

Elements Of Motivation (Part 7)

Eternal Life

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I think that I can safely say that this last element of motivation is one that is going to encompass all of the previous six, and I think that this will be obvious once we understand what it is. This last point contains a term that we are very, very familiar with because we hear it so frequently. I also wonder whether we really know what it means when we read it in the Bible or hear it spoken of in a sermon.

The Bible uses some of its terms in ways that we are unfamiliar with. I have mentioned the word "spirit" in time past, how that the Bible uses that in nine different ways and if you were not aware of that, it might give you some difficulty understanding what is being spoken of in a given context. Another one is the word "soul," which is used four different ways in the Bible.

In Richard's sermon on Song of Solomon a couple of weeks ago, he used one which I think we have a tendency to understand, maybe more than some of the others. That was the word "to know." But even here, we most frequently think of that word in terms of "being acquainted with," but in biblical usage it can—though it does not always—have intimate sexual connotations as well.

This term that we are going to be using quite frequently today is "eternal life." Now to us, the first impulse is to think of it in terms of living without ever dying. We think of it in the sense of endless existence. That is certainly correct, but it is incomplete because its biblical usage encompasses a great deal more than that. If we do not understand this, we can deny ourselves a great deal of motivation arising from having a better knowledge of the great purpose of God, and if we understand this I think that this is going to help us in making preparations for His Kingdom. I think it will also give us an understanding of why we go through a great number of the trials we go through in preparation for eternal life.

Now eternal life is not difficult to understand, and I think that in many cases we just simply tend to overlook it, or we forget it, and we need to sharpen our understanding of this term, though, if our vision is going to be clear. Today, we are going to bolster our understanding of it, because in doing so, it is going to sharpen the focus on the other six motivators as well. As we begin the sermon I want you to turn with me to Romans 2. Paul is the author, and he says:

Romans 2:7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality, .

Did you notice that Paul separates immortality from eternal life, so they are different? They *are* somewhat different. The Greek words there share one common idea. That is, they both indicate a long, enduring period of time. The word translated "immortality," simply means, "unending existence." In fact, even there it is rather specific. It means "unending existence" simply because the being having it does not corrupt in age and die. That is kind of interesting because everything material corrupts. It oxidizes. Fast or slow, but it corrupts.

However, eternal life as it is used by the Bible's writers, includes something that immortality does not have. Unfortunately, again we have a tendency to confuse immortality with eternal life—but they are not one and the same thing.

I think that a good way to illustrate this might be to refer to your knowledge of the Greek myths and their pantheon of gods. If you remember, the Greek gods had immortality. However, by the Bible's definition, their gods did not have eternal life. Their gods acted and reacted and had passions and attitudes just like human beings, and that is because immortality speaks only of endless life and not on its quality; whereas eternal life is life lived the way God lives it. Let that sink in.

Eternal life, as the Bible uses that term, means life lived the way the true God lives it. It indicates the totality of life—which we are going to be able to see as we go along here in this sermon—that we already possess in principle. Now let me turn the perspective on the meaning of this word just a bit, to put it into a more human setting. *Eternal life is to live life according to the will of God endlessly.*

Now, with that understanding we can know then that demons (like the Greek gods) have immortality, but they do not have eternal life. Turn with me to the book of John 5:24. Jesus is the speaker. He says:

John 5:24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him [the word "believe" here is critical] who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

Already passed from death to life. Notice that this is the past tense so that we can understand that the person who believes has "already passed." It is something that is in the past—from death to life.

A major key here is the word believes. That word, as it is used in the Bible, does not merely mean to have a knowledge of, or be acquainted with, but to know well enough to act on the basis of knowing. On the sermon last week I spent a little bit of time on Ephesians 2:1. Now, I am going to go back a few verses from that into Ephesians 1:19-20, and I am reading these two verses because I want you to see the lead-in to what Paul said there in chapter 2 and verse 1. But here is what the subject is as he proceeds toward what he is going to say in chapter 2, verse 1.

Ephesians 1:19 And what is the exceeding greatness of His [the Father's] power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.

Now, what is that working going to produce here?

Ephesians 1:20-23 Which he worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead [the subject is the resurrection] and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power. . . And He put all things under His feet, . . . which is His body [the church], the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Then in verse 1 of chapter 2:

Ephesians 2:1 And you [he brings it right down to the Church member] He made alive, who were dead . . .

