

## **ETERNAL LIFE A GRACE AND A GIFT**

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"As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." John 17:2,3

The high priest under the law was a type and figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great high priest over the house of God, and as such he had two main offices to perform: first, to offer sacrifice; secondly, to make intercession for the people. These two acts were not indeed confined to the high priest, for they were necessarily connected with the priestly office, and therefore existed before the law was given from Mount Sinai. We see this very clearly in the case of Job, who lived before the institution of the Levitical priesthood, in that patriarchal period when each man was a priest in his own family. In the opening chapter of the book of Job, we find him offering for his children burnt offerings "according to the number of them all;" for he said, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." (Job 1:5) Here we see the patriarchal priest in the act of offering sacrifice. But in the closing chapter we see him performing the second act of the priestly office—intercession, for the Lord gave an express command that Job should intercede for his friends by praying for them:—"Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept." (Job 42:8) Thus daily in the service of the tabernacle not only was a lamb offered morning and evening by the ordinary priests, but incense was also burnt by them morning and evening in the

holy place, as we see from the instance of Zacharias; (Luke 1:8,9) for as the offering of the lamb was the perpetual daily sacrifice, so the burning of incense was the daily standing intercession. But though both these acts were necessary parts of the priestly office, yet they were peculiarly so those of the high priest, who differed from his brethren not merely in superiority of rank and dignity, but by offering sacrifice and intercession on a day, the great day of atonement, and in a manner, by taking the blood with the incense into the most holy place, which they were not suffered to do. Now Jesus, as the great and glorious antitype, being made of God a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec, fulfilled both these two offices of the high priest. The first and main branch of the priestly office he executed here below, when upon the cross at Calvary he offered the sacrifice of his spotless humanity—the sacred blood of his pure body and the meritorious suffering of his holy soul. Combining in himself all types, he was at once the offerer and the offering, the sacrificer and the sacrifice, the high priest and the slaughtered lamb, as we read: "For such a high priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's; for this he did once, when he offered up himself;" (Heb. 7:26,27) and again, "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Heb. 9:26) This sacrifice of himself had in the sight of God an infinite efficacy to put away sin, for it was the blood of the Son of God, and had therefore in it and on it all the value and validity of Deity. This sacrifice he offered "once for all," and therefore never to be repeated here upon earth, when he suffered, bled, and died on the cross. The other act of the priestly office, to make intercession for the people, he now executes in heaven in the very presence of God. As the apostle

speaks—"But this man, because he continueth ever," that is, ever at the right hand of God, "hath an unchangeable priesthood;" or rather as we read in the margin, one "which passeth not from one to another," as was the case of the Levitical high priests, "who were not suffered to continue by reason of death;" being poor dying men out of whose hands the office was ever dropping. "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:24,25) Again, as we read in that noble challenge of the apostle, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom. 8:34)

These two offices of the high priest were intimately connected; in fact, the latter was but a branch, a kind of continuation, of the former. Two striking instances will I think clearly show you the connection of these two parts of the priestly office. When the high priest went into the tabernacle on the great day of atonement, he took live coals from off the brazen altar, wherewith he filled a censer; and as he went into the most holy place with the blood of the bullock he sprinkled upon the burning coals incense beaten small, the fragrance of which filled as with a cloud of smoke the holy of holies where the ark of the covenant was. Two acts of the Lord Jesus Christ as our high priest were typified thereby. The burning coals taken from the brazen altar typified the offering which he made for sin, for on the brazen altar all the sacrifices were burnt; and the incense beaten small and lighted by the burning coals, and then taken within the veil into the most holy place, typified his intercession now in the presence of God, it deriving its chief fragrance from the sacrifice of himself. The other instance is that of Aaron making an atonement for the people by putting incense on a censer filled with coals from off the altar. (Num. 16:45,47)

