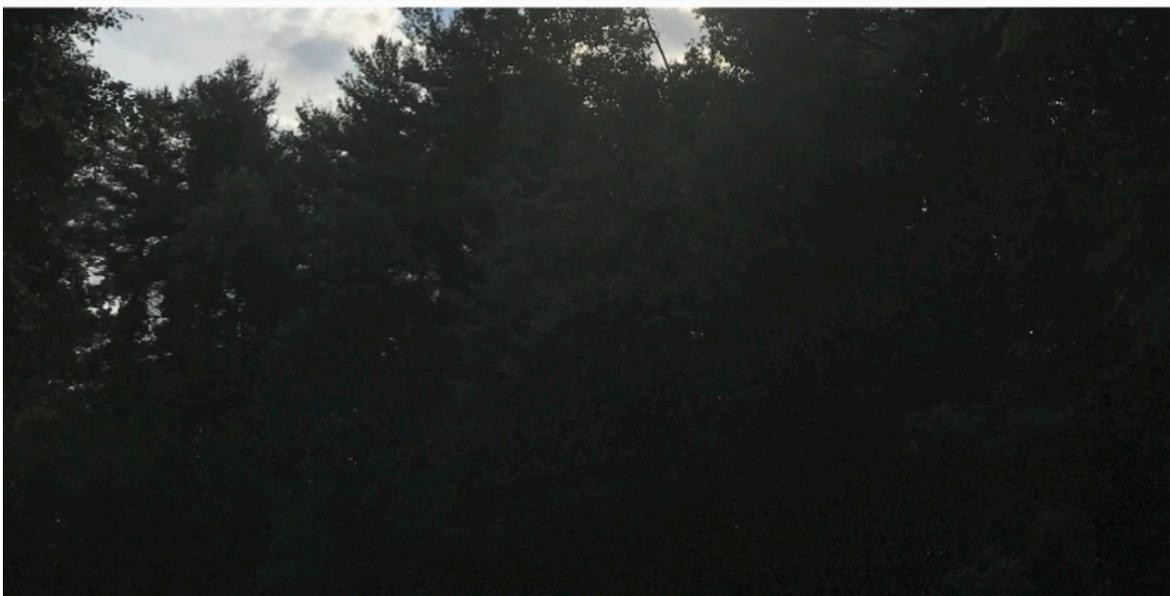




Inheriting The Kingdom of Light: Essays on Heaven

John H King



Inheriting The Kingdom of Light: Essays on Heaven

and other related studies

John King

Giving joyful thanks to the Father,
who has qualified us to share
in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.
Colossians 1:12 NIV

Fear not, little flock,
for it is your Father's good pleasure
to give you the kingdom.
Luke 12:32 ESV

Inheriting The Kingdom of Light: Essays on Heaven 1

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Meet Me at The Gate

My thoughts moved to the testimony of many a child of God when they closed the record of this life with the awareness of Jesus' presence to escort them to glory. This is my prayer.

This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.

Psalms 118:20

This is the gate of heaven. Genesis 28:17

Oh Lord, that blessed touch of grace
When I have walked the way called strait
To see you in that heavenly place
Awaiting me beside the gate!

My hope alone in life and death,
If life is short or should I wait,
Through many days to final breathe,
To see you standing at the gate.

Life's sorrows in its final hour
Release their hold upon the soul
And every grief will lose its power
When finally You complete the scroll.

Life's trials were a faithful friend
That I with widened eyes might see
What living hope and faith contend

A glorious welcome awaiting me.

To see the saints who went before
A joyous thought to celebrate
But now I long for nothing more
Than see you standing at the gate.

Refrain:

Meet me at the Gate, Dear Lord, Meet me at the Gate.

When the race is run, The battle won,

Meet me at the Gate.

Oh Lord, to see you standing there

My sole request, my only prayer.

The Kingdom of Heaven

the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel. Colossians 1:15

“It is not more natural to take the term kingdom¹ in its full sense at once spiritual and external, ” Professor Godet maintains.² When Jesus taught us to pray, “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” both meanings were on His heart and mind?

“Whatever, therefore,” Professor Lightfoot agrees, “is essential in the kingdom of Christ must be capable of realization now.”³ There is no other way to interpret Paul to the Ephesians,⁴ “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” We, as believers, are, in a real sense, already able to make deposits on a heavenly account: “... store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” We can deposit but must await our opportunity when we arrive there to make withdrawals on the blessings.

I am not prepared to distinguish among the various terms used to describe heaven: The Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Light. They all blend together into one message, one truth that the benefits of Heaven to come are already

¹ βασιλευειν - cp. 1 Corinthians 15:25

² F. L. Godet, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* 362

³ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* 142

⁴ Ephesians 2:6

shared in part with us by God's Spirit. We should be living in our future not simply awaiting change.

The only reference to *Christ's Kingdom*⁵ points to the Father, as well. So, here, these references are interchangeable. They refer to the same kingdom where God, the Father, reigns.

Heaven

It is understandable that believers are often imagining what living with God (in Heaven) might be like. But we tend to focus on our surroundings, on an environment we can imagine: streets of gold⁶ and mansions.⁷ [In modern terms. a mansion is a large and impressive house. Even if heaven provides us with lean-tos, we'll be impressed!!!] As exciting as such thoughts might be, these are isolated references that do not begin to give us a reasonable picture of what we have to look forward to. What would be the special value to us of mansions rather than simple dwelling places or if the streets are gold or some heretofore unknown element?

There are other aspects of heaven that have no clear biblical explanation. If someone cuts a rose from a bush, does it die? There is no death in heaven. [Maybe there's no scissors.] Will there even be roses

⁵ Ephesians 5:5 *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and [even] of God.*

⁶ Golden streets might be how things appear more than a literal description of what heaven's thoroughfares are made of..

⁷ John 14:1 in the KJV translates dwelling places or apartments as "mansions" which in 1611 meant "a place to stay."

there? I think so because God returns to the “Tree of Life” introduced to Adam and Eve in the beginning.⁸

We also envision ourselves in our early 20’s, men having washboard abs and women with graceful forms, even though gender has no meaning in Heaven.⁹ Perhaps, we might be shocked to discover once there that God’s favorite bodily form is obesity!¹⁰

It’s fun to talk about such things and I would encourage us to do so but—really now—these possible external considerations, if they are verities, are still beyond the scope of our temporal imagination. Don’t you think!

Discussing what our heavenly surroundings might be inspires hope—as it should. Imagining anything of what awaits us there is exciting converse—but the overarching Biblical message found throughout Scripture is the *relationship* we will then enjoy with Christ. In both the Old and the New Testaments the desire of God toward His people,¹¹ Israel and the Church, is so prevalent as to suggest a theological

⁸ Revelation 22:2 *On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

⁹ Luke 20:35 *But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage,*

¹⁰ Proverbs 28:25 [KJV] *he that put[s] his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.*

¹¹ There is no direct reference here to either Covenantal or Dispensational Theology. Whether Israel and the New Testament Church are viewed separately or as one, interpreting a believer’s inheritance in the King of Heaven remains an overarching study. I tend not to think in dispensational terms.

emphasis in Scripture in which God's kingdom, the Kingdom of heaven, is centric.¹²

The overarching message in both testaments is that He is coming back for us¹³ and He will establish His kingdom¹⁴ with those who have been His faithful followers. It is absurd to read the Scripture any other way. A Holy God wants a holy kingdom peopled by holy servants or followers. Instead of talking mansions, perhaps, we should be talking "righteousness." Our study needs to focus on who we are in God's kingdom, our relationship with God and each other. This takes up far more space in Scripture and should be of far greater interest to us as we converse over our eternal future.

¹² *"The Kingdom of God is the primary theme that binds the Scriptures and indeed all of history together. Only the kingdom theme flows easily from the pages of the biblical writers. It alone does adequate justice to the progressive unfolding of biblical revelation by viewing the historical covenants of redemptive history as keys to revelatory development in the Kingdom of God."* cp. <http://pneumareview.com/the-kingdom-of-god-as-scriptures-central-theme-a-new-approach-to-biblical-theology-part1/>

¹³ John 14:3 *I will come back and take you to be with me*

¹⁴ Isaiah 9:7 *Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

Through God's Eyes

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

1 John 1:2

Paul knew that the mysteries of God would not be perfectly understood in time, in this life. We need to be with Him in His heaven in His eternity to finally perceive things as God does, to see through His eyes with inarguable clarity.

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.¹

If we see our own lives in the light of eternity, it tends to give another significance to everything that happens to us and everything we say and do. Our perception of the meaning of life, of our own life, changes when we see its value in the light of eternity.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.²

Scripture is inspirational because it is revelational; it is God's thoughts, God's perception on our lives; God's divine reasoning, and His plan for His

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:12

² Matthew 6:20

creation.³ This often challenges our natural reasoning process. It is better we seek the Spirit's understanding than trying to rationalize some logical continuity of thought by pure human reason. Sometimes too much Greek is too much Greek!

The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from ...God ... and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.⁴

To understand God's mind, we need to go back to Eden and ask ourselves what went wrong. God's plan—it seems theologically evident—was to create man to inherit the blessings of His/God's creative energies, a world of happiness with Him for Adam and Eve to stroll around in, experiencing love on many levels. God's plan was always an eternal plan but death like the viper's poison, took it all away. Something went terrible wrong which would need Calvary to fix.

An age old metaphysical question is "where did evil come from?" If God alone creates, how could we conclude He was and is its author! In New Testament days a heresy circulated that since God could not/would not create evil, how did it come into being? In contradistinction from Paul (as in his Epistle

³ Occasionally, the writer takes credit for a thought as in I Corinthians 7:12 "*To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.*"

⁴ I Corinthians 2:14

to the Colossians) they argued that the kingdom of evil was the world of matter. They argued that in order to be free from evil a strict asceticism must be maintained, either in not giving in to fleshly desires, physiological cravings or, in some schools of thought, ignoring the body altogether—living with a conscience that is not concerned with what the body engages in, giving in to physiological needs and wants but endeavoring to live on a spiritual plain separate from such needs. Some sects didn't believe in marriage for this reason.

There is nothing evil about human physiology. Evil was the result of free will yielding to temptation.

God's Word takes us to Adam in a place called Eden and a forbidden fruit that reveals the knowledge of evil. The result of that tasty [I assume] bite was physical *death*. Not to put too fine a point on it but I would never have thought that an eternal God had a word like "death" in His vocabulary!

It might be difficult to talk about it, but where does *death* fit into eternity? Death is an element of time showing degradation and finally the end of something. So the question for us should be: where did death come from?

When Paul theologized about the origin of physical death, he appeared to stroll into the weeds of philosophical thought.⁵

⁵ Francis Godet in his Epistle to the Romans details this discussion [p. 206 ff.]

Therefore, just as sin entered the world **through one man**, and death through sin, and in this way death came to **all** people, **because all** sinned⁶

Let's try to look at the above verse logically. Did Paul say that each man's death is in consequence of their own sins? Or did he blame Adam?

Again, if this were merely the churning of Paul's mind working overtime giving most of us a headache, we should pass it off as so much chatter. But here, Paul's inspiration is God's revelation. Here God is saying something He wants us to understand, but because it is how God perceives events in the Garden and in our lives, we need the Spirit to speak to our hearts and minds for Him.

But let's go the natural route first. Why did Paul say that this happened "*through one man*" implying that death for all mankind was a direct result of *Adam's* sin?⁷ Was Adam alone at fault?

Then why did he say "*because all sinned*" unless it is each person's disobedience to God that brings their own death? Much hinges on what Paul meant by the biblical phrase "*because all sinned.*"⁸ Professor Godet [I like him] admits that the simplest interpretation might be "*as a consequence*" of Adam's

⁶ Romans 5:12

⁷ I Corinthians 15:22 *For as in Adam all die*

⁸ ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον. ἐφ' ᾧ in its primitive meaning translates "near." With time it signifies "at the date of." In a moral sense "on the ground of" and logically: "as may be seen by." [Godet, 207]

sin, all have sinned and all die, but he confesses that this meaning is *“without precedent.”*⁹

In Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,¹⁰ he says it a little differently, *“in Adam all die.”* Godet interprets this to mean *moral solidarity or community of life.*¹¹ All died in Adam *“in whom they were embraced”*¹² according to Godet. [I’m still not sure what we are saying, but so much for the natural mind!]

And how are we to interpret the word “all” in this verse [I Corinthians, 15:22],

For as in Adam **all** die, so in Christ **all** will be made alive.

If all are dead in Adam’s act of disobedience, are all now to be saved through Christ’s death (a universal salvation)? This idea is not supported by Scripture.

Maybe the *all* are believers: all believers died in Adam but are now made alive in Christ. But Paul’s point as discovered elsewhere is that *“all [humankind] have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*¹³ So, did Adam bring about physical death or is each man [and woman] to blame?

Going back to that word *because*, *“because all sinned....”* I interpret this to read: *“on this basis, [we*

⁹ Godet, Romans, 208.

¹⁰ I Corinthians 15:22

¹¹ Godet in his Epistle to the First Corinthians, 352

¹² *ibid.* 353

¹³ Romans 3:23

can say], *all sinned...*" Adam is to blame and so am I ...and you! *Because* when Adam sinned, I was *in* Adam at the time and sinned with him.

Here is not the place to try and wack away anymore at these high weeds. We leave this task to the theologians who persuade us through Latin and Greek phrases. But what if we are able to perceive this event as God perceives it to have happened. Might we see something that makes sense to us viewing these verses by faith through God's eyes? Everything God does is in light of our eternity with Him.¹⁴ So even in the Garden God's evaluation of what happened when Adam ate the forbidden fruit and how it impacted all His creation was inseparably connected in His heart and plan with His ultimate desire that His people would inherit His Kingdom.

Is it possible that an eternal perspective concludes that there really is no difference in nature between Adam and me. If I claim that I was not with Adam in the garden, God corrects me: all humankind was there! It wasn't just Adam who disobeyed God. I did, too. *In* Adam I sinned and physical death is the result!¹⁵ Any excuse I might reason to project the blame for all evil on this one man holds no legal weight with God. Might I claim innocence because I was born into all this evil and I shouldn't be included in Adam's sin? That's not how God sees things.

¹⁴ Isaiah 55:9 *As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

¹⁵ James 1:15 *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

Paul is *not* saying that I *will* sin because Adam sinned. My life was “embraced” by his. Original sin was not passed down to me. I committed that first sin as did all mankind *in* Adam. When Adam bit down, I, in him, did the same and evil was unleashed [truly, Pandora's Box]. We all became knowledgeable by experiencing such evil, inquiring after it, and using it for selfish ends. We were in no condition without Christ to inherit the Kingdom of God and there would be no one else to fault for this than ourselves.

Yes, the theology says that we inherited original sin because this is our view looking up on the Cross. But Jesus's view—God's eternal view—looking down upon us from the Cross “*concluded all under sin.*”¹⁶

No one stands before God and claims innocence. Both Adam and Eve pointed the finger away from themselves.¹⁷ God was not interested in their attempt at self-justification. The mind of God sees all mankind subject to the same judicial process unless He, God, decides on mercy.¹⁸ Paul decided on a word to explain God's thought. We are all under *lock and key*, not just Adam.

¹⁶ Galatians 3:22 KJV

¹⁷ Genesis 3:12-13 *The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree...The woman said, “The serpent beguiled me,”*

¹⁸ Exodus 33:19 *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*

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But Scripture has **locked** up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised,¹⁹ being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.²⁰

No one can say they were not there when the crime against God was committed. In Adam all sinned. Therefore, all are under the umbrella of God's mercy ...and that's His point. As Godet put it, "... enclosed in such a way that they have only one exit..."²¹ And that exit is God's mercy.

For God has **bound** everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.²²

Now God makes sense. If you or I were not part of a sinful mankind or if God concluded that we were not taken in by Satan's nefarious plan, if we played no part in Adam's foolish interest in the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, we would not be candidates for God's mercy. I for one want His mercy.

What did Paul Mean?

¹⁹ "As the passage ...testifies, the law condemned all alike, yet not finally and irrevocably, but only as leading the way for the dispensation of faith, the fulfillment of the promise." - Bishop Lightfoot, *The Epistle to the Galatians*. 147

²⁰ Galatians 3:22

²¹ Godet, Romans, 415

²² Romans 11:32

So, what does *all* mean in First Corinthians 15:22? [*For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*] Godet²³ maintains that the simplest reading should be: “Death passed upon all in Adam; all shall be resurrected—some to life and some to perdition—because of Christ.”²⁴ The language is inclusive. There are no exceptions.

