

# John 17:3

**-Live the Eternal Life as a Witness to the World-**

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## Introduction

- ❖ When Jesus prays: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3), he is not giving a definition of immortality or afterlife, but he is praying for life in this world.
- ❖ **The eternal life is given to be lived in this world as a witness to the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent!**
  - Eternal life means living by faith in Jesus Christ, in this world!
    - “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11.25-26).
- ❖ Certain scientists, futurists, and philosophers have theorized about the immortality of the human body, and suggest that human immortality is achievable in the first few decades of the 21st century, whereas others believe that life extension is a more achievable goal in the short term, with immortality awaiting further research breakthroughs into an indefinite future. The absence of aging would provide humans with biological immortality, but not invulnerability to death by physical trauma.<sup>1</sup>
  - This is about biological immortality, which is not the same as eternal life!
  - Death will be still there and cannot be reversed.

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<sup>1</sup> Immortality (n.d.). Retrieved March 14, 2016, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immortality>

- Humans will still be vulnerable to physical trauma. Psychological trauma is not mentioned, but Imagine that one has to live an immortal life with psychological trauma...
- ❖ Eternal life is often equated to the afterlife. All major religions have some concept of an afterlife, even non-religious people have some vague idea about a kind of spiritual afterlife or existence.
  - Materialism is the view that on the ultimate level of reality when one comes to the bottom of existence, all is matter.<sup>2</sup>This view is incompatible with “eternal life.”

## Context

- ❖ An overview of John 13-21:

John 13:1-30	The Last Supper
John 31:31-14:31	Final discourse – part I
John 15:1-16:33	Final discourse – part II
John 17:1-26	The “LastPrayer” of Jesus
John 18:1-19:42	The arrest, crucifixion, and death of Jesus
John 20:1-29	The resurrection of Jesus

- ❖ This “last prayer” is a kind of farewell prayer. Within about 24 hours, Jesus will be crucified and after his death on the cross, buried in a new grave. After his resurrection, he will appear to his disciples, but no longer live in their midst. On Ascension Day, he will be glorified and sit at the right hand of God Almighty, the heavenly Father.

## Technical notes

- ❖ Several words in this text need attention:
  - “eternal” = **αἰώνιος**.<sup>3</sup> Pertaining to: to a period of unending duration, *without end*.<sup>3</sup>
    - As will be explained below, John doesn’t mean life after death, but a life in communion with God.
  - “to know” = **γινώσκω**. 6. to have come to the knowledge of, *have come to know, know*.β. of persons. *know someone*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Ratzsch, D. (2006) *Materialism (philosophical/metaphysical)*. In: *New dictionary of Christian apologetics* (p. 425-427).

<sup>3</sup>Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 33)

- This is not scientific knowledge, but personal knowledge acquired in personal relationships and encounters.
- “true” = ἀληθινός. 3. Pertaining to: to being real, *genuine, authentic, real*.<sup>5</sup>
- “sent” = ἀποστέλλω. 1. to dispatch someone for the achievement of some objective, *send away/out*.<sup>6</sup>
- “life” = ζωή, which corresponds to the **Christian’s possession of life here and now, a resurrection proceeding from life**. John is fond of calling this Life ζωή αἰώνιος, as in many passages: J 3:15f, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; **17:2f**; 1J 1:2; 2:25; 3:15; 5:11, 13, 20.<sup>7</sup>

## Form and structure

- ❖ The “last prayer” of Jesus consists of three parts:

John 17:1-5	The glorification of Jesus
John 17:6-19	Jesus prays for his disciples
John 17:20-26	Jesus prays indirectly for all believers, “those who will believe in me through their message” (Jn 17:20), and for his disciples

## Exposition

### Verse 3

- ❖ **“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”**
  - Jesus doesn’t give a definition of eternal life. It is part of a prayer for the true knowledge, which is life.
- ❖ **“they”** are those who the Father has given to Jesus (Jn 17:2, 9, 24; Jn 10:29)
  - In the first place, Jesus is praying for the disciples.
  - In the second place, Jesus is praying for all believers (Jn 17.24).

