

John 17:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

Jesus defines eternal life: 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' (haute de estin he aionios zoe hina ginoskosin se ton monon alethinon theon kai hon apesteilas Iesoun Christon). Eternal life (zoe aionios) is not merely endless existence but knowing (ginoskosin) God. The verb ginosko indicates experiential, intimate knowledge, not mere intellectual awareness. The description 'the only true God' (ton monon alethinon theon) affirms monotheism - one genuine God exists. Critically, Jesus includes knowing Himself: 'and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.' This places Jesus alongside the Father as object of saving knowledge - a staggering claim to deity. Eternal life consists in relationship with Father and Son. This definition transforms soteriology - salvation is not escaping hell but knowing God through Christ.

Historical Context

This comes from Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, offered before His arrest. The prayer reveals Jesus' intimate communion with the Father and His understanding of His mission. In Jewish thought, knowing God meant covenant relationship, not abstract philosophy. Prophets promised a day when 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD' (Isaiah 11:9). Jesus claims to mediate this knowledge - no one knows the Father except through the Son (Matthew 11:27). Early church understood that Christianity's distinctiveness lay in knowing God personally through Christ. Gnostic heresies claimed secret knowledge (gnosis) brought salvation; orthodox

Christianity countered that knowing God through Christ was openly available through faith. Aquinas distinguished natural knowledge of God (through reason) from supernatural knowledge (through revelation). Reformation emphasized that knowing God required Spirit-illumination. Modern evangelicalism sometimes reduces salvation to transactional forgiveness; this verse emphasizes relational knowledge.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does defining eternal life as knowing God transform our understanding of salvation from legal transaction to personal relationship?
2. Why does Jesus include knowing Himself alongside knowing the Father - what does this teach about His identity?

Interlinear Text

αὕτη δέ ἐστιν ἡ αἰώνιος ζωή ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σὲ
this And is G3588 eternal G166 life G2222 that G2443 they might know G1097 thee G4571

τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν καὶ ὅν ἀπέστειλας Ἰησοῦν
G3588 the only G228 God G2316 and G2532 whom G3739 thou hast sent G649 Jesus G2424

Χριστόν

Christ
G5547

Additional Cross-References

1 John 5:20 (Eternal Life): And 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.

John 17:25 (Parallel theme): O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

John 3:17 (References God): For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Hosea 6:3 (Parallel theme): Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

1 John 4:6 (Truth): We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

1 Chronicles 28:9 (References God): And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

John 17:23 (Parallel theme): I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Isaiah 61:1 (References God): The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

John 17:21 (Parallel theme): That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

John 3:34 (References God): For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.