But is it possible Paul was speaking primarily of the resurrection of the just, saying “All die in Adam [all are guilty before God; all have sinned, and, therefore death has passed upon all], there is no life outside Christ. Only Christ brings life! All are made alive *only* in Christ!”

It is the contention of this work that human language, even the Greek, has its limitations. Here Paul uses the word for “*made alive*”²⁵ instead of the word “*resurrected*”²⁶ used 15 times elsewhere in this chapter. Some might contend that using *made alive* for resurrected is forced since *made alive* is used elsewhere to mean spiritually quickened and brought to spiritual life those who had been dead in sin.²⁷ Is it possible that here it means *to bring all to life* [bodily

²³ F. L. Godet, “*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*” 355.

²⁴ John 5:29 *those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.*

²⁵ ζωοποιηθησονται

²⁶ εγειρεται

²⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:6 *He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

resurrection] including those not in Christ unto eternal judgment.²⁸

Stay tuned in to the Word of God. Not all is made simple on the first read! God doesn't always reason as we do. Think of it: Jesus gave a full day's pay once to a few harvesters He hired an hour before the sun set [the penitent thief on the cross], and He paid *me* the same, even though I endured the heat of that golden sphere all day! [I write this in my mid-70's!] Seems unfair? But maybe I need to give God through His Spirit a chance to explain His grace and make sense of His great heart. Whom might we meet when we get there that we never figured would be.

²⁸ Romans 8:11 *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also **give life** to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.* Is Paul speaking of our coming bodily resurrection or the Spirit's enabling us in this life to life for Christ.?

Calvary's Provision

...to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith Acts 26:18

C.S. Lewis on prayer once explained, though cryptically,

"Almost certainly God is not in time. His life does not consist of moments one following another... Ten-thirty -- and every other moment from the beginning of the world-- is always present for Him. If you like to put it this way, He has all eternity in which to listen to the split second of [a] prayer."

The true context of Scripture is not the cultural milieu of the writer who penned its inspired message. It is the mind of God who, as C. S. Lewis correctly noted, "*is not in time.*" Calvary did not become just an historical event. Jesus's death became the fulcrum for all history, before and after. Nothing else of any real importance has ever happened because this single event, the Cross, eclipses all events backward and forward in time and defines their significance to mankind.

Calvary, to be sure, is an eternal plan overlaid upon the timeline of history. Calvary is a work of an eternal God in His eternity which means it applied as much to the Patriarchs and the prophets as to us. Calvary reaches back (in temporal terms) as well as forward. In Glory we might all agree that Jesus died

on the Cross while we looked on in our sin and spiritual need. In God's eyes, can we not say: we stood next to the centurion that looked on while Jesus was dying?

Calvary speaks, among other truths, to divine *forgiveness*.¹ Dare we say that while Jesus was dying at Calvary God forgave us every sin? God's forgiveness reached back to the Ancients who served and worshipped Him and forward to our time and beyond. It was and is an eternal act of God. Was not His forgiveness complete and final through Jesus's death on Calvary?

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.²

All that remains is that we appropriate His divine provision. All that God's forgiveness entails is

¹ Luke 23:34 From the cross, Jesus cried, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" but some manuscripts do not have this sentence. The Bodmer Papyri, second century, p⁷⁵, lacks it and evidence is now available that the Alexandria text goes back to an archetype dated second century. Yet many scholars today regard such readings as aberrant. cp. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Intro. xviii. Metzger continues, "*There is discernible [here] a Christological-theological motivation that accounts for them having been added ...[but many] regarded the longer reading[s] as part of the original text.*" [Metzger 191-193] The main theological ground for the belief that Christ's death was an act of eternal forgiveness relies on such verses as Hebrews 9:22 "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*"

² Colossians 2:13-14

ours through accepting Christ as Savior and letting God engender faith in our hearts to embrace it.

Hear John out on this point:

"If we confess [regularly?] our sins, he is faithful and **just to forgive** us our sins, and to **cleanse** us from **all** unrighteousness."³

Translating this verse might be more difficult because we live in time. Some translations read with the NIV: "*If we confess...he is faithful and just and will forgive us.*" Because the word "confess" speaks of an ongoing act of contrition and the word "if" is conditional, this interpretation suggests that with each sin we commit, with sincere penitence, we admit to the Lord we have sinned and that particular sin is then cleansed and wiped from the record. A dearest friend, now with the Lord, once maintained that should Christ return at that very moment we have an unconfessed sin in our lives, we would not go "to heaven." So, we confess daily or nightly all sin, known and unknown, intentional or merely the wayward expression of our humanity, and God forgives nightly. Our Lord's prayer seems to support this idea: "*Give us ... this day..daily And forgive us ...as we forgive...*"⁴ This interpretation sounds perfectly sensible because it is born in time and confessed in time, ...but is it correct?

No, not at all!

³ 1 John 1:9

⁴ Matthew 6:11-12

The problem here is that God's promise of salvation is not bounded in time. If He saves, He saves *eternally*. I don't think I need to list chapters and verses for this truth.⁵

God's forgiveness is timeless. We are enjoined to drop the facade of self-justification, admit to the Lord our need of a Savior, confess our sins not in some abstract,⁶ "everyone-does-it" sense but in a sincere heart-searching effort as we see ourselves in need of Calvary. Accepting God's forgiveness is accepting Calvary's provision.

In a sweeping act to forgive *all*, to declare that God's forgiveness is *not* temporary or limited in scope, the words *forgive* and *cleanse* use a simple word form⁷ suggesting "simply done!" With salvation comes total forgiveness for all time. God's children *not will be* but *have been* forever forgiven! Forgiveness was simply complete at Calvary: *It is finished!*⁸ God is faithful and just.

But we are here living in time and needing to talk over with our Lord those matters of which we sense the need to repent. As believers, one thing characterizes the "new" us and it is the cry for His mercy. We are by nature, in relationship with our Savior, repentant until our perfection comes.⁹ This is ongoing

⁵ Hebrews 5:9 ...he [Christ] became the source of *eternal* salvation for all who obey him

⁶ Thus the present tense for "confesses"

⁷ aorist of completed past

⁸ John 19:30

⁹ I Corinthians 13:10 *But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.*

in our frailty, our imperfect expression of our love toward Him. But make no mistake about it, His forgiveness never waited until we cried for that mercy. His forgiveness knew from Calvary that we would and it was then He extended a remission to us for *all* sins.¹⁰

One more thing: the word “to,” *to forgive* is better understood as “*for the purpose of forgiving.*” This verse outlines the divine plan executed on Calvary and, if I may boldly propose, is better interpreted in the light of that eternal salvation and not a forgiveness limited to a specific moment of repentance.

The point to be made here is that God’s Word is an eternal Word and what is written about His grace, our salvation, and His promises are not momentary or “this-life-only” provisions. They are everlasting.¹¹

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.¹²

Complete and eternal forgiveness is an aspect of Kingdom life in the Son. God’s people are now forgiven for all sin and all time as a provision of eter-

¹⁰ Hebrews 10:10 *And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all.***

¹¹ Jeremiah 31:3 *The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.*

¹² Colossians 1:13-14

nal salvation, under a new covenant and better promises, as the writer¹³ to the Hebrews clarified:¹⁴

But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises. ... For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

¹³ “*The Epistle to the Hebrews seems to have been written by a disciple of St Paul immediately after the Apostle’s death.*” [J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 123]

¹⁴ Hebrews 8:6, 12

The Servant's Heart

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven -
Matthew 5:3*

Privileged to conduct bi-monthly services at a local resident home for the elderly we decided to share thoughts on the eight Beatitudes in Matthew 5, Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount." Our original interest was how these eight blessings impacted our service to the Lord in the face of ridicule, mockery and other forms of persecution. Our research labored under the theory that these eight Beatitudes, from "Poverty of Spirit" to "Peacemaking" were somehow linked in the spiritual development of a follower of Christ. We concluded in addition that the order of the Beatitudes is not incidental but an undeniable example of the divine genius in preparing each believer for divine service. Research into the various words used in Matthew's recollection support this approach.

What didn't seem as obvious at first was how these eight Beatitudes (eight beautiful attitudes) represented the heart of a servant of God and in the process prepared them and qualified them for *the kingdom of heaven*—referenced twice in these few verses.

God's grace, according to this text—is the claim here—is at work in the life of every believer preparing them to "*inherit the earth., see God, and be called the children of God.*" In another, Pauline, sense we are

being prepared for *citizenship* in heaven¹ and as the *Bride of Christ*.²

Terms like *meekness, mourning, hungering and thirsting for righteousness*, and the hapax legomenos³ *peacemakers* require a close—not casual—look if this prima-facie idea is correct. It only remains to make the logical link between now and when, between the work God is perfecting in us in this life⁴ and how it relates to the life to come.⁵

Lastly, this work becomes a study of words based on the strong fundamental belief that every word is inspired. Yet scholarship has long recognized the limitation on some biblical terms to do justice to what God is introducing to us.⁶ Professor R. C.

¹ Philippians 3:20 *our citizenship is in heaven.*

² 2 Corinthians 11:2 *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. compare; Revelation 19:7 ...his bride has made herself ready.*

³ found only here in Scripture.

⁴ Matthew 4:17 *From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

⁵ Matthew 8:11 *I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*

⁶ Dr. Milligan writes in his Introduction to The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament,

Alike in Vocabulary and Grammar the language of the New Testament exhibits striking dissimilarities from Classical Greek; and in consequence it has been regarded as standing by itself as "New Testament Greek." In general it had been hastily classed as "Judaic" or "Hebraic" Greek; its writers being Jews (with the probable exception of Saint Luke), and therefore using a language other than their own, a language flled with reminiscences of the translation-Greek of the Septuagint on which they had been nurtured.

It is an endless debate among scholars as to the meanings of some words in the New Testament, whether they are more classical in meaning or somehow carry a special nuanced significance under divine inspiration.

Trench, lecturing on the importance of the study of language in the history of thought, remarked,

“...words often contain a witness for great moral truths — God having impressed such a seal of truth upon language, that men are continually uttering deeper things than they know...”⁷

Words do bear witness to truth even if imperfectly since God’s thoughts are elevated above our humble ability to grasp them. We have only begun to learn Truth which is eternal. We are students more than scholars of all God provides and only beginning by an active faith to comprehend what the natural mind cannot grasp. So we begin first with a look at some biblical terms that have relevance to our understanding of our inheritance in the saints.

The thought promoted here is that only the servant’s heart can thrive spiritually during persecution. But more so, this is the type of citizen which inherits the blessings of heaven.

Paul, A Servant of God

You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ... I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master.... Now

⁷ Richard Trench. *On the Study of the Words Lectures* (New York: W.. Widdleton, publisher. Unknown), 56.

that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.⁸

Jesus is our Savior and Lord and if He is our Lord, we are His servants. If we are His servants, we listen and follow Him. But this simple definition of service is incomplete for two reasons. One, Jesus calls us friends.⁹ We are more than servants, even while we remain His servants.¹⁰ Additionally, this servant-friend relationship, we contend in this work, describes also our heavenly relationship with God. This relationship continues through eternity?¹¹

So we are servant-friends which made me wonder if the words used for servant/slave in the New Testament are adequate to describe this relationship. Paul called himself, the Lord's *slave*—*he used the word "slave"*— not because God required his commitment to the ministry of reconciliation which he trumpeted but because *His heart required it!*

Paul, a servant [slave] of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness¹²

⁸ John 13:13-17

⁹ John 15:15 *I no longer call you servants, ... Instead, I have called you friends...*

¹⁰ 2 timothy 2:24 *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.*

¹¹ Revelation 19:10 *I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus.*

¹² Titus 1:1

A brief study of the terms used in the New Testament will suffice to make this point.

Slave

Some servants are enslaved (slaves) and have no choice but to execute given service for their ruler. Such an obligation was often self-imposed upon the believer's heart.¹³ Such service defines a servile *relationship* with a Master. If we are God's slaves, we are obligated to obey, but does this effectively represent the relationship the Lord has with His saints. The word carries the notion or nuance of compulsory, enforceable, service. Our heavenly relationship starting in this life is based on willing service. This is the main message behind *grace*: against such there is no law.¹⁴

Servant

The Bible does have another word for a servant whose service is *voluntary*. A slave might be a servant, but not all servants are enslaved. Some serve freely. Some service "*may be used of the physician's watchful tendance of the sick, man's service of God, and is beautifully applied by Xenophon (Mem. iv. 3. 9) to the care which*

¹³ Romans 1:1 Paul, a *servant* of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. Compare: Acts 4:20 *As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*

¹⁴ Galatians 5:23

the gods have of men."¹⁵ Moses, for example, served¹⁶ God *voluntarily*, but as scholarship is won't to point out, his service was more like an *administrator* of God's affairs. Joseph might have served Pharaoh in this way, which is honorable. But in the kingdom of heaven service is more than voluntary. Somehow in this divine context there is a harmony in God's relationship to His saints. They are living in sync with His great heart.¹⁷ Scholarship tells us:

They [We] are as Jesus was, on the earth, **at once His free and submissive** agents, the depositories of His holiness, the bearers of His love, the interpreters of His wisdom throughout the boundless spaces. ... The meaning is ... that every member of this glorified society has no longer anything in him which is not penetrated by God....¹⁸

John clothes this truth in terms of our love of God.

¹⁵ Richard Trench, "Synonyms of the New Testament," p. 31

¹⁶ Hebrew 3:5 "*Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house.*" Moses a servant in the house of God ... implies that he occupied a more confidential position, that a freer service, a higher dignity was his, than that merely of a slave, approaching more closely to that of an [administrator of God's affairs] in God's house; and, referring Num. 12: 6-8, we find, confirming this view, that an exceptional dignity is there ascribed to Moses, lifting him above other ["servants"] of God;

¹⁷ Biblical terms that represent service begin here to show the flaw in human understanding behind their definitions and uses. In addition, the use of the concept of free service in biblical language was often confused with servile service. The distinction between voluntary and obligatory became blurred.

¹⁸ Godet in his Epistle to the First Corinthians, 374

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,¹⁹

Minister

Perhaps instead of calling saints God's servants, we might say saints *minister* to the needs and interests of their Lord and King. But even here the word does not go far enough to point out the closeness between the Lord and His people. The Biblical term "minister" suggests service of a particular kind, an area in which a servant worked to please his or her master. Performing certain tasks was expected of them. Ministry limits itself to those responsibilities particularly assigned. We sometimes refer to such servants as *deacons* after the biblical term.²⁰ Such a servant has their focus on a particular duty. Unlike the word, *servant* already described, a deacon or minister in this regard is more mindful of the *task* at hand and not specifically the person for whom they perform it. It is fulfilling a duty rather than in a more general sense serving their Lord. ...as when my wife has me empty the dishwasher and put the clean dishes away. I had to be told. It is more about dishes than a loving sensitivity about her interests. In another sense: it is more about one's office than one's calling—more descriptive of what they do proficiently than

¹⁹ I John 5:3

²⁰ Colossians 1:23 *if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

who they do it for in a caring relationship with a leader.

Interestingly, in the parable of the Marriage Supper in Matthew's Gospel²¹ the servants who invite guests to the feast are called slaves,²² in the same sense Paul felt obligated, not because our Lord is a severe despot but because their devotion or dedication to their Lord required them to answer the call and comb the streets to find others who might come and fill the banquet hall. But the man without the wedding garment²³ was escorted out of the feast, *not* by these same "slaves" or servants.²⁴ Instead, *ministering angels* [our word: ministers] served in that regard to execute the king's judgment. In modern terms, these were God's assigned bouncers. Ministering angels are faithful to their chosen assignments.²⁵

Domestics

There remains yet 2 other terms for service. Some servants or "slaves" were specifically known as "household" or domestic servants.²⁶ Such slaves along with their families were no doubt closer to the master of the house. The weakness in this term should

²¹ Matthew 22:2-14

²² Matthew 22: 3, 4, 8, 10

²³ Matthew 22:13

²⁴ Scholarship called them the ambassadors of Christ

²⁵ compare: Job 1:6 *One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD,*

²⁶ Acts 10:7 NLT *As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants.*

be obvious: God is no respecter of persons.²⁷ If any are to be considered household servants of the Lord, all are His household servants. There is a closer relationship defined in this level of servitude but not because they are more loved but because the value of their duties to their master is more immediately obvious.