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<sup>4</sup>Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p.200)

<sup>5</sup>Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 43)

<sup>6</sup>Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000 p. 120)

<sup>7</sup>Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 430)

- ❖ **“is”** = consists of “knowledge”. It means that eternal life is a life in communion with God. Jesus lived on earth a life in communion with God and he gave the church an example of the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus lived in communion with Jesus.  
Jesus said to Martha after his friend Lazarus has died:
  - “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11:25-26). After he had said this, he called Lazarus by name to come out of the grave.
- ❖ **“know you.”** It is instructive to read John 14:6-11 and John 1:18:
  - “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really **knew me**, you would **know my Father** as well. From now on, you do **know** him and have **seen** him.”  
Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “**Don’t you know me**, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has **seen** me has **seen** the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that *I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me*? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that *I am in the Father and the Father is in me*; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.
  - “No one has ever **seen** God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him **known**.”
    - In these two passages two words are important: **to know** and **to see**. Especially: “**Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.**” The disciples have seen God incarnated.
    - And there is the identity in word and work (Jn 3:22-24, 5:19, 7:16, 8:28, 12:49, 15:15, 17:4), summarized in the union of Father and Son: *I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me* (Jn 17:20).
      - The reception of the little children (Mt 19:13-15) is a strong illustration. Jesus acts as a Father and speaks the words of the Father.
      - Jesus extends this spiritual (mystical) union to his disciples and all believers: “that all of them may be one, Father, just as *you are in me and I am in you*. **May they also be in us**” (Jn 17:21), and: “they may be one as we are one: **I in them and you in me**. May they be brought to complete unity” (Jn 17:22-23).
      - This unity is visualized in figure 1. And 2.
- ❖ **“eternal life”**
  - Is a gift: Jn 17:2. It is a life through the Spirit of the Father and of Jesus. See for an elaboration of “eternal life” the application.
- ❖ **“only true God”** = this means that whatever something of somebody is called god, this is a counterfeit god or no god.

- There are many counterfeit gods in this world, in other religions. But also, when people put their trust into technical and medical solutions to extend their lifetime.
- ❖ **“and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”**
  - “whom you have sent” and similar expressions occur 17 times in this Gospel, of which 6 instances are found in this prayer only: Jn 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23 and 25!
  - Other passages:
    - “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but **have eternal life**. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (Jn 3:16-17).
    - “For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. **Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life**, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (Jn 3:34-36).
    - “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me **has eternal life** and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (Jn 5:24).
      - In this case is not the Greek word *apostelloo*, but *pempoosed*.<sup>8</sup>
  - In this prayer Jesus extends his sending into the sending of the disciples in this world:
    - **“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”**