Then we see the same connection between the coals from off the altar and the incense rising up and propitiating the wrath of God. Strictly speaking, then, the second branch of the priestly office of our most blessed Lord commenced when he ascended up on high and entered within the veil there to carry the efficacy of his blood into the presence of God for us, and fill heaven with the incense of his all-prevailing intercession. But Jesus anticipated, so to speak, that part of the priestly office in the prayer before us. That, viewing the end from the beginning, he did sometimes anticipate the end of his own work is plain from an expression in this very prayer, where he says—"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17:4) The work was not then really finished, for the sacrifice had not then been offered, as when he spoke with expiring lips—"It is finished;" yet in anticipation he speaks of it as already finished, for it was so in his mind's eye, and he was fast nearing the end and object of his sojourn here below. So in anticipation of the second branch of the priestly office which was really to be carried on in heaven, even whilst upon earth he offered as an interceding high priest, for his disciples and all his future saints the prayer recorded in that holy, that sublime, that touching chapter, John 17. Not that the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father now offers vocal prayer as he did when upon earth. But as in the case of the high priest on the day of atonement, the incense filled the house; so, rising up from the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus upon Calvary's tree, the incense of his mediation, without vocal intercessory prayer, fills the courts of heaven, and thus he ever liveth to make intercession for us.

Having just dropped these preliminary remarks, I shall now, with God's blessing, open up my text; and in so doing, I shall, as the Lord enable, speak chiefly upon three points:—

**I.** First, the power which God has given Jesus over all flesh.

**II.** Secondly, the object wherefore God has given him this power; that he might give eternal life to as many as God has given him.

**III.** Thirdly, the nature of the eternal life which he gives to those whom God has given him: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

**I.** When Jesus rose from the dead, ascended on high, and took his seat on the right hand of the Father, all power was given to him in heaven and on earth as a reward of his obedience, and as the inheritance promised him before the foundation of the world—"Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." (Ps. 2:8) He therefore said to his disciples before the ascension—"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." God, so to speak put the reins of government into his hand, made him his vicegerent, constituted him supreme Lord of all things, and gave him power over all persons, circumstances, and events in heaven and earth, so that nothing should be done without his controlling direction, or as regulated by his sovereign will. Now when we can see this by the eye of faith, it carries our minds up into the very courts of heaven to view our nature there united to the person of the Son of God. We thus behold the honor put upon humanity, the glory wherewith flesh and blood is invested in the person of the Son of God; for he always lay in the bosom of the Father as his eternal Son. But viewing him as God-Man, Immanuel God with us, as having united to his glorious person as the Son of God a nature like our own, actual flesh and blood, though glorified beyond all conception, brighter than the rays of a million suns, and

filling heaven with unspeakable glory; though it be all this, still we see that it is human nature in conjunction with the person of the Son of God, on which the Father has conferred such dignity and glory. We see, then, his beauty and blessedness not simply as the Son of God, such as he was in the courts of heaven before his incarnation, but as the very same Jesus whose feet toiled in this vale of tears; the very same whose lips spake the blessed words of our text; the very same who groaned in Gethsemane's gloomy garden, and sweat great drops of blood from his overcharged brow; the very same whom the apostles saw rise up in a cloud when he was received out of their sight; the same sympathizing, merciful, and faithful high priest who lives and rules and reigns at God's right hand, and has had power given him "over all flesh" in his character of God-Man.

**1.** In looking at the words "all flesh," we may view them thus: first, as comprehending men generally, the whole human race, irrespective of their state before God as sinners or saints. Power is given to him over all flesh; therefore, over the ungodly as well as the godly; over kings, queens, emperors, and princes, as well as men of all sorts, ranks, and conditions. Well nigh every day brings us tidings of fearful events now taking place in foreign lands, and of fields being watered by human blood. But if power is given to Jesus over all flesh, not a man in either of the hostile armies can raise a musket, wield a sword, or draw a trigger except by the permission or the providence of the Son of God. We may well, then, lie passive in his hand, and bow down in quiet submission before him, as believing that all these events are under his control and working out his own counsels for the church's good and his own glory.

**2.** But if power is given to Jesus over all flesh, we may a little extend the term to include all the thoughts of the flesh,