...you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.²⁸

A curious use of this term comes from Luke's gospel and the word "serve" here speaks to this very personal level of devotion between a person and his or her purse/money.

No one can **serve** two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.²⁹

If we were slaves to money the relationship would suggest an addiction, but the emphasis here is a devoted interest, a more worried involvement, something we think about constantly and dream about nightly. This is a perfect description of "greed." Perhaps, the picture painted here is of a scrooge sitting at their desk reviewing their investments and

²⁷ Acts 10:34

²⁸ Ephesians 2:19

²⁹ Luke 16:13

counting their profits. Some treat their personal wealth as their god; they are money's household servants!

Helper

One final term is best translated, *helper*. John Mark was said to be one who ministered to Paul and Barnabas.³⁰ The NIV translation not incorrectly sees him as their "*helper*" Such a minister or servant or helper tends to hold a recognized position in relation to a master. They exercise a limited sphere of service as defined by the need or requirements of whomever they serve.

There is not much here to suggest heavenly service or our heavenly relationship with the Lord as His servant-friends.

Christian Service

In all of these words: *a servant does not know his master's business*. Servanthood must never be confused with friendship ...until Jesus redefines it in His relationship with His disciples:

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you

³⁰ Acts 13:5 *John was with them as their helper*.

friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.³¹

One thing was true of all servants. Their knowledge of their Lord's motives or interests seemed limited to the specific duties they attended to. This changes in the kingdom of heaven. Citizens in heaven become friend-servants, friends who enjoy the freedom of an ongoing relationship and friendship with their Lord while retaining the servant's heart, the robe of righteousness, which they donned on entering there.

Friendship with God

For since our **friendship with God** was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.³²

This level of friendship which God has established is now possible because in glory we will have reached, as Paul wrote, “[the] *unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*”³³

In this life, we need Jesus's constant and prayerful attention to our many spiritual needs while the tempter and accuser roams the land. Jesus has a

³¹ John 15:15

³² Romans 5:10 [NLT]

³³ Ephesians 4:13

ministry of intercession for us³⁴ and to fulfil this ministry He has been given authority by the Father “*over all things ... for the benefit of the church ... which is his body,*³⁵”

Not without meaning Paul confronts heretical ideas that we might need more than Jesus in this effort. Paul argues with undeniable conviction that Christ, was “*the fullness of him who fills all in all.*”³⁶

In Glory, however, Christ’s ministry of intercession will necessarily cease. So, Jesus will then relinquish to the Father the authority He had as an intercessor. God, the Father, will then become “*all in all.*” He will exercise sole authority, sole supremacy, over all.

... when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. ...And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, **that God may be all in all.**³⁷

The saints become “*heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ*”³⁸ Professor Godet interprets all this to mean:

³⁴ Romans 8:34 *Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

³⁵ Ephesians 1:22 [NLT]

³⁶ Ephesians 1:23 [ESV]

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

³⁸ Romans 8:17

*“sharing the divine inheritance...the possession of God, Himself. He is no longer a king surrounded by His servants.”*³⁹ We are servant-friends.

We need to further study this promised and prophesied relationship between the believer and the Lord. In simplest terms, we have become like Christ,

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.⁴⁰

...that Christ “... *might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*”⁴¹ Because we will be like Him we will share in the same relationship with the Father that Jesus knows. Godet concludes, “*God is all in them [the saints] in the same way as he was and is all in his glorified son.*”⁴²

We call it heaven.

³⁹ Godet in his Epistle to the First Corinthians, 371

⁴⁰ 1 John 3:2

⁴¹ Romans 8:29

⁴² Godet, *Epistle to the First Corinthians*, 371

A Robe of Righteousness

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Matthew 5:6

No christian would disagree that the heart of a servant of God is righteous. But what does *righteousness* mean? Is it a more spiritual way of discussing justice? The NLT (New Living Translation) interprets the fourth beatitude: *God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,*" but then in a footnote replaces the word *justice* with *righteousness*. In John's gospel, we hear Jesus say, "*And when he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning ...righteousness...*"¹ If this is justice, as we understand it, "*the quality of being fair and reasonable*" we should, even on this account, be overwhelmed with a sense of dread—conviction—convinced beyond debate that our world is in trouble with God. But what if, as I want to maintain, this word means a lot more.

In a simplistic, almost childlike, look at righteousness, it means doing what the Lord says is right toward others—play fair. Doing what is right in God's eyes might go beyond those relationships we intentionally engage. What if, like the good Samaritan,² we come across need or injustice which we had no part in creating. What part should we play in assuaging the pain and misfortune of our neighbors? Professor

¹ John 16:8 [ESV]

² Luke 10:33 *But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.*

Trench seems to think this applies to define justice or righteousness. Righteousness should be our religion, he hears James say,

James 1: 26, 27. 'If any man,' he would say, seem to himself to be [religious], a diligent observer of the offices of religion, if any man would render a pure and undefiled [religion] to God, let him know that this consists not in outward lustrations or ceremonial observances ; nay, that there is a better [religion] a than thousands of rams and rivers of oil, namely, to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with his God' (Micah 6: 7, 8); or, according to his own words, "to visit the widows and orphans in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world"³

There are three terms used in Scripture that seem to mean the same thing, but, in my prima-facie way let me distinguish them: *Godliness*, *Righteousness* and *Holiness*. Is there a difference? I believe so.

*Godliness*⁴ hangs out with ideas like "fearing God" or James's talk of religion. Perhaps, the best definition is Micah's, "*to walk humbly with ... God...*" Godliness is living life with one eye fixed on God, living in His divine peace as the confirmation of His approval. Godliness speaks to our relationship with God.

³ Trench, *Synonyms*, 176

⁴ 2 Peter 1:6-7 *and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;*

Righteousness speaks to our relationships with others, how we treat persons who walk into our view or life. It is more than justice, if we use this term to mean *legal*. The expression of our christian love toward others in our lives will be morally and ethically just. More so, as righteous we will agree with the judgment and will of God in our actions toward others. Righteousness sanctifies God before others.⁵ If God gives “grace,” the righteous without reluctance or reserve joyfully proclaim it so. If we love God, we love each other!⁶

Holiness is that inward quality of the soul and spirit, of heart and mind, that is expressed as righteousness and godliness. Whoever is not holy will not be righteous or godly. Righteousness and godliness are outward expressions of that change of heart and life that “*share in his holiness.*”⁷

The Bride of Christ

One sub-theme that flows from this interpretation is God’s people as the *bride of Christ*. The church⁸

⁵ Numbers 20:12 *But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”*

⁶ 1 John 4:7-8 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

⁷ Hebrews 12:10

⁸ Ephesians 5:31-32 *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

as well as Israel⁹ are designated Christ's bride. Jesus's parable of the wedding banquet, and therefore a kingdom theme, is far more descriptive of things to come than our imaginations suggest. Here we begin our study into what awaits us in God's heaven.¹⁰ Don't fast read the text but linger on Jesus's opening remark. We are not talking about heaven as much as the *kingdom* of heaven where the *king* dwells. We are initially upon arriving invited to attend the wedding of *His Son*.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son."¹¹

We find ourselves at a large *banquet*. We are in the presence of unprecedented excitement. Jeremiah proclaims,

...the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD, saying, "Give thanks to the LORD Almighty, for the LORD is good; his love endures forever." For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were before,' says the LORD.¹²

⁹ Hosea 2:16 "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'"

¹⁰ Isaiah 25:6 On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.

¹¹ Matthew 22:2

¹² Jeremiah 33:11

John the Baptist betrayed his excitement, as well, not about golden thoroughfares but about the wedding.¹³

John, the beloved apostle, makes clear that after the final events of the Revelation and the New Jerusalem finally set upon its 12 foundations, the marriage of God's Son explodes upon the scene, as if God could not wait for any further interlude. The introduction of the Lamb's wife in glory¹⁴ bursts on the scene:

The Spirit and **the bride** say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!"¹⁵

Moffatt, in a single brush stroke, completes this heavenly scene, *"From the smoke and pain and heat [of the preceding scenes] it is a relief to pass into the clear, clean atmosphere of the eternal morning where the breath of heaven is sweet and the vast city of God sparkles like a diamond in the radiance of His presence."*¹⁶

Wedding or Marriage

¹³ John 3:29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

¹⁴ Revelation 21:9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

¹⁵ Revelation 22:17

¹⁶ J. B. Moffatt, EGT. 5:477

We use to say, at least men in relaxed conversation, “It isn’t the wedding that’s important but the marriage.” Does such an idea have any biblical merit? Can such a distinction be made between the wedding ceremony and the marriage that follows?

In the Bible it is a distinction without a difference. The same word that refers to the *wedding*,¹⁷ refers to the *marriage*.¹⁸ The modern cultural idea of annulling a marriage which has not been consummated views the wedding ceremony as separate and incomplete, but this is not how biblical cultures see it. The wedding *begins* the marriage!

The Garment of Righteousness

Continuing, we might observe that the Savior’s parable¹⁹ did not reference the banquet as much as the importance of the *garment* all guests must wear: of salvation,²⁰ washed white,²¹ i.e. a robe of right-

¹⁷ Matthew 22:2-3 *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a **marriage** for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the **wedding**: and they would not come.*

¹⁸ Hebrews 13:4 **Marriage** should be honored by all,

¹⁹ Matthew 22:2-14

²⁰ Isaiah 61:10 I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

²¹ Revelation 7:14 I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

eousness.²² The wedding garment²³ is, therefore, not an incidental detail but an important qualification to attend. Jesus's thoughts were not centered on the backdrop of this eternally anticipated celebration, the Marriage of God's Son to His bride. Jesus's thoughts made clear that a sinless righteousness was required of all who would participate.

A Cover Up

What was this "guest" wearing who did not have the wedding garment on? A garment in Old Testament language may have a more sinister purpose. It is a coverup, not in terms of one's dress but in terms of one's character. Deception and lies are often referred to as a covering of true motives. (We use the phrase "a wolf in sheep's clothing"). In the Old Testament the garment signified deception and unfaithfulness.²⁴ It is no mystery that one form of the word "garment" means "lies."²⁵

²² Revelation 19:8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)

²³ Matthew 22:11-12 But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.

²⁴ In the Old Testament language one word for "garment" also carries the meaning "deception." The action word, verb, speaks of unfaithfulness, a form of deception, since the "wearer" of this garment is showing themselves faithful. Genesis 27:15 *Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob.*

Jeremiah 3:11 *The LORD said to me, "Faithless Israel [hypocritically shows herself] ... more righteous than **unfaithful** [the deception of] Judah.*

קָבִים²⁵

True Righteousness

At the marriage supper, the pure white robe of righteousness speaks to the outward expression of the bride coming into the marriage with Christ. All who wear the robe need not be ashamed.²⁶ The saints in glory can enjoy a shameless as well as a sinless relationship with each other, and, first and foremost, with Christ. We understand that a robe of righteousness as a garment was not only worn at the ceremony or the marriage supper²⁷ but represents the spiritual condition of the bride going forward in the marriage relationship.

How might we describe this robe, this garment, in biblical terms that will give substance to the parable? Is the word “righteousness” sufficient by itself to give us a meaningful picture of what type of individual will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, who will be invited to this great feast? Or might we ask, as we purpose to here: are these the “poor in spirit” in the beatitude²⁸ for “...theirs is the kingdom of heaven” These are those who hunger after righteousness. We are lead to Jesus’s sermon on the Mount for answers. We are focused more on the spiritual aspects of God’s kingdom and less on background possibilities.

²⁶ Revelation 16:15 “Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.”

²⁷ Revelation 19:9 *Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”*

²⁸ Matthew 5:3

Righteousness has often been defined simply as “justice” but clearly it is much more since it characterizes our eternal relationships with each other and with God. The fourth Beatitude: *“blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness”*²⁹ says much more than a sinless life. Jesus added, *“...they shall be **filled**.”* Sinfulness has been replaced by holiness. Righteousness will be the God-like character that will fill everything we say, do, and think in the Kingdom of God. Righteousness is a “robe” or an outward expression of serving God faithfully. Righteousness fills every action and thought of a child of God.

²⁹ Matthew 5:6

Give Us a King

*The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever. -
Micah 4:7*

First Samuel 12 has to be one of the saddest chapters in Scripture. Here Israel requests of Samuel to choose and anoint someone to be their king while God, who had been leading them these many generations looked on in—what would be called in human terms—disbelief. We may not know how God felt since He knew this moment was inevitable but His grief had to be real.¹

...you said to me, 'No, we want a king to rule over us'—
even though the Lord your God was your king.²

To imagine the severity of such an offense against God one need only picture a more human scenario: A man claims that his neighbor's wife is so good to her husband. She does magical things with food, while *his* wife can't cook. His neighbor's wife also Spring cleans their apartment at least twice monthly. The air is so clean and fresh over there, it's like being outside on a Spring morning. His house, he claims, is a slum. Dirt seems to huddle in corners almost afraid that someday someone might find it

¹ Psalm 78:40 *How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the wasteland!*

Blueletter Bible: *to ...pain or anger:—displease, grieve, hurt, ... be sorry, vex,*

² 1 Samuel 12:12

there. So, one day, he breaks down in an intense argument with his wife to tell her that he wants a wife like the woman next store. His wife sadly realizes that in his heart he has already been having an affair with the neighbor.

Do you know how offensive this is!?!?

Israel's decision to reject God for a king was unconscionable, just as if one had told a spouse they no longer wanted them but they had interest in another. That's what Israel was saying to Samuel about God! Did they think God didn't lead them or didn't watch over them or didn't take care of them or didn't provide for them? God not only cared for them but also for their parents and their grandparents and their entire ancestry.com! Israel needed to be reminded of all God had done for them and warned that their interest in a king in God's stead was a mistake. So, Samuel began in harshest and uncompromising tones to express God's grief as he rehearsed their long history with the Lord.

...stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your ancestors.³

Samuel then warned of this "evil" desire:

³ 1 Samuel 12:6

...you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the Lord when you asked for a king.⁴

There are 11 words commonly used in the Old Testament for sin in its many manifestations: *wrong, travail, iniquity, transgression, rebellion, wickedness, breach of trust, vanity, guilt, sin*, and the word used here, *evil*. Why had God chose this term and not one of the others? According to Professor Girdlestone⁵, "*It is one of those words which binds together in one the wicked deed and its consequence.*" God was thinking of the *consequence* of their decision. Rejecting God's leadership would result in harm to them and subsequent generations and they didn't seem to know it or care.

They were rejecting the Lord!! Girdlestone summed this up: "*...one of the most marked features of the ungodly man is that his course is an injury both to himself and to everyone around him.*"

Dangerous Rationalization

There were three reasons that suggested this course of action to them. But rationalization is a dangerous enemy, for, it supports and condones the very temptation entrapping us.

It seemed a reasonable request, first of all, since Samuel would no longer be their judge and his sons,

⁴ 1 Samuel 12:17

⁵ Robert Girdlestone, "Synonyms of the Old Testament," 80

who should fill that role, were corrupt, taking bribes, something Samuel wouldn't think of doing.

So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."⁶

They knew that Samuel was God's anointed and chosen spokesperson, like Moses of old.⁷ Now, who would stand in that gap!? They never reasoned that God might provide another prophet! With Samuel's retirement from ministry, in their minds, Israel entered a new era, an era they chose to define without God.

What God knew but Israel was not considering was the impact of their decision on future generations, their own sons and daughters. It would all too soon become evident to them that God's leadership was irreplaceable.

It seemed a reasonable request, secondly, because it was culturally in sync with how the nations about them were led. Human monarchies seemed to work just fine for the Canaanites.

⁶ 1 Samuel 8:4-5

⁷ Exodus 18:15 [KJV] *And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God:*

“We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”⁸

It was this mistake that has confused both the professional and amateur scholar; for, had Israel followed God we wouldn't be wondering how during the time of the judges there could be almost a complete absence of the Mosaic law and a call to worship the Lord. They had in their hearts chosen a king to replace God long before Saul's inauguration. Already Israel's history is replete with tales of idol worship, child sacrifice, wars, economic crises, famines, acts of moral turpitude and inevitably the persecution of God's prophets.⁹

Thirdly, and most horribly, it seemed reasonable because God's deliverance out of Egypt was a forgotten memory. This was Canaan and Israel had been settled in the towns in open country, now, for generations. The nations of idol worshippers surrounding them lived in walled cities and hated Israel for being there. They sought the protection of the monarch to lead their young men into battle, destroy their enemies, and protect their women and children. This sounds admirable. It sounds patriotic but the flag that should have flown over their nation was God's banner!