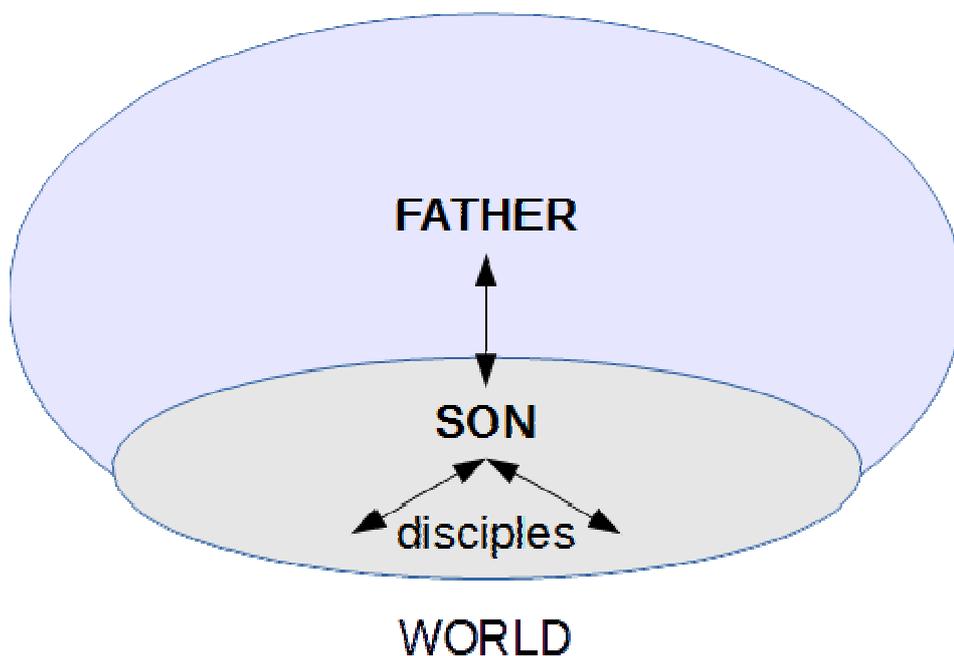
## Application

- ❖ The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the “only true God.” This means that whatever something of somebody is called god, this is a counterfeit god. Only the true God gives eternal life through the Son. Medical and technical developments can’t give eternal life, they can retard aging, perhaps for a long time, but can’t eliminate death, nor sin.
  - Eternal life is a life in communion with God. This life commences when someone starts to believe in Christ. This will change his or her life. This life will be characterized by:
    - PRAYER
    - “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love” (Jn 15:9-10).
      - Which commands?
        - To speak the word of God, words of grace and truth (Jn 1:17; 17:8).
      - “Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves

<sup>8</sup> “to send” = πέμπω. 1. to dispatch someone, whether human or transcendent being, usually for purposes of communication, send. Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 794).

me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (Jn 14.19-21; Jn 17:25-26).

- Eternal life is a life in which Jesus Christ reveals himself to the world.
  - It is a fruitful life (Jn 15:1-8; Gal 5:22-23).
  - It is a righteous, merciful and pure life (Mt 5:3-10).
  - It is a joyful life (Jn 15:11) in which the glory of God will be revealed (
  - It is a protected life by God (17:11, 14).
  - It is a sanctified life (Jn 7:18).
  - It is a unified life with other Christians (17:21-24).
- The purpose of this eternal life is:
  - “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (Jn 17:18).
  - “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me”(Jn 17:21)
  - “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me”(Jn 17:23).
- ❖ The eternal life is of the utmost importance for the advance of the Gospel. Therefore, every Christian should live the eternal life in the world and not postpone eternal life to the world to come.
  - Figure 1. John 1:18 and 14:6-11 visualized.

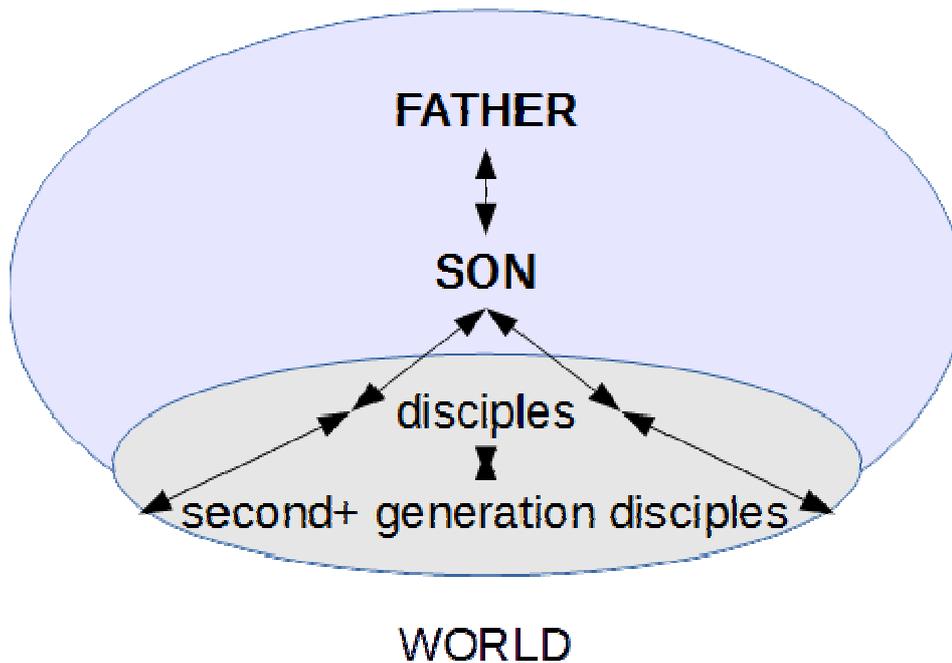


- “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (Jn 1:18)
- “Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” 9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a

long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (Jn 14:8–9).

- This visualization shows that the Son revealed the Father in this world to his disciples.

- Figure 2. John 17:3 visualized.



- “No one has ever seen God and Jesus Christ, but the disciples who were at Jesus side, have made him known.” And after the first disciples came the second generation of believers, and the third and fourth...
  - How? By living the eternal life, living in communion with the Father and the Son. **“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”**

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