however numerous; all the counsels of the flesh, however deep or subtle; all the works of the flesh, however multiplied or various. There is not a thought in any man's heart, nor a word in any man's lips, nor a secret counsel in any man's mind, nor an action performed by any man's hands, over which Jesus has not a supreme controlling power. Were it not so, the world could not be habitable. Did he not restrain by his providence the crooked wills of men, did he not put a hook in their jaw, men like wild beasts, would tear each other to pieces. Earth would be an Aceldama, a field of violence. But the Lord reigneth, and though the floods lift up their voices, yet the Lord on high is mightier than the voice of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea. (Ps. 93:3,4) Could we, then, by the eye of faith view how all events and circumstances are under the guidance of infinite wisdom and almighty power, and that the Son of God holds in his hands the reins of government, we should look around upon human events as we might stand upon a lofty hill and gaze upon the landscape around us—as free from harassing doubt and fear as to the ultimate issue of present events as at seeing sheep and cattle moving in the fields, or a railway train rushing along in the distant prospect. It is because we do not carry in our bosom a prevailing faith that Christ has power over all flesh, that we are so tossed up and down by external circumstances. Thinking that the Lord cannot or will not manage our affairs, or the affairs of others in which we are interested, our mind is racked by a thousand apprehensions and a thousand anxious fears as to what the coming morrow may bring forth. But Jesus has "power over all flesh." And so over the flesh of all the saints of God as of all the enemies of God; over the workings of our rebellious flesh, over the desires of our covetous flesh, over the conceits of our proud flesh, and over the lusts of our sinful flesh. He has power over them all, for he has power over all flesh. Then how good it would be if the saint of God, looking

up with a believing eye to the Son of God as having power over all flesh, would lay before him all that he suffers in and from the flesh, would bring before him all his trials as still in the flesh, spread before him all the accusations of law and conscience, tell him all his troubles as bound down by a body of sin and death, pour out before him all his complaints, and beg of him to take all that concerneth him into his own hands, and guide and direct it according to the council of his own will. If we, for instance, should have committed any of our worldly affairs into the hands of a person, from his integrity and ability, fully able to manage them, need we be always interfering with him? You may have some very difficult matter in business, or some very perplexing point in law, where you need the ablest advice, and not knowing yourself how to act for the best, you consult a friend, faithful and wise, or put the whole case before the best counsel that can be obtained. Having put the matter into his hands, why cannot you leave it there, without further doubt or fear? By putting it in his hands, you have to a certain extent relieved your own: you have given it into his charge, because you believe he can manage the matter better than you, or better than anyone else. Now stay quietly at home and let your friend or your lawyer act: he has taken the matter in hand, let him carry it out, if you believe that he has skill and power to do so, and if you can fully rest in his integrity and faithfulness. So it should be with a believer and his Lord. When once he has committed his body and soul, family, property, and all matters temporal and spiritual, for life and death, for time and eternity, into the hands of him who is able to manage them all with the greatest wisdom, power, and faithfulness, he should then quietly and believingly leave the Lord to work. Does not he himself say, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass?" (Ps. 37:5) This was Paul's blessed confidence: "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am



not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." (2 Tim. 1:12) After, then, you have once unfeignedly and unreservedly, in the actings of a living faith, committed yourself and all that concerns you into the hands of your heavenly Friend, then to be ever tossed up and down upon a sea of uncertainty, wondering how the matter will end, how disparaging is all this to the wisdom, the love, and the power of him whom God has set at his own right hand as the supreme Ruler of all persons and the sovereign Disposer of all circumstances.

**II.** But, to pass on to our second point, the Lord here expressly tells us why power was given to him over all flesh: that he "should give eternal life to as many as God had given him:" not then to save all flesh, nor to sanctify all flesh, nor to bring all who were at that time, or should be hereafter, clothed with flesh, into the enjoyment of heavenly bliss. No such words as these, or any inference to be drawn from them, ever escaped the Lord's lips. Why then should we thrust into the Lord's mouth words he never uttered? Why place in the Book of God thoughts and plans, doctrines and views, that the Holy Ghost never revealed, and which have no place or part, room or seat, in the bosom of Jehovah? It seems to me, that apart from the light of divine teaching and the work of God upon the soul in conviction and consolation, a man who can merely read, who has his eyes in his head, and possesses sufficient intellect to understand what words put together mean, could not read a sentence like this and not believe that a people was given to Jesus Christ, and that he gives eternal life unto them. We have no mysterious language here to require a skilled interpreter to explain its meaning, no dark parables or intricate expressions, demanding the aid of schools of learning and professors of divinity to unravel their hidden signification. All is so plain

that "he who runs may read." Language itself could not be framed to express with greater perspicuity or greater simplicity the solemn fact that there is a people whom God has given to Jesus, and that to them Jesus gives eternal life.

