

“PIE IN THE SKY, BY AND BY”2 Corinthians 5:1-10**THEME: The biblical doctrine of heaven****DATE: 01/21/07**

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Is there really a heaven—a place where God dwells and where people can go after this life? Or is heaven just a preposterously optimistic hope—pie in the sky?

Many believe that everything comes to an end at death; beyond the grave there is nothing to fear or to enjoy. Just nothing.

A viewpoint like that may relieve anxiety about a hereafter, but it also diminishes the meaning of life here.

Some have a sort-of pantheistic view of life. They believe that at death we lose our individuality and we are absorbed into the Infinite Whole.

Others believe in reincarnation or the law of *karma*—that after death an eternal soul occupies another body, perhaps a lower form of life if you were a bad boy in this life.

Spiritualists believe that the dead don't really leave. They are nearby, invisible to the physical senses, but they can appear to those who have psychic powers.

- What do we know about heaven?

The word “heaven” can mean the atmospheric heavens, where the clouds are. It can also mean the celestial heavens, where from our perspective on earth the planets and all the stars and galaxies have their place in the universe.

For about 50 bucks you can actually name one of those tiny pinpricks of light in the night sky after yourself. Some doofuses actually lay out the money and get a certificate, so I'm told.

In the Bible we read of God shutting up the heavens so that it didn't rain. In the Old Testament we read about God creating the heavens and the earth, and about the constellations Orion and Pleiades. The context makes it clear what kind of heaven is meant.

- Today I'm talking about heaven as the dwelling of God.

Almost every morning I recite the prayer Jesus taught to his disciples, “Our Father who art in heaven.” . Is that truly where God is?

In Wilbur Smith's study of this subject he wrote: ‘Even though we are told in the Scriptures that the “heaven of heavens cannot contain God” (1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 2:6), and that God is everywhere present, on earth as well as in heaven (Deuteronomy 4:39; Joshua 2:11), nevertheless, the same Scriptures clearly teach that God does dwell particularly in heaven, a place often designated as his *habitation*.’ (*The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven*. Moody 1968. p.50)

Wayne Grudem explains, ‘*God is present everywhere . . . The greatest manifestation of God's presence to bless is seen in heaven, where he makes his glory known, and where angels, other heavenly creatures, and redeemed saints all worship him.*’ (*Systematic Theology* p.1159)

If we accept the Bible as the inspired, authoritative word of God, we find answers there to many of our questions about heaven.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 the Apostle Paul gives us some helpful **insights** into the nature of heaven and life after death, and I'm going to look at a lot of other Scripture portions too.

**I. HEAVEN IS A LITERAL PLACE (2 Corinthians 5:1-3)**

Some think that heaven is a state of being rather than an actual place.

- The New Testament presents heaven as a place.

After his resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven in full view of the apostles, then a cloud hid him from their sight.

Two angels came to them and said, ‘*Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*’ (Acts 1:11)

Jesus left physically, miraculously, and went somewhere—to a place.

Before his crucifixion Jesus told his disciples that he was going to a place and he would also prepare a place there for them. (John 14:2-3) The word for place is *topos*, which means a location, place, site.

- In the New Testament we read that Christ's followers should look forward to a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1).

This "new heaven" is the atmospheric and celestial heaven, not the dwelling of God. It's what we read about in the first verse of the Bible, *'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'* (Genesis 1:1).

When mankind defied God's will in the garden and sin entered the world, the whole creation was cursed. We're living in a corrupted world. But it will be renewed. The Apostle Paul wrote that *'the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.'* (Romans 8:21-22)

What's going to happen to the world and the cosmos? The Apostle Peter wrote, *'But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.'* (2 Peter 3:10)

- How will this happen? I don't know, but it's not absurd to believe that a cosmic cataclysm could occur. We're living on a very vulnerable planet. We're riding on the very thin crust of a huge, dynamic molten ball. Every earthquake, every volcanic eruption is a sobering reminder of our precarious position.

A gigantic asteroid shattering and burning as it strikes our atmosphere with parts perhaps rupturing the earth's crust could cause unimaginable devastation.

There's evidence that mini versions of this have happened in the history of planet earth in Central America, Siberia, and to a lesser degree in Arizona.

If you study all the factors that go into making this world habitable for us, you will realize that it could not happen just by chance. It is sustained and held together by God. The Apostle Paul said, *'All things were created by him and for him, . . . and in him all things hold together.'* (Colossians 1:16-17)

Only God's power prevents something catastrophic from happening to this world right now.

- Will this earth be completely annihilated? Will the new earth be a totally new creation, or will this present creation be renewed? We don't know for sure, but we do know that there will be what is called a "new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." (2 Peter 3:13)

This is way outside the range of our experience, and it stretches our imagination. We're trying to grasp just a little bit of what our infinite, eternal, all-powerful God will do, and it's beyond our ability to comprehend how he will do it.

- And there's still more. After the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, God will make his dwelling with his people. The apostle John described it: *'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'* (Revelation 21:1-4)

Heaven and earth will be one. There will be no more separation between them. The Holy City, heaven, will be on the new earth.

- We read that there will be no darkness or night in heaven (Revelation 21:25). Does that mean there will be no time in heaven? If there is no time, then things cannot be done after one another. But the description of events in heaven includes words being spoken—one after another—and events happening, such as a tree of life yielding its fruit each month (Revelation 22:2).

We should expect that time as we understand it will be part of heaven for us. We cannot experience eternity as our infinite God does. Grudem says, *'As finite creatures, we will rather live in a succession of moments that will never end.'* (Systematic Theology p.1162)

- So heaven is a real place where believers go after this earthly life.

<sup>1</sup> Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling,

<sup>3</sup> because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.

Paul groaned under the burden of hardships he endured as an apostle.

