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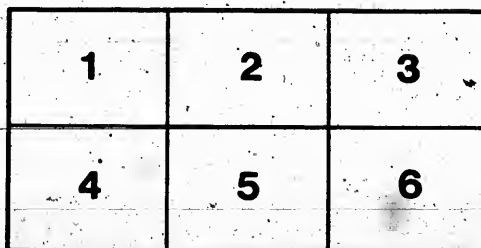
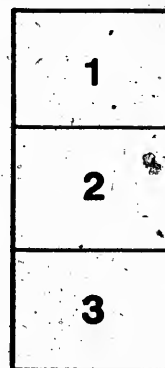
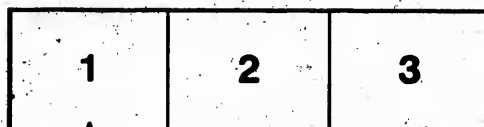
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# "ON LIFE ETERNAL;"

## ITS SCRIPTURAL DEFINITION, AND HOW TO BE OBTAINED.

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent."—*John*, xvii., 3.

These comprehensive words form a portion of the sublime and fervent prayer which our blessed Lord and Saviour, just previous to his last sufferings and death, addressed to His Heavenly Father in behalf of his believing people through all ages. Like many other passages of sacred revelation, they briefly embody several of the most important truths and principles of our Divine Christianity. This concise comprehensiveness is, indeed, one of the many remarkable characteristics of the Holy Scriptures, and which so fully show their divine origin and manifestly distinguish them from all merely human compositions.

The following passages are of a similar comprehensive description:—"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."  
—*Rom.*, iii., 23-26. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."  
—*Titus*, ii., 13, 14. In the first of these two cited passages we have the humbling announcement of the universally sinful native condition of man; next, the free, unmerited grace and mercy of God, in providing an all-sufficient method of deliverance from the dreadful consequences of that condition, through the sacrificial and atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as a

full propitiation and satisfaction to Divine Holiness and Justice, 'for the sins of the whole world;' and then the pardon and justification of the sinner and his acceptance to divine favor; also, full redemption from the captivity and power of sin, through faith in the efficacy of that propitiation and redeeming work of the Saviour. In the latter texts the same propitiation is evidently implied and alluded to; and the divine nature of the Saviour is also set forth in the words, "the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," which, according to the Greek original text, mean and designate one and the same Divine Person. And further are shown the designed redemption of Christians from all iniquity, their peculiarity in the performance of good works, and their "blessed" and comforting "hope" of everlasting felicity at the final coming of their gracious God and Saviour.

But returning to the words of our text, it may first be remarked—as a universal truth—that the way to secure permanent happiness has been the enquiry and endeavor of every human being; and it has also been equally true that none have obtained that enduring blessing from merely earthly ways or means. The wisest of men, in his book, "The Preacher," though a king, and having had every variety of such means within his power, and having employed them all for effecting that object, has left on record the most decisive testimony of their utter inability to secure the desired result. He has repeatedly declared of them all, —of the various schemes and courses of pleasure; of the pursuits of pride and ambition; the possession of riches; the varied acquisitions of human skill and knowledge; and of every other object and pursuit of a merely worldly nature,—that, as to the attainment of satisfying and permanent happiness, they are only "vanity and vexation of spirit." The most experienced and wisest of heathen philosophers and other sages, in all countries and ages, who have spoken or written on the subject, have given similar testimony. As to all these last, there could have been no other result, for they did not seek aright the knowledge of the true God from his visible work of creation, for which neglect, as Scripture declares, "they had no excuse." Not using the degree of divine light which was put within them, they universally and utterly failed to find, either as to *this life* or any supposed *future*

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that permanent rest and happiness they ardently desired and sought. It has, indeed, with infinite wisdom and mercy, been ordained that the satisfying and eternal enjoyment of the spirit of man cannot be secured but by an adequate knowledge of the great and benevolent God of the Universe; and especially, under his Scriptural revelation, by the additional or combined knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, as His gift of mercy, according to the words of the text.

