

Sermons on John 17~ Sermon III By Samuel Pierce

Joh 17:3

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is here speaking out his heart to his divine Father immediately before his sufferings. He is going soon to be immersed in his own blood. He was soon to be overwhelmed in sorrows, and griefs, which none but himself could sustain. He is here speaking to his Father, in the hearing of his disciples, that they may in time to come repeat it, and thereby convey a blessing through it to others belonging to the election of grace. In reading and preaching on this most divine prayer, the connection of each and every part should be very closely attended unto. Our Lord had begun, as God-man Mediator, to address the Father. He could not pray but as God-man Mediator. As such he did pray. And as real prayer is the very index of the spiritual mind, it is so here, as it expresses the inward thoughts of the Lord Jesus himself, and that too in words, to the intent that by the recording it, all believers might look into the heart of Jesus, and see for themselves what is in it as it respects them. Our Lord had, in the former verses, signified the hour of his sufferings was come. That he was most freely willing to die the death due to sin. That he stood in need of succor. That it was the Father's part, agreeable to covenant acts, and transactions to glorify him, his Son. Which would be the case, as he should sustain his human nature, and carry him as the surety, through all his sorrows. Hereby, way would be made for the Son to glorify the Father, by his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. And at his resurrection and ascension into the highest heavens, then and there, it would be manifested that the Father had given him all power in heaven and in earth, that as God-man Mediator, he should exercise it over all things, over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him. Then our Lord says, in the words before us, *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* In which words we have the following particulars:

First, A declaration concerning eternal life. *And this is life eternal.*

Secondly, An account given of what eternal life consists in. *That they might know thee, the only true God.*

Thirdly, The knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ, is joined together, as the one cannot be without the other. *This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

May the Lord, the Spirit, so enable me to open these particulars, and give such an account of the knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, from the scriptures, and so truly, spiritually, and consistently with them, as may be satisfactory to each and every spiritual mind which may attend the opening of these soul-important subjects. The Lord grant this for his name and mercy's sake. Amen.

I am first to observe, here is in the words of my text, a declaration concerning eternal life. *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

Life is the perfection of being and existence. What it is we cannot say. We know what it is to live. That is, we know what it is to perform the actions of life. But life itself is mysterious and wholly in God. He is the fountain of it. "In him we live, and move, and have our being." In scripture, the actions of life are called life. It is applied to the blood, which, with the spirits contained in it, is the seat and support of life. Life is also spoken of in the scriptures, as it concerns a spiritual, supernatural, and heavenly life, whereby we live unto God, and enjoy peace with him, which also is the way to eternal life. See Ro 8:6; Col 3:3; Joh 14:6. The scripture also speaks of it under the subject of that eternal happiness, glory, and blessedness, which saints will enjoy in heaven. And the strengthening power of the Spirit of Christ, which supports believers under afflictions and sufferings, so that they are not overwhelmed and conquered by them, this is attributed to this life of Christ in them. Christ is spoken of, in the

word, as the fountain of natural, spiritual, and eternal life to his people. It is also applied to the doctrine of the everlasting gospel, which points out the way to eternal life. Joh 6:63. Christ's resurrection and ascension is spoken of as the life of his people. And his life is expressed, by the apostle, by living unto God. *For in that he died, he died unto sins once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.* Ro 6:10. Eternal life is the same with everlasting life, and it is the perfection of that being and existence which the elect have in their eternal, ever-living, and ever-lasting head, the God-man, Christ. As life natural is a mystery, so, much more is spiritual life; which is the same with eternal and everlasting life. It consists in knowing the Lord, in living in the Lord, in having communion with the Lord, and enjoying endless satiety in, and with him. It is wholly of grace; it is founded on an immutable union between God and the elect; it is bottomed on the union between the Son of God and the man Christ Jesus. He being God and man, is the medium of an immutable union between God and elect creatures. Who being chosen in him, and united unto him, are hereby raised up into such a state of fellowship with Father, Son, and Holy ghost, as is unspeakable, and in which most divine communion, all the blessings of life everlasting are enjoyed. This life is beyond the dues of creatureship; it is wholly of grace; the fruit of everlasting love; the very essence of all blessedness; it exceeds all known and enjoyed by Adam in Paradise before the fall; it is the birthright and privilege of the elect, in consequence of the union of their persons, souls, and bodies to the soul and body, to the whole person of the God-man; it is supernatural life; it is the very same life which Christ himself liveth, of the same nature and kind, though not to the same degree. We are favored at times with some views and discoveries of it, as the Holy Ghost is pleased to shine on our minds and into our hearts. It is a mystery which faith only can have the least perception of. We are wholly passive, and altogether under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, when we have any of the influences of it put forth in our souls, and the fruits and effects of it produced in our hearts, affections, lives, and conversations. It is always exercised in a supernatural way, on spiritual and supernatural subjects. Our Lord represents it, in the sixth chapter of this gospel, as the fruit of his indwelling in the souls of his people, and as the effect of their indwelling in him. He says, *He that believeth on me hath*

