

Introduction

In the middle of the second century, **Polycarp**, a pastor of the church of Smyrna was arrested for his faith in Jesus. He was brought to trial in a stadium in front of a crowd that wished him dead. The Roman Proconsul said to Polycarp, “Take the oath and I release you; revile Christ” (*The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 9.3). Polycarp responded, “Eighty-six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?” (9.3). The Proconsul continued, “I have wild animals; to them will I throw you, unless you change your mind” (11.1). Polycarp said, “Call them, for change of mind from better to worse is a change not allowed us” (11.1). The Proconsul responded, “If you scorn the wild beasts, I will have you burned by fire, unless you repent” (11.2). Polycarp again responded, “You threaten the fire that burns for an hour and in a little while is quenched; for you do not know the fire of the future judgment and of eternal punishment, the fire reserved for the wicked. But why do you delay? Come, do as you wish” (11.2). The soldiers gathered wood around the stake and brought Polycarp to nail him to the stake. Polycarp stopped them and said, “Leave me as I am, for He who gives me power to endure the fire will grant me also to remain in the flames unmoved, even without the security which nails give you” (13.3).

How could Polycarp endure the certainty of death and maintain his profession of faith? How could his faith hold him more secure to the fire than the nails? Listen to Polycarp’s final prayer. “Lord God Almighty, Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received knowledge of Thee, God of the angels and powers, of the whole creation and of the whole race of the righteous who live in Thy sight, 2 I bless Thee, for having made me worthy of this day and hour; I bless Thee, because I may have a part, along with the martyrs, in the chalice of Thy Christ, “unto resurrection in eternal life.” ’ resurrection both of soul and body in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit. May I be received today as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, among those who are in Thy presence, as Thou hast prepared and foretold and fulfilled, God who art faithful and true. For this and for all benefits I praise Thee, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, through whom be to Thee with Him and the Holy Spirit glory, now and for all the ages to come. Amen” (14.1-2). Polycarp would not recant, even in death, because of his confidence in the “resurrection of soul and body in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit” (11.2).

Personal Reflection

How much confidence do you have in God's promise of resurrection? It is far easier to confess confidence in resurrection when it does not cost your life. Far too often we live with our eyes set on our present life, rather than our eternity. Far too often, we devote our time and our affection to things that our children will throw away when we die.

How much confidence do you have in God's promise of resurrection?

Someone might reasonably respond, 'Why would I devote my life to something that I cannot be sure of until I die?' So often I have asked people what they expect when they stand before God's judgment and they have responded, 'I hope I have done what is needed, but I cannot know until I die.'

The concept of professing faith in Jesus **without** confidence of eternal life is foreign to Scripture. Faith in Jesus and confidence of eternal life go hand in hand. *Do you want to know **now** that you have eternal life? Do you want the confidence to live and to die, knowing that you will resurrect to eternal life?* [1 John 5:11-13](#) teaches that **those who have faith in Jesus have confidence of eternal life**. God has promised eternal life through faith in Jesus alone and you can have confidence in this promise. There is no distinction between faith and confidence.

Scripture's testimony

What is God's promise concerning Jesus? Our confidence is based on God's promise. Our confidence is based on Jesus' faithfulness. [1 John 5:11](#) "11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." **God gives eternal life through Jesus.**

God's Testimony

What is the testimony mentioned in verse 11? [1 John 5:5-10](#) explains that **Faith in Jesus is based on God's testimony about Him**. God has testified about Jesus by His words, the works of Jesus, the resurrection, and Scripture. God testifies that Jesus is the Christ, truly God and truly human. Faith in Jesus is not baseless; it is not blind. Faith in Jesus is based on our confidence in God's testimony because God is true and faithful.

Eternal life

[1 John 5:11](#) adds more detail to God's testimony. Verse 11 states that God's testimony is that He has given eternal life through Jesus. *What is eternal life?* This does not mean that a believer never dies. God's people still suffer and still die.