But, now, properly arises the enquiry, what are we truly and savingly to understand by the knowledge of God and of His Son whom He sent, as expressed in the text, and as to the purposes for which He was sent? And first, as to the knowledge of this "only true God." It implies, of course, as its primary element—as far as human intellect and intelligence can reach it—the correct knowledge of the attributes and perfections which form His divine nature and character. These have never been truly discovered by a Plato, or an Aristotle, a Seneca, a Cato, or a Cicero, or through any merely human investigation or system framed by the seeming wisdom of man;—so true are the words of the Patriarch: "Who can by searching find out God, or find out the Almighty unto perfection;" and also those of the Apostle: "The world by wisdom knew not God." The highest human wisdom could only reach the idea, or conclusion, that there was some great Being of a Spiritual nature, who originated all living creatures and inanimate objects and things; but when they sought to find out his true character, they were confounded and their investigations came to an end, or became perplexed and contradictory—chiefly through their inability to reconcile the seeming inconsistencies of His supposed government of His rational creatures and visible works, and His varied providential dispensations. But blessed be this true God that, in due time, He gave—and through more than fifteen hundred years progressively enlarged and has constantly preserved, and will, as promised, preserve to the end of time—a revelation of His own sacred attributes and character, and of His gracious will and designs regarding the whole human race. And this revelation is as full and perfect as the capacities, wants, and duties of man require for his welfare and happiness while here, and his eternal enjoyment hereafter. In this inspired revelation we are plainly informed of

all the attributes and perfections of this eternal and glorious Being. In His communications to Moses, when giving the law and the ordinances at Sinai, He declared Himself to be "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty." In other portions of the sacred Records, He is described as "almighty" in power, "infinite in wisdom," "perfect in holiness," "righteous in judgment," a "just God," as well as "a Saviour," "rich in mercy" and "ready to forgive," "true and faithful" as to all His promises and predictions, immeasurably "rich in love" and "compassion," and willing and providing for the welfare and happiness of all his creatures, most especially of sinful and helpless humanity. Such is a brief but very imperfect sketch of the perfections which compose and exhibit the character of this true God—the eternal and glorious Jehovah.

The second essential subject of knowledge mentioned in our text, relates to that gracious and glorious Being, sent of God, and called the "Messiah," who possessed and exhibited in his immaculate person and character the divine nature, one in essence and in equality of attributes and perfections with the Eternal Father, and mysteriously connected and combined with our infirm humanity. And here, also, as to the true character of this Divine Saviour, and the gracious purposes for which he came into our polluted and rebellious world, we have not, and cannot have, any accurate knowledge but from the same inspired revelation: Even with the large portion of the sacred Records possessed by the Jews as the chosen and peculiar people of God, the character and works, the sufferings and death of the Messiah and Saviour were to them, as Scripture declares, "a stumbling-block," as they were "to the Greeks—foolishness," though these latter boasted and were renowned as possessing wisdom superior to all other people in every department of knowledge. In that earlier code of revelation is recorded the first consoling promise of our gracious God, given immediately after the introduction of sin into our world, that the "seed" of the woman should "bruise" the deceiving serpent's "head." To this succeeded, through a course of ages, corresponding promises of remedial blessings made to the

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early Patriarchs more especially, and often to the faithful Abraham, and afterwards more clearly and fully declared, through Moses, to those chosen though disobedient people, in the words in Deut., xviii. : "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, unto him ye shall hearken." All the divinely-proscribed ordinances, sacrifices, and offerings, under that literally strict legal dispensation, were designed to prefigure and symbolize that promised and gracious Messiah, in due time to be *personally* manifested on the earth, and his redeeming, atoning, and eternally saving work in behalf of our guilty and helpless race. He was, in substance and reality, the symbolized lamb and other slain animals, with their sprinkled blood, as well as the other and varied oblations and offerings for obtaining the forgiveness of sins, so constantly and multitudinously presented in the tabernacle and temple services. He, and his atoning, justifying and saving offering were represented by the blood of the one animal sprinkled on the altar and mercy seat, and by the other animal typically laden with the sins of the people, and bearing them away "into the wilderness, — a land not inhabited." By the enjoined washings and other purifications of the persons and vestments of the priests, and the various offerings and observances connected with their public services, the immaculate purity and the perfectly propitiating offering and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, as the one great and all-sufficient High Priest on behalf of universal humanity, were *representatively* and most aptly prefigured. By the hyssop branch, dipped in the blood of one bird and laved in the pure water of the running brook, and the sprinkling of both, in the cleansing of the leper, and by the release of the other bird to its perfect freedom, the Saviour's atoning and satisfying work for the redemption and the free and full salvation of our sinful and captive race were further representatively prefigured and exhibited. The fresh bread, daily laid on the consecrated table, symbolized the same divine Saviour as the bread of life, indispensably required as the daily food for sustaining the life of the regenerated spirit of man.

