

## Knowing God – the Source of Eternal Life in the Present

Christmas 2011

The God of the Bible spoke into history to tell us of our purpose, our natures, our problems, and of His desire and ability to bring virtue and healing to our lives. He offered us immortality and true life – not just existence.

*In hope of **eternal life**, which God, who never lies, **promised** before the ages began (Letter to Titus 1.2)*

*This is the **promise** which He Himself made to us: **eternal life**. (1 Jn 2:25).*

*For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of **Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality** through the Good News. (2 Ti 1:9–10).*

*For it is my **Father's will** that all who see his Son and **believe in him** should have **eternal life**. (Jn 6:40).*

*I came to give life—**life in all its fullness**. (John 10.10)*

One writer pointed out that John 10:10 had a wide reach:

“Jesus’ main purpose was the salvation (health) of the sheep, which he defined as free access to pasture and fullness of life. Under his protection and by his gift they can experience the best life can offer. In the context of John’s emphasis on eternal life, this statement takes on new significance. Jesus can give a whole new meaning to living because he provides full satisfaction and perfect guidance (cf. Ezek 34:15). [Expositors Bible Commentary, at John 10.10]

As Jesus walked among us, we saw this Eternal life in His life, character and words:

*And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and **this life is in His Son**. (1 Jn 5:11).*

*We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. **This one who is life itself was revealed to us**, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that **he is the one who is eternal life**. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. (1 Jn 1:1–2).*

Writers comment on this last passage:

“In both the Gospel and the epistle, John reveals that he (along with the other apostles) has heard, seen, and even handled God in the flesh. In both books, he tells us that the one they experienced is both “the Word” and “eternal life.” The apostles had come to the realization that the **Word of life, who had been in face-to-face fellowship with the Father for all eternity, had entered into time to be manifest in human flesh to them.** ... This experience was so life-changing and so memorable that John used the perfect tense verbs (“have seen” and “have heard”—1:1, 3) to convey the idea that the apostles’ past experience of the God-man, the incarnate Son of God, was still vivid and present with them. **When the Son entered into time, the eternal fellowship of the Father and Son also entered into time.** Thus, to have heard Jesus was to have heard the Father speaking in the Son (John 14:10, 24), to have seen Jesus was to have seen the Father (John 14:8–10), and to have known him was to have known him who was one with the Father (John 10:30, 38). The Son and the Father are so united that they are said to indwell each other (John 14:8–10). Christ perfectly expressed the Father because he lived in perfect union with him. Thus, for the disciples, to know Jesus was to know the Father. [Osborne, G., & Philip W. Comfort. (2007). Cornerstone biblical commentary, Vol 13: John and 1, 2, and 3 John (331). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.]

“Duration (everlasting, or even without beginning) is not the primary issue; it is a life from another eon (age) or sphere. **Indeed, it is the life of God Himself; and since only the Son has come down from that sphere and from God, he is the only one who can communicate that life.** More simply, Jesus Christ is the eternal life (1 John 5:20) [Brown, R. E. (2008). The Epistles of John: Translated, with introduction, notes, and commentary (168). New Haven; London: Yale University Press.]

“Eternal life” is a spiritual quality of life, which God gives to every believer through Jesus his Son (cf. John 3:16; 17:2–3). **It is not to be thought of as life prolonged to infinity, but as a sharing of living fellowship with the Father,** in which “the category of time recedes before that of **moral quality**”. In the words of Maurice, if eternal life is “that which was manifested in Christ, in His words and acts, **then it is a life of gentleness, justice, truth**”; and you “**cannot measure these by the clocks.**” In Johannine terms, “eternal life” is a synonym for “salvation.” [Smalley, S. S. (2002). Vol. 51: Word Biblical Commentary : 1,2,3 John. Word Biblical Commentary (10). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.]

But this immortal and robust eternal life comes by **knowing** God:

*After Jesus said these things, he looked toward heaven and prayed, “Father, the time has come. Give glory to your Son so that the Son can give glory to you. 2 You*

*gave the Son power over all people so that the **Son could give eternal life** to all those you gave him. 3 And **this is eternal life: that people know you, the only true God, and that they know Jesus Christ**, the One you sent. (Jn 17:1–3).*

God the Father can be known, and He can be known through knowing Christ—His own self-expression and image in history.

Indeed, the promises of God in the Old Testament specifically point to knowing God. Two of these promises focus on the coming of Messiah Jesus.