Feed that back into John 5:24—that we have already passed from death into life on the basis of belief. Before repentance and conversion, and the receiving of God's Spirit, God views us as being dead, even though we are alive. You see, we are only alive physically. We possess animal life. But as far as God is concerned—this great, awesome Spirit-being who has spirit life—we are dead. When we are unconverted we are totally unaware to the spiritual life of God, even as those who are literally physically dead are to being unaware of pleasures and cares, amusements, and excitements of this

world. People who are dead—I mean, in their graves—hear no music, they see no beautiful scenery, they are not aware of any kind of beauty. They are not even aware of people trampling on their graves. They cannot enjoy any food; they see no loveliness in anything.

Are you beginning to get the comparison? One who has passed from death to life is just like a physically dead human being, only in this case, in terms of the spiritual life of God. And so before conversion, we are in like manner unaware of the spiritual life of God, of the beauty of holiness, the joy, the power, the abundance, the peace, the honor, and the glory of that life. So when we begin to be converted, that life is a life that is the beginning of an expansion into a new dimension of life we did not even know existed before, and that life is called in the Bible, "eternal life." So eternal life, in the biblical sense, includes the qualities that those who have it live by.

We are going back to the book of John, only this time we are going to John 17. God has a way of giving definitions of things that are so simple. The definition is simple, but the subject may be extremely complex. For instance, we all know that I John 3:4 says that "sin is the transgression of the law." That is such a simple definition, but it is certainly adequate to the use that God wants us to put it to. On the other hand, love is the keeping of the commandments. That is also very simple, and He defines the fear of God in Proverbs 8:13 by saying that "it is to depart from sin." That is the fear of God.

Here we have the Bible's definition of eternal life. Now let us read it.

John 17:3 "And this is eternal life, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Notice that Jesus did not even use the term "immortal" or "endless," but rather He defined eternal life in terms of "knowledge within a relationship." In this case, a very intimate relationship. If you care to look up the word "eternal" in *Strong's*, it is #166. Just be careful; do not be misled. The reason is, because Strong's definition is very limited on this word, and in this case it would be much better to go to a more complete lexicon, like *Zodhiates'*, where he gives a much more precise and detailed usage of that word. In a lexicon like *Zodhiates'*, he is much more likely to show how the word is used in the Bible, rather than to give the classical Greek definition.

Zodhiates says in the first paragraph of his definition, that the word refers to the "life of God." It did not say a thing about immortal—immortality, or endless. The word, as it is used in the Bible, means "the life of God." Since God is eternal, He lives endlessly, He has no beginning of days or end of life; hence His life is perpetual—eternal. Now the life of God is more than endless, and that is what is important here.

This is where a commentary, I think, becomes helpful because they have the room to expand on what the life of God means. There is no doubt that the word includes "length of time." The Greeks had another word to indicate endless time. It is a word pronounced "aheedus." Now I am going to quote Zodhiates from Section III under his definition for this Greek word [this Greek word that is translated into English "eternal"] is (transliterated, spelled)—*aionios*. Now listen to this.

It is to be understood as referring, but only to duration, but more so to quality. i.e. It is not merely a life that is eternal in duration, but is primarily something different from the

natural life of man. Since it is His life God gives to the believer through Christ, and He is endless, His life imparted must be endless, although the life He gives to the believer has a beginning.

That is the only difference. The word speaks of the quality of the life that God lives. We are going to take a look at this a little bit more deeply by first looking at the word that is translated here "know." First of all, in the English. From the *Reader's Digest Wordfinder*, it says that this word know means, "to be certain of, be sure, realize, discern, be positive, be confident, have information about, recognize, be informed." From *Webster's* I will pick something from him. It also means, "to have sexual intercourse with." Now, you may be familiar with the term, the cliché, that knowledge is power. This is a true saying that God agrees with and I am going to quote to you verse 6 of Hosea 4 (another familiar scripture).

Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

The implication of understanding the meaning of this word "to know," is very clear. If these people had the knowledge of God, they would have had the power to keep themselves from being destroyed. Now nobody in his right mind wants to be destroyed. Ignorance might be bliss, but it is also dangerously life-threatening.