Through a long course of ages, during that typical dispensation, a line of inspired prophets recorded numerous and gracious predictions regarding that divine Messiah and Prophet, declaring

the certainty of his promised appearance ; the royal stock from which his human nature should spring, as declared in the Psalms and other Scriptures ; the place where he should be born, as in the Book of Micah ; and especially in the singularly evangelical records of the sublime Isaiah, where he is described as the " child born," " the son given," and also as " the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace ;" and most especially of all, in chap. liii. of his Book—that portion of it being the most remarkable and deeply affecting of all the primary code of inspired records. Therein is revealed the humble and unattractive circumstances under which—in the judgment of a blind and sinful world—he would make his appearance ; its scorn and rejection of him ; his voluntary and agonizing sufferings and death, by Divine appointment and gift, as an atonement and full satisfaction to immaculate holiness and inflexible justice for the iniquities of the whole of our depraved and helpless race. And farther is given the soul-cheering intelligence of the innumerable and rich blessings which were thereby purchased for all the faithful and obedient as their temporal portion and eternal inheritance. In other inspired records, also, as by the sublime Psalmist, by the same transcendent Isaiah, by Micah, Zechariah, Malachi, and others, are plainly declared the mercies and blessings which should attend and follow his advent ; the teachings of his word, given under both dispensations ; his gracious dealings and dispensations for the salvation of souls ; the protection, government, and perpetuity of his Church ; also, celebrating his praise, declaring " how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty ;" and how men should " rejoice in him" and " all nations call him blessed," one of the inspired band declaring that he would be " the sun of righteousness" arising " with healing in his wings ;" and another that he would " judge the poor of the people," would " spare the poor and needy," " redeem their souls from deceit and violence," that " their blood should be precious in his sight ;" " that he would break in pieces the oppressor ;" that in blessings he would " come down like showers that water the earth ;" and that he should " have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."

All the foregoing and other similar announcements regarding the infinitely great and glorious Jehovah, and the ancient intima-

tions and predictions concerning this gracious personage—the divine, redeeming Messiah—are, as a merely historical revelation, sufficiently ample and clear for perception and knowledge. But infinitely above and beyond this literal instruction, there is implied and included in the text a *personal Spiritual knowledge*, essential for the formation of the character, and for the support, and consolation, and the stability of the cheering hopes and expectations of the Spiritual and only true Christian. Numerous passages of Scripture expressly declare the necessity—and, indeed, its whole tenor inculcates and requires the personal possession—of this Spiritual and saving knowledge. In these infallible records all are told: “Ye must be born again,” born “of the Spirit;” that this new birth is “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;” and that unless thus Spiritually born, no man can “see the kingdom of God” or “enter into” it; that Christ must “dwell in the heart by faith;” that “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his;” and this will be a personally conscious possession, for the same inspired Word says: “Know ye not your ownelves how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.” And yet further, according to Scripture, there will be the possession of “the earnest of the Spirit;” of which Divine Spirit it is declared that “itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.” Of this kingdom of God, thus divinely set up in the believing human soul, it is Scripturally declared that it is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Every professor of Christianity is exhorted and commanded to strive most earnestly and perseveringly to obtain the possession and influence of this soul-regenerating, sanctifying, and comforting Spirit; and there are numerous Scriptural promises of its free and full bestowment, with all its precious and saving blessings. Every really converted and regenerated soul does possess it, in a greater or lesser degree, and consciously knows that he does possess it. He thus knows it by its inward, gracious effects of “love, joy, and peace,” and the other precious fruits of that Divine and Holy Spirit, as described in Galatians, v., and other portions of the inspired Volume; and by the corresponding effects he thereby freely and joyfully exhibits in the external observances of worship and other religious exercises, and in works of piety, benevolence,

and righteousness. He knows from the testimony of the Sacred Word, and from that inward consciousness of possessing these gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, that God is reconciled to him and has forgiven his sins, through the atonement and merits of His Son, the divinely-anointed Messiah, and feels the happy assurance and confidence that this true God and His Son, Jesus Christ, are his ever-watchful and faithful friends and guardians. He can say in the language of the pious poet :