In Isaiah 11, the Messiah is prophesized to make the knowledge of God universal:

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. **And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.** And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth... They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; **for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.** In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—**of him shall the nations inquire**, and his resting place shall be glorious.*

One commentator said this:

“In these verses the character and work of the “Branch” are described. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, that is, the Holy Spirit would empower Him (at Jesus’ baptism, Matt. 3:16-17) for **His work which would be characterized by wisdom... understanding... counsel... power... knowledge, and the fear of the LORD. The attributes of the Holy Spirit would characterize the Messiah.** Because of His wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge He is the Wonderful Counselor (Isa. 9:6)... He is characterized by the fear of the LORD and has delight in it (11:3) just as His people should have. To fear God is to respond to Him in awe, trust, obedience, and worship. (Interestingly all three persons of the Trinity are suggested in vv. 1-2.) The Messiah constantly seeks to do what God the Father wants Him to do. This contrasted with the religious leaders in Isaiah’s day who were unconcerned about following God’s Word.... The reason such tranquility is possible is that **all the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD** (Isa. 11:9; cf. Jer. 31:34; Hab. 2:14). This means more than people knowing intellectually about the Lord. The idea is that people everywhere will live according to God’s principles and Word. ... The Messiah, the Root of Jesse, will be a means of rallying **for the nations** (cf. v. 12; Zech. 14:9, 16). Jesus Himself made the same point **that many people from outside Israel will have a part in God’s kingdom** (Luke 13:29). God had promised

**Abraham** that through his line **all peoples on the earth would be blessed** (Gen. 12:3). [Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Is 11:1–10). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.]

And in Jeremiah 31, God promises a New Covenant with Israel—which Jesus inaugurated by His death on the Cross and which also has benefits for all nations:

*But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ **for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,**” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

And commentators point out that this is accomplished by the giving of the Holy Spirit by the Father and by the Risen Christ:

“The result of the new covenant is to **be the universal knowledge of God**. The Mosaic law required the people to teach the law to their children (e.g., Deut 6:4–9; 11:19). ... Having the law written on one’s heart is not so much a matter of immediate knowledge as transformed attitudes and behavior (22:16). **The result is said to be not just the knowledge of the law but the knowledge of the Lord, i.e., a relationship with the Lord of the covenant by faith**, the goal of all the earlier covenants.” [Huey, F. (2001). Vol. 16: Jeremiah, Lamentations (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (285–286). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.]

“The new covenant (cf. Jer 31:31–34) carried with it **assurance of forgiveness through Jesus’ blood shed on the cross and the inner work of the Holy Spirit** in motivating us and enabling us to fulfill our covenantal responsibility.” [Leifeld, W. L. (1984). Luke. In F. E. Gaebelein (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke (F. E. Gaebelein, Ed.) (1027). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.]

There is an **assurance and confidence** we have before our great God—we can know for **sure that we have this eternal life now**, and have passed from death to life, never to die again:

*I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you **may know you have eternal life**.* (1 Jn 5:13).

*Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me **has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life**.* (Jn 5:24).

*Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will have life even if they die. 26 And everyone **who lives and believes in me will never die.** (Jn 11:25–26).*

On this last verse:

“The key is belief. The one who comes to a faith-decision “will live, even after dying.” This is the physical resurrection. Death has no hold on the one who believes. Though it is “the last enemy” (1 Cor 15:26a), its destiny is “to be destroyed” (1 Cor 15:26b). **The one who lives and believes in Jesus “will never ever die.” This is the spiritual resurrection; eternal life is the believer’s destiny.** Jesus is life and controls life; the only way to participate in his life is via faith . [Osborne, G., & Philip W. Comfort. (2007). Cornerstone biblical commentary, Vol 13: John and 1, 2, and 3 John (170). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.]

Indeed, in addition to the certainty of the promises of Jesus in the scriptures, God also gives us **evidence** of our possession of this new life through the spiritual experiences in our lives **in this world**.

The Holy Spirit, which indwells every believer, is God’s down-payment to us. Our experience of the Holy Spirit—as He grows Christlikeness in our lives—gives us evidence that immortality and eternal life is ours:

*And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And **when you believed in Christ**, he identified you as his own by **giving you the Holy Spirit**, whom he promised long ago. **The Spirit is God’s guarantee** that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him. (Eph 1:13–14)*

*For while we are in this tent [the human body], we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, **so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.** Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is **God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.** (2 Co 5:1–5).*

***And God has given us his Spirit as proof** that we live in him and he in us.14 Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. 16 We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. (1 Jn 4:13–16).*

All believers have eternal life and have passed from death to life, but not all believers walk with God in this life, and so some believers do not experience the beauty and power of the New Life resident inside them—they can even forget that they have been forgiven

(2 Pet 1.9). To experience the qualitative and transforming Eternal Life now, requires walking with God and abiding in His love. It requires us to live in an active relationship with the Living God, and He grows His beauty and love in our hearts as we walk closely with Him.

