



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

Eternal Life: Choosing Jesus' Definition

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“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3 ESV).

Since it is popularly defined in terms of endless and trouble-free existence with God in a glorious paradise, Jesus' definition of eternal life will surprise many moderns. He described it as relational involvement with a personal God, a present experience (1 John 5:13) that matures and continues beyond time. The expectations in the popular definition are among the blessings of eternal life, not its essence.

My understanding of this reality developed over time as my thinking was stretched by different writings about God's nature and works. For example, in his book, *Knowing God*, James Packer affirmed that knowing God is what we are made for, should be our life's aim, leads to our greatest joy and contentment, and gives God the most pleasure.

When I began to check such statements against the Scriptures, I was rewarded with the discovery that knowing God is a recurring theme. For example, the prophets recorded both God's attribution of Israel's fall to their failure to know the Lord (Jer. 2:8; Hos. 4:1) and his promise that, under the new covenant, “all shall know me” (Jer. 31:34). Paul rejoiced at the thought of the depths of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Rom. 11:33). John declared that God's Son came “so that we may know him who is true” (1 John 5:20).

Beyond correctly aligning my view of eternal life with Jesus' words, understanding it as knowing God was transformative in other ways. I'll mention only two.

First, I began to read the Scriptures differently, paying more attention to what they say about God's nature and actions. Knowing about God is not the same as knowing him, but, as in any relationship, the former is necessary for the latter.

Second, I began to see God's commands differently, not as lifeless rules to be dutifully obeyed, but as wise expressions of his love given to provide for and protect me. Since keeping his commands is vital for knowing him (1 John 2:3-5), I aim to obey so I can know Christ, be more completely transformed into his image, and share God's holiness (Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 3:18; Heb. 12:10).

Can any objective be more compelling?

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