⁸ 1 Samuel 8:19-20

⁹ Matthew 5:12 *...in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

But you have raised a banner for those who fear you—a rallying point in the face of attack.¹⁰

The children of Israel were wrong! Egypt was not a distant memory—not for God. If I may challenge logic: An eternal God does not pigeonhole events He is involved in into chronological snapshots that He can put in a album and later reminisce over. His creative work in and through us is always ongoing. He was still delivering His people. God’s work was, in His words, “*until this day.*” What He started in Egypt continued to the present. God is eternal and His love and work on our behalf cannot and will not end. Like His creative work in the beginning, He still creates.¹¹

I brought them up out of Egypt **until this day**,¹²

But they were in Canaan. Times were different in their minds. Egypt was the past. They couldn’t be more wrong. With us, as believers, our moment of salvation when Christ entered our hearts, was not just part of our past but the first act in God’s eternal and always present work on our souls. Israel couldn’t connect then and now, sadly:

¹⁰ Psalm 60:4

¹¹ Philippians 1:6 *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

¹² I Samuel 8:8

...the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king..."¹³

Samuel interceded for Israel realizing how offended God had to be as well as how hurtful Israel's decision would inevitably be for their children and grandchildren and generations to come. Did they not know the pain this would cause for *themselves*.

Ignorance of the grief Israel's rejection caused God is even in our times a failure to see God's heart-beat in the text, even though in the history of an idolatrous nation these feelings are ubiquitous.¹⁴ Our theologies tend to be academic in nature. Many Old Testament Scripture are an emotional outburst of God's raw and intense feelings which are sadly read unnoticed.¹⁵

Rejecting the God Who deeply loved Israel since the beginning,¹⁶ was theologically indefensible!

But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king."¹⁷

¹³ I Samuel 8:19

¹⁴ Exodus 33; 1 Samuel 8; Hosea 11

¹⁵ Psalm 78

¹⁶ Hosea 11:1 *When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.*

¹⁷ I Samuel 8:6-7

Why tell this story? God's leadership in the lives of His people is His passion. He takes pleasure in protecting them. He involves Himself in their lives, not as a meddler but a wise counselor, a wise lover. He longs to lead them to places of peace.¹⁸ His story in 1 Samuel 8-12 was a broken hearted love story with Israel.¹⁹ There is, though happily, a day of reconciliation coming, a grand wedding feast, a time when Israel along with the Church as the Bride of Christ will honor God's great heart and reject Him no longer.²⁰ Happily, the story of God's romance with His people will reach this high note, "*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!"*"²¹

Earthly Government

"Give us a king" is not an ancient request. In modern times, God's people run the risk of compromising their message. We want to be like all the other cultures around us. A prayer filled life is replaceable

¹⁸ Psalm 23

¹⁹ Hosea 2:16 *In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.*

²⁰ Micah 4 *In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. 2 Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ...*

4 Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken. 5 ...we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever. 7 ... The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever.

²¹ Revelation 22:17

with a litigious mindset. Political partisanship takes on a religious passion while the ritual of our religious services ceases to have personal value.

“Give us a king!” But earthly governments are led by men and women which represent a morally weak and self-interested humanity. They cannot possibly replace God’s leadership!

I am writing this during a pandemic in which government involvement and medical necessity get all tangled up in political objectives which stresses even more the point that God needs to be in charge. Evolutionary theory, so popular in our time, looks toward that manmade progress when through science they will see an end to injustice and poverty toward an economic and socially healthy world. But this is falsely imagined without God!

A glance at our own world should convince us that evolutionary social theory is an unreachable dream. If biblical prophecy is correct, we are actually heading toward dystopia and ultimately the apocalypse of Scripture before God ushers in His new world, God’s Kingdom, which believers should anticipate joyfully.

A utopian dream is nothing believers need to concern themselves with. Meanwhile, whatever government we find ourselves in, we need to accept while keeping our testimony vibrant and alive—as the writer to the Hebrews admonished.

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.²²

And Peter agreed,

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.²³

No man-made government is forever. But take heart; for, we look forward to inheriting the kingdom of light²⁴ ...which is!

²² Hebrews 13:17

²³ 1 Peter 2:13-16

²⁴ Colossians 1:12

God's War on Sin

...who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father... - Galatians 1:4

God wants us in His heaven ...but not the sin that was in our lives. Instead of trying to picture heaven with golden streets and mansions, we should imagine heaven as a sinless place. The Scriptures are not silent on this subject but with uncommon clarity expose those acts, thoughts, and words that we will happily discover absent when we get there. Nothing makes our longing to be there more real than realizing that all the evil that has caused us a lifetime of pain here will never find expression there.

Sin is not only the enemy without. Sin is the enemy within. A world of evil has been unquestionably hurtful to us but we have shared in that hurt. We have been the cause of much of it. As Professor Girdlestone adroitly put it,

The Hebrew Bible meets us with a full acknowledgement of these manifold aspects of human suffering, and blends wrong doing and suffering to a remarkable degree, setting forth sin in its relation to God, to society, and to a man's own self.¹

God's war with sin is historic in our experience. We were entrapped in a personal world of

¹ Robert Girdlestone. *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids Book Manufacturers, Inc. 1974), 76.

hurtful passions and endless destructive decisions before we allowed the Savior into our lives to free us. And how did He do that? There was no other way for God to accomplish this miracle of grace; we had to die!

For ye are dead, ... with Christ...² For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin³

Then God created us anew.⁴

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.⁵

This may sound more a metaphor than science. Even the theologians, whose job it is to know what Paul meant, remain preoccupied with active imaginations in a protracted debate over this amazing feat of divine grace. Perhaps Paul is not saying what the KJV translated in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:*" Perhaps, the NLT version is more realistic: "*This means that anyone*

² Colossians 3:3

³ Romans 6:6

⁴ John 3:3 *Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.*

⁵ Romans 6:4

who belongs to Christ has become a new person." The RSV translates, "*he is a new creation*"

Realizing that christians, born again christians, *do sin*, many decided to be more practical and back off such strong Pauline language (even though Jesus started this in His conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, "*you must be born again!*"). It seemed more realistic to say that Paul's explanation is more proleptic⁶ in its application.

We like the theological phrase "*imputed* [credited] righteousness: "*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,...*"⁷ This suggests we are not perfectly righteous but because of our faith in God, and Christ's righteousness,⁸ He *credits* that faith toward a righteousness we will live by later in heaven. Our experience seems to confirm this. We still sin. Are we not really "*dead to sin*"?

One of my college professors, Reverend Hobart Grazier, shared a story from his past that might explain how we could be dead to sin and yet sin. Hobart was a young lad who observed his dad "ring" a tree in the back yard. Ringing a tree, went the explanation, is cutting into the bark deep enough into the cambium layer to prevent the sap in the tree from flowing into the root system when Autumn comes. Hobart saw his dad ring the tree and he expected the leaves

⁶ the representation of a thing as existing before it actually does

⁷ James 2:23

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:30 *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

to wither and drop off but the summer went into Fall and the leaves were still there. Hobart thought to correct his dad, an excited boy about to prove himself right and dad wrong, “The tree was still alive, dad.”

“Hob, the tree is dead, son.” His dad spoke without hesitation. He had no interest in revisiting the tree.

Winter turned to Spring and small new leaves broke out on every branch of that tree, giving Hobart renewed confidence that the tree was not dead. He alerted his dad, who again reiterated in fatherly tones the lesson of the rung tree.

“Hob, the tree is dead, son.”

Dad didn’t need to look. The leaves turned brown and fell off. The tree was indeed ...dead.

Reverend Grazier was saying that even if we sin from time to time,⁹ the old nature, like the old tree, has been disconnected from any source of strength that would feed its ways. As we follow Christ and serve Him in relationship expect old habits, old ways, old thoughts, old feelings to drop off, that are not representative of the holiness of God and His kingdom.

God’s Campaign Against Evil

How serious is God about evil ...about sin? We know that before Christ God patiently awaited Cal-

⁹ 1 John 2:1 *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

vary's solution. But since Calvary, God takes a more serious stance against this enemy of the soul. Now repentance is the only way to His great heart.

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.¹⁰

If we study in Scripture God's offensive against sin, we are left with the truthful impression that His rage is real. In places the wording of scripture seems frighteningly merciless. Some verses gather together an entire category of behavior and assign it to a painfully hopeless forever. Pentecostal preachers are mild voices compared to the threatening cries of a God who in earnest seeks to alert a fallen world of the final consequences of living outside Christ.

For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.¹¹

Some forms of human behavior seem a harmless exercise of our humanity—but not to God! To the list of offenses against God Paul includes *greed*,¹²

¹⁰ Acts 17:30

¹¹ 1 John 2:16-17

¹² Colossians 3:5

James includes hurtful words,¹³ and Jesus warns about a wandering eye, like Eve saw the forbidden fruit “*pleasant to the eyes.*”¹⁴ Jesus, also, gave John insight that was truly a Revelation when He sentenced to the sulfur of the second death the *cowardly*: the timid, or those frozen with fear when following Jesus seemed to exact too great a price. Are these mediocre followers who are excited about miracles and the display of God’s power, who are thrilled at Jesus’s teaching, but who cower at the thought of persecution? They are grouped with *murderers* and *liars*—two words that beg clarification in their own right.

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.¹⁵

Even Jesus on one of His walks near Jerusalem used the Valley of Gehenna nearby as an object lesson to shock His audience into giving serious thought to how they govern their own lives. Hell is the nightmare of all nightmares they would be wise avoiding.

¹³ James 3:6 *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*

¹⁴ Genesis 3:6

¹⁵ Revelation 21:8

'But, if thy right eye doth cause thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast from thee, for it is good to thee that one of thy members may perish, and not thy whole body be cast to gehenna.¹⁶

As already noted, even Paul clarified that certain behavior will never be found in the Kingdom of Heaven. Citizens of the Kingdom of Light must be pure or free from sin!¹⁷ So in general: *pride, moral turpitude, greed, and a hurtful tongue*,¹⁸ including *lying* will not characterize the saints in God's Kingdom.¹⁹

To be perfectly clear: God isn't keeping us out of His kingdom—He's keeping *sin* out! It was on Calvary that God "*put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness...*"²⁰ His plan was to rescue all those who would seek His deliverance.

¹⁶ Matthew 5:29

¹⁷ Ephesian 5:3 *No ...such a person ...has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

¹⁸ Abusive, accusing (1 Peter 3:9)

Denying, blaming others (2 Timothy 3:3)

Insulting (Romans 1:30)

Flattering (Ephesians 5:4)

Boastful {2 Peter 2:18)

Lying, misrepresenting Truth (Ephesians 5:4)

Obscene (Ephesians 5:4; Colossians 3:8)

Foolish, careless talk (Ephesians 5:4)

"The overflow of an evil heart" (Matthew 12:33-37)

¹⁹ Philippians 4:8 *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

²⁰ Daniel 9:24

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.²¹

Fear of God's judgment or anger no longer grips the soul.

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.²²

Whatever the theology needs to say in order to appreciate the mind and heart of God, we know, as persons of faith, we are loved by Him and that makes all things right.

²¹ Colossians 1:13-14

²² 1 John 4:18

Hidden With Christ

...your life is now hidden with Christ in God. - Colossians 3:3

One commentator interpreted, “*We have forever disappeared from the world.*”¹ And this point needs to be brought home with a most literal understanding.

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.²

Colossians was written by Paul to alert the believers in the tri-city area of Colossi, Hierapolis, and Laodicea to a heresy that taught that salvation was for the few to whom the mystery of salvation was revealed. This was an esoteric ideology [I cannot use the word “truth”] shared by the few [which is what “esoteric” means] who claimed somehow that living right meant effectively controlling or dealing with natural passions and desires through a form of asceticism. [One group solved the problem by outlawing marriage!] Theirs was a spiritualized asceticism that misrepresented the gospel message on a number of

¹ Read in Tyndall’s commentary on Colossians 3:3.

² 1 John 2:15-17 [NLT]

levels. The most obvious was that as Paul maintained: salvation is for *all* [a favorite word of Paul in this epistle] not a divine gift to a chosen few who allegedly knew [it was called “gnosticism” after the Greek word “gnosis” or knowledge] something mystical about overcoming passions and understanding where evil came from. In our view, gnosticism was an elaborately woven mythological tale of good verses evil. Professor Lightfoot offers us this argument:

For negative prohibitions he [Paul] substitutes a positive principle. ... They [those who would serve God] must transfer themselves into a wholly new sphere of energy. This transference is not less than a migration from earth to heaven... to the region of the spiritual and eternal. [And he references Colossians 3:1]. For a code of rules they must substitute a principle of life, which is one in its essence but infinite in its application, which will meet every emergency, will control every action, will resist every form of evil. This principle they have in Christ. With Him they have died to the world; with Him they have risen to God. Christ, the revelation of God’s holiness, of God’s righteousness, of God’s love, is life, is light, is heaven.³

To say that a believer’s perception or a believer’s outlook on life differs from how they saw things before faith understates the total transformation God

³ J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 120-121

performs upon the soul.⁴ Somehow, their values and priorities, their understanding of happiness, is now mutually exclusive of the view they once held endorsed by the world or society at large. This chasm is so wide that there is no secular academic pursuit that should be called upon to explain it. The believer has “*disappeared from the world.*”

God’s holiness is the believer’s principle for living.⁵ His holiness is the expression of who God is and the believer in relationship with Him. Words like *peace* and *love*, *happiness* and *faith*, *meekness* and *humility*, *righteousness* and *purity* of heart have been elevated to a place of practical, and life changing service. Paul called such commitment to God a reasonable undertaking in a believer’s life.

But it is more than this. “*they have died to the world; with Him they have risen to God... the revelation of God’s holiness, of God’s righteousness, of God’s love, ... is heaven.*” We are being introduced to heaven and heavenly things, heaven’s ways, and what eternal life in Christ is all about.⁶

Paul therefore calls us to holiness, as dearly loved by God, to take those first steps in living the heavenly life. Cease living the former life of “*...anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy or obscene language. ...*

⁴ Romans 12:2 *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

⁵ 1 Peter 1:15 *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;*

⁶ Ephesians 2:6 *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,*

*sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, ...*⁷

Paul introduces here three categories of a person's character that are *not* found in God's kingdom:

1. *immorality*, which needs further explanation in light of the variety of today's social contracts that have been legitimized while the idea of *immoral* has lost meaning. The writer to the Hebrews saw honorable only a relationship [one man and one woman] in marriage.⁸
2. Inappropriate talk⁹ which includes facetious¹⁰ talk, obscenity including "dirty jokes,"¹¹ and foolish or "empty" talk.¹²

⁷ Paul repeated this instruction to the Ephesians: [5:3] "*But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.*" He expands on the idea of filthy language: [vs. 4] "*obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking*" adding for clarity: [vs. 5] "*No ...such a person ...has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*"

⁸ Hebrews 13:4 *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*

⁹ "*includes therein every license of the ungoverned tongue employing itself in the abuse of others, all the wicked condiments of saucy speech ...; nor can I doubt that St. Paul intends to forbid the same, the context and company in which the word is used by him going far to prove as much; seeing that all other sins against which he is here warning are outbreaks of a loveless spirit toward our neighbor.*" [Trench 121]

¹⁰ treating serious issues with deliberately inappropriate humour; flippant: which Aristotle called childish pride [πεπαιδευμένη ὕβρις] or in Ephesians 5:4 NIV, *course joking*.

¹¹ The word means saying shameful things, what one would be embarrassed to repeat in "polite" or Christian society.

¹² Seeking to focus in on the exact meaning of this term, Trench admits, "*words obtain a new earnestness when assumed into the ethical terminology of Christ's school. ...[he then defined this term as] the talk of fools*" [Trench 120-121] Of interest is Paul's choice of word here in Ephesians 5:4 compared his use of a synonym in Colossians 3:8 *filthy communication*, "*all foul-mouthed*

3. Greed, which is idolatry.¹³ Greed has been defined as having more, wanting more,¹⁴

These have no part or place in God's kingdom.¹⁵

And what are those qualities of a holy life this side of heaven? *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."*¹⁶

abusiveness of every kind..." [Trench 121]

¹³ Colossians 3:5

¹⁴ Luke 16:13 *You cannot serve both God and money.*

¹⁵ Colossians 3:6 *Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.* cp. Ephesians 5:5 *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*

¹⁶ Colossians 3:12-15

Our Glorification

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" - 1 Corinthians 15:35

For 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 - 2 Corinthians 5:1

Why do we need a glorified, resurrected body in heaven? Or don't we. Paul at Corinth dealt with pantheism which maintained that there was no bodily resurrection. Only the spirit lives on and is absorbed back into God. It was as if to argue: God breathe into Adam to make him alive and now God inhales that spirit back. The thought is advanced that Paul taught a bodily resurrection to combat this theory.