My God is reconciled,  
His pardoning voice I hear,  
He owns me for his child,  
I can no longer fear.  
With confidence I now draw nigh,  
And Father, Abba Father, cry.

Every such regenerated and pardoned soul may and does feel assured that all the divine attributes and perfections are ever firmly pledged and exercised on his behalf for his Spiritual safety, holiness and happiness. In the enjoyment of this confidence, he can say, the *wisdom* of my God and Saviour, by His Spirit and Word, will inform and direct me in the course of duty, safety, and peace; his *almighty power* will guard and defend me in every season and form of trial and danger; his *enduring love* will cheer and fully console me under all adversities and afflicting events; his *mercy* will bear with my weakness and infirmities, and forgive my offences on my sincere repentance and renewed exercise of faith in his Son's atoning and meritorious offering; His *truth* and *faithfulness*, as revealed in his unchangeable Word, will sustain my hopes and confidence, and cheer my spirit, when passing through the deep waters of temptation—relying on the divinely recorded assurance that they shall not overflow me; nor shall the kindled flame destroy me, but I shall in the most suitable and best time come through them both in safety and with purified effects. He can confidently feel and say, I know that my Redeemer and Saviour is also my heavenly Mediator and Advocate, and that He and his Holy Spirit ever make intercession for me. Such regenerated and pardoned believer, thus divinely sustained and comforted, goes forward in a progressively sanctified course, and, if continuing faithful, attains the required holy meetness for the glorious and eternal inheritance of perfect safety and happiness.

No professor of our holy Christianity should rest satisfied without the personal, soul-sustaining experience of this Spiritual knowledge of the "Great God" and the Lord "Jesus Christ," as declared in the text to be the requisites for obtaining and finally securing "life eternal;" or remain destitute of the attainments and qualifications so plainly and repeatedly declared in Scripture to be absolutely essential to the acquisition of such Spiritual confidence, as well as holiness, while in this state of probation, and for the future eternal confirmation of happiness and glory. It is clearly revealed that it is the Divine will and design that every professor of Christianity should possess this Spiritual knowledge, with its consequent assurance and confidence, as well as all its holy and happy effects, as Scripturally described. How, indeed, it may be asked, can any such professor, destitute of that Spiritual knowledge and conscious inward divine testimony, have any *real assurance and confidence* that his sins are forgiven, that he is a child of God, has Spiritual guidance and support, and it "an heir of glory" and eternal happiness? Here, again, the words of the hymn of the devout poet may be appropriately cited:—

If now the witness were in me,  
Would He not Testify of Thee,  
In Jesus reconciled;  
And should I not in faith draw nigh,  
And boldly Abba Father cry,  
And know myself thy child.

None can have that confidence but those who possess that Spiritual knowledge and testimony, and manifest, in a greater or lesser degree, those corresponding inward and external fruits of grace and righteousness which the Scriptures so plainly and repeatedly describe. Wanting these essentials, the merely external and formal professor, however sincere and earnest in his desires and services, must and will remain more or less doubtful and uncertain as to his eternal safety and happiness.

As regards the solemn and all-important words, "life eternal," declared in the text to be the result or rather the present and eternal effect of that Spiritual knowledge of the Great God and His Son, the Divine Messiah,—there can be no difficulty in ascertaining its true meaning. In numerous passages of Scripture the term "*life*" is employed to signify a state of happiness. It is

perfectly evident that the expression as used in the text does not merely mean *eternal existence*, for this all the wicked, doomed to perdition and misery, will have as well as the righteous. It certainly means an eternity of happiness. Moreover, it includes the possession of real and abiding happiness, by the faithful believer, while in his probationary state, as shown by these words:—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life;" John, iii., 36. And further, in the following passages in 1st John, ch. v.: "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son, hath not life;" and also in the following words: "That ye may know that ye have eternal life." No future is employed; it is not "shall have," but "hath" now "everlasting life." All these words declare a present possession of that "eternal life," as a principle enjoyed by the true believer, and which is the sure and cheering "earnest" of his eternally joyous and glorious inheritance.

