

I Want to Go to Heaven

One of my pet peeves is the belief many seem to hold that everybody goes to heaven. It seems that we hear people talking about murders, drug dealers, and others whose life-style suggest that they were anything but a Christian and when they die, “they earned their wings” or “they are waking up with God.” I certainly don’t want to think that anyone misses heaven. However, Jesus tells us **“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. (Matthew 7:21 NASB)**

In fact, Luke records a conversation in which Jesus was specifically asked if only a few would be saved.

And someone said to Him, “Lord, are there *just* a few who are being saved?” And He said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (Luke 13:23-24 NASB)

I recently read that for some, earth is a close to heaven as they will ever see and others, earth is as close to hell as they will see. This may be an indicator about whether we will be in heaven. Jesus told His disciples that He would prepare a place for them in His Father’s house.

“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also. (John 14:1-3 NASB)

Then, He told them: **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6 NASB)**

This is a restrictive route to God’s house. It only through Jesus. Peter testified before the Sanhedrin concerning Jesus when he said: **And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12 NASB)**

Those were simpler times, the world is so different today than in the days of Jesus, Peter, and the other apostles. There was not as much evil or sin in society so that it was easier to follow Jesus and His teachings. I beg to differ. Reflect with me for a few minutes on the city of Corinth.

Corinth was a cosmopolitan city. It sat on a small sliver of land between two bodies of water. People from all over the Mediterranean world converged in Corinth. Goods were brought into the city by ship. Sometimes the ships were pulled across the land to the other side where they would sail on.

So, there were all kinds of people in the city. They brought their own religious beliefs. The religious background of Corinth was a mix of Greek, Roman, and Oriental. There was very little understanding of the ways of this new religion in town, Christianity. The Christian teachings went against the grain of everything they knew of religion.

Corinth was the home of the temple of Aphrodite. She was supposed to be the goddess of sensual love and pleasure. It’s been said that one thousand temple prostitutes served at the temple.

Even in the morally corrupt society of the Roman Empire, Corinth was known for its excessive moral decay. The word “Corinthian” was used by the Romans for someone who was immoral and excessive in that immorality. Corinth was the sin city, the “Las Vegas” of the Roman Empire.

The shipping trade made many people rich. But there were many more poor people in the city. There was a chasm between the two groups. These people did not socialize with one another. Into this city, Paul came and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. He joined with Aquila and his wife Priscilla. Later Timothy and Silas came and they worked there for 18 months building up the church in Corinth. Paul had an emotional and spiritual connection with the church in Corinth.

The church at Corinth had many problems. But all of the problems stemmed from one central problem. The people could not or would not detach themselves from the world they lived in. They were having problems shaking off the ways they lived before they were introduced to Jesus Christ. They were bringing the world into the church.

The many problems in the church in Corinth prompted Paul to write several times to the church. From internal evidence found in the two letters that are contained in the New Testament, we find that Paul may have written four different letters to this church.

The open society of Corinth that valued sexual expressions of worship to Aphrodite and rebelled against any moral codes that might restrict their life of satisfying any and all physical appetites and urges.

Paul addressed any of these issues in the letters of First and Second Corinthians. He also addressed the exclusion of people based on their socio-economic status. For a society that seemed to oppose rules, Paul and his Christianity seemed to impose many restrictions on their lifestyle.

When we reach the Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, Paul is pointing out that there is a freedom and liberty to be found in following Jesus.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18 NASB)

In the fourth chapter, Paul tells them that he and the others with him that they had used trickery to persuade them to follow Christ. They had not preached a gospel that was based on them but on Christ Jesus. They had given the whole gospel message without modifying it in any way. According to Paul, if the gospel message was not clearly understood, it was because of the gods of this world had blinded their eyes.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4 NASB)

Paul is using the same image for Jesus Christ as John. He is holding Christ up as light (John 1:9-10; 1 John 1:5).

For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6 NASB)

Satan cannot stop the light of Jesus from shining but he tries to place veils over our eyes so that we do not see the brilliance of Jesus shining against the darkness of this world. Satan works hard to help us see shades of gray versus black and white. Satan wants us to accept the lie that there are no absolutes and therefore, we will only see a dim representation of Jesus. The light of Jesus will be veiled.

Paul returns to the spiritual side of Jesus. Paul begins to show that the Spirit of God stand firmly while the earthly side begins to falter.

But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE,” we also believe, therefore we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:13-15 NASB)

As more people come to believe in Jesus the Christ, the more God’s grace is spreading. All whom have been saved by the grace of God will be raised just like Jesus.

Many in Corinth and many in the world today are growing weary in living under the burden of serving God in a world that refuses to accept that evil is wrong. In Corinth, the heathen ways that were even bad by the standards of Rome under Caligula and Nero, made living for Jesus difficult. Today, we live in a time that pushes a secular standard of morality that has no basis in God’s word. As we try to live by the example of Jesus, we suffer the intolerance of a world which refuses to be governed by God’s standard.

We grow tired of bearing the tribulations of living a life in which we place God above all other things in our life. Some have yielded to the pressure and allowed the concerns of this world to crowd out our unfettered service to God.

We have reached a point where we no longer have the energy to fight. We see that we are outnumbered. We feel like Elijah when he said; **I alone am left a prophet of the LORD. (1 Kings 18:22 NASB)**

Paul offers these words of encouragement for those in Corinth and for us today.

Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NASB)

We are not to become disheartened as we see our earthly body begin to show signs of wear. Rather, we are to work on our spiritual being each day. We are to be transforming from an imperfect worldly-minded person to a Godly person growing spiritually each day.

Paul used similar words to encourage those in Ephesus. They, like all of us, are told to lay aside our old corrupt self so that we may be renewed. Paul writes: **in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Ephesians 4:22-24 NASB)**

Finally, Paul points to the ultimate transformation when our mortal bodies will leave this temporary dwelling place for that house prepared by Jesus (John 14:1-3).

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Corinthians 5:1 NASB)
Many of us are weary and ready to exchange this earthly tent for the splendor of heaven. We are ready. Are we ready to enter heaven through the only door? Are we a child of God who has accepted Jesus and are following His path?