Jesus confronted the same theological skepticism among the Sadducees who sought to entrap Him with the story of a widow who married seven brothers—by Jewish law—in turn as she returned each time to widowhood: *"Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"* they argued.

Jesus's response is important not just for silencing Sadducean heresy but for its reference to a bodily resurrection:

Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. ... But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God

of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”¹

The patriarchs are alive in glory not as disembodied spirits without personhood or personality but as themselves. Who they were—in terms of their relationship with God—is who they are in God’s eternal presence.

If we existed in eternity in spirit form only absorbed back into the life force called God, we contend, we would be void of personhood and personality. Who we were as individuals would cease to have significance even though throughout the record of Scripture God invested His Spirit’s work in maturing us in Christ.² No bodily resurrection would mean none of this divine work would have eternal value and our faith in this life would perpetuate a dead hope.³

God’s Image

If our glorification or resurrection is in spirit only, God would be denied His original plan regarding Adam and Eve, to create man in His divine image, that is, capable of a relationship with Him.

¹ Matthew 22:29,31-32

² Ephesians 4:13 *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

³ 1 Corinthians 15:19 *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

We are assured that reference to God's *likeness* in Genesis⁴ does not regard outward form [although this is one definition] but of inward qualities of mind and spirit: feelings, sensibilities, and an overarching ability to reason with and understand God, capable of a meaningful, mature, and holy relationship with Him as a Holy God.

We are being made anew⁵ into Christ's image⁶ in preparation for a heavenly citizenship. Paul clarifies that this will also require us to be clothed in a new and glorified body. We can only assume that in eternal life the person we will be requires a body for full participation in a relationship with God, the same as Jesus has.

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.**⁷

Human Form

There is the example: Jesus after His resurrection. Even prior to His resurrection, "*Anyone who has*

⁴ Genesis 1:26 *Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness*

⁵ Colossians 3:10 *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

⁶ Romans 8:29 *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

⁷ Philippians 3:20-21

seen me,” Jesus explained, *“has seen the Father.”*⁸ Afterward, Paul called Him the manifest persona of the invisible God.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.⁹

Jesus’s resurrected body added to this reality a revelatory certainty that gave Paul the undeniable conviction that Jesus was alive. Jesus’s death and resurrection became the cornerstone of Paul’s “good news” to the gentiles, not only based on the testimony of others but because he also encountered unexpectedly the risen Savior.

He appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all **he appeared to me also**, as to one abnormally born.¹⁰

A Human Body

Paul’s theological explanation of this new body the Savior donned was tangled in analogy—as often seems the case. Paul compared Adam to the resurrect-

⁸ John 14:9

⁹ Colossians 1:15

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:5-8

ed Savior to clarify that though both are bodies, there are some key differences. But what are those differences?

[If I may be so brash: It wasn't that Adam had two arms but Jesus had three. There is no distinction recorded anywhere in scripture which might lead us to assume that our glorified bodies will be in a different human form in appearance.] The differences, regardless, would be incidental unless they represented a distinct dependence on some functionality afforded us through our celestial body not possible in our natural one. Will we have arms in glory? How else would we hug? Heavenly bodies must be capable of functioning as bodies in a heaven that far exceeds in glory anything experienced in this life! We need somehow an inexhaustible capacity to love God and love one another.

There were a few points Paul focused on which are all we have to answer such questions:

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is **sown is perishable**, it is **raised imperishable**; It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; **it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power**; it is **sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body**. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the

heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just **as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.**¹¹

1. *it is raised imperishable*; we need a body that cannot be overtaxed to death. Its abilities cannot wane; its strength cannot be exhausted.
2. *it is raised in power*; The “weakness” or drawback of our human body is its physiological neediness and “*all the miseries of ...this life, which go to produce the dissolution of the body.*”¹² The natural body runs down, becomes old, and dies but not the celestial body we will live in forever: “*endowed with unlimited power of action.*”¹³ The limitations place on the natural body, which we are more acutely aware of with age, are removed with the celestial body. Our ability to show and feel love, to worship God or experience joy, happiness, peace, etc. will not be limited but will experience freely God’s heaven of infinite grace. “*Such a body will never be to the principle of its life what the earthly body so often is to the ...soul, a burden and a hindrance.*”¹⁴
3. *it is raised a spiritual body*. The natural body accommodated the soul, its passions, hungers, and drives—even though its limitations ended

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:42-49

¹² Godet, *Epistle to the First Corinthians*, 411

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

in death. The celestial body will accommodate our *spirit*, our desire to commune with God and fellowship with one another. This is “*the higher element of the human personality, ...acting in ...union with the Divine Spirit.*”¹⁵

4. *we bear the image of the heavenly man.* We shall be like Christ. “*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*”¹⁶

Why a Bodily Resurrection?

Why a bodily Resurrection? Scholarship seems contend to argue only that Paul and Jesus affirmed that the resurrection of those in Christ, their glorification, would be *bodily*. The reason why was best answered by those who maintain that this glorified body would be able to fully appreciate the spiritual connection we will have with God. [Point #3 above].

Our new bodies will be “in tuned” with God’s eternal and inexhaustible desire toward us as worshippers, as servants, as friends. The current natural body often proved undeniably inadequate in many ways. We seem in this life to have a need for a fre-

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ 1 John 3:2. cp. 1 Corinthians 2:9 *However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”— the things God has prepared for those who love him...*

quent modicum of divergence, a vacation or holiday, even from things spiritual. An endless worship service sounds to many beyond reason, but we have heaven all wrong here. We are interpreting an imagined heaven based on feelings and thoughts tied to this life and this body.

God's Pleasure

One thing is sure: God takes pleasure in having us close, in having our friendship. He has always craved this unhindered love relationship with us. How else might we understand His reason for our creation? The Psalmist knew!

...but **the LORD takes pleasure** in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.¹⁷

Our Pleasure

Does it matter to God that we, too, share in His pleasure?

How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.¹⁸

¹⁷ Pslam 147:11

¹⁸ Psalm 36:7-8

When God made humankind He made Adam and Eve in a “human” *form* fit for His Garden and He pronounced it “*very good*.”¹⁹ There is no record of God ever discrediting this design which allows us to believe possible that this will be the bodily form God will redress us in—only glorified and without the natural limitations we now live with. We will get to walk with Him in the cool of the day in a second Eden.

I have been somewhat reluctant to suggest—but I will—that pleasure is something we have come to connect to the body. The church has been less disposed to give any credence to this principle since the world has discovered here a goldmine of indulgence that has led them into depraved [the church’s word] and unnatural [again: the church’s word] areas of human experience. Sadly, this was the Gnostic’s argument which still influences the church’s understanding of right and wrong.

I understand, somewhat, what the church is saying, but there is much to rethink here in terms of human need and natural passions. The word “Eden”²⁰ which God named the garden He planted, means “*pleasure!*” I cannot imagine that the garden environment for Adam and Eve could have been anything less. Even Eve had to be perfect for Adam in every way—I leave this to my reader’s imagination.

¹⁹ Genesis 1:31 *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*

²⁰ Genesis 2:8 *Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.*

[Scholarship still maintains that the bodies they lived in were restricted—something not true of the celestial ones we will have. Also, there will be no marriage; in heaven—other than all of us to Christ—so, there will be clear changes evident when we get there.]

But, notwithstanding, God gave Adam and Eve a taste of His pleasure they could experience as well on a walk with Him in the cool of the evening air.²¹ This had to be an early taste of heaven even if they did not know it.

²¹ Genesis 3:8 *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day*

The More in Forever

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. - 2 Timothy 4:18

Paul's description of forever correctly does not depend on the simple term: *eternity*. He takes us through the miracle of resurrection that brings us to an incorruptible immortality, the end of death and decay:

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and **we shall be changed**. For this corruptible must put on **incorruption**, and this mortal must put on **immortality**. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, **Death is swallowed up in victory.**¹

Eternal Life

I borrowed a paragraph taken from my booklet, "*The Day After Time*" to point out that the word *eternal* is a term of *duration* only which speaks of a long and indefinite but limited period of time. This word in the biblical languages is tied to this life and to

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:52-55

time. It is the language of the natural, not the spiritual or celestial, man.²

Eternity sounds simplistically uninteresting— as definitions go— but perhaps it might take on a completely different appeal if we realized that there is, per se, no biblical word for it. “*Eternity*” is an abstract idea. “*Eternity*” is not something we experience in a natural way in this life. All around us is evidence of the temporality of things.³ Everything dies.⁴

The word used in the Old Testament for “eternal”⁵ is a *terminus ad quem*, limited or bounded, a period of extended time. The context must decide the meaning. Isaiah 35:10, for example, speaks of a *perpetual* gladness: “...those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; **everlasting joy** will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.” Some scholars are reluctant to rescue this scene or prophecy from the restrictions of time. How should we understand it? Is Zion’s joy *everlasting*?

In Exodus 21:6, a servant commits his service to his master *for life*. “Then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his

² “The O.T. Words representing **duration**, and their Greek equivalents, call for careful consideration in consequence of the fact that the revelation of man’s future destiny must depend to some extent upon their accurate interpretation.” [Girdlestone, 312]

³ 2 Corinthians 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

⁴ Hebrews 9:27 Just as people are destined to die once
עלם⁵

servant for life.” “For life” is our word *forever*. We know it is not speaking of endless time.

Interpret Exodus 15:18, “*The LORD reigns for ever and ever.*” The meaning to us is clear.

The Hebrew word for eternity is applied to the earth and the whole of nature: *The earth remains forever.*⁶ *He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.*⁷ But we know we await a new earth and heaven.⁸

When it comes to the idea of the eternal we shouldn’t expect much more from the New Testament.⁹ In simple terms: The Bible writers were inspired to talk about *this life* and our witness here and now. They, indeed, shared details of a reality to come but these might not be easily understood since the language—our language—imposes on our perception¹⁰ a timelessness.

Peter’s explanation regarding our Lord’s scheduled return is worth noting. Some conclude that reason argues against this being true. It has been thousands of years by now!

⁶ Ecclesiastes 1:4

⁷ Psalm 104:5

⁸ 2 Peter 3:13 *But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*

⁹ “*The New Testament writers were firmly rooted in the Old Testament and lived in its world of images.*” [Bowman, Introduction]

¹⁰ I John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is **like** a thousand years, and a thousand years are **like** a day.¹¹

Our Lord lives in eternity—not time! Jesus has been away only a very limited numbers of days by Peter’s reckoning. If we place a thousand years of our time line against the eternal and timeless expanse of forever, there is no real difference between a day or—even ten—thousand years. Mind-blowing!?

Picture this simple truth: from eternity past God has always been. He is the *Ancient of Days*.¹² No matter how far back in time we go, God is there. But we are not going back in time; we are going back in eternity—eternity past. Think of it: *God* puts the ‘more’ in *forevermore*. To understand eternity, we need to understand God. A study of eternity is really a study of the nature of the God Who lives there.

...which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.¹³

When all is said and written, we have an assurance from the language that *eternal* means eternal,

¹¹ 2 Peter 3:8

¹² Daniel 7:9 *the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.*

¹³ 1 Timothy 6:15-16

even if we continue to think in terms of endless time. Time measures decay (death) but there is no decay in heaven. There is, therefore, no need for a time piece!

In God's eternity, in His heaven, we must be as eternal as He. The expanse of this idea is difficult now to wrap our minds around; so, to simplify, accurately, our perception of heaven, Paul used different words: Death and decay does not exist in heaven. Paul made a wise choice in calling it a *victory over death* (over decay, over the running down of nature, over the idea of all things coming to an end). *Corruption*¹⁴ (decay) is no more. This mortal must put on *immortality*—the Greek for “no death.” Death is swallowed up in victory.

Victory

“Death is absorbed in imperishable life.”¹⁵

Paul, instead, spoke of a *victory over death*. This draws our attention to a more effective explanation of the eternal: *Death is swallowed up in victory*.¹⁶ To get here Paul disagreed with most English transla-

¹⁴ ἀφθαρσίαν “non-perishing” cp. Romans 2:7 *to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.*

¹⁵ F. L. Godet, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* 442

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:55 בָּלַע הַמָּוֶת לְיָצֵחַ

tions of Isaiah's prophecy:¹⁷ *He will swallow up death forever.* Instead of saying "forever," Paul wrote, *in victory.*

"The word which we translate **victory**," Professor Godet wrote, "following Paul, is one of the most beautiful terms in the Hebrew language.¹⁸ It denotes the state of perfect inward vigor which excludes all possibility of outward decay, and hence: eternal duration."¹⁹

The word signifies everlastingness or perpetual endurance but it also signifies, as such, eminence and victory. In Hebrew thought, what lasts or endures is by virtue of that perpetuity to be considered victorious and therefore having the eminence. It was recognized as an attribute of God:

Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the **majesty** [victory] and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.²⁰

Immortality

How can we be sure that what is eternal is really eternal?

¹⁷ Isaiah 25:8 *He will swallow up death forever.* According to the Septuagint translator: death is not swallowed but *does* the devouring and the word "forever" is translated *mightily*: "Death has swallowed up mightily."

מַצְלָחָה¹⁸

¹⁹ F. L. Godet, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* 442

²⁰ 1 Chronicles 29:11

There is another word used only 3 times in our New Testament that makes all this plain. Time is only useful as a measurement while death reigns, because time measures decay, entropy, the running down and dying of all things. So we look for a non-death or in our language: *immortality*.

Jesus promised:

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."²¹

²¹ John 11:25-26

The Government of Heaven

From the beginning of this present world until the present God's purpose has not changed, and it never will. His purpose has always been to establish his kingdom among men. - David D. Burns "The Kingdom of God As Scripture's Central Theme: A New Approach to Biblical Theology, Part 1" <http://pneumareview.com/the-kingdom-of-god-as-scriptures-central-theme-a-new-approach-to-biblical-theology-part1/6/>

Heaven is not built on a tension of opposing political factions like earthly governments. There God rules alone. This is why believers invest their faith and hope in the coming Kingdom of God, in a citizenship to which we are introduced in this life under God's spiritual guarantee of the life to come.¹ Our life in Christ here is an introduction to that far purer experience as citizens in His Kingdom when we arrive.² Paul's admonishment to "*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things*"³ is an instruction to live now in the light of eternity,⁴ to treat every oppor-

¹ 2 Corinthians 1:22 God has "*put his Spirit in our hearts ... guaranteeing what is to come.*"

² 1 John 3:2 *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

³ Colossians 3:2

⁴ 1 Timothy 6:19 *In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age*

tunity in this life to love,⁵ to live in peace,⁶ to be truthful,⁷ to be forgiving,⁸ to be holy!⁹

Where there is no sin, there is no law code required to keep order. Where the relationship each believer has with each other is built on their relationship with Christ that relationship is holy providing heaven's citizens unfettered and total freedom in what they say to and do for each other and the Lord. Where the Fruit of the Spirit rules in the hearts and lives of its citizenry, "...*there is no law.*"¹⁰ There need be no code or regulation to limit or legislate righteousness.

God's Covenant

But there is a *covenant* agreement. Heaven is a theocracy of love, governed by a holy God in which the holiness of God pervades every action, word, and thought of every citizen. This is the covenant not scripted in legal code but written on the heart.

⁵ Colossians 3:14 *And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity*

⁶ Colossians 3:15 *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

⁷ Colossians 3:9 *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices*

⁸ Colossians 3:13 *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

⁹ Colossians 3:12 *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

¹⁰ Galatians 5:23

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.¹¹

This new covenant Paul plainly declares,

... is the covenant I [God] will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord.

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.¹²

What God introduced in the Garden was ultimately a dream He would fulfil in us. The finality of all things is one kingdom standing—God's—and one ruler—God!¹³ No description of God's theocratic rule is better expounded than Paul's excited utterance to the Corinthians.