**1.** But in those two simple declarations, how much is wrapped up! Take the first: that there is a people that God had given to Christ. Surely, God acted as a Sovereign in giving that people to his dear Son. The gift has no control over the will of the giver. Be it much or be it little, of great or inconsiderable value, the present passes from the hand of the giver to that of the receiver, without the gift itself having any voice or authority in the transfer. Apply this to the gift of a peculiar people to Christ by the Father before all worlds. Were you there on that solemn occasion? Was any human being present in those mysterious counsels? Did angels themselves intrude into the presence of the holy Trinity, to suggest persons and whisper their desire that certain friends might have an interest in those eternal decrees, and that their names might be written down in the book of life? Surely, in those eternal counsels, in those solemn covenant transactions between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the eternal Three-in-one perfectly knew their own mind and acted in the fullest union with each other; for in the glorious Trinity there is no division of sentiment, no disunion of will. As they are One in essence, power, and glory, so are they One in mind, will, and counsel. Thus in those solemn transactions, a people was given into the hands of the Son of God, a people that no man can number, a people exceeding in multitude the stars in the midnight sky or the sands upon the sea-shore, a people of every tongue, and land, and nation, and age, and clime. Why God chose this particular individual and why he did not choose that, are matters into which we cannot penetrate; they are deep mysteries which exceed a finite intellect: our wisdom in the contemplation of

such inscrutable mysteries is to be mute, for "secret things belong unto God." We believe them as we believe other matters of divine revelation, because God has revealed them. This people, then, of whom the Lord here speaks, were given him that they might be members of his mystical body; the bride and spouse of the Lamb; the inheritance of the Son of God, in which he should take eternal delight. He received them from the Father's hand with the same love with which they were given, for he and the Father are one; so that he could say to him in all the meekness of filial love, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me;" and all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them." (John 17:6,10) Nor did he love them less, nor did he love them more, than the Father loved them; but he had a peculiar joy and supreme delight in them as the special jewels of his mediatorial crown, and the promised reward of the travail of his soul.

Now the question for you and me to ask ourselves is, "Do I, do you, belong to this happy number?" If there be a people given to Jesus—and how can we doubt that solemn fact when it was so expressly declared by the lips of him who cannot lie?—May I not well ask myself, "Have I any evidence in my bosom that I belong to that people?" I was not present in those eternal counsels; I have never mounted up to heaven to read my name in the book of life, and no angel has ever brought it down and opened the scroll before my wondering, gladdened eyes. How, then, am I to know whether I be one of that favored number which the Father gave to the Son? As I cannot know it by any external revelation, it must be by some internal testimony or by some evidence of God's own communicating on which I can rely in life and death, for it will not do to venture into eternity without some knowledge whither my soul is going. The main evidence of belonging to this people, and which enfolds in its bosom every other, is

the present possession of spiritual life, what the Lord calls in our text "eternal life;" for though born in time it lives to all eternity. "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Let us pause over these words, for they are full of truth and blessedness. Eternal life is the gift of Jesus, and is given by him to as many as God gave unto him. If given, it must be received, or it would be no gift; and it is given and received as a present grace. This is the point I am aiming at, to show you that eternal life is a gift and a grace, and that it is the peculiar mark and distinctive possession of the people given to Christ. If our text does not mean this, I am at a loss to understand, much more to explain it. I do not wrest a sense out of it which it will not bear, to suit any peculiar views of my own. I merely, as a faithful interpreter of God's word, open it up as I see it in the light of the Spirit. I can do no less; I do not wish to do more. Bear then in mind these three points, that eternal life is the distinctive privilege and the peculiar mark of Christ's people; that it is Christ's special gift to them; and that in this time state it is a spiritual grace. We may perhaps now be better prepared to answer that momentous question—"Am I one of those who were given to Christ?" What is the answer? It lies in this. Has spiritual life been given to me? If so, I have Christ's own testimony that I am one of those who in eternity were given to him. But when was that spiritual life given? On that day, in that hour, when God the Spirit was first pleased to communicate divine life to my soul, and raise it up from its death in sin or death in profession, and so make it alive unto God. But if given, it could not have been merited, earned, deserved, or worked for. Surely gift excludes merit; as grace, in the language of the apostle, excludes works, so the very nature of a gift excludes purchase, and lifts it beyond the domain of all mercenary bargains, all laborious earnings. Were there no other proof, the universal experience of all God's living family

