

## COMING TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH (THRU PARTICIPATION II)

We are continuing to study the thought of 2 Timothy 3:1-7, especially the idea of verse 7 which says that in the last days some will be "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." We've studied four steps to coming to this knowledge - education, meditation, participation, and evaluation. We worked our way through the first two steps in previous articles. This article is the second on the study of participation.

Life is so dynamic. It is always moving and changing. People grow and change and learn to love new things. Whenever feelings and emotions are involved, situations can change quickly. If we expect to learn how to handle these situations in a Christ-like manner, we must learn how to hit a moving target. Sitting and thinking just won't get the job done. We must get involved with doing the Lord's work. We must be about our father's business (Luke 2:49). We must be willing to get out of the boat, like Peter (Mat. 14:29). I have been studying and preaching a long time, but I still learn what I've been talking about and what I need to be talking about, by doing.

Now let's consider a few general observations about participation:

Man needs trials and tribulations to grow. Consider two examples. The first is about a butterfly. A man watched a butterfly struggle to free itself from its cocoon. He tried to help by freeing the butterfly's wings from the tangles of the cocoon. He watched the butterfly, waiting for the wings to dry and lift the butterfly in flight. But the wings never worked - they were too weak. What the man didn't know, until he participated in the wrong way, was that the butterfly is designed to struggle against the cocoon to strengthen its wings so they can carry it in flight. The struggle brings strength. What a lesson for us! What if we are made like the butterfly in that our struggles are designed by God to make us stronger (Rom. 5:3-5; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). So if we complain and whine and expect someone else to ease our burdens so that we don't have to participate in them, how will we get strong enough to fly? We don't learn very well when we're complaining. Do you have a difficult spouse? Be thankful! Don't look for a way to get rid of him/her and get another. And don't spend all your time

waiting for them to change. Stay-put and learn the lessons God is trying to teach you. Marriage may be the best teaching institution God ever established!

The second example is a quote from Thomas Edison - "Great ideas originate in the muscles." This observation also shows how important the act of using the muscles (participation) is in stimulating the mind. Now, I know that all spiritual work does not involve the muscles, but the principle still stands. When we do something it makes an impression on our minds that leads to a better understanding of our efforts. Did you ever think you knew how to discipline a child only to try it and find it made the child's behavior worse? Sure, because our natural instinct is to make the child act like we want it to act. We want to use a direct route and tell the child what to be and how to feel. It didn't work, did it? You probably (hopefully) learned to use indirect methods to make the child want to do what you wanted. For instance, if you tried to bully the child into submission you probably only made the child rebellious or showed him/her how to be a better bully. Neither are what you intended. But by acting in the opposite way of your instincts, by being patient and kind, you might show the child a better way - a way the child would want to follow. Surprisingly this works with adults, too.

Participation is essential for faith to live. James tells us (Jms 2:20) that "faith without works is dead." This says so simply what I have been trying to say - that education and meditation without participation is dead. Works are essential to assure that our faith is not vain. We may study love, patience, humility, etc. and convince ourselves that we have them, but until we are put to the test in these areas and have to prove ourselves by performing, we don't really know. I can say I have patience a million times, but until I get in the first situation to exercise patience, it's all just words and air. And I don't think faith is any different.

We must participate in knowing. Not all participation involves action. Sometimes it involves being completely convinced by observing things happening around us. Consider this idea in Psalms 46:10 - "Be still, and know that I am God..." Do you know that God is God, or do you just know what you have read and heard about God? There is a difference! Try participating in life, in embracing the struggles of it, seeing the weakness of the flesh, and you will see that God exists, He is great, and He is awesome! But when will you realize this? In the midst of a bad situation, say a car wreck or some other accident or a

serious illness? No, probably after this traumatic event when you look back and think that it could have been worse, or that some unforeseen event turned the situation for the better. Then you realize someone else is in control and has been all the time. This has happened to me time after time. It tends to make you an optimist!

Godly participation occurs even in the workplace. Colossians 3:23,24 speaks to us about our conduct in the situation where we may spend most of our waking hours. And this may also be where we are around people that we can influence most by our conduct and conversation. This is the workplace. How do we do our job? With enthusiasm, dedication, and determination, or by slacking, shirking, and complaining? This sends a message about our faith, especially to God! One thing we have to really watch is lying. It's so easy to stretch, bend, or downright ignore the truth to protect ourselves or our client that we lie. We don't call it a lie. We justify it somehow. But when we don't tell the truth as the truth, it's a lie and we are liars and our coworkers know it unless they are so busy lying themselves that they no longer recognize a lie as a lie. Sounds like someone needs a good example!

We must participate in Godly conversation. Consider the whole verse of Colossians 4:6 - "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every man." I cannot emphasize how important this is. Through our speech we tell others about ourselves, what we feel, how we think. We pass along family values and traditions to the next generation. We comfort or irritate those around us. We make our spouses crazy about us, or just crazy, period. What power our speech has! Most disagreements are started with a poor choice of words and the way the words are delivered. Know someone that you just don't like to be around, someone that irritates you or makes you stressed, and you don't really know why? Think about the way they talk, their mannerisms and phrases, their body language. If you will study their conversation, you will probably find the problem. That's the easy part. The hard part is making sure our own conversation is not equally grating to others. And this is not necessarily sinful talk; it's just talk that is not smooth or Godly. It might not keep us out of heaven, but it can sure keep us from taking someone else with us!

Jesus' willingness to participate in human mortality made him a perfect comforter. This is given to us in Hebrews 2:18. If participation is not essential, then why did Jesus have to participate in mortal life to learn obedience (Heb 5:8)? Why did

he have to "suffer being tempted"? If even Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, had to participate in human suffering, then who do we think we are to escape it? This idea is so important not only to our own individual growth, but to even understand God's plan of salvation for us through the mortality of Jesus. He suffered through mental, physical, and spiritual attacks, and yet still did no sin. So the next time you are tempted to "lose it", or "just do it", think of what Jesus would do in your situation. If you are indeed a Christian, this mental participation with Christ will surely keep you from physical participation in an ungodly way.