everlasting life. I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so, he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever, verses 47, 51, 54-58. This life is called everlasting, because it will never decay. We style it spirituality, or spiritual life, because it is produced in us, and communicated unto us from the Holy Spirit. This life itself is, indeed, *Christ living in us.* And our Lord calls it *eternal life*, because it consists in living in the actual favor of God for ever. As we contrast it with eternal death, it most easily appears to be the consummation of all blessedness, as the other is of all misery. Our Lord mentions it in this prayer, to his Father, and makes here a declaration of it. He had just before said, that he as God-man Mediator, was constituted and appointed to give eternal life to as many as he had given him. And here he declares what it consists in. *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

As the first particular in the words is a declaration concerning *eternal life*, so the persons to whom it is given are carefully expressed; for as these words are closely connected with the former, the given ones—the many which the Father had from everlasting given to the Son, are those, they are the persons on whom, and to whom this eternal life is to be bestowed. *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* It is they only whom thou, Father, hast loved before all time, whom thou hast chosen and set apart in thy decree, to be partakers of all my communicable titles, honors, grace, salvation, benefits, and blessings, this most transcendent favor belongs unto, and is to be bestowed on. This shows how deeply engraven the elect were on Christ's heart. That whilst he prayed for himself, he did not forget them. It proves he might as soon forget himself as them. That they are never out

of his thoughts. No, not one single moment. That in his highest intercourse with his Father, and with the highest glory in heaven in immediate view, yet his heart burns with love to his beloved ones, and that too, because they are the beloved of God. May the Holy Ghost give us a glimpse of this, for the glory of his name. Amen.

I proceed, secondly, to give an account of what eternal life consists in. *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God.*

Our Lord here sets before us what eternal life consists in. And he only could. He uttered these words prayer-wise, that we might receive instruction from them. If he will be pleased, as he has the key of *David*, and openeth, and will continue to open the scriptures to his beloved ones, and he also openeth their understandings to receive the same, and to understand and retain it to their spiritual profit. If he will be pleased to be open to us, the passage before us, we shall have to bless him to all eternity. It is truly blessed to have a spiritual understanding given us. It is the fruit and effect of the new birth. Our Lord saith, *verily, verily, I say into thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* The new birth is a spiritual faculty, created in the mind by the Holy Spirit. He is the author of it. The soul is the seat of it. And by it the person, as enlightened by the Holy Spirit, is enabled to take in the knowledge of God, and his son Jesus Christ, and salvation by him, so as to have real communion with God, and Christ, through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. All true faith in God, must be the fruit of knowing God. We can have no knowledge of God, by any inward ideas of our own. We cannot know God without the revelation which he hath been pleased to give of himself, in the word of his grace. That is the sole medium by which we can know the Lord. In it he hath revealed his nature as incomprehensible, self-existent, all-sufficient, a fountain of essential life, perfections and blessedness, to which nothing can be added, from whence nothing can be detracted. In which glorious and incommunicable Godhead exist coequally, and coessentially, and coeternally in the unity of the same nature, life, perfections and blessedness, the personalities, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the one God, whose name alone is Jehovah, the fountain of

being, life, and existence to all things visible and invisible. By this revelation we are admitted to that knowledge of the Godhead, and of the persons in the Godhead, as lays a true foundation for our faith, and hope, and love, to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as our creators, in which acts all true worship and reverence is offered unto them.

The doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity is revealed in the very account given in the first chapter of Genesis, which relates how all things were created by them, in the space of six days. The Bible begins thus, *In the beginning God created the heaven, and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.* Here is God, and the Spirit of God, and God said, all expressed. An explanation is given of this, in these words, *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.* Ps 33:6. At the twenty-sixth verse of the first chapter of Genesis, we have God saying, *Let us make man.* Which must prove a plurality of persons in Godhead. We have the same *us* after the fall. *The Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us.* Ge 3:22. We have it again when the building of the tower of *Babel* was prevented. *Let us go down, and there confound their language, etc.* Ge 11:7. We this *us* again in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us.* The Holy Ghost is the speaker, according to *Paul*, who said to the Jews, *well spake the Holy Ghost by Esias the prophet unto our fathers, etc.* Ac 28:25. And we have the same *us* spoken by Christ in this chapter, verse 21. *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.* So that as the word *us*, in the aforementioned places, are proofs, of a trinity of persons in the unity of the one incomprehensible essence, so this truth concerning the God-head, and the personalities in the one incomprehensible Jehovah, is most clearly revealed and set before us in the written word. And the true knowledge of this, must be one essential part and branch of divine truth, which eternal life consists in.

Not that the simple acknowledgement of the sacred personalities in the Divine Essence, is life eternal. For though this doctrine as of divine revelation is most awfully rejected, yet nature, as we style it, by which I mean, creation and creatures, bare their testimony to the truth hereof, willingly or unwillingly, yet so it is, the agents in nature, the heavens in its three conditions, fire, light, and air, man, whose whole, consists in spirit, soul, and body—and the very testimonies contained in heathen writers, of the acknowledgment of three hypostasis who were one in deity, give evidence of this fundamental truth, and which is most plainly and clearly expressed in the written word, yet it is not the natural knowledge and acknowledgment of this truth, which is eternal life. None can acknowledge the true God without an acknowledgment of the persons in God. And there may be an acknowledgment of the persons, nature, and perfections of God, and yet no saving knowledge of him. When on this most sublime subject, some conceive, they must know and understand the nature of the divine existence, and the modus of the personal existence of the sacred three in deity. Not so, no, this is impossible, we cannot comprehend God, we shall never know any more of the existence of the divine persons, than by revelation. It becomes us to rest and be well pleased with the revelation given. As a revelation it is clear, and plain. It becomes us to receive it, because the Lord has given it. If we step, one step beyond it, we become reasoners, not believers. Therefore let us be content with God's own word, and never try in any one single instance to go from it. As there is a revelation given concerning the Godhead, and personalities in it, who are essential to Godhead, so there is a revelation given concerning the will, acts, and transactions of the Divine Persons, before all time. How Father, Son and Spirit, willed to go forth in love towards an innumerable company of persons, styled the elect.

It is revealed how the second Person in the essence was set up to be God-man. How the elect were chosen in him, as their head. How they were beloved and blessed in him with all spiritual blessings. How they were accepted in him. Also, how under the views of their creation-state, and fall from it in *Adam* their nature-head, a council and covenant was held, and obtained between the three in Jehovah, how they should be raised up