would amply prove this. Take the whole range of God's children, interrogate them first and last, and say to them, one by one, "Did you merit the grace of God? Was there anything in your life, anything in your heart, anything in your lips, before you were called, so truly holy, so invariably pure, so pleasing in God's sight, as to merit his grace?" Every child of God, whose heart and conscience have been made tender in his fear, would answer in a moment, "No; for whatever I might have been in the sight of others as moral and religious, I certainly was in myself the farthest off of all from God and godliness. If I was not an open sinner, I committed sin in secret; if my life was not outwardly vile, my mind was full of pride and worldliness, and my lips of vanity and folly; if I was not altogether abandoned to gross licentiousness, my heart was as a cage of unclean birds. I had no true fear of God, no real love to him, no sure hope in his mercy. My religion was almost my worst feature, for I was a Pharisee, building up a Babel of good works, trying to climb to heaven on a ladder of duties, and reckoning God my debtor for the poorest acts of mere legal, external, and I now see hypocritical service." I have purposely taken the best case that, according to man's judgment, could present itself, for no one would say that a life of open sin deserved eternal life, though a more favorable verdict might be given to a moral and upright one. Thus every saint, whatever he was before effectual calling, moral or immoral, religious or profane, carries in his own bosom an infallible witness that he did not by any merit of his own obtain so unspeakable a gift as eternal life; but that it was freely given him only for this reason, that he belonged to Christ. Besides which, if we compare the thing given with any conceivable degree of human merit, assuming that there could be such a thing; as, for instance, that you had lived for a few years the life of an angel—that there was no corruption inherent in your very nature—that your lips had never spoken folly, your heart never conceived iniquity, your hands

never practiced any deed of sin—assuming that it were possible for you to have lived a life for many years in a way as pleasing to God as angels please him, could even all this merit such a blessing as eternal life? Must there not be always a proportion between what is bought and what is paid? If eternal life could be bought, what equivalent sum could be offered for it? What price could be paid at all adequate to an eternity of bliss? But when we put into the balance what man is as a sinner by nature and practice, then to presume to proffer a few paltry deeds, which men call good works, a few duly muttered prayers, a few shillings dropped into a charity plate, a regular observance of private and public worship, an unflinching sacramental attendance, a due keeping of feasts and fasts, when the heart is really absorbed in sin and folly,—to lay these poor miserable performances down before the throne of a holy God as so many meritorious acts, and say, "I have done my duty, regularly attended church or chapel, and now I want to be paid: give me heaven; give me eternal life; give me bliss unspeakable; give me that which will ravish my heart through endless ages:"—common sense revolts at the idea of a poor fallen sinner using such language and attempting to drive such a bargain with God for heaven. I appeal to you if it is not insulting to God, mocking the Majesty of heaven, to tell him in heart if not in lip that a few good works can merit eternal life. I have purposely used strong language to show you what human merit and what human presumption are in all their naked deformity. Heaven is not to be bought, eternal life is not to be earned. It is granted or is withheld; it is a free gift, or it is never received at all. But is not merit in some shape the language of a thousand pulpits? May I not say of all that do not proclaim aloud in the language of the apostle, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord?" (Rom. 6:23) Remember, then, there must be no compromise; no mixture of grace and works; no Christ doing

his part and we doing ours. To be a gift it must be sovereign, or the creature could defeat it; free, or man could merit it; irrevocable, or God could recall it; eternal, or death and hell could destroy it.

Sweet, then, it is to look up with a believing eye, and see power given to Jesus over all flesh; and for this express object, that he should give eternal life to as many as God has given him. As such we see him installed in glory at the right hand of the Father, and the reins of government put into his sacred hands that he may from the courts of bliss, from time to time, send his Holy Spirit down to quicken into spiritual and eternal life the members of his mystical body.

How encouraging is it to his ministering servants to see him at the right hand of God blessing their labors; how encouraging to hearers to pray for the manifest communication of that divine life to themselves and others; how encouraging to the drooping to seek for a revival; to the backslider in heart for a gracious restoration; to the mourner in Zion for a word of consolation; and to all who believe in the Son of God for fresh visitations of his grace to their souls that they may enjoy more of his presence, walk more in his fear, and live more to his glory.

**III.** But this leads me to show the nature of the eternal life spoken of in the text; for the blessed Lord, in condescension to our ignorance and many infirmities, has not left us in the dark as to what it really is, and in what it essentially consists. But for this gracious intimation from his own lips, we might have formed very strange and very erroneous conceptions both as to its nature and its end. Groping in ignorance of its real character, we might have pictured to ourselves a Mahometan paradise, or, as the wild untutored heathen, have dreamt of carrying out in heaven the pursuits followed

upon earth. Or we might have pictured to ourselves a kind of Elysian fields, where a perennial Spring and eternal youth would yield such delights as now suit the unrenewed heart; and that heaven would be but a second earth, without earth's sorrows, poverty, old age, sickness, misery, and death. Even with the Bible in their hands, the most vague and loose ideas are still entertained by thousands as to the nature of eternal life, and what is the happiness and blessedness of heaven. But all such fleshly ideas are cut down to the very root, and all such vain delusions utterly extinguished by those words from the Lord's own lips which we have now to consider.