Consider this in the area of natural law. A person who does not know—does not discern, does not realize, is not sure of—the power of electricity, or of nitro-glycerin, or of carbon monoxide, or let us say of a certain medication, might pay for his ignorance with his life. Even if a person who is ignorant of these things is not killed, by his misuse he might have the quality of his life severely impaired. The implication right here in Hosea 4 is very clear—that ignorance injures and destroys. To know edifies, heals, and gives life more abundantly. Ignorance kills. Knowing gives one power to add wonderful quality to one's life.

In Proverbs 3, we will carry this a little bit further, because I want you to see that the cliché "that knowledge is power" is a true proverb, and have you feed this understanding back into the understanding of what the word—the term "eternal life" means.

Proverbs 3:13-14 Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. [We are talking about knowledge here.] For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold.

Now, is money power? You had better believe it! But yet, knowledge is even greater in power than money, than wealth.

Proverbs 3:15-18 She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot be compared with her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.

Is knowledge power? Is knowing God power? Does knowing God have the power to produce eternal life? I will tell you—that is power!.

Proverbs 3:19 The LORD by wisdom has founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens.

Think how much knowledge it took to produce what you and I live on, and we so frequently take it for granted; but when we start to think about it, we have to recognize how wise, how smart, how intelligent, how thoughtful, how kind, and generous God is.

Proverbs 3:20-22 By His knowledge the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew. My son, let them not depart from your eyes—keep sound wisdom and discretion; so they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck.

Eternal life is to know God. It is not knowledge *about* God—it is the knowledge *of* God. We are "to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ." There is awesome power there that speaks of quality.

Proverbs 11:6 The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the unfaithful will be caught by their lust.

Proverbs 11:8 The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead.

What if a person does not know righteousness? It cannot then deliver him. And then what? They are destroyed.

Let us look at one more scripture here and I think that this will be enough on this particular point in Isaiah 11. As you turn there, I am going to ask you, "What is it that is going to make the Millennium so awesome to live through?"

Isaiah 11:9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain [Does that speak of quality? Here is the reason:], for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD.

Not knowledge *about* the Lord. It is the knowledge *of* the Lord that the people will have in their mind, enabling them to produce the right things. Is there something wrong with the quality of life on earth today? Is there something wrong even with the quality of our lives? Is it possible that having the knowledge of God is part of the problem here, that we do not have enough of it, or that we do not appreciate it, do not use it enough? Eternal life speaks of quality, not just endlessness.

Did you get this one point then, of what Jesus was talking about there in John 17:3, when I said that God speaks of things so simply in the way He defines things? And yet hidden beneath the surface, when we dig a little bit deeper, the subject begins to open up and it is so complex and beautiful. Eternal life is more than endless. The biblical eternal life includes the power to produce quality living super-abundantly beyond merely existing. The Greek gods existed. Of course, they were just stories, but the idea is there.

Now let us look at the sexual aspects just briefly:

Genesis 4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD."

That is so clear, it does not need any explanation. He knew her, and suddenly she has a baby! I should not say suddenly. It was nine months.

Genesis 4:17 And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived.

Now, that can take place pretty quickly. Again, in verse 25:

Genesis 4:25 And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel."

The word in the Hebrew that is there translated into the English know, is *yada* (transliterated) and it has a wide variety of application and one of which is "to lie by man," which the translators chose to interpret by the English word know, or in this case, by the past tense, knew. Now, what this does is it adds intimacy to the knowledge of God. It is not just something from which we are detached, but it adds to the "knowing God" the fact of being close to Him within a relationship. So it is not merely being acquainted. I think today we would probably say something that, it is like "we're inside of His head." We know Him inside and out in a way that we are just beginning to understand.

So to know God then includes all the impressions of mind and life which a fair view of God should produce. This includes things like love and reverence and obedience and honor and gratitude and deep affection for Him. Besides, we know Him as our Sovereign, our parent, our friend, our lawgiver; and in the case of Jesus Christ, as our Elder Brother and husband-to-be, and thus we can yield to Him with all of our heart while we are striving to obey Him.

Just in case you have wondered whether the Greek word means the same as the Hebrew—it does.

Luke 1:34 Then said Mary to the angel, "How shall this be, since I do not know a man?"

The corresponding Greek word to the Hebrew *yada* is *ginosko*. Incidentally, this is exactly the same word that is translated "know" in John 17:3, and so it is used in the Greek, in the English, and in the Hebrew all in the same way.