Then the end will come, when Jesus hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.¹⁴

¹¹ Ezekiel 11:19

¹² Hebrews 8:10-13

¹³ Revelation 11:15 *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever*

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

In heaven all are under the rule of a divine love written on the heart. In heaven, we interpret this to mean, every act, thought, and spoken word¹⁵ is a spontaneous expression of who we are as a holy people. I call this *spontaneous* because forethought is generally a cautious approach to craft words either intended to deceive or in a more honorable effort to avoid offense. Neither of these are a concern when a holy people respond in Christlike love toward one another. Heaven is a place of uncompromising truth. In heaven there is no deception, no lies,¹⁶ no craftiness or flattery,¹⁷ no political parties, no elections, no dictatorship of 51%.

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:¹⁸

¹⁵ These are spelled out in Scripture as what *not* to say: shaming, scolding, putting another down, belittling (especially our children), insulting, slandering, blurting out misplaced sarcasm, condemning, lying, speaking evil of someone, projecting blame, accusing (which is Satan's activity), humiliating, using abusive and scathing language, purposely trying to say something you know hurts, and even being unthankful. It is correct to say these are not found in heaven.

¹⁶ Zephaniah 3:13

¹⁷ Romans 16:18 *Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests. By smooth talk and glowing words they deceive innocent people.*

¹⁸ Colossians 3:8-10

So, it is the prima-facie argument here that citizenship in the kingdom of heaven requires a change of heart that redefines humanity more faithfully in terms of the image God initially created Adam and Eve into in the Garden of Eden and now recreates His people into in the image of Christ.¹⁹

This spontaneous response to all that is God's heaven is real freedom! In every sense citizenship in the Kingdom of God is a level of pure freedom other governments cannot provide. Here there is a total transparency, a total simplicity of life shared by all equally.

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.²⁰

My son, Josh, who is the Director of Youth Ministries in the church he attends, gives good advice to the young adults in his ministry—and all of us—from Colossians 3:1-3,²¹ *"Think about the big picture. ... Keep Heaven in mind..."*

¹⁹ Colossians 3:10 *...put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:16-18

²¹ *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

Free from Racism or Class

I never thought I would be including a thought on racism in a discussion of heaven but Paul did. Some prefer using the category: class. Either way, there is no such thing in heaven.

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.²²

Elsewhere Paul included gender distinctions that do not exist in glory. "...*nor is there male and female,*" he added, "*for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*"²³ Then again, this should be obvious since "...*in the age to come and in the resurrection...[the saints] will neither marry nor be given in marriage,*"²⁴

Paul brought up the discussion of racism because the gnostics of his day couldn't imagine that a Scythian, for one, could be saved. They were considered the wildest barbarians living a nomadic existence on the outskirts of the Roman Empire. Some gnostic sects made Judaism's circumcision a requirement for salvation.

²² Colossians 3:11

²³ Galatians 3:28

²⁴ Luke 20:35 *But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage*

Consider, also, the contrast between Gentile and Jew. Ancient Israel had a derogatory term for those who were not Jewish: “*people of the earth.*”²⁵ Rabbinic teaching reserved this phrase for “*plebeians, [and] boors, as opposed to one learned.*”²⁶ This spoke of all gentiles, thought to be barbarous enemies²⁷ of Israel.

Barbarians to the Greeks where anyone who could not speak Greek! That includes me! Paul points out that with him this distinction did not exist.²⁸

American’s history—where this whole discussion began—is a story of racism worth pointing out because it will underscore the need for what God offers His people—a race and class free society where all nations join as one in Christian unity. “*From its very beginnings,*” wrote Annette Gordon-Reed, “*the United States has struggled to deliver on the promise of the Declaration of Independence.... Race has often been at the heart of those struggles.*”²⁹ I mention this specifically because there is a clear biblical instruction in Paul’s words that believers never allow racism to eclipse the message of their faith and the cry of their hearts that recognizes

²⁵ Deuteronomy 28:10 *Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you.*

²⁶ William Gesenius, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 790

²⁷ Deuteronomy 32:21 *They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are **not a people**; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding*

²⁸ Romans 1:14 *I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.*

²⁹ Annette Gordon-Reed’s endorsement of Jon Meacham’s work, “*The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels*” a history of America’s struggle with white supremacy.

all believers in Christian fellowship without distinction.

Believers look forward to a grand reunion—or introduction—with nations of believers like themselves who serve our Lord and one another in unconditional love. We await this glorious prophecy's fulfillment!

Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.³⁰

Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you.³¹

For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before **all nations**.³²

The subject of racism raises another question. Will we recognize our loved ones in heaven when we arrive? Our ability to recognize one another in this life depends heavily on facial features and skin color, sad to say. Does that suggest that in glory we retain our

³⁰ Micah 4:2

³¹ Zechariah 2:11

³² Isaiah 61:11

facial features and skin color? The Bible implies, at least, another idea.

On the Emmaus road, two disciples had no clue they were talking to Jesus. Their grief and the conclusion that Jesus was dead blinded them.³³ They should have at least questioned the sound of His voice.³⁴ Paul on his way to Damascus had to enquire to whom he was speaking³⁵ for the obvious reason: he wasn't saved yet.

The New Testament has a sparse record of someone this side of heaven recognizing someone who is already there, At the Savior's transfiguration, Peter may have recognized Elijah and Moses.³⁶

But Elijah and Moses were not personal acquaintances of Peter. They were historical figures; so, had he known, this would suggest that we will recognize one another in glory based on something other than skin color or recognizable facial features. There is nothing in the Scriptures, from what I have researched, that tells me that in glory I will recognize my mom and dad based on their age, height, skin color, etc, the last time I saw them. Would it be strange of God to re-color us all olive skinned after His Son? We cannot confirm this idea either.

³³ Luke 24:16 *but they were kept from recognizing him.*

³⁴ John 10:4 *...his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*

³⁵ Acts 22:8 *'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. " 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied.*

³⁶ Matthew 17:3-4 *Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."*

So will we know one another in heaven!?

Yes, But recognition will have nothing to do with how pretty you are or young you look or any of the thousands of features which distinguish us here. We won't be pretty because we're black or white. We might be black or white, red or yellow or brown skinned but our true beauty is the reflection of Christ in whom "we have our being."³⁷ Some maintain that when Paul said, "*I shall know fully, even as I am fully known*"³⁸ to the Corinthian church, he was including an ability someday in heaven to recognize one another. Others, though, think this is far reaching. I will even know Peter, though I never met him?!

Paul related a rather singular account that might have served us here, had it not been classified information:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.³⁹

I have heard similar accounts, some of which you can YouTube, of individuals who recognized

³⁷ Acts 17:28 '*For in him we live and move and have our being.*' *As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'*

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:12

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

loved ones who have gone on ahead ...but here we want the support of Scripture!

Will each saint in glory be recognizable by the color of their skin? There is no race or class division in heaven and therefore no need to even ask.⁴⁰ Perhaps, that is all we need to know that in heaven we will know each other and no one will be focused in on race ...only Christ.

⁴⁰ Acts 10:34 *Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism"*

The Language of Heaven

...he will tell you what is yet to come. - John 16:13

Language is only a vehicle of communication. It can be abused and often, in this world, is.

If I speak in the languages ... of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.¹

But in heaven our vocabulary will serve a far more glorious purpose: to understand the love and grace of the God who invited us there. Heaven's language will be new.²

The languages of this life fail to describe or represent the divine thoughts and the depth of feelings that believers will experience in the continued presence of the glory of a holy God. There will be no veil, no toning down the grace of a loving God who will be free to do all and explain all that's on His great heart. The language of heaven will necessarily, therefore, be a single language spoken and understood by all³ who are there. Each word will speak to the deepest desires and experiences of the saints.

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:1

² Revelation 3:12 *The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name.*

³ Isaiah 29:24 *Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction*

There will be no rhetoric in heaven, no words spoken without meaning. No deception, no lies.⁴ The Shepherd of our souls will have brought us to peaceful pastures which will be an experience we were only introduced to in this life.⁵ Not only are words like: *fear*, *lies*, *deception*, never spoken again, but words like: *love* and *peace* will bear deeper and fuller meanings previously in this life experienced in a very limited sense.⁶

A quick review of the Fruit of the Spirit will reveal how even the meaning of these qualities have been elevated in meaning. Some of these words that profile a believer are words used for the first time in the Greek language to represent the dynamics of the work of the Spirit on the soul.⁷ *Love* is first found in Scripture, as is the word *goodness*.⁸ And as we already

⁴ Zephaniah 3:13 *They will do no wrong; they will tell no lies. A deceitful tongue will not be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid.*"

⁵ John 16:13 *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

⁶ John 14:27 *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

⁷ Galatians 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

⁸ Lightfoot, on Gal. 5:22, finds more activity in the ἀγαθωσύνη [lovingkindness] than in the χρηστότης [gentleness or sweetness]: 'they are distinguished from one another as the ἦθος [character] from the ἐνέργεια [reputation or expression]: χρηστότης is potential ἀγαθωσύνη, ἀγαθωσύνη is energizing χρηστότης.' With all this it is hard to suggest any other rendering; even as, no doubt, it is harder to seize the central force of ἀγαθωσύνη than of χρηστότης, this difficulty mainly arising from the fact that we have no helping passages in the classical literature of Greece; for, however **these can never be admitted to give the absolute law to the meaning of words in Scripture, we at once feel a loss, when such are wanting altogether.** [Trench 232]

know: His *joy* is unspeakable and His *peace* passes understanding.

“Against such things there is no law” and indeed there can be no regulations or restrictions. The fruit of the Spirit and His work in us are unlimited and timeless, because they are the aspirations of an eternal God who plans to bring us to His level of understanding and fellowship.

God’s Thoughts

There is a sense in which we should take a step back and imagine God’s thought in creation from the beginning. Before there was language, as we understand it, the Godhead was planning ultimately to bring us in Him to a place where His great heart could be understood by us.

When God spoke to an Abraham or a David He dreamed the same dream that He dreamed for us. Calvary can be read between the lines of Old Testament text. Calvary alone explains the prophecies and God’s overwhelming passionate response to Israel’s spiritual ups and downs. Calvary itself becomes the language of a divine love for His people—Old and New. Dispensations or periods of biblical history notwithstanding, God had one thing clearly and only on His mind—the plan that involved His Son for our redemption. To assume our spoken language capable of fully articulating the infinite complexity of this plan is beyond intellectual presumption.

To begin with: To assume God would wait until the Gospel message through Paul's teaching was ready to speak to His creation—such a notion—fails to appreciate the expanse of such a love existing outside time. Whether His Word, His love message, is heard through the moral conscience of one who has discovered the pains of the knowledge of evil unleashed on the world, or through the object lesson of a Jewish ritual, or eventually and happily through the Gospel message, God has been speaking.⁹

Bishop Lightfoot in a study of the Pauline epistle to the Colossians said it this way:

The language of the New Testament writers is beset with difficulties, so long as we conceived of our Lord only in connection with the Gospel revelation: but, when with the Apostles we realize in Him the same Divine Word who is and ever has been the light of the whole world, who before Christianity brought first in mankind at large through the avenues of the conscience, and afterwards more particularly in the Jews through a special though still imperfect revelation, then all these difficulties fall away.¹⁰

What we are admitting here is not mysterious or esoteric. We are only saying that if our theology, our study of God, is limited to the New Testament Epistles—laboring under the mistaken notion that it wasn't until Paul, the apostle, that God began to re-

⁹ Proverbs 1:20 *Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square;*

¹⁰ J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 118.

veal the message of the Cross and His Son's death—we have placed too much of a burden on language (The Greek in particular) to share such deep and eternal truth.¹¹ The revelation of God has even been recognizable in the stars!¹²

The Spirit Speaks

Nor would we say that until we reach that golden shore, the scriptures offers no lessons. Quite the opposite. The Spirit is busy sharing with every believer a common knowledge of eternal Truth.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and **he will tell you what is yet to come.**¹³

And there is no need to debate the value of a Greek or Hebrew term beyond what scholarship has already provided. Scholars spend a lifetime pondering the meaning of some words which seem to be contextual out of place.¹⁴ Perhaps we have so many English translations in an honest effort to explain or resolve such difficult passages.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 2:10 ...*the deep things of God*....

¹² Psalm 97:6 *The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all peoples see his glory.*

¹³ John 16:13

¹⁴ When Peter quoted Proverb 11:31 [1 Peter 4:8] he used the Septuagint version which cannot be a translation of the Hebrew since the word "scarcely" [cp KJV] is not in the that language.

We admit only that there is much that will surprise us when the glory of God is revealed in all its eternal splendor, when in the language of heaven things once mysterious begin to make infinite sense.

Much Still to Learn

We might only caution those who think they know something—they most likely do not know—to be a bit more understanding of other believers who have not caught up to their level of expertise. There is much here that is yet outside the reach of our understanding. That's what makes Deuteronomy 29:29 so important:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

We live with a quiet peace embracing in our limited language and imagination what we do not yet know while we await that eternal morn when "*his glory shall be revealed.*"¹⁵

Here is where faith comes in. During Jesus's final days with His disciples, His words in their simplicity were an encouragement that embraced every spiritual grace they—and we—would ever need. He spoke of His return to receive them to Himself—such an assurance a child could understand.

¹⁵ 1 Peter 4:13

My Father's house has many rooms; ...I am going there to prepare a place for you ... I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.¹⁶

His thoughts were not cloaked in apocalyptic imagery nor were they an historical overview of His creation's need of redemption—as He presented later to two disciples walking to Emmaus. His focused gaze must have captured their undivided attention when He pledged just two words, "*Trust me!*"¹⁷

We, who have done so, know what He meant.¹⁸ "[We] *know the way...*"¹⁹

¹⁶ John 14:2-3

¹⁷ John 14:1

¹⁸ Romans 3:25 *God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.*

¹⁹ John 14:4

The Unity of Heaven

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. -
Matthew 5:9*

There is a level of unity anticipated in Pauline theology that is unheard of in human society. It is the unity which characterizes our coming relations in heaven. The secret to that unity is oneness and the result is peace. A study of heaven, therefore, must include a study of a united sainthood which should enthuse even the most complacent of believers.

We live in a divided world—a reality that is indisputable—and believers should find this condition painfully unharmonious, even within our own relationships. Families are fractured; political parties explode with opposition and the world seems always on the verge of the next global conflagration.

In contrast, the unity of heaven should be the desire of every child of God. We should begin in this life to allow peace to reign in our hearts.¹ The bond of peace, which is the result of christian unity, is Paul's interpretation of Jesus's promise that "*Peacemakers ... shall be called the Children of God.*"²

Paul envisioned seven levels of oneness that characterize a unity that guarantees the bond of peace.

¹ Romans 14:19 *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace*

² Matthew 5:9 *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is **one** body and **one** Spirit, just as you were called to **one** hope when you were called; **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism; **one** God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.³

One Body

In God's mind denominationalism does not exist. There is only "*one body*." Having said this, let me quickly add: God's people do nothing wrong by being part of a group of believers [and a group of groups is denominational in essence] with a distinct approach to worship. In some cultures christians use coconut milk in communion and the Masai of Tanzania have totally redesigned the MASS on their Catholic missionary [but it is very Christ-centric]. Don Richardson used the example of the "peace child" to represent Calvary to the Sawis of the, then, Dutch New Guinea. [Papua New Guinea]. In civilized [christian] nations the church is mutating in an attempt to make worship culturally relevant without compromising the spirit and message she trumpets. Some pastors see this as spiritually life-threatening. [The drums are too loud!] But others recognize a rightful role in church life for the denomination.

This should not divide us. If a local congregation is successful in bringing a convicting message of

³ Ephesians 4:3-6

salvation in Christ and giving an expression of worship to empower that witness, it is proper to note that these distinctions are without a difference. There is one body because there is "*one Spirit.*"

One Spirit

The Spirit of God *alone* moves among *all* God's people with equal interest in helping us *all* experience the knowledge of God's Son,⁴ and bring us *all* to complete maturity in spiritual matters.

...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.⁵

The work of the Holy Spirit is to introduce Jesus to all. To those of us who have made the Savior's acquaintance in salvation the Spirit's ministry leads us into a richer relationship with the Savior as the Lord of our lives.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.⁶

⁴ John 16:13 *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

⁵ Ephesians 4:13

⁶ John 16:13-14

The theological difficulty here is that the Spirit has nothing to say about Himself. He works sight unseen in the background. We attempt to infer the theology from anecdotal evidence in our personal experience and those of the apostles in the record with varied interpretations. Nonetheless, the important truth here is: there is only *one* Holy Spirit with a *singular* purpose.⁷ His work is the same in and through all believers. Our level of christian maturity or experienced truth might differ greatly but the Spirit's goal is the same "*He shall glorify me,*" Jesus affirmed.