"And this is life eternal," or, as the words might be better rendered in harmony with the original, "This is the life eternal," the life, namely, of which he had just been speaking as his own gift, "that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." How these words not merely for ever cast out all the vain imaginations of the carnal mind as to the nature of life eternal, but what a blessed ray of light they also throw upon the experience of believing souls, and what an assured evidence they give them that eternal life is even now in their bosom. The words are frequently incorrectly quoted. We hear them often uttered from the pulpit or quoted in books thus: "And this is life eternal, to know thee," etc. The words read not so as they dropped from the lips of the Holy Lamb of God, but as follows?—"And this is the life eternal, that they might know thee," etc. There is a marked difference in the two modes of expression. The words, as the Lord uttered them, are not so much an abstract definition of the nature of eternal life as something distinct from the persons who enjoy it, as an explanation of the peculiar privilege enjoyed by the people of Christ. We may now perhaps clearly see the force of the article which is suppressed in our translation, for the meaning of the words, slightly paraphrased, is, "And this is



the life eternal of which he has spoken as his to give, that they who have been given to him may know thee," etc. We are thus led from the mere doctrinal view of the abstract nature of eternal life to fix our eyes upon that special people to whom it is experimentally given. For who are the "they" of whom the Lord here speaks? Those whom the Father had given to him, as the objects of his eternal love; those for whom he was about to shed his precious blood, and redeem to God by his atoning sacrifice, sufferings, and death. He thus instructed them that this eternal life was not, as they might have dreamed, some shadowy greatness and exaltation in mansions of light, or some visionary bliss apart from the possession of grace and holiness; but that even upon earth it was given to them in the new birth; and that not only its very nature but its essential blessedness consisted in this, that they might spiritually and experimentally know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

**1.** The first branch of eternal life is, "That they might know thee the only true God." Man by nature cannot know God. He "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto." No man hath seen or can see him, for he is essentially invisible. It is true that in the days of man's primeval purity God made himself known to Adam, but only as the God of creation: he was not known before the fall as the God of redemption. But in and by the Adam-fall, this knowledge of God was almost wholly extinguished. Tradition preserved for a while some relics of this primeval knowledge of God, but it grew gradually fainter and fainter till "darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people." The very knowledge they had by tradition they perverted and abused; and yet a few inextinguishable sparks still illuminated the world. A conscience was still in man's bosom, sadly fallen, grievously defaced, but yet retaining some faint traces of the knowledge

of God possessed by Adam in Paradise. But as to any spiritual knowledge of God, that none could have who were devoid of God's Spirit. The Old Testament saints had, indeed, eternal life as much as the saints of the New, for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will sit down in the same kingdom with God as the disciples, for whom Christ here prayed. There can be but one eternal life, whether it dwelt in the bosom of Abraham or of John. One main branch of this eternal life, then, consists in the knowledge of the only true God. This knowledge must be communicated, or we cannot possess it. For the most part it is given thus:—"The Holy Spirit shines upon the Scriptures, for in the Scriptures God has revealed himself, and applies some quickening word to the heart, thus begetting the soul into spiritual life. Thus James speaks, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth;" (James 1:18) and so Peter, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Pet. 1:23) We do not come to know God by any miraculous revelation; by any voice sounding in the sky; by any supernatural discovery of him in the clouds, breaking through them with flashes of lightning and peals of thunder. Not but what, as in Paul's case, Augustine's, and Col. Gardiner's, a voice may have been heard from heaven, speaking, as it seemed, in audible accents, and this accompanying the more distinct and peculiar work of the Spirit upon the heart. But as in the Scriptures the true God has revealed his great name, so it is by the application of his word to the soul by the power of the Spirit that he for the most part makes himself known to the sons of men. A holy light shines upon the word of truth and is reflected from the sacred page into our understanding, communicating thereby light and life to the soul. In that light we see God, for we see light in his light, and as he is "the fountain of life," in his life we feel life. (Ps. 36:9) Thus divine light and life given by Jesus, through the application of his word of truth, make us