### Conclusion

We are all participating in life. The fact that you are reading this proves that. Are we participating in a way that will lead us, and others, to heaven? Are we being made stronger spiritually each day by our struggles, or are we just being frustrated? Are we making those around us stronger, or are they having to accommodate us? It is our choice. I hope and pray that this study has increased your understanding of the ways the Lord has designed to make us worthy. What a joy it is to live with the knowledge of the truth that God is in control of what is best for us!

**Bill Prince Jr.  
Oxford, AL**

### APOLOGIA

QUESTION: Is it possible to know that we have eternal life? Most of the preaching I hear makes me think we cannot be sure until we die. What do you say?

ANSWER: I want to begin by pointing out that it really makes little difference what I say about the issue. I do not say this flippantly but sincerely. We live in a day and age where opinions and feelings of others are esteemed as highly and viewed as authoritatively as God's Word. What should be the basis for the answer is the Word of God. What does it say?

With that having been said we can turn in the scripture and find the answer very quickly to the question. I John 5:13 reads,

*"These things I have 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." (NKJV)*

Notice that John says that he has written to those who have faith in Christ that they may **know** that they have eternal life. There is the answer. John says that we can know that eternal life is a present possession.

While we have supplied the answer to the question, we do feel that it would do us all good to follow John's argumentation to this conclusion.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of I John, we find that beginning in verse 6 through 10 that the Greek word for witness was used eight times. This same Greek word is also used a little later in verses 11-13 where it is translated testimony or record. John brings this up in order to provide evidence God has concerning Jesus as His Son and the nature of His work.

The evidence that God gives is not so much proof of who Jesus is as it is proof of the content of His work. Jesus came to redeem, to reconcile, to ransom, to justify and to save man from sin.

As we begin to examine the text we find that the content of God's testimony concerning Jesus is that we might have eternal life. Note 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 I have 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." (NKJV)*

The point we want to emphasize is that John in this section writes of eternal life as being a present possession. In verse 11 he tells us that God has given (not that He will give) eternal life. In verse 12, John says that He who has the Son has eternal life (not will have eternal life) and finally he says the things of which he wrote were designed to let us know that we have eternal life (again, not that we will have it).

The above is very plain. John says three times that we have (currently, are presently in possession of) eternal life. So one might ask, "Since the above is so plain, why would one think otherwise?" Well the dilemma begins when one reads other

statements of divine scripture that suggests that eternal life is a future blessing. For example note the following passages:

*"But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality:"* (Rom. 2:5-7 NKJV)

*"But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life."* (Rom.. 6:22 NKJV)

*"in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,..."* (Tit. 1:2 NKJV)

Unlike the three passages in I John mentioned before, these verses speak of eternal life as being rendered to the saints at the end of time. Note the references to the end and the hope of eternal life. We now must ask which then is it? Is it a present possession or is it yet a future hope?

Since scripture cannot contradict scripture because truth cannot contradict truth (and all scripture is truth) eternal life must have both a present aspect as well as a future one. Too many times we as students of the Bible are quick to forget that all things are not mutually exclusive.

This is the case with the passages in this article. Here different authors to describe different concepts use the same term eternal life. For example Paul is utilizing the term to describe that which begins after judgment while John is using the term to describe the life we now have in Christ because of the fellowship we enjoy with the Father and the Son. Here again is a prime example of allowing the immediate context to determine the sense in which a term is employed.

The meaning of eternal life in I John 5:13, the eternal life that we may know that we are in possession of, is the eternal life that is in Jesus, God's dear Son. Note how John began the epistle:

*"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, concerning 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..” (I John 1:1-2 NKJV)*

So even as he begins so even he ends. His conclusion is that possessing eternal life is knowing Him who is true and being in Him who justifies and makes righteous. Thus we who are walking in the light as He is in the light are cleansed of our sin and thus possess presently what we shall have yet in the future! Eternal life is not something that exists on a shelf somewhere, but rather is in the Father and the Son. Since the Father and the Son are eternal life those of us that have fellowship with them have the eternal life that is in them!

As we conclude this article, we would be remiss if we did not bring to the attention of readers one more time, the truth that eternal life is only in the Son! Verse 11 of chapter 5 tells us that the eternal life God gives is in His Son. It is to be found no place else. If we are to be in possession of eternal life we must be in Christ who died for us. Antithetically if we do not have Jesus then we do not have eternal life.

*“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (I John 5:12 NKJV)*

**SAM DICK**  
Cave City, KY

## **SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES**

1. According to Psalm 1, a man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly is comparable to what?
2. According to Jeremiah, what did the Lord say his people would no longer need to remember after he rewarded them?
3. Who asked Jesus, “What is truth?”
4. Paul told the Corinthians that he was sent to preach rather than what?
5. In Chapter 3 of Hebrews, Jesus is compared to whom?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. What did the Lord tell Moses the punishment was for working on the Sabbath? BEING PUT TO DEATH (Exo. 31:15)
2. What did Saul want to do with his son Jonathan, who had unknowingly violated Saul's order? KILL HIM (1 Sam. 14:44)
3. What was Nehemiah's job as a worker in the Persian palace? CUPBEARER TO THE KING (Neh 1:11)
4. Where did Philip begin a successful ministry, doing many miracles, and converting a former sorcerer named Simon? SAMARIA (Acts 8:5-13)
5. What two people did Paul say he "delivered to Satan?" ALEXANDER AND HYMENAEUS (1 Tim 1:20)