There are two important aspects of eternal life in Scripture. First, those who have faith in Jesus **resurrect to eternal life after death**. This is why men like Polycarp face death with confidence. In [John 11](#), Jesus' friend Lazarus had died. Jesus raised Lazarus back to life and used that event to show His power over life and death. Jesus said in [John 11:25-26](#) "... "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, **though he die**, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me **shall never die**." In Christ, we have resurrection after death.

Second, in Christ we are made **alive now**. In [Gen 2:17](#), God warned that the consequence of sin would be immediate death (cf. [Rom 6:23](#)). We are all spiritually (and eternally) dead because of our sin ([Rom 5:12](#)). Listen to the explanation in [Ephesians 2:1](#) "1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins" [Ephesians 2:4-5](#) "4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—" We are dead in our sin ([Eph 2:1, 4](#)), but in Christ, we are made alive. This does not refer only to resurrection after death; this means we are made alive in Christ **now**.

Life in His Son

How does a person have eternal life? Verse 11 states that "this life is in His Son." If you want evidence of God's love for you, consider this - the purpose of Jesus' birth (His incarnation) and His death was to give us eternal life. [John 3:16-17](#) "16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." Jesus said in [John 10:10](#) "... I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." **God gave us eternal life in Jesus.**

No other way

Who has eternal life through Jesus' death? We must be careful that we do not read [1 John 5:11](#) and conclude that God has given **all people** eternal life in Jesus. In [Matt 7:13-14](#), Jesus is clear that some will go to eternal life and many will go to eternal destruction. In [Matt 25:31-46](#), Jesus says that some will be sent to eternal life and others to eternal punishment. If some go to eternal destruction, *who has eternal life through Jesus' death? Do **you** have eternal life?* [1 John 5:12](#) "12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." **Faith in Jesus is the only way to have eternal life.**

Who has life?

Verse 12 says that “whoever has the Son has life.” *What does it mean to have the Son?* Notice the parallel between verses 12 and 13. [1 John 5:12](#) “12 Whoever has the Son has life...” [1 John 5:13](#) “13 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.” Verse 13 indicates that **having Jesus equates with believing in Jesus**.

As usual, it is important to define belief (faith). Faith is not professing a belief that something is true. [James 2:19](#) gives the example of demons, who profess belief in truth. [James 2:14-26](#) explain that genuine faith will produce change (works). Also, Scripture is clear that trials and time will sometimes demonstrate that a person’s profession of faith is not genuine. [1 Peter 1:6-7](#) “6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” [Hebrews 3:14](#) “14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” Genuine faith is **belief** in the truth of Jesus that produces a **love** for God and **devotion** to Him (e.g., repentance and holiness).

Having the Son also refers to our **relationship with Christ**. Through faith, we have a covenant relationship with Jesus. Jesus said in [John 17:3](#) “3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” **Eternal life is knowing God**.

No life

If Jesus died to atone for sin, does this mean that all people are forgiven and have eternal life? This is a common teaching, referred to as **Universalism**. The verses I mentioned earlier ([Matt 7:13-14](#) and [Matt 25:31-46](#)) explicitly reject universalism. Some people go to eternal destruction.

There are two important things to understand about this topic. First, Jesus’ death (His blood) is **capable** (sufficient) to atone for all sins of all people in all times. Just as Jesus is infinite; so also His atoning death is infinite. However, Jesus’ death **only atones for the sins of God’s people**, that is, those who have genuine faith in Jesus.

Second, those who reject Jesus **remain in sin and remain in eternal condemnation and death**. [John 3:18](#) “18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” [John 3:36](#) “36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” Notice that both of those verses state that we are **already condemned**. When we reject Jesus, we **remain** in condemnation.

Additionally, those who **never hear of Jesus** remain in sin and remain in eternal condemnation and death. This is a difficult truth for people to accept. We want to say that those who never hear of Jesus can come to salvation through faith in God apart from hearing the gospel. But that is not what Scripture teaches. Jesus said in [John 14:6](#) "... "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." That is, there is no way to know God apart from knowing Jesus.