All this taken together points to Jesus indicating that eternal life is not merely endless, even though that is its dominant sense, but rather that the one having it is living in close intimacy with God and conducting his life in the same manner as God; otherwise, there would be no close intimacy with Him, because sin separates.

Now, I am going to ask you a question: Where can we turn in Scripture where we might find a statement that is broad enough to give us an overall conception of the kind of life that God wants us to live so that we might be in His Kingdom, and yet narrow enough so that we can see that what is being stated is directly tied to the resurrection, the Kingdom of God, and eternal life? In other words, it ties together the present and the future. Well, there might be a number of scriptures that we would come up with and they would all be correct, but I am going to have you turn to John 12.

John 12:20 Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast.

These might have been proselytes to Judaism. They were in Jerusalem. They were Gentiles and they heard Jesus speaking.

John 12:21 Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

They wanted to see Jesus. Philip did not know exactly what to do, so he went to Andrew, and both of them together went to Jesus.

John 12:23-26 But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor."

I do not know where you would turn, but from a pastor's point of view, this series of verses I think catches the essence of what Christian life and overcoming is all about. You probably have heard it said that if God repeats something twice—you had better pay attention! How about if He said something six times? I would have to say that is at least three times more important than if He says it twice, at the very least. Now if it increases exponentially, we have a problem here. We are looking at a statement that is super important.

I will say this, that the specific wording in all of the six places is not exactly the same, nor is the context exactly the same; but, the sense is there. I want you to notice the setting here: A small group of Gentiles asked Philip for an audience with Jesus. Not one word is recorded about what they said. Context gives the distinct impression Jesus uttered this before they even asked a question.

What we see here is His response to the knowledge that they wanted to talk with Him. That response was interesting, because He undoubtedly knew that they were Gentiles. I can see at least three thoughts that exploded into His mind all at the same time. The first was that the people who wanted to see him were Gentiles. He himself had said, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Jesus knew the plan of God better than anybody. He knew what was coming, and so when these Gentiles came to Him, He undoubtedly looked into the future, and if I can put it this way (even though He may not have known the personality) He saw somebody like the apostle Paul going to the Gentile world.

The Gentile world is many, many times more populous than the Israelite world, and so what Jesus must have envisioned is the huge multitudes—these populations all over the world—great masses of people being converted, growing, overcoming, and being brought into the Kingdom of God, and here was the beginning—a small group of Gentiles coming to learn more.

At the same time, He must have anticipated their questions. What question do you think they would have asked? Would it not have been something like that rich, young ruler—"What must I do to be saved? What must I do to have eternal life? What must I do to be in your kingdom?" Now notice His answer. I am going to put it in plain English. "You've got to quit living like the way you are!" What kind of life do you think He had in mind that they should be living? Obviously, it is eternal life.

So the third thing was that He must have envisioned—this is obvious—the culmination of His life's work and the part that it would play in bringing this about. What was the culmination of His life's work?—His crucifixion! The sacrifice of His life, in death, that the sins of all mankind could be paid. When Jesus responded, He was not overly concerned about specific actions in the conduct of their

lives, but rather the overall principle involved. He was concerned about the force that drives human life, and that is "self-centeredness."

I want to give you another idea of how important this section was. It was so important that God Himself responded, and His voice thundered in agreement, out of heaven. You can read that in verses 27-29. Let us look a little bit more carefully at what Jesus said. He used a simple illustration that everybody can understand, because what He did was say, "This is what you need to do to be in My Kingdom. This is the kind of life you need to be living. Unless a seed is planted in the ground and die, it bears no fruit."

What is the interpretation of that in practical terms? *It is only when life is sacrificed that it bears fruit.* This is the key to eternal life. Now this applied to Jesus, because what happened to Jesus? Well, He was thinking of His crucifixion and what was going to be the fruit of Him giving His life—sacrificing it there. It was going to be the forgiveness of mankind. Now, was that life sacrificed going to bear anything? Same principle of planting a seed in the ground. Same principle in terms of living on a day-to-day basis. A life produces whenever it is sacrificed.

So He sacrificed His life and the fruit of His sacrifice at this point is the church. Eventually, multitudes more are going to come to pass and this same principle holds true for individual lives. The fruits unto eternal life are produced when an individual sacrifices himself in service to others, whether that other be God, or others be man. Now in verse 25:

John 12:25 "He who loves his life will lose it."