As to the blissful nature and perfections of this "eternal life," as the ultimate result of the *Spiritual knowledge* mentioned in the text, no human language can heighten the descriptions given in the inspired Volume. There we are told that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." (1 Cor., ii. 9.) "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (Rev., vii.) They shall "see God," possess a "fullness of joy," and "at His right hand pleasures for evermore" with "an eternal weight of glory." (Ps. xvi., 2-25).

A few intimations and directions, founded on Scripture precept and authority, may now be appropriately urged as to the course to be adopted and diligently pursued in order to obtain that life-giving knowledge of the "true God" and the Lord Jesus Christ; and for securing all its present and eternal blessings. There must, at the commencement—through Divine grace, sought and imparted—be a sincere repentance for all past transgressions; an abandonment of all openly sinful acts and

practices, forsaking all their temptations, snares, and besetments; earnest and fervent prayers and supplications must be perseveringly addressed to that "true God" in the name and by faith in his Divine Son, for obtaining forgiveness of all past offences; and for securing Spiritual life, light, and purity. The Sacred Scriptures must be prayerfully and frequently read, examined, and compared, with close and earnest meditation thereon, and being ever regarded and obeyed as the all-sufficient standard and rule of faith and practice. There must be a regular and serious attendance on the true and faithful ministry of the divine Word and other religious means, as Scripturally enjoined or recommended for obtaining needed wisdom and grace; and further, as most essentially requisite, the forsaking of all ensnaring associations and companionships, with watchfulness and circumspection as to thoughts, desires and conduct. Most especially of all, there must be a constantly looking to and imploring the gracious God for wisdom and support, and the persevering exercise of faith and confidence in the atoning sacrifice, mediation, and advocacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Divine Redeemer and Saviour, together with a constant and skillful employment of the Spiritual armour described and enjoined in the Scriptures, particularly in ch. vi., of Ephesians. All these duties and exercises, with other means, are Scripturally enjoined as essential to the acquisition of the divine knowledge described in the text, with "eternal life" as its glorious consummation. In the sincere and diligent pursuance of such a course no soul can fail of securing all those inestimable blessings, for the merciful and unchangeable God has declared: "Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart;" "I will pour out my Spirit upon you;" "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" and give "eternal life." (Jer., xxix. ; Prov., i. ; Rom., vi.) There are also numerous promises of guidance, protection, and cheering consolation. The almighty and gracious Saviour has declared: "He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out," but "will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." If enduring to the end, faithful and obedient, he will give him to eat of the tree of life, and the heavenly "manna" and bestow a "crown of

life" in that eternal kingdom of glory, where there will be "pleasures for evermore."

But although this Spiritual knowledge mentioned in the text, and its consequent inestimable blessings, are so freely and fully offered to all who will rightly seek them, it is manifestly a deplorable truth that the vast majority of those who profess faith in a pure Christianity remain for ever destitute of their actual possession. This is chiefly, if not entirely, owing to a carelessness and neglect of putting forth, and perseveringly employing, the degree of *effort* and *diligence* Scripturally and essentially required. In some faint degree, they occasionally seek, but they do not perseveringly strive; yet it is commanded: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able;" "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure;" "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force." Such careless persons also remain, more or less, involved in worldliness of *spirit* and *conduct*, avoiding the required self-denial of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." They are unwatchful and defective as to prayer, the exercise of faith, consulting and obeying the Scriptures, and attending on other means for obtaining grace, wisdom, and needful direction for a steady and safe religious life. And further, they are very inattentive as to the discharge of personal and relative duties, divinely required. Thus careless, neglectful, and disobedient, they remain to the last, like the "foolish virgins," unholy and unsaved. They are of those, of whom it is said in Scripture, "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and like the sluggard, who "will not plough by reason of the cold, therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing."