It makes sense that with our minds and hearts fixed on Jesus, we should have "*one hope*" expecting His soon return.

One Hope

Paul taught that we have only *one hope*: looking for the return of Christ.⁸ We live out our christian experience with a single expectation upon which our faith rests. Hope is hereby redefined not in a general sense as a desire for something good to happen but

⁷ Ephesians 3:16-19 *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

⁸ Titus 2:13 *while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,*

always and only specifically looking for the Savior's return for us as He said,

I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.⁹

Christians divide, however, when our expectations are personal—perhaps, based on an understanding of faith or separate teachings. Yet Paul trumpets a single hope! There is only one hope represented in Scripture and defined in Christian theology: We should be living out our christian experience anticipating our Lord's soon return.¹⁰

Expect great things from God—yes! Let the church proclaim loudly that our faith in God is alive with hope.¹¹ Yet the hope of all things hoped for should be—must be—our Lord's coming back for us. Without this anticipation our faith, Paul cringed, would be in vain.¹²

The one “hope” we all share and which unites us is the return of our Lord—our *One Lord*.

⁹ John 14:3

¹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10 *The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

¹¹ Hebrews 11:1 *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

¹² 1 Corinthians 15:14 *And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*

One Lord

God's kingdom is a theocracy governed by *one Lord*. As already noted there will be no partisanship, no political division, no voting in heaven. Church government needs to take care to honor this relationship between our Lord and His church.¹³ It is easy to draft elaborate church documents that wrest the power of decision from a Bible based wisdom to something more corporate and personally empowering. The Lord alone governs by His holiness. As believers follow our Lord's leadership, we are united.

I used to think this was the primary objective that guaranteed christian harmony and peace. If all God's children lived with a single purpose in mind—say, the Great Commission—unity would be a consequence of their dedication to that cause. One of the conditions of heaven will be that our Lord will define that purpose: *“in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”*¹⁴ And if there is only one Lord leading us, there can be only *one faith*.

One Faith

¹³ Acts 15:28 *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:*

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:7

The Bible already recognizes that all believers have one faith in common because it is God given. ..and a common faith is a singular faith. There can be only one. This is true in a two-fold sense.

... through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ [all the saints] have received a faith as precious as ours:¹⁵

We prefer to define “faith” in terms of doctrine—and rightly so. But there is only one Christian doctrine:¹⁶ Christ crucified and risen.¹⁷ Christians have rallied around theological footnotes to this primary truth: that should never divide us—though they often do.

Faith is more than a theology, however. It is a way of life. Faith is *an awareness of a trust relationship* with God.¹⁸ Consider Isaiah’s use of faith as trust. To begin: for Isaiah faith and *being* were identical. Faith was not a feeling or a belief; faith was a way of life. Faith, to Isaiah, was not a circumstance by circumstance decision to rely on someone’s word or support. Faith was an established reliance on someone who in relation he had come to trust implicitly and unre-

¹⁵ 2 Peter 1:1

¹⁶ Galatians 1:8 *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!*

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:2 *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

¹⁸ “Concretely πίστις [faith] means the ‘guarantee’ which creates the possibility of trust, that which may be relied on, or the assurance of reliability.” Gerhard Kittell. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), vol VI. pg. 177.

servedly. Faith defined a person's relationship with another.

Not seen in the English translation is a play on words in Isaiah—the word 'stand' is the word 'trust.' They are the same word used in two different ways:

If you do not **stand** firm in your faith [**trust**], you will not **stand** at all.¹⁹

"If you do not trust God, Ahaz, you will not survive."

Scholarship affirms that *"Faith is for Isaiah the only possible mode of existence"*²⁰ It is Isaiah's way of saying with Paul: *"For in him we live, and move, and have our being..."*²¹

Because our trust in the Lord is shared by all believers, we can affirm that there is only one baptism which is the first step on this journey of faith.

One Baptism

Even with water baptism, we debate the mode instead of recognizing the common act of publicly

¹⁹ Isaiah 7:9 to stand is a passive of the verb to trust (causative). Isaiah's use of 2 separate stems using the same root clearly shows the equation between trust and being.

²⁰ Kittell. vol VI. p.189

²¹ Acts 17:28 KJV

testifying to our commitment to Christ.²² The true meaning of baptism is that herein we begin our journey with *Jesus* as the One we follow.

Scholarship argues that water baptism is a “reason” for maintaining christian unity²³ but we suggest it is more basic or fundamental than that. Water baptism was introduced to Jesus’s followers at His own baptism (His *initial* act as He began His walk to Calvary) showing that this step must be the first step in a lifelong pilgrimage learning Christ and living for Him. While walking beside Him we walk beside our brothers and sisters in Him which is a clear sign of a united fellowship.

One baptism as the first step in one Faith following one Lord guided by one Spirit into one Truth—not alone but—with other believers from one and only one body while we excitedly expect Jesus’s soon return is the plan for unity by *One God*.

One God

The biggest truth hidden in plain sight in this revelation is that there is only “*one God*” who is the heavenly Father of all the saints. Dr. Vincent Donovan, former missionary to the Masai in Tanzania for 17 years during the 1960’s and 70’s, observed

²² Romans 10:9 *If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

²³ What about communion? “*The Lord’s Supper is rather an act of the preserved unity, than a motive for its preservations.*” John Peter Lange, “*The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*” (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1980) p141

sadly that *“Our God is often more descriptive of a pagan concept of god, a god who favors us and our interests.”*²⁴ In paganism, each tribe believes that the god to whom they sacrifice and pray lives among them only. He never goes outside the border of their world. God only exists to perform miracles for them and no other tribe, clan, or nation.

Christianity risks developing this same mindset: seeing God only able to move freely among parishioners of our own particular religion or denomination. Christianity has without sound biblical reason splintered into countless denominations, each one thinking that God favors their prays, their theologic, and their style of worship over all others. Christians, perhaps unknowingly, have discarded this precious and sacred Pauline revelation that there is only *One* God and He moves freely among all believers notwithstanding the minor differences in beliefs and styles of worship. *“One God”* is the believer’s Schima²⁵ upon which all christian unity must be based.

The overarching bond of peace and unity is possible because God has no favorites.²⁶ I believe it was William Alfred Passavant (October 9, 1821 - June 3, 1894), a Lutheran minister, who wrote:

²⁴ Father Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978) p. 36.

²⁵ .The Jewish Schima is Deuteronomy 6:4 :הויה אלהינו יהוה אחד

²⁶ 1 Peter 1:17 [NLT] ...*the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites.*

There is one path,²⁷ one goal [message],²⁸ one house,²⁹ one family,³⁰ one home to which you have been called,³¹ ..all hope for one heaven, and in the same heaven to obtained a common inheritance, an identical blessedness and glory in the heavenly life.³²

The Bond of Peace

Why shouldn't God wait until we reach His kingdom to unite us. Why the hurry to provide for us a new life we can and should walk together?³³

Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?³⁴

The simple answer is to bring us to a unity that empowers our witness to our world. A divided

²⁷ Psalm 16:11 *You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:2 *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

²⁹ John 14:2 *in my Father's **house**...*

³⁰ Ephesians 3:15 *from whom every [KJV: the whole] **family** in heaven and on earth derives its name.* cp. Galatians 6:10 *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

³¹ John 14:3 *I go and prepare a **place** for you*

³² J.P. Lange on Galatians. 143

³³ Galatians 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

³⁴ Amos 3:3

church promotes an ineffective message or no message at all!³⁵

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.³⁶

The world likes to label us “hypocrites” and, sadly, not without cause. We might imagine—and not without reason—that Satan has attacked the church’s unity by offering us a sense of oneness based only on the inner circle of friends we tend to frequent. One clergyman boasted that his church was united because he booted out all the dissenters. This mindset is all too easy for us to find reasonable but a heavenly unity is discarded in the process. Any child of God is my brother or sister in Christ. Absolutely! Doctrinal differences notwithstanding. Style of worship notwithstanding. Political leanings a none issue. God has no favorites and neither ought we. How sad if we wait until heaven to embrace our brothers and sisters in Christ that were unwelcome in this life in our inner circle of fellowship. The scripture is more emphatic on this point than we tend to think:

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.³⁷ For God is not a God

³⁵ Interesting: The 7 letters to the 7 churches in Revelation 2-3 do not mention disunity as reason for removing a church’s witness. The Revelation is focused on each individual church rather than collectively on “the Church” as a whole.

³⁶ John 17:21

³⁷ Romans 14:19

of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.³⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.³⁹ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.⁴⁰ Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.⁴¹

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:33

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 13:11

⁴⁰ Colossians 3:15

⁴¹ Hebrews 12:14

The Story of A King

*I no longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends, - John
15:15*

Once upon a time there lived a king, a very benevolent monarch, whose relationship with his servants in his kingdom was unlike any ruler's before him or since. The usual words used in other worlds for servant or slave or indentured or hired help could not describe what was true here in this kingdom.

Their service to their king suggested of each of them an overwhelming passion to serve him best for which they were rewarded, even though they sought no reward. Every act of kindness or thoughtfulness or obedience on their part seemed to elevate them in his eyes above the very service they sought only to fulfil. He saw them more and more as friends though they never stopped serving him.

He began to confide in them, share the secrets of his heart with them and educate them in all the ways of his kingdom even though they were still servants. Jesus saw this possibility in His relationship with His disciples,

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you

friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.¹

Such an elevation in social status of mere slaves is unprecedented! If a servant can advance in standing, does this not suggest that all servants are *not* equal? Some are “greater” than others and one is greatest of all! Perhaps some servants hold rank over others whom they manage for the king! Not here! Greatness was a measure of a servant’s relationship to the king, how close they wanted to be to him, how much they wanted to know about his leadership.

We might be reminded of Jesus’s comments to His disciples, “*Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.*”² “Servant” here speaks of the *work*—or ministry—of a servant to their master. The more faithfully they served the king, the closer they grew to him. Their service in this way became acts of kindness and a desire to please their king. They did not act out of duty or pride.

Now here in this kingdom, it was observed, no servant enjoyed any less privilege or fellowship by the king than any other. No servant was denied an audience with their sovereign. In service to this benevolent sovereign each one of his servants sought only to please him and each act of love toward him raised them somehow in their relation with him. We know they didn’t serve him out of obligation. Jesus

¹ John 15:15

² Mark 9:35.

clarified “*whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.*”³ This speaks to the relationship. They are not into duty or service for service sake. They wanted to serve *him*.

In a world of greed, deception and self-interest, a competitive spirit, or a desire to get ahead, such service could never be because the focus would not be on their sovereign only but on their own achievement. But his kingdom was unlike any other kingdom that ever was. Each servant, first, came there with a recognition of their dependence on his rulership. Every servant humbly knew that their well-being and happiness as well as life itself would not exist without him, without who he was to them. His kingdom supplied every need of every servant. There was no want here.

No servant complained. No servant was proud of their service or sought to be outside his kingdom, outside of the king’s bountiful provision. The king was as pleased to provide for all their wants as they were to receive from his hand. They only and always wanted to serve him. There was never a revolt nor did any servant imagine better in another kingdom.

The king’s servants, also, had a special awareness of the king’s feelings. They lived with, what one might call, a heightened sensitivity to *his* needs—not material needs which he could never have. At times his heart ached for servants in other kingdoms. He was not beyond caring for all those servants enslaved under tyrants. He did not pretend they were not out

³ Mark 10:44

there living in squalor, living in want, living in ignorance of what his servants enjoyed. There was more to his great heart than his desire to provide for his own servants from his abundance.

He carried burdens for many who should have been part of his kingdom but who chose not to and his servants lived with a heartfelt awareness of all this. They had more than empathy or sympathy. In a real sense, his servants carried his burdens along with him. His servants cared because he cared. They often responded so spontaneously that the king didn't need to say anything. They served him in sharing a heartfelt interest in whatever concerned him. They served him in this way faithfully—often without his telling them what was on his mind. They seemed to feel his pain. In a predictable way this enriched their conversations. Servants would often spend hours sharing and discovering how benevolent he was. No servant was ever an inconvenience. No servant was ever turned away. The king had time for all his servants. They were, after all, his friends, too.

The king had studied the heart of man and knew that only servants who relied on him would be able to read his heart. He knew that the proud and self-reliant would regard only their own self interests. The king also knew that his servants, whose hearts were in rhythm with his own, would also be predisposed to listen when he shared his heart.

His servants, also, were known as "The Gentle Ones." They were not brought to submission like a

tyrant would his servants. They were inclined—they simply wanted—to please him in whatever way they could. They never argued with their sovereign or questioned his judgment. No one ever spoke of correction or discipline. It may have seemed strange to outsiders that such servants existed but it was a natural expression of their humble reliance on him and their closeness to him. Their faithfulness was an extension of who they were. What they did for the king was a spontaneous reaction to his presence among them. Often, the king didn't express his interest in service, they responded with such automatic forethought that they seemed to know, almost instinctively, what he desired and they fulfilled his interests before a word was spoken. Strangely, words became less important in this regard. Words were for relaxed conversation. Words were for discovering the beauty of their relationship and not so much anymore for instruction. And this was true of all his servants. There were no house servants to distinguish duties among each other. They were all equally his friends.

Now if this seems strangely unreal, it is only so for someone who did not serve him. Nothing was more real to those who knew him and served him. He was their sovereign, something they never lost sight of, but he was also their closest "friend"—which had to give uncommon meaning to that word.

The king would have required one other thing of them that his servants care as much about each other as they cared about him. Their love for him overflowed, it seemed, into a love for each other—and

this was anticipated by a king who knew his servants' hearts. The more one is loved, the more they love others. This meant that each servant grew to depend on each other because each one was dependent on the king. Much of what he provided as a benevolent sovereign he provided through one servant for another. Any selfish revolt would have broken this interdependence that characterized their interpersonal relationships. Instead what happened was that each servant developed a keen awareness of the others, how they felt and what they cared about. This connection was reasonable since each servant had a heart after a king whose heart and benevolence reached out to all their fellow-servants. Each servant was as predisposed to serve each other as they were to serve him.

It has been said that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." This catchphrase was known among the servants in other kingdoms, too, but had a different meaning there. In the kingdom of this benevolent monarch, his servants were *natural* givers. They didn't give to be blessed. They gave because they were givers. In his kingdom all their needs were met. What they gave each other was emotional and spiritual support. They gave love because they were loved. The goodness of their king overflowed as generosity toward one another in terms of their fellowship, their interest in caring for one another, and their desire to learn all they could about the kingdom in which they served. There was nothing unusual about this for servants who cared about one another were servants

who needed no prompting to give of their resources to others in need.

Now their king did not look at his kingdom and call it perfect, not yet. There remained the two most critical characteristics of true servants which he looked for in his ...and found. First, His servants were not only givers but they gave out of a *pure* heart. A pure heart, a pure thought, a pure act is a genuine one. There was no ulterior motive in the offering. In our language, there was no flattery, deception or craftiness in any servant's actions or words toward the king or toward one another. His servants were transparent. There "eye" in a biblical phrase was "singular." What others saw in them, we might call, "truth in simplicity." No servant lied! In this kingdom, words like: lies, deceit, duplicity, fraud, trickery, guile ..and a thousand other such terms to describe the serpent's slithering in the Garden didn't exist because the serpent didn't exist here!

The king knew that ultimately his kingdom now would not need to be governed by laws or regulations that are designed by other rulers, other governments, and tyrants to keep their servants under control or to punish them. The simple fact is that controlled servants who feel the pain of bondage will often attempt to break free but never openly, only under the dark of some form of deception. None of the king's servants knew what punishment meant because there was no need of jurisprudence, fiats or even written covenants to explain it. Service was freedom and there was no deception in his kingdom.

One might conclude that such a covenant had been inscribed upon their hearts.

So, lastly, there were no peacekeepers, no need for those professionals skilled in law who might bring peace out of social chaos. Each servant was in themselves a *peacemaker*, for, they were at peace within themselves and with their king and each other. The kingdom was a kingdom at peace.

Now, if how these servants lived in relation to the king sounds strangely like the Beatitudes, it is not strange at all. A study of the beatitudes, not in terms of service but *servanthood*, will bear this out.