The person who attempts to preserve his life rather than sacrifice it, will end up losing what he spent a lifetime to preserve. Meanwhile, the one who sacrifices his life [Now listen to what I am going to say] keeps right on living into the Kingdom of God. You know why? Because that is the way God lives—endlessly!

Just to add a little bit more here, it is interesting when John wrote this that he used two different words that are translated into the single English word "life." The first is *psuche*, which we are all familiar with—one which is most frequently translated soul, and it simply means here "physical life." The second one is *zoe* (transliterated "zoe") and it is the noun to which the adjective "eternal" is attached. Those two in combination mean then, eternal life is the spiritual vitality of God. It is the life of God. Now in verse 26:

John 12:26 If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me, and where I am, there My servant will be also.

Here the word "follow" means to "ape," "imitate." It does not mean merely to walk behind; it means to imitate. Now, is Jesus going to be in the Kingdom of God? There you have it. If you want to be in the Kingdom of God, just "ape" what He did, and we will follow Him right into the Kingdom.

Let us not get too far from the point here, because the whole point of this sermon is that we see that eternal life includes what we do now. It is not just something that is on out into the future. It is something that God has empowered us to do right now so that we can right now live eternal life, and so when we get to the end of the journey (which we would normally think of as the grave)—you see, we just go right on into the Kingdom because we are already living the same way God does eternally. It is so beautiful!

In this case, the "aping" Him means "the sacrifice of our life." It is the life that produces eternal life. Jesus would complete His work by sacrificing His life in death, and He said, "Greater love has no man that to lay down his life for his friends." He said that in a context that we would understand, that this laying down of life is a continuous process—not just something that happens at the end of a person's life, but it is something that happens all the time.

It is said in another context, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve." So He laid down His life on a daily basis, and so He expects us to imitate Him—to follow in His steps. That means then, what He does, we do, and what He bears, we bear; what He loves, we love.

Most of the people who call themselves Christians believe that Christianity is a theory to be accepted—a faith to be lived out daily. Many of these people have the vague idea that what Christ does for us, and offers us, is to enable us to remain what we are, to evade the consequences of being what we are, and to reap a destiny that is not normally ours—or not naturally ours, I think would be better. Please get what I am going to say. I am going to prove what I am going to say in just a second. At the end of our life we are going to receive from God what we have been living.

Romans 2:6 Who will render to each one according to his deeds.

Now another scripture on that.

II Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

So I have simply changed the wording a bit by saying that at the end of our lives we are going to receive from God what we have been living.

I will read three scriptures here, fairly close together, with little expounding:

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

Mark 8:34-38 And when he had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also will the Son of man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Matthew 10:39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Now, why does Christ have to say things like this to you and me? Because human nature thinks that the only way to succeed and get the things they deeply desire out of life is to accomplish them the

human way. This involves being self-centered, pushy, competitive, utterly concentrated on getting what it sets out to attain. We all have it. The only difference is a matter of degree and the direction it takes us in order to have what it is we desire.

Human nature is also driven by pride and by covetousness. That is why He says what He does so frequently. The self has to be denied and lost. It has to be gotten rid of, in biblical terminology. I want us to understand (a little caution here) that the Bible is not urging us to court martyrdom. It is talking about a general approach to life. It is talking about sacrificing, or crucifying the self-centered impulses of human nature. It means subordinating a clamoring ego with its preoccupation with I, me, and mine—it is self-concern for self-assertion and insistence on comfort, etc.

It is denying the self for the sake of putting the self into Christ's cause. Christ's cause is to live life like He does. To be ashamed to live this way of life is the equivalent of being ashamed of Christ Himself.

I want you to think just a bit about what you read so much about the way God lives. What does it say about the way God lives? Let us begin with a very, very familiar scripture. You probably know exactly where it is. "God so loved the world that He gave. . ." "Greater love has no man than this that he lay down his life. . ." "The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve and give."

God gives His Holy Spirit. God gives forgiveness. God gives mercy, kindness, correction, rain in due season. Prosperity comes from Him. God gives power. God gives feeling. He gave us this earth and daily He supplies life to billions of people. The list of things in His Word that He says that He gives is so long we could not go through it all. God lives to give. Remember the two trees? Mr. Armstrong? Two ways of life so simply stated—give or get?

