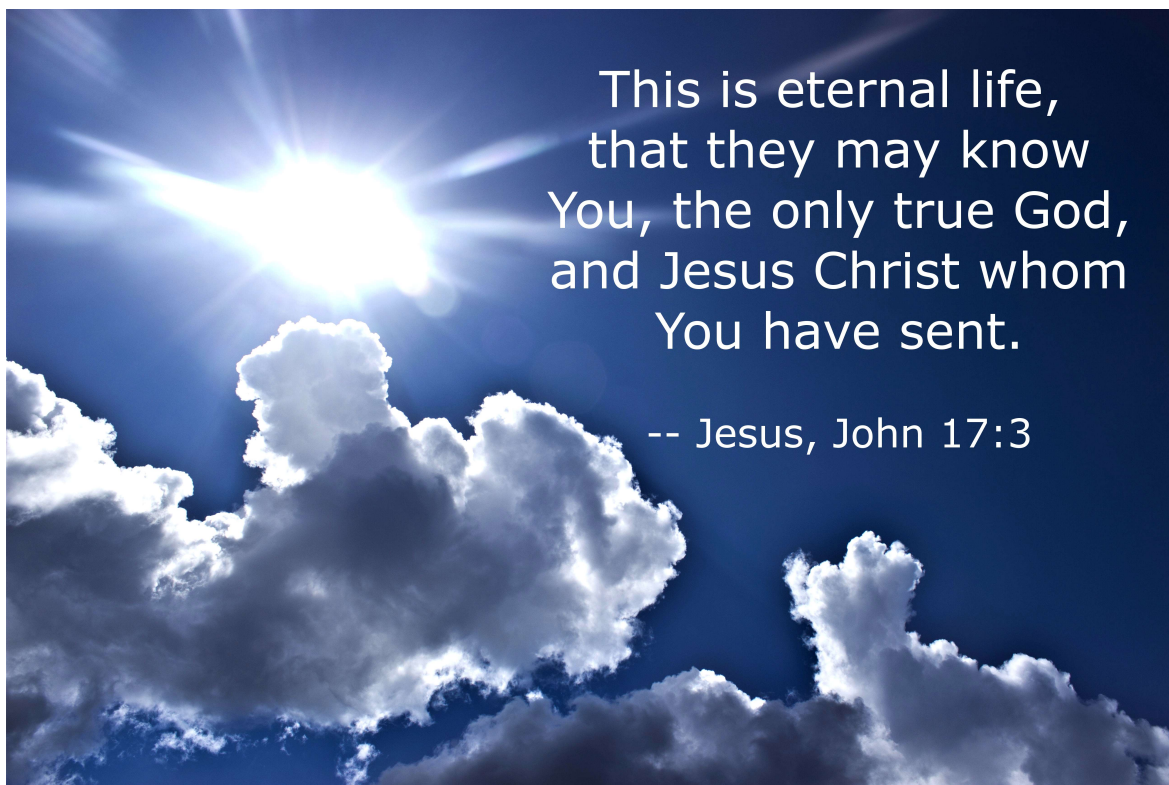


“What is Eternal Life?”

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Sun and Clouds - Pixabay Stock Photo - with John 17:3 Added

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3)

"Life eternal, then, is not mere conscious and unending existence, but a life of acquaintance with God in Christ." (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, Ref. 1)

This lesson describes the biblical definition of eternal life. This lesson primarily uses the Scriptures about eternal life in the Gospel of John. In the next lesson in the series, we will focus on who receives eternal life and how to receive eternal life.

Consider. Think for a moment. How would you define eternal life? How would you explain eternal life to an inquisitive unbeliever, or to a new Christian? For believers in Christ, eternal life certainly includes living with God after our physical death (John 11:25-26). However, the Bible has much more to say about the characteristics of eternal life.

Eternal life is a free gift of God to believers in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). In this verse, the Greek word for *gift* is *charisma*. *Charisma* means a *gift of grace, an undeserved favor* (Ref. 2). Thus, eternal life is not something we deserve or earn. Eternal life is an undeserved gift of God's grace and favor. "In spite of your sanctification as Christians, still you will not have earned eternal life; it is the gift of God's grace" (Ref. 3).

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28).

For the believer, eternal life begins in the present, the here and now. Jesus described eternal life in the present tense. Thus, eternal life is not just in the future, but is a present possession of the believer which continues into the future.

John 3:36 - "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John 5:24 - "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

John 6:47 - "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life."

In John 5:24, note the importance of hearing Jesus' words. Jesus said, "He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life."

For believers in Christ, eternal life continues with God after our physical death. Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

To the thief on the cross who asked Jesus to remember him, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:42-43).

Jesus said to his disciples, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

Jesus defined eternal life as knowing God experientially. "Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent'" (John 17:1-3).

In John 17:3, the Greek word for *know* is *ginóskó*. *Ginóskó* means *to know*, especially through *personal experience (first-hand acquaintance)* (HELPS Word-studies, Ref. 4). Knowing God *experientially* requires knowing Jesus who is the truth (John 14:6), as well as knowing and living the Word of God on a daily and life-long basis. "This life eternal, then, is not mere conscious and unending existence, but a life of acquaintance with God in Christ" (Ref. 1).

Eternal life is a quality of life, not just the duration of life. The Greek word for *eternal* is *aiónios*, which means *perpetual, unending, age-long* (Strong's Concordance, Ref. 5). *Aiónios* includes the *character of that which lasts for an age, as contrasted with that which is brief and fleeting* (Ref. 5). "*Aiónios* does not focus on the future *per se*, but rather on the *quality* of the *age* it relates to. Thus, believers live in eternal life right now, experiencing this *quality of God's life* now as a *present possession*" (Helps Word-studies, Ref. 5).

Summary. Eternal life is a free gift of God to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Eternal life begins when we put our faith in Jesus. As believers in Christ, eternal life continues with God after our physical death. Eternal life is the quality of life that results when we know Jesus Christ by experience, on a first-hand basis.

Apply. Think for a moment. In your own words, how would you describe eternal life? Write down your description of eternal life in a few sentences. What Scripture verse would be your key reference?

References

1. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/jfb/john/17.htm>
2. <https://biblehub.com/greek/5486.htm>
3. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ellicott/romans/6.htm>
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