The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes are ... a spiritual ... list of the qualities God brings to bear in the people who follow Jesus.⁴

I have been meditating on the Beatitudes [the beautiful attitudes] and wonder if there is an order to Jesus' enumerated blessings in Matthew 5:3-12. Although there are places in the Sacred text where the choice of words are less demanding, especially in ongoing narrative, here in the opening salvo of the Sermon on the Mount it is most likely that Jesus was careful to detail those characteristics that once developed, spiritually and emotionally, equip His follow-

⁴ Ronnie McBrayer, *How Far Is Heaven?: Rediscovering the Kingdom of God in the Here and Now*

ers to face the world they must minister in. The ultimate test of a disciple's commitment and dedication to the Lord is their ability to represent the Good News—as only good news can be represented—with an undying hope, an enduring peace, an unconquerable love, an unquestioning faith, and an unquenchable joy. But reaching this level of commitment is a journey through stages of spiritual development beginning with the first beatitude. For the dedicated disciple of Christ who takes seriously a commitment to be used of God, he or she must begin at the beginning by:

- 1 embracing poverty of spirit⁵ or learning to humbly depend on God, in a most absolute sense. Now we are prepared to embrace the heart of God in ceaseless prayer—a prayer *life*,
- 2 finding a profound sense of fellowship with God in sharing His burden⁶ for souls. The evil around us does not go unnoticed; it is a painful reality that we are not of this world. We are here on a mission. We are
- 3 discovering a growing and spontaneous passion within to follow Jesus⁷ unquestioning and without reason's approval. We are
- 4 Developing a hunger for righteousness, for representing Christ to our world, for a pro-

⁵ Mt 5:3 *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁶ Mt 5:4 *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted*

⁷ Mt 5:5 *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

found sense of commitment to living⁸ a faithful witness.

And these are the first four steps that precede “showing mercy” where we pause to consider how these four are requirements for the Lord to mold us and make us into effective and faithful ministers of His truth.

Johann Albrecht Bengel taught: *grace removes guilt; mercy removes misery.*⁹ The most basic expression of *showing mercy* would be giving to the poor, giving alms. Many are content to assign this meaning here to this beatitude but it more represents the spirit of giving behind the gift or a desire to lessen someone’s suffering simply because we can and God wants us to—without reward or recognition.

Mercy enters a world of hurt and misery and is driven by divine love to do something about it, to lessen that pain, if even in the most minuscule, cup of cold water, pillow fluffing, way. Mercy speaks to the heart of the giver, to a spontaneous outflow of caring love. Mercy sees all our resources as God’s, held in trust until God calls for them, until He chooses to use us.

To this simple truth, the Lord adds the need to be pure of heart. This is to say that heaven’s citizenry will be known by the purity of their humility, their growing closeness to God, their spontaneous re-

⁸ Mt 5:6 *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

⁹ <http://m.studylight.org/lexicons/tsn/view.cgi?n=37>

sponse to His desire toward them and a heart of pure mercy, free from greed, without deception, without personal and hidden objective.

We have been highlighting these quality of those who inherit the kingdom of light throughout this work. The ultimate quality of God's children in His kingdom, the overarching heart throb of every saint who strolls its street of gold is *peace*.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.¹⁰

We will not be peacekeepers. [There is no such word in Scripture.]. No one needs to keep the peace because peace reigns *in* all hearts. We *produce* it from within: *peacemakers*.

We might be better using the Hebrew term—which we all know—*shalom*. Shalom speaks of security and safety, safe from all and any harm—complete and perpetual. Shalom speaks of mental and emotional health or soundness—to be well—as well as prosperity (define this word any way you want and then add the other definitions you missed. It is complete prosperity in every way.) As the Jewish peace-offering taught, it is rich and abiding fellowship between us and the Lord. And all this adds up to “*a mind at peace*.”

¹⁰ Matthew 5:9

The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly¹¹ to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.¹²

There is overwhelming support in Scripture for such a peace. There is also peace from God¹³ and the peace of God¹⁴ which every believer has experienced and is prepared to speak of. But here we have argued, first and foremost that all eight beatitudes are intrinsically the expressed traits of those who follow Jesus. Secondly throughout Scripture these eight beautiful attitudes are interminably on God's great mind and heart. These are, therefore, the heart's adornment of *the children of God, of the inheritors of heaven*, of those who will walk its streets and learn of its wealth of divine grace, these are the true saints who are citizen's in God's kingdom of light, God's kingdom of peace!¹⁵

¹¹ KJV *a perfect heart*, i.e. a heart at peace.

¹² 1 Chronicles 29:9

¹³ Romans 1:7

¹⁴ Colossians 3:15

¹⁵ Luke 19:38 *Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!* "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Imagination

*He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" -
Revelation 21:5*

I like to imagine a heaven similar to my Bible school experience: lots of Bible study, fellowship and evening worship. Oh, and I met my wife there. Maybe there's the drawback: current human relationships. There is no marriage in heaven. My wife of 52 plus years (at the time of this writing) will be an "ordinary" and "other" child of God in His kingdom. The marriage, the special love relation we shared, is not anticipated there. She will be like all the other "women." No! No womenall the other children of God. I am already missing her!

now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.¹

Romance

Romance has been an integral part of my adult life. Heck! My interest in girls goes back to 5th grade and my first kiss. And now a major part of my emotional life no longer has relevance in heaven or will we, as the Bride of Christ, have a new collective passion for, a love relationship with, Christ alone?

There have been a couple special relationships in my earthly sojourn that I already miss. Will there

¹ 1 John 3:2

be no opportunity to renew these in glory? In heaven, will these relations no longer be a part of who we are!?

I had only four loves in my adult experience and one of these still lingers in the heart. From time to time over the decades, she has unannounced intruded on my memory. I took opportunity to pray for her well-being. I would pause in deep thought to wonder how life was working out for her. It all became a pleasant recollection mingled gently with a longing to find her in heaven's crowd—if just for a moment. But now I am thinking this is all unimportant in a heaven where the focus is understandably on God.

Personhood

Throughout this work we have maintained that a bodily resurrection keeps alive the persons (personalities, personhood) we have become in Christ during this life. But does this mean that heaven will necessitate drastic and new relational changes? My passionate love relation with my wife—very much a part of me—will no longer exist!? Or might it be transformed into another and deeper level of closeness? I will have 2 arms? So, I will give my love of over half-a-century a *christian* hug but not a *romantic* one?

Memories

Our personalities are defined in part by memories, good and bad. These memories represent who

we have become, the person our life's experiences helped form. The only plus for a believer is that God is the Potter. So, what about memories? Might heaven provide me with a quickened memory, a complete memory, of all the good things God did for me, all the moments in life when He graciously intervened to keep me on track for His will in my life. Will I be able to look back on this life and make sense out of circumstances that now seem spiritually irrelevant or worse—out of His will! And can I share those memories in fellowship with the woman who experienced much of them with me while she does the same in return! In a word: will heaven provide opportunity to all God's children to share the rich testimony of the Lord's involvement in our lives during our pilgrimage here?

Tears

God will wipe away all tears but what about tears of joy? Tears of joy have played an important role in an emotional release when we were overjoyed or we were surprised with something we thought would never be. Heaven is a different place; so, our glorified body might not have this feature. We only know that in the Bible "tears" are tears of sorrow and grief—and these are wiped away! But discussing tears leads me to think that our new body will come with a panoply of new feelings—and intense ones—which we could not have handled in this life.

The question I ask is: What happens to the “old” feelings? I already mentioned “romance.” Someone once listed 104 great feelings² that support our interests in this life. Our new body might come with thousands! We don’t know. Perhaps, the new emotions—and all the sights and sounds of heaven—will cause me to forget about my old life that I currently ponder.

Bible School Days

I want to return to my school days and relive memories of indulging in all things Bible. I had no television set. The radio I brought with me in my sophomore year was never turned on. [I don’t recall where I left it.]

Prayer was always a welcomed opportunity to let the Lord know how my day was going. I enjoyed talking to Him.

Men students used to discuss theology into the night draped like so many lifeless forms about the chairs and couches in the dorm lounge. [Some, I was told, welcomed the morning sun.] Across the dinner table, after a meal, discussions continued—sometimes with a comedic twist because teachers often strolled by.

And then there was the spontaneous worship, the a cappella harmony, among the kitchen staff that

² <http://www.psychpage.com/learning/library/assess/feelings.html>

silenced an entire dining room of students. I also recall the exceptional Friday night missions services where we learned God's Spirit from time to time takes worship in a different direction—and faculty leaders needed to discern the change and encourage us, as students, to submit to whatever the Lord had in mind. How real God was to us!!

These spiritual experiences took place in a quiet, partly hidden, glade which opened up to us only after walking the lane through the trees that lined it. Will the Lord return us to campus but in a more exciting experience in heaven? Or does another life await us?

All Things New

My wife, Joyce, and I took a walk out the lane that circles our condo. Upon hearing the birds chirping in the nearby trees and smelling the fragrances we passed, I thought to engage her in conversation about heaven. "Will there be birds in heaven?" I asked. And what about the fragrances that in this life excite fond memories.

She shut me down in her classical woman-of-a-few-words way, "Hon, everything will be new!"

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."³

³ Revelation 21:5

New?

New! There are two words for *new*: something new *in time* or recently having been made or born, like a “newborn.” New also *in quality*. New wine [in time] is a new batch. New wine in quality might be a sweet after dinner red compared to the usual white wine.

The new you and new me are both:⁴ We are born again, newborn in Christ [new in time at salvation] and we are *new* inside, [new in quality] new in nature, not a repeat of the person we were but a brand new “creature” or life in Christ.

“All things *new*” regarding heaven means all things new *in quality*. A brand new earth speaks of an earth [not newly created, though God might]. This speaks of an earth not yet experienced. It is not a replay of this life. A new earth means a new experience! This we have been saying throughout this work.

I still do not know about the birds on my walk, though.

I can hardly wait to find out!

⁴ Ephesians 4:24 *and to put on the new self* [in quality], *created to be like God* in true righteousness and holiness.

Colossians 3:10 *and have put on the new self* [in time] which is being *renewed* in knowledge *in the image of its Creator*.

A Final Word

...speculation on this subject is dangerous. Speculation, however, to some degree there must be... - John P. Lange

What will heaven be like?

We do not know! The biblical emphasis has always been on the changes God would perfect in us preparing us for His kingdom and less about the surroundings. The question should be: what will we be like in heaven? On that, we have already written a lot.

In terms of heaven's surroundings, God will surprise us with experiences that we could only imagine now. Sadly our thoughts leave us with more questions than answers because—again—the Scripture is deliberately silent.

The biblical context is of our life in the Son here and now, about overcoming sin in this life, about walking now in newness of life. Very little outside the maturing of our faith is revealed within its pages.

until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to

become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.¹

We must depend on the final chapters of the Bible for some insight but even here the description suggests symbolism rather than literalness.

The reference to the *New Jerusalem* is a mixed metaphor. Is it really a city? Why is the New Jerusalem spoken of as Christ's bride?² This double use, however, should occasion no surprise. Sometimes a city represents the city and at other times, the people in it. This suggests that the City is the material dwelling place of the resurrected as Eden was for Adam and Eve. But if taken literally it appears to be small for all the elect. It is described as a cube 1400 miles on a side.³

And why a wall around it 200 feet high⁴ resting on 12 foundations?⁵ We can only speculate.

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.⁶

¹ Ephesians 4:13-15

² Revelation 21:9 "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

³ Revelation 21:16 1400 miles on a side. Cubed shape. "The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long."

⁴ Revelation 21:17 The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick.

⁵ Revelation 21:14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations,

⁶ Revelation 21:2

We are at liberty to dream, to imagine, to paint a picture in our hopes of a place sparkling with the overwhelming brilliance of a divine glory where we shall live forever.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.⁷

Scholarship reminds us,

“In conclusion, the writer would remark that he feels most keenly that speculation on this subject is dangerous. Speculation, however, to some degree there must be, if there be study...if we be obedient to the command, ‘Blessed is he that reads and they that hear the words of this prophecy’ (chap. i.3)...”⁸

⁷ Revelation 22:1-5 “It is a city of beautiful walls and gates; a city that has no temple—for it is all a temple; a city that needs no light—for God is its light; a city into which nothing impure enters; a city filled with trees, and streams, and fountains, and fruits—the Paradise Regained.” John P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, v 12, p 390

⁸ John P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, v 12, p 892

Epilogue

There are eternal benefits attached to each beatitude—to be sure: theirs is the kingdom of heaven; they shall see God and be comforted and shown mercy, etc. But looking forward to these promises is not the source of happiness. Spiritual poverty, burdened for a lost world, meekness, hunger for more righteousness, showing mercy, purity of heart and making peace profile true happiness and what citizenship in heaven is all about.

I had been accused by church leadership of preaching a more psychological rather than theological message but was this not what Jesus did the day He taught His disciples the secret to being happy? (Matthew 5:1-10 “blessed” means “happy”) The Beatitudes, as we called them are not attributes of God, nor do they represent the 10 commandments, nor are they fruit of the Spirit. The Beatitudes are no theology. They profile the heart of a follower of Christ. A true follower stripped of competing passions lives with a singular interest—to be like Christ. There is no scripture more psychologically revealing of a true follower of Christ than here.

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...¹

These eight principles should be translatable into everyday life and believers should be given to see that beyond this they need not go. All other church

¹ Philippians 3:10

interests, theologies, programs, support groups, and activities are expressions of these “beautiful attitudes.”

Here is the heart of the matter. Here is a lesson in happiness that denies pleasure and self-indulgence. Here is a way of life Jesus calls blessed even though it is a path to that delight through—to use William Goldman’s phrase from his work, “The Princess Bride”—the dark forest of despair. (Psalms 37:4;² Romans 12:1-2)³

The beatitudes are the book within the book, the sum of all things spiritual, the ultimate goal in becoming like Christ. This is the image, His image, we are being made into. (Romans 8:29) There is a sense in which all other sermons find their text here. All biblical emphasis rests on this fulcrum of truth.

For years in ministry I sought to understand in some visible or recognizable way the difference between believers and non-believers. In a persecuted world, that difference is a sharp contrast in so many ways, but in a country where religious freedom reigns, the line begins to fade as material interests, and even greed, hold sway over believers as with non-believers. Some credit their material blessings to

² Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

³ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

God's goodness—a comment that needs to be evaluated in the face of the "Sermon on the Mount."

Some learn to swim quickly when tossed into the waters of persecution but in a country cited for its religious freedom persecution is far more subtle and deceitful an enemy of the soul. Regardless the number of bathrooms and fireplaces in the home or the acreage of the homestead or how many properties we may boast, we need to recognize that the abundance of our happiness is a function of how little we cherish these things and how readily, if called upon by God, we would spontaneously, like Matthew at his receipt of custom, without forethought, abandon them! When the rich young man asked the Savior, "*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*"⁴ it was not to brush aside an annoyance that Jesus shared the wisdom of heaven with him, "*distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.*"⁵

In a spiritual poverty, ("*poor in spirit*") we prepare to become true followers of Christ, true citizens of heaven, true children of God. We honor a meekness and a hunger to represent the Savior's heart without pretense or personal interest. The final step ("*when men shall revile you...rejoice*") is obtained when we have discovered a peace that transcends the world of hate and abuse we live in, a world that has no concept of where—or who—we are. "We have disap-

⁴ Luke 18:18

⁵ Luke 18:22

peared forever,” to interpret Colossians 3:3: *...now hidden with Christ in God.*

Our happiness no longer derives from the temporal and changeable circumstances that swirl about us but from following our Lord wherever He leads. ... And ours *“is the Kingdom of Heaven.”*⁶

⁶ Matthew 5:10

Enoch Walked with God

Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. -- Genesis 5:24 NIV

Lord, may I walk, like Enoch walked,
That You would merit praise,
A holy walk, impassioned heart,
To follow in Your ways,
As Enoch walked along with You
Communing as he went
While You conversed as friend with friend
In mutual consent
Until one day You would conclude
The friendship needed more
And Enoch past the threshold
Through Heaven's opened door.

So when this journey's end at last
Reveals what is to be,
May I, Dear Lord, like Enoch had,
Find myself as he,
In chrysalis all time transformed
Into that glorious day,
When evermore to walk with You
Is just one step a way.

Lord, keep me from mere self pursuit

With Heaven out of view
Instead may I stay true through life
By walking close to You.
And if perchance I walk this earth
Not mindful of Your grace
Still living on a temporal plane
And not a higher place,
Lord, raise me to that heavenly sphere
Where fellowship is sweet
On "higher ground," as once we sang,
I pray, "Lord, plant my feet."

For some this is a sudden change,
A fearful chasm wide
And not a painless final step
At this life's eventide.
But Lord, I pray, as Enoch had,
May I approach the gate
With quickened step and joyous shout,
"I simply cannot wait!"

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