We can never be in His image until we live like He does, and if we have understood and believe in the purpose that He is working out, then we will be using our faith to yield to his way and developing His character image. Brethren, that is what overcoming and growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ is all about.

I do not know about your experience, but from my perspective, many who have left Worldwide Church of God want to make a religion out of technicalities. Paul calls it "strivings about the law." Brethren, what I am telling you about in this sermon—this is where life is! Being technically correct has its place, but it is not as important as being in the image of God in terms of character, in terms of morality, in terms of ethics. This is what prepares us for living with God. Let us draw this picture even more finely by going back to I John, the 1st chapter. Notice the wording carefully.

I John 1:1-4 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we to you that your joy may be full.

What is it that John is saying was manifested? Eternal life! Do you get that? Eternal life, something that is a biblical concept, can be seen, and heard, and touched right now—not in the future—right now! The "we" and the "our" is primarily referring to the apostles. The apostles fellowshiped with

it, ate with it, drank with it, listened to it, touched it, slept with it. They in turn reported it to us so that we can have fellowship with it—not in the same intimacy that they did, but still the principle is there.

Verse 3 is the Specific Purpose Statement of the book of I John. The purpose of this epistle is to proclaim the reality of the eternal life of God revealed in Jesus Christ. When John wrote this epistle, a lot of heresy was becoming quite strong, and if you will notice any time in the future when you read through I John, his method of proclaiming eternal life is highly subjective. In other words, he puts himself right into it, and the epistle is filled with the first person, singular—"I" as well as the first person plural—"we" (meaning primarily in many cases the apostle himself).

What John is doing in this epistle is using the weight of his personal experience of witnessing this life to combat the heresies of the Gnostics. He says that this life that he witnessed from the beginning, in modern English, we would say—"With his own eyes he witnessed the ultimate reality." He saw life that was not subject to, nor will it change from culture to culture. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever."

What the gospel does is that it invites us, encourages us, inspires us, exhorts us, educates us, commands us to live in the eternal life of the Kingdom of God right now. The gospel is not only that which one hears at the beginning of conversion, but what one is supposed to hear in greatly expanded detail the entirety of his Christian life. That is why Paul said in Romans 1 that he desired to tell, to preach the gospel to that already converted group of people there in Rome.

Eternal means not just what is in the future in terms of time, but that it is unending in both directions and is the character of the life that Jesus Christ lived. Look at what the gospel offers in verse 3.

I John 1:3 That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us.

He says that our fellowship is with the Father. That means right now! The gospel is offering us life with God now! Turn to chapter 5 and verse 11.

I John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things have I written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

So eternal life includes fellowship with God and living, at the very least beginning to live life as God lives His, and to fellowship with Him. When God gave us eternal life, He gave us something unique, different from the life that we ordinarily would live as others do, because that kind of life is self-centered.

Brethren, how many people do you know who have fellowship with God, who actually walk with Him as His friend, because we agree with Him and He with us, as to how to live and stay at His side endlessly? It is entirely possible—the fellowship aspect, one of the more important things to understanding eternal life.

Can two walk together unless they agree? No. That is an impossibility. They might walk together for a little while. Two people who do not agree are going to part. I want you to think about this.

Humanity was created right from the beginning for fellowship. By nature it is something that is within us—to seek out fellowship. We may not call it that. We might call it companionship, but we seek out fellowship on a large number of levels.

How do we do it? We do it through hobbies. We try to get together with people, talk with people, walk with people, fellowship with people who have the same hobbies as we do. How about interest in a general or specific branch of the arts? If you like poetry, do you not like to get together with people who also like poetry, or write poetry? People who do painting. You try to get together with those people. How about athletic affiliation? Why do people join bowling leagues? They like the fellowship. They like the sport. They like to be with people who also like to fellowship and like the sport as well.

Let us get a little bit more serious. Right after God created man—here we are, right in the beginning, and God is laying the foundation for everything that is to follow. The first thing He did was create a fellowship for Adam with Eve. The highest form of human fellowship available.

You begin to see where this is all leading, and right now you and I are in a stage of fellowship that has not been made available to the rest of mankind. We are at the beginning stages of a fellowship on the very highest level of fellowship, even higher than the fellowship of the intimacy of marriage—a fellowship on a God-plane—a fellowship with Him that is going to eventually end in a marriage and being in the God Family. Man was created for fellowship.

