter ventured to ask, "Dr. Machen, you do not seem to think very much of man. What reason do you have for so belittling him?"

Without hesitation he replied, "All I did was to present what the Bible says."

"But really Dr. Machen," the woman reporter rejoined, "It doesn't make any difference what anyone believes, does it? Just so he believes something?"

The eyewitness [to this event] told me that the chills shot up and down his spine as he watched this great man of God. Dr. Machen could have passed it off with some innocuous reply, but that was definitely not Machen's way of doing things! He leaned over the lectern and looked the questioner right in the eye.

Then he said, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him!"²

Liberal expressions of Christianity and secularism always downplay this division. They do so because it's embarrassing to some that biblical Christianity would draw such a narrow circle of salvation. They will say, *but God's love is wide* or *there are many paths to God*, or *all religions contain truth*, or *this is just our perspective or opinion*, or some other dodge. Dear friends, that is false teaching by false teachers who mislead people to hell. Pluralism says there are many ways to God and all religions can get you there. It is arrogant to make absolute claim to truth, which is of course, an absolute statement itself.

I remember in my youth pastor days teaching our kids about these things. One of our brighter students was in a high school class where her teacher said, "There is no such thing as absolute truth." The student raised her hand and asked, "Is that absolutely true?" I was proud. That was 25 years ago. Our culture has moved even further. Tolerance today is itself a kind of religion that deems any claim to exclusive truth of any kind as narrow-minded and bigoted.

"Much of contemporary pluralism is driven by the desire to affirm the increasing cultural diversity of our times...And thus, for many in today's society, acceptance of cultural diversity becomes largely indistinguishable from endorsement of religious diversity—endorsement not

² Henry W. Coray, *J. Gresham Machen: A Silhouette* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1981), p. pxfif.

simply in the sense of legally and socially accepting the place of non-Christian religions in American society but also in the sense of affirming the beliefs of such religions.” (D.A. Carson)³

How can you be a pluralist with biblical statements like these?

- *“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).*
- *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6).*
- *“Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5).*

The logic law of non-contradiction states that two opposite statements cannot both be true. The opposite of what is true must be false. They can both be false and wrong. But they cannot both be opposite and true. Christianity can be completely wrong in its claim. But if 1 John 5:12 is true, then it cannot be true that you can have eternal life apart from Jesus.

This bottom line of the Bible urges us to ask, *where in this verse am I? Am I in the first clause or the second? Do I have the Son of God? Have I trusted in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior who died on the cross for my sins?*

Or am I in the second clause, *I don’t have the Son and so I don’t have eternal life.* It’s either one or the other. And that’s the bottom line.

You say, well what is the point of talking about this? It seems unduly off-putting or frightening. Why write it? Why preach it? You have the whole Bible to choose from Pastor Steve and you choose a divisive verse like this? Why? The why for John and Pastor Steve is the same. Here is the very next verse, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

The point is to give assurance to those who have Christ that life eternal comes with him. And to urge those who do not have Christ to turn in faith to him and with him, to get eternal life. Might that be you, today?

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³ D.A. Carson, *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 54.