from all the ruins of the fall by their head, and husband, the Lord Jesus Christ. This revelation contains a most glorious discovery of the grace, and good-will of the holy ones, towards the elect church and bride of Christ. And together with this revelation, an account is given in the sacred page, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. That he so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son. That he made him sin, by laying on him the iniquities of all his people. And that, as he made him sin for us, so he hath made us the righteousness of God in him. Now when our Lord here says, *and this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent*, it must necessarily follow, that the knowledge which our Lord is here speaking of, is not, does not consist in abstract thoughts, and speculations on the Godhead, and personalities in it, but in such a knowledge of God, as enables us to believe in him, as our everlasting all. Yet you will say to me, whilst what you have delivered already we cannot deny, yet all this is but negative. It is not positive. We want to know what the true knowledge of God, and Jesus Christ is. Let us have that subject fairly stated. We call nothing into question you have delivered, yet most certainly it is nothing more than a preliminary. Our Lord says, *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent*. Come you therefore to the text, and open it unto us. Beloved, so I will, the Lord being my helper. Our Lord says, *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent*. The knowledge of God here spoken of, must include in it, such a knowledge of the Holy Trinity as is revealed in the blessed gospel. The divine persons in their essential and distinctive relation to each other, and to us, must be so far known as to be believed, and acknowledged by us. The truth of their existence, (not the knowledge of their subsisting in the infinite essence,) is most essential to the being, and to the well-being of our faith. As also how they are related unto us, and have acted for us in the everlasting covenant, in and by which they are, and have revealed themselves to be the Lord our God. To know the Father, to be our Father in Christ Jesus, that he hath loved us with an everlasting love, is life eternal. To know the Son, as one with the Father, of the same essence with the Father, and that he was set up to be

God-man, from everlasting, this is life eternal. To know the Holy Spirit, to be personally distinct from the Father and the Son, yet of the same essence, glory, perfection and blessedness with the Father, and the Son, is life eternal. Because this knowledge cometh from God, it leads us to worship each of the divine persons, and makes way for us, to apprehend them, as they stand related to us, as they are united to us, as they are interested in us, and what we have to expect from them. Jehovah, Father, Son and Spirit, is the true God. And our Lord says to the Father, *this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God*. In so saying, he does not exclude himself, and Spirit, from being the true God. No, but as we in acknowledging one of the Persons in the Trinity acknowledge all, and as we by denying one, we deny all, so our Lord here, whilst his address is to the Father, yet by acknowledging him Father, he consequently includes the Son and Spirit, just as when the apostle says, *One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*, Eph 4:6, does not hereby exclude the Son and Spirit. No, our apostle tells us, *Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father*. 1st Jo 2:23. Plainly signifying, it cannot be, if one of the persons of the Trinity are dropped and denied, but the rest must. It is eternal life to know the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in their grace and oeconomical officers towards the elect. This knowledge is the gift of God unto them. It is bestowed upon them as the fruit of everlasting love. It is one of the blessings of the everlasting covenant. It is promised to the church. *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant*. Ps 25:14. It is the Lord's promise to his church, *all thy children shall be taught of the Lord*. Isa 54:13. It is one of the greatest promises which the Lord God hath given his people, *I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord*. And the blessedness of it is so great, that the Lord speaks thus in the prophecy of *Jeremiah*, *Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord*, chapter 9:23, 24. It is from the word, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we receive the knowledge

of the true God, Father, Son, and Spirit, into our minds, it is from the word and Spirit we receive the true knowledge of God, and so know the Lord, as to find in communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, life everlasting.

The renewed understanding is raised up, and enlightened with supernatural life, so that we know of the Lord is by instinctive knowledge, which the Holy Ghost is most graciously pleased to give. Hence believers are said to be called out of darkness into marvellous light. And Paul says, *Ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.* And he, speaking of himself, and others who had received the true knowledge of God in Christ, says, *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.* 2nd Co 4:6. As the knowledge of Father, Son, and Spirit, is reflected upon the renewed mind, in the person of Jesus Christ, so it is received into the heart. So the apostle *John* says, *We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.* 1st Jo 5:20. Which words are explanatory of our Lord's before us. He says, *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* And *John* says, Jesus Christ is the true God, and eternal life is in him. Thus to sum up this part of this vast and important subject, the knowledge of the only true God, in which eternal life consists, is the knowledge of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as they have been pleased to reveal and make known their personalities in the God-man Christ Jesus. It is in him all their manifestative glory is displayed. And this brings me thirdly to observe, the knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ is joined together, as the one cannot be without the other. *This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

As our Lord thus expresses himself, it follows that all the true knowledge of God, is in knowing him in the Mediator. So that all abstracted thoughts of God, out of Christ, must be entirely laid aside. The incarnation of the