to see and feel that there is a God, for faith is thus raised up in the heart to believe what the Scripture says; and by faith thus divinely communicated we see God, who is invisible. You may not be able perhaps to trace distinctly when, how, and where God first made himself thus known to your soul; but you were conscious of a marked change that took place in your feelings at a certain most memorable period, and of a mighty revolution that then rolled over your breast, giving you altogether a new being and making you a new creature. Now look at the contrast between what you are and what you were. There was a time when you were almost uncertain whether there was a God or not; when you neither feared his frown nor sought his smile; when you might have taken his name into your lips, but had no real knowledge of him; neither faith nor hope, neither love nor fear. But a time came, never to be forgotten whilst your soul has being, when other thoughts arrested your mind, and other feelings, like wave after wave, rolled in upon your conscience, and amongst them this as an overtopping billow, which seemed almost as if it would sweep you away into hell, that there was a just, holy, heart searching God, and that you had sinned against him. For the Scripture in revealing God, and the Holy Spirit in applying it, do not reveal him abstractedly as God; do not, for instance, say to us, "There is a God," as providence and creation make him known; but show us his character, how holy, just, and pure—thus setting before our eyes God in his infinite perfections. In the same light and by the same teaching, we see and feel our sins before him. This revelation to the soul of the character of God plants his fear in the heart, which is "the beginning of wisdom;" for the light which comes from heaven is not a dead but a living light; not a cold, straggling moonlight beam playing over a field of snow, but a warm sunlight ray, vivifying the heart into warmth and motion; for it is the very life and power of God. The light that illuminates gives the life that quickens, and

both by their united action communicate faith and feeling. Like a man waking out of a sleep, or Lazarus coming out of the tomb, you wonder at the change which has taken place; and others, as they look upon you, wonder too, for you are become one of "the men wondered at." (Zech. 3:8) "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." (1 Cor. 4:9) But you realize in a measure those words—"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17) And amongst the old things passed away is the old, formal worship whereby you used to mock God; the old, ceremonious Pharisaical religion, whereby you worshipped him with your lips when your heart was far from him. Now you know and feel that God is a Spirit, and that those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth; for with regenerating grace invariably comes a Spirit of grace and supplications, and by that Spirit you are enabled to pour out your heart before God. Nay, at first you are so earnest in secret prayer and supplication that you seek him almost night and day. But at first he appears to you exceedingly terrible: you see little else, so to speak, but the dark parts of God's character. As it was with the Egyptians and the children of Israel, the pillar of the cloud was light to one, but darkness to the other; or rather as it was at Mount Sinai, where there was "blackness and darkness and tempest, so that all the people that were in the camp trembled." So in the first manifestations of the righteous character of God, you see his wrath against sin, his inflexible justice, infinite purity, majesty and holiness, and that you, as a sinner by nature and practice, are amenable to his law and are verily guilty before him—a wretch justly doomed to die. But there are very mingled feelings in the first work of God upon the soul, for besides the sensations of guilt and condemnation which I have named, there are many very earnest desires to know him for ourselves, to obtain his favor, live to his praise, seek

his honor, and consult his glory. It is impossible to describe, though, I trust, I have known the feelings in my own bosom, all that is contained in the knowledge of the only true God by the discovery of himself to the soul. We know its effects and fruits better than the thing itself; for there is a mystery in regeneration into which we cannot penetrate; as the Scripture speaks, "As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all." (Eccles. 11:5) But one main effect of this divine knowledge is to show us that God has a people upon earth, and to draw our affections towards them. Another effect is, that it makes us watch over our hearts, our lips, and the actions of our hands. It makes also the conscience tender, the heart contrite, and the spirit broken. It makes us see and feel that heaven is everything and earth comparatively nothing; that the salvation of the soul is our grand concern, and that what becomes of the body in life or death matters little if the soul be saved in the bosom of God. Never is there more real uprightness of heart, or greater strictness of life than when God first sets his hand to the work. No hypocrisy is then indulged, no insincerity allowed; old and inveterate sins are broken off, evil habits forsaken, the world and all worldly company given up, and everything interfering with the salvation of the soul laid aside; and all this willingly and cheerfully through the constraining influence of God's Spirit at work in the heart. Religion is with a new-born soul his all in all. He must have God for his friend or perish. To please God is his chief concern; to have his soul saved his inmost desire; what God approves he loves; what God abhors he hates.

