

Going to Heaven

There is an old joke that tells of a preacher standing before his congregation one Sunday morning and asking the question: “Who wants to go to heaven?” All the people assembled raised their hands with one exception. The preacher was puzzled and came down to stand in front of the lone gentleman who did not raise his hand and he asked, “Sir, don’t you want to go to heaven?” The man answered, “Of course, I thought you were getting up a trip for this morning.”

We can certainly see the humor in this situation. We all want to go to heaven, but not right this moment. Going to heaven is a desire of all people who acknowledge God. Some seem to be certain of their place in heaven while others are hopeful but uncertain about heaven and their place in that glorious realm.

This morning we will look at some things that we need to do to help facilitate our going to heaven. You may tell me that we don’t need to do anything to go to heaven. You may even point out the passage from Ephesians the 2nd chapter where Paul tells us: **For by grace, you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB)**

It is true that we cannot earn our salvation but it does not mean that we receive our salvation without any involvement. Indeed, Jesus speaks of a judgement scene in the 25th chapter of Matthew where those received the invitation to enter the kingdom along with those who are excluded are given some examples of “doing” or “not doing” things. Consider these two verses from Matthew 25. First the 40th verse: And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did *it* for one of the least of these brothers *or sisters* of Mine, you did *it* for Me.’ (Matthew 25:40 NASB)

Then, in verse 45: **Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do *it* for one of the least of these, you did not do *it* for Me, either.’ (Matthew 25:45 NASB)**

We will not take this debate any further. It is sufficient to say that we must have certain mind set to be able to go to heaven. God, through Jesus, has covered the requirements of sacrifice and justification. We obey His commandments because of our love for Him and what He has done. Today, we will look at four things that are required if we want to go to heaven. There is no bus waiting in the parking lot. We will not be abducted and stolen without our doing these things. First, we must make a decision. When we think on people in the Bible making a decision, we often think about Joshua. We remember his famous challenge to the children of Israel once they had entered the Promised Land and divided it up by tribe. We may even picture Joshua as he said, But if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the **LORD**, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served, which were beyond the *Euphrates* River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the **LORD**.” (Joshua 24:15 NASB)

Joshua made his choice and, at the time, the children of Israel also made the same choice.

Even before the time of Joshua, we can look to Moses. We may not think about Moses making a choice. However, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that Moses had a choice.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin. (Hebrews 11:24-25 NASB)

With the exception of Judas, we know that the apostles made a choice to follow Jesus. We tend to forget that Peter was pulled by the world before he finally made the decision to be a bond servant of God (Matthew 16:22-23 and 2 Peter 1:1)

If heaven is our desire, then we must make a decision to follow the things of God and leave behind the allures of this world with all of the temptations that are offered.

Second, we must seek direction. Heaven is a goal—a real destination. To make the trip to heaven, we need to know the direction. We do not intuitively know how to get to heaven. We are told in Proverbs 14:12: **There is a way which seems right to a person, but its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12 NASB)**

We also find these instructive words in Proverbs: **Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6 NASB)**

If we want to go to heaven, we need to look to God for our directions. We like the psalmist need to pray to God: **Make me know Your ways, LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all the day. (Psalm 25:4-5 NASB)**

Even Jesus tells us our entrance into heaven is dependent on our doing God's will.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. (Matthew 7:21 NASB)

If we are looking for looking for the directions to heaven, we need to look to God. We need to know that God sent Jesus and remember that when Thomas asked for directions from Jesus, Jesus reply is found in John 14:6.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14:6 NASB)

Going to heaven requires that we travel via the right direction. The wrong path will not lead us to our goal.

Third, we need to be able to discern the truth. Remember that Satan is eager for us to fail to make it to our goal of heaven. He specializes in misinformation and partial truth. It is up to us to know the truth. Discernment goes beyond simply having knowledge. It is the ability to properly use knowledge. For example, we mentioned Joshua earlier. Joshua knew firsthand about the many gods that had been worshipped both in the land of Egypt and in the land of Cana. He also knew about God and how He had provided, led, delivered on His promises. Joshua used his knowledge to discern the proper course of action when he made his discission to follow God rather than go after the other gods.

We may remember that when Paul left Thessalonica and went to Barea, we are told in Acts 17:11, that the people in Barea applied their knowledge of the scripture to discern that Paul's message was truth.

Now these people were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so. (Acts 17:11 NASB)

Paul specifically calls out knowledge and discernment in his letter to the Philippians. In this passage, tells us that we use knowledge and discernment to be found blameless before God.

Again, it is the ability to use knowledge to make the right choices.

For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may overflow still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may discover the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere

and blameless for the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, for the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:8-11 NASB)

Our knowledge of God's word (the Bible) is good. In fact, it is critical to our being able to develop a discerning mind and heart.

For me, discernment couples action with knowledge. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul call for us to example and make choices based on our examination when he writes: **but examine everything; hold firmly to that which is good, abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 NASB)**

In order to make it to heaven, we need to know truth and to discern the proper choices that we must make. God has provided for us but we must choose to follow His will.

Fourth and finally, we must discipline ourselves to make the trip to heaven. The very word disciple carries with it the idea of discipline. We may think that we are the first to use sports analogies but Paul was using them when he wrote to the church in Corinth. Listen to his words. **Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. So, they do it to obtain a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore, I run in such a way as not to run aimlessly; I box in such a way, as to avoid hitting air; but I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NASB)**

He not only speaks of running a race but of boxing. An athlete certainly must train and discipline his (or her) body to endure through their field of sport.

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former way of life, you are to rid yourselves of the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you are to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Ephesians 4:20-24 NASB)

Then we read in Romans where once more Paul admonishes us to become a new person.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 NASB)

We are to be transformed and not conform to this world. We find that it is not easy. We find that it is not an instant change. Maybe we missed the hint in this passage about the renewing process and we are not changed instantly.

We need to understand that we grow into our new life. Peter lays out the steps for growth in his second letter and chapter 1. He shows us that it is a step-by-step process.

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they do not make you useless nor unproductive in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-8 NASB)

To sum up, if we want to go to heaven, we need to decide that is what we want, we need to seek the directions, we need to discern the truth, and we need to discipline ourselves for the trip.
Do you want to go to heaven?