Son of God is a glorious proof and evidence of the Trinity of persons in God. To know God in Christ, is eternal life. To know the Father's everlasting love to the persons of the elect in his beloved Son, is the fountain and spring of eternal life in our souls. To know the person of the glorious Immanuel, who is both God and man, and the man in God, is life eternal. He being the true God, and eternal life. As the Holy Ghost is pleased to open to our spiritual apprehensions the mysteries of Christ's personal, mediatorial, and relative glories, and makes him known to us, we have a real enjoyment of eternal life. By this knowledge as the medium, the Holy Ghost is pleased to give us the knowledge of the only true God, in all his persons, and perfections, so as for believers to find in it, a sufficiency to feed and feast their minds to all eternity. As our Lord here joins the knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ as sent together, we learn it to be of the utmost consequence to know his person as Mediator, and his mediation as appointed by the Father. Otherwise he had not mentioned it here. And as all the love, and thoughts, purposes, will, and designs of God towards his people, were in Christ, God-man, so they are all revealed and set before us in the sacred record, which God hath given of his Son. And as the Holy Ghost is pleased, according to his covenant office, to take of these and show the same unto us, we are led into an increasing knowledge of God the Father in the person of Christ the Mediator. So also as the Holy Ghost is pleased to give us exalted views and perceptions of the free sovereign love of God the Father, to our persons in Christ Jesus, we hereby gain an increasing knowledge of the personality of Jehovah the Father, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our God and Father in him. It is the true knowledge of Christ in his mediatorial person, and work, and office, which fixes our hearts on him. And the Holy Ghost having set forth the full glories of Christ in the gospel, and the perfection of his work therein, with his relation to his church, and people, and the fulness of his grace, which he is to communicate to his beloved ones, as he exercises his offices on their behalf, by this they are led to increase in the knowledge of the person of Jesus, and find and enjoy everlasting life in believing on him. In, and through the teachings of the blessed Spirit, saints are led to know that God hath given to them *eternal life, and this life is in his Son*. And that *he that*

hath the Son, hath life, and he that hath not the Son, hath not life. 1Jo 5:11-12. So that the true knowledge of the Son of God is life eternal. *No man can call Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost.* That is, none can make a right, true, and spiritual confession of Christ, without the Spirit. It must be by the Spirit, when they rightly confess his Person, Godhead, and Salvation. So saith the apostle, *whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God.* 1st Jo 4:15. And as hereby Christ and his love is enjoyed in the heart, so hereby a real evidence is given of interest in eternal life. The apostle says, *This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.* This eternal life here spoken of is Christ himself. Thus the Holy Ghost is pleased to lead such as he hath created anew in Christ Jesus, into a saving knowledge of the Father's love, and Son's salvation, and hereby he makes known to such, his own personality as distinct from the Father, and the Son. Hereby he gives them undeniable evidence in their own spiritual understandings, hearts, and consciences, *that there are three that bare record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.* As this is eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, so according to our Lord's words, we know the Father in the Son, the Son as sent by the Father, and this from the Spirit. Who being not here expressed, was before this declared in the sermon which preceded this prayer, that he would come on the apostles, and lead them into all truth. *Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.* Joh 16:13-14. Thus we have the whole Trinity in Christ, and in the true knowledge of Christ, we have the true knowledge of the Trinity. And in the knowledge of the Three in Jehovah, in their everlasting love, and covenant engagements, we have eternal life. And our eternal life, the life which saints live on earth, and which saints live in heaven, is kept up, fed and maintained, by the real knowledge they have, of the eternal Three. In this consists the essence of all perfection and blessedness in the heavenly state. Even in a personal knowledge of all the persons in God, in the God-man, Christ Jesus, and in personal and uninterrupted communion with them forever, and ever.

Beloved in the Lord study the truth of this. Your utmost attainment on earth, lies in the knowledge of Christ. If you know him, you will know the Father in him. If you grow into Christ, you will also grow into an increasing knowledge of the Father's everlasting love to you in his dear Son. All which will be owing to the teaching of the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in you. Consider what hath been said, and the Lord give you understanding in all things. Amen.