Similarly, in [Romans 10:13-14](#) "13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" Notice that salvation is available to all who believe; however, no one can believe without hearing. That is, **someone must proclaim the gospel**. This is stated more explicitly in [Romans 10:17](#) "17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." The "word of Christ" here refers to the revelation of Jesus in Scripture. No one comes to faith in the gospel or to salvation through being convinced by **creation** that God is real. [Rom 1:19-20](#) explains that this knowledge only condemns; it doesn't save. God brings all people to a **knowledge of Him** through general revelation, but He only brings people into a **relationship with Him** through the proclamation of Jesus Christ through Scripture.

We, the church, bear **the burden of the gospel**. This is what Jesus meant when He told Peter that he had the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" ([Matt 16:19](#)). Christ has given the church **stewardship over Scripture**. We literally hold the keys to eternal life in our hands and we must choose if we will bury those keys or if we will share them with the world. If someone in Indonesia never hears the gospel, his life is on my hands because God has given me His word and has appointed me to take His word to all nations - not because I am a pastor, but because I am a Christian. **Faith in Jesus is the only way to have eternal life.**

Assurance

When can you know if you have eternal life? Do you have to wait until you die to know if you are eternally condemned or eternally alive? Polycarp was held to the stake by his confidence of eternal life. There was no need for nails because he was certain that he would resurrect after death. *Can you know now whether you have life after death?* [1 John 5:13](#) "13 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." **If you have faith in Jesus, you can have confidence now of eternal life after death.**

Faith in Jesus

What is the basis of our confidence? This confidence only applies to those who have faith in Jesus. In fact, the point here is that your confidence in eternal life depends on your confidence in Jesus. Anyone who says they have confidence of eternal life because they are a good person does not have faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus means you have **no confidence in yourself**. Also, faith in Jesus means you have no reason to doubt your future because you have confidence in Jesus.

What was the basis of confidence for the criminal who was crucified with Jesus? He died the same day he professed faith in Jesus. His confidence was not in baptism. His confidence was not in church membership. His confidence was not in being a good person. His confidence was not in his understanding of theology. His confidence was in Jesus' words, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" ([Luke 22:42](#)).

There is no basis for confidence of eternal life other than Jesus.

No need to wait

Why is confidence of eternal life important? Confidence, based on genuine faith in Jesus, is important because our confidence shapes our lives. Confidence in Jesus (faith in Jesus) was the basis of Peter stepping out of the boat and walking on water. Doubt was the basis of Peter beginning to sink. The story of Peter walking on water is not about us doing miraculous things; it is about us walking with Jesus **wherever** He leads us. It is our confidence in Jesus that allows us to continue walking with Christ when we are diagnosed with cancer. It is our confidence in Jesus that allows us to continue walking with Christ when the person closest to us dies. And it is our confidence of eternal life in Christ that allows us to walk with Jesus as we are burned at the stake.

Notice what [1 John 5:13](#) says. This **letter** is written so that those who have faith in Jesus might **know** that you have eternal life. If your faith is genuine (which will be demonstrated by the Holy Spirit changing your life), do not waver in your confidence. If you believe in Jesus, believe His word - believe His promise that you have eternal life in Him. **If you have faith in Jesus, you can have confidence now of eternal life.**

Conclusion

Polycarp is not an exception in Christian history. Countless Christians joyfully accepted death because "the sufferings of this present time (even death) are not worth comparing the the glory that is to be revealed to us" ([Rom 8:18](#)).

Do you know what will happen after you die? The answer to that question hinges completely on your faith in Jesus. *Do you trust in Christ without reservation? Do you trust Jesus with your eternal life? Is that faith displayed in your life?*

[1 John 5:11-13](#) teaches that **those who have faith in Jesus have confidence of eternal life.**

Closing Scripture: [Romans 8:35-39](#) “35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”