And the Christian walk is still about knowing God personally and intimately!

The apostle Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1 that everything we need for a life that honors and enjoys God comes from knowing Him, and that by living according to that knowledge we can produce beauty and grace around us:

*His divine power has **granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him** who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, **they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** (2 Pe 1:3–8).*

Knowing God—His heart, His will, His values, His love—is critical to the enjoyment of God in this life and essential to producing fruit. Jesus described this once in terms of branches abiding in the vine (John 15).

Knowing God is communing with God—in prayer, reflecting on His works, interaction with His Scriptures, and in listening to others about the lessons God had taught them.

To illustrate how important this is, we should note that three of the apostle Paul’s prayers in scripture are for believers to **know God better!**

*For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while **making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.** I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.*(Eph 1:15–19).

*For this reason **I bow my knees before the Father,** 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory **he may grant you** to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,*

*17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:14–19).*

*And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.(Col 1:9–10).*

Knowing God—and the life that flows from Him—is what salvation in the New Testament is all about. It is not about religion, but about relationship. It is not about law, but about life. It is not about works, but about wonder.

We should remember at Christmas time—though we celebrate the Incarnation in this season—that our salvation was the work of the full Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We should remember and give thanks for the completeness of God’s work, in removing the barrier caused by our sin and thus opening up access to His life and heart.

We should thank Him because the work required to ensure our salvation and eternal life *with Him* was all done *by Him!*

If we review the basic facts of how God saved us, we can see the richness and roles of each Person in the Trinity.

- The Son chose to come to earth as a human
- The Father who loved Him from eternity to eternity sent Him, because of love for us humans
- The Holy Spirit miraculously created this unique Jesus inside the womb of Mary.
- The Son –now in human form and yet still also having His divine nature—depended upon the Holy Spirit to live his human life in perfect obedience and submission to the Father.
- During his life on earth, the Son promised that every person who believed His claims and trusted in His work as savior would be exempt from the Final Judgment and be given eternal life by the Father.
- Before His sacrifice on the Cross for us, Jesus promised that He and the Father would send a down-payment of eternal life to believers, in the person of the Holy Spirit.



- He also promised that this Holy Spirit would reveal more about God the Son and God the Father as part of the Spirit's ministry.
- Jesus then offered himself up through the Holy Spirit on the Cross as a substitute sacrifice for us law-breakers. He took the punishment that we deserve from the Father upon Himself, and suffered in our place.
- The Father accepted the Son's sacrifice, raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him to heaven.
- The Holy Spirit was then sent by the Father and the Son to live inside believers, and to begin growing, from within, the experience of Eternal Life—including internal joy, love, peace, and intimacy with God. At the Resurrection, this indwelling Holy Spirit will completely renew our human bodies into immortal bodies.
- This same Holy Spirit enables humans to share the message of God's offer of eternal life with other people—like you and I.
- His offer of eternal life is based upon His own works—not ours. Righteousness and Peace with God are a gift from him—not something we work for. The triune God did all the work—out of His love—and we can enjoy His gift freely **and be forever confident in His love:**

*But now God has shown us a way to **be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law**, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. 22 **We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ.** And this is **true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.** 23 **For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.** 24 **Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous.** He did this **through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.** 25 **For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin.** People are made right with God **when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life**, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, 26 for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and **he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.** 27 Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. 28 **So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.** 29 After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. 30 **There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.** (Romans 3:21–30).*



*Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. 4 But—“When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, 5 **he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.** He washed away our sins, **giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.** 6 He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. 7 Because of his grace **he declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.**” (Letter to Titus 3:3–7).*

As we enjoy our relationship with God—knowing His heart, His love, and His good-hearted will for us—we must realize that our reconciliation with Him was costly to Him. The manger in Bethlehem was easy—the Cross at Golgotha was not. Yet His love drove Him forward and His love beckons us to draw closer and closer to Him, in our daily lives on earth.

As those who know and are secure with God—through His reaching into our lives with the Gospel of Christ—we stand in the spotlight of His amazing grace:

*Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. 2 Because of our faith, **Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand** (Ro 5:1–2).*

May we walk with our precious God this season and boast about HIS goodness, His character, and His activity of kindness and nurturing in our lives--

*Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but **let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.**” (Je 9:23–24).*

Warmly,  
Glenn Miller, Dec 2010

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