- He compared our physical bodies to a tent.

For some of you it's a pup tent, and for some of us it's a circus tent.

The tent was a symbol of something temporary. Our earthly bodies are like temporary tents.

Peter wrote something almost identical: *‘I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.’* (2 Peter 1:13,14)

Something infinitely better is waiting—a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands (v.1).

- We have bodies that are wasting away, but those who have life in Christ live on—to receive a new body far better than the earthly one.

Most people cling to what they have here, and don’t want to let go.

This is all temporary. Don’t cling to something that won’t go with you.

Christ has prepared a place for you where you can be with him forever.

[2<sup>nd</sup> insight into the nature of heaven and life after death]

## II. HEAVEN IS A FINAL DESTINY (2 Corinthians 5:4-8)

The apostle Paul wrote:

<sup>4</sup> *For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

<sup>5</sup> *Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

<sup>6</sup> *Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.*

<sup>7</sup> *We live by faith, not by sight.*

<sup>8</sup> *We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

God made people for a purpose much greater than our earthly life. The anticipation of heaven should bring joy to our souls.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon the greatest preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was teaching some young preachers about putting expression into their speech. He said, *‘When you speak of Heaven let your face light up, let it be irradiated with a heavenly gleam, let your eyes shine with reflected glory. But when you speak of Hell—well, then your ordinary face will do.’*

- How do we attain to our heavenly destiny?

By the presence of the Holy Spirit guaranteeing what is to come. (5)

Maybe you hear snap, crackle, pop in the morning--and it’s not coming from your breakfast cereal.

Have you grasped the awesome truth that though you may be increasingly frail outwardly, yet inwardly the Holy Spirit is getting you ready for all that God has prepared for you—if you have the Holy Spirit?

- What will we be like in heaven? Our bodies will be like Christ’s glorious body. The Apostle Paul explained it to the Christians at Philippi, *‘But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.’* (Philippians 3:20-21) I dealt with this last Sunday morning. Our physical bodies that die will have a continuity with our glorified bodies in heaven, much as a seed has a continuity with the glorious shrub that emerges after the seed is planted.

If you are a Christian, this newness has already started. If you have repented and placed your trust in Jesus Christ you are a new creation. The old has passed, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). You are able to *‘put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.’* (Ephesians 4:24). All that you are meant to be will be fully realized in your glorious resurrection body.

Before sin defiled God’s creation, everything God created was pronounced “very good.” (Genesis 1:31) When God makes everything new, including our bodies, the entire creation will be perfect—just as he originally created it to be.

- If you like to eat, there’s reason to believe that you won’t be disappointed in heaven. We’ll be guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb—Jesus Christ. Who ever heard of a supper without food? The tree of life in heaven will yield fruit every month—heavenly fruit. Vegetarians may like the description of heaven more than carnivores. But we have a guarantee that no one will ever be disappointed.
- What will we do with ourselves in heaven?

Sin has twisted and corrupted us so much that we tend to focus on created things rather than on the Creator; on our desires rather than God’s glory.

In John's vision of the throne room of God in heaven he saw heavenly beings worshiping God. That's why worship here on earth is so important. Have you ever been caught up in pure worship of God and experienced an indescribable joy? That's just a foretaste of the worship we'll give to God in heaven. I don't know exactly how we'll glorify God, but in doing so we'll be all God created us to be. God has a future for people infinitely grander than anything we can experience in our mortal bodies.

[3<sup>rd</sup> insight into the nature of heaven and life after death]

### III. HEAVEN IS AN ETERNAL INHERITANCE (2 Cor. 5:9-10)

How do we get to heaven?

Billy Graham told a story from his early years as a preacher. He arrived in a small town for a meeting. He had a letter he need to mail, so he asked a boy on the street how to get to the post office. The boy told him. Then Graham said, "If you'll come to the Baptist church tonight, you can hear me telling everyone how to get to heaven." The boy answered, "I don't think so. You don't even know how to get to the post office."

Jesus said, *'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'* (John 14:6)

- Jesus promised those who follow him an eternal inheritance (Matthew 19:29). He promises that those who overcome will inherit all the blessings of the dwelling of God, where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Revelation 21:3-7)

The concept of an inheritance after this life in the dwelling of God was something people sought and Jesus taught. Jesus said, *'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'* (Matthew 6:19-21)

- We're supposed to prepare ourselves for heaven while here in this earthly life.

Speaking of the destruction of the present heavens and earth on the day of the Lord, Peter adds, *'Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. (That's because) in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.'* (2 Peter 3:11-13)

- Paul makes the same point here:

<sup>9</sup> *So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.*

<sup>10</sup> *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

These Scriptures show us that our Lord will confront Christians with the evidence of wasted earthly lives through self-indulgence instead of service to their Lord.

- It's false comfort to think that upon entering eternity any self-indulgent living in our earthly bodies won't be an issue any more.

If it's all past and forgotten, then why this Judgment Seat of Christ?

Christ will reveal the things we have done in our physical bodies as good or worthless, but it will not be a judgment of condemnation.

You've all heard the saying: 'Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last.'

That's not in the Bible, but it's thoroughly biblical.

That's why Paul said, 'we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.' (9)

- For many Christians everything that matters is tied to their temporary earthly bodies. Everything they long for is here on earth.

That's the wrong goal. Our goal is to please him. It has always been that way. Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land God told them to love the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength. (Deuteronomy 6:5) God wants our wholehearted devotion.

Heaven is real. It's not "pie in the sky, by and by."

It's a place where those who belong to Christ will be with him forever. It's a place where you will be all God ever meant you to be.

You will be totally fulfilled, and your focus will be on the Lord God Almighty.

For Christians the best is yet to come.

- The only way to heaven is by a relationship with Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.