What God is doing with you and me right now is seeing if we are going to be able—or willing—to live within the guidelines of the fellowship that He has established for His Family. This is why I say, and why the Bible says, that at the end of our life we are going to receive from God the kind of life that we have been living.

Now, what if our fellowship is with the world? Not so good, is it? We have been created for that other fellowship, and if we are going to walk with God, we are going to have to enjoy the same things He does, love the same things He does, hate the same things He does, and talk about the same things He talks about, bears the same things that He does, and on and on. That is eternal life. Does that not make sense? That is what John says that God wants us to have. That is what the gospel does.

Let me take this one step further. Since the WCG is breaking up, there are an awful lot of people who have declared themselves to be "independent." They are going to float. That is a contradiction! That is impossible! It will not work. God has created us for fellowship with a group because that is where the greatest amount of growth is going to take place.

The Christian church is a community. It is a fellowship. It warns in Hebrews 10:26 not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together. Please understand: Christian fellowship is not just friendly smiles and being congenial. The Bible's writers show plainly that it is a fellowship whose mark is self-sacrificing love that is manifested in mutual service, in prayer, labor, sacrifice, and helpfulness.

Now, while we are in I John let us go to chapter 2 and in verse 17.

I John 2:17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The will of God is the driving principle of life. Indeed, since God created it, and He rules His creation—it is the driving force in all of creation. Those who are not in harmony with the will of God are doomed. They will simply be swept away as if they were not even there. Permanent value, reality, abide only within the will of God. Everything else is vanity, and only as far as we attach ourselves to His will do we belong to eternity. If we live life according to the lust of the flesh, we are not living according to God's will and we will simply pass away with the world—be destroyed.

So life beyond the grave is bound up in the life that we live here and now, and this is because the blood of Jesus Christ and the way that we are living prepares us for walking with Christ eternally. Now in this same chapter of John, in verses 1 through 6, think of this in terms of John 17:3—that eternal life is to know God.

I John 2:1-2 My little children, these things write I to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sin, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

There is a great deal of encouragement there. God is looking at the overall picture of what we do with our life. He knows that we are not going to complete the course without sinning, so He looks beyond that—to the attitude, and so we sin once in a while, and He is certainly willing to forgive it. Graciously He will do it and generously and quickly He will forgive sin. He wants us to understand that, but He wants us headed in the right direction and putting ourselves into it. Look at verse 3.

I John 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

Does not that verse mean a lot more now?

I John 2:4-6 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Can two walk together except that they be agreed? These things keep tying together all over the place. So, do you want to know God and do His will at one and the same time? There it is. Keep His commandments. That is how you come to know God: Do not sin. Another way of putting it is—overcome and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Brethren, in order to do this, we have to greatly desire to live the eternal life that right now only the Father and the Son have in its reality, and the fullness of what is coming to us.

Remember the last sermon that I gave in this series. Sin destroys ideals, and as we sin the high standards are gradually eroded away and we become willing to accept just about anything. Sin destroys innocence, and while it is doing that it produces fear, cynicism, guilt, and restlessness. Sin destroys the will, gradually removing the barriers to more sin and the incentive to doing well. Sin produces more sin, sickness and pain, and finally death.

Nothing will ever change unless each person, as he is summoned by God, takes it upon himself to set himself to allow himself to be motivated to use the gifts God gives. It takes a lot to do this. Jesus warned that it would be difficult. He says, "Difficult is the way; narrow is the gate." He never hid that from His followers. But the fear of God, vision, and hope, a deep sense of obligation to Christ,

knowing who we are, having a hatred of sin, and a strong desire to live eternal life—these things will motivate.

Now in this series we did not even consider faith and love. Faith undergirds the entire process and it manifests itself as a reality in our lives through love. Now turn with me and we will conclude in John 14, and in verse 6.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Let me put that in a little bit different way. Nobody will be in God's Kingdom who is not living "the way." Nobody will be in God's Kingdom who is not living the truth. Nobody will be in God's Kingdom who is not living the life. This is three ways of saying the same thing. Jesus did them all. That is the pattern. We are to follow Him—that is, to "ape" Him.

So I think that this series has given us a number of things to think about and I hope that it proves to be valuable to you in making sense of the life that God has called us to, making sense in terms of what we are to do and where we are to head, that the most important thing in our life at this time is to overcome and grow. It is to learn to live God's way. It is to learn to live eternal life.