Now though you may not be able exactly to tell when God first awakened your soul, have I in any way drawn out a map or chart of your course at a particular period of your life—

anything resembling your feelings, desires, exercises, doubts, misgivings, sighs, groans, and prayers, when that mighty revolution took place in your soul which is called the "new birth," when you came out of darkness into God's marvelous light? (1 Pet. 2:9) I like to insist upon the beginning of the work of grace. It tends to establish the saints of God: it throws light upon those in whom the work is in some measure obscure, and revives the hopes and expectations of those who have fallen, through the power of temptation, into darkness and deadness of soul.

**2.** But this is not the only branch of eternal life. There is "the knowledge of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." How the Lord Jesus Christ here puts himself on a level with God. For could it be said of the highest saint or the most exalted angel, that a knowledge of him is a necessary ingredient of eternal life? We have seen that one main branch of it consists in knowing the only true God. But is that all? There is another branch of equal importance, of equal value—a branch that must be known by the same divine power—a personal, spiritual, and experimental knowledge of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Now what are we to know in Jesus Christ? First, we are to know his eternal Deity. It may be that your mind has been at times tossed up and down upon this grand, vital, fundamental point. You have wondered how Jesus, who lay in the womb of the Virgin, and was crucified upon Calvary's tree, could have been the eternal God. Infidelity may have racked your soul to its very center. I am sure it has mine, and does so even to this day. Yet you find that you cannot give this grand truth up, for you see that without it there could be no salvation for your guilty soul; that he must be God, or his blood could not wash out crimes like yours; that he must be God, or his righteousness would not avail to justify your guilty soul; that he must be God, or he could not now hear or answer your prayers. Thus, when we come to

look at the things of God in the light of the Spirit, we see that the deity of Jesus Christ is so involved in every gospel truth, in every branch of living experience, in every part of holy practice, that to give up that is to give up the Scriptures, and stand before him who is a consuming fire in all our sin and guilt and crime. I know what I am saying, for these are things my mind has been exercised with now for many years, and I preach to you only what God the Spirit, I hope and trust, has taught me.

But in seeing the deity of the Son of God, we see his eternal sonship, for the two are connected together. If not the eternal Son of God, he is not God; for the eternal sonship of Christ is intimately connected with the deity of the Lord Jesus. What sweet views does the child of God sometimes enjoy of the eternal sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ! How he views the love of God flowing through his own beloved Son, and salvation, pardon, and peace all involved in that most blessed mystery of the Son of God taking our nature into union with his own divine Person. The deity of Christ shines through the scriptures as with a ray of light, and sometimes beams into the soul with a ray of heavenly life. In fact, it is the animating ray that quickens the whole spirit of a believer, and makes the life of God to be what it is in the soul in its power and preciousness. Take away the love of the Son of God to his Church from all eternity, his atoning blood and justifying righteousness, and his present advocacy in heaven as an interceding high priest, and where is your guilty soul? Must not the law come down upon us with all its awful thunders unless divine blood has put away its curse, divine righteousness become our justifying obedience, and divine love be still pleading divine merit at the right hand of the Father?

But there is the pure humanity of the spotless Lamb of God—

a pure body and a pure soul united to his glorious person as the Son of God, and Godhead stamping infinite merit upon all its gracious acts and sufferings, which we are also savingly and experimentally to know as a part of the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. O the precious blood that dropped from his sacred brow in the garden of Gethsemane and fell from his hands and feet on the cruel tree! And O the efficacy of it to cleanse a guilty conscience, for Godhead is in every drop! If there were no Godhead in it, there could be no availing pardon and no real peace. So it is with the righteousness, so with the love, so with the grace, so with everything concerning the blessed Jesus.

Let me then again and again sound in your ears, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent;" and let me apply the subject to your consciences. Do you know the only true God by any revelation of his power and presence to you soul? Do you know Jesus Christ whom he hath sent by any manifestation of his love and grace? Has the mighty revolution taken place in your bosom of which I spoke as manifesting the new birth in its beginning and progress? Then you have eternal life; you shall never die. Sin may often dim your evidences; Satan often fight against your soul; clouds may surround the throne of God and darkness beset your mind; but if you know by divine teaching and by divine testimony the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, you have eternal life, and as sure as God is true will reign in his presence for evermore. Think upon these things; they are solemn realities. May God seal them home with his mighty power upon your heart and conscience!—