

Trends

In 2014 over 35,000 Americans were surveyed in the *Religious Landscape Study* and compared to a similar study conducted in 2007. The percentage of religiously unaffiliated rose from 16% to 23%; belief in God by the religiously unaffiliated dropped from 70% to 61%; overall belief in God dropped from 92% to 89%; daily prayer dropped from 56% to 53%.

- data from Pew Research Center

Matthew 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Sentence Sermons

"Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation, for tis' better to be alone than in bad company."

—George Washington

I Corinthians 15:33: "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'"

Proverbs 13:20: "He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed."

News & Notes

Please pray for those mentioned in the announcements after services and others listed on the bulletin board in the foyer of the church building.

Pray for all the members at Westside! Please pray for Susan Ferrell and her family as she continues to recover from a brain tumor. She had another successful round of chemo. Please pray for her and her family.

Please pray for my son Ryan and for me. I am scheduled to have surgery on my lower back (spinal stenosis) on 9/29 and Ryan is scheduled to have surgery (bulging disc) on his neck on 10/5.

A big "thank you" to Al Cook and Jan Worthy. They both recently stepped up and donated money to help with the needy saints and preacher support in the Philippines. Thanks!

Pray for the all of our students. Schools are back in session and bring many temptations to our young people.

Please keep sister Wilma in your prayers! She gives all of us so much encouragement! God bless her and Virginia! Remember both of them in your prayers.

There are many needy saints! Can you help?! Let me know.

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"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

John 6:68



What Can We Know About Heaven?

Robert F. Turner

"Now my idea about heaven is. . ." and then the writer or speaker reveals himself far more than he tells us about heaven. The materialist, sensual, mystical, aesthetic, and surrealist all have a field day with heaven. It is "pie in the sky" to those who ridicule its reality; and an extremely plush "paid vacation" for those who equate "real" with earthly literalism.

"Heaven" is a divinely revealed place, state, or condition; and we can know only that which is revealed about it in God's word. We say "place" with some hesitation, using accommodative language; for "location" is space related, and may lose its literal significance when applied to eternity. But God's word is directed to time and space related beings, and information about deity and eternity are necessarily couched in terms that translate into mental images. We can not truly imagine "eternity" or things eternal in nature, so we must expect the Bible to use anthropomorphisms: whereby things of God, totally incomprehensible to mortal man, are described in the time and space terms of man.

Jewish typology finds its final usage here. God built a literal people, a literal nation, through whom His Son would put on flesh and dwell among men. He used these people, a distinct advantage to them, as His vehicle for demonstrating God-to-man dealings (Rom. 3:1f; 9:4-5). Then, as His eternal purpose began to reach its fruition in Christ, the literal kingdom of Israel is seen as a type of His spiritual rule over whosoever will. Christ reigns on "David's throne," and is our High Priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Acts 2:30f; Heb. 6:20f). Scattered Israel finds a "highway" and "returns. . . in righteousness" (Isa. 10:20f; 35:8f); and all Christians are "Abraham's seed" or "the Israel of God" (Gal. 3:29; 6:16). It should come as no surprise that heaven is called "New Jerusalem"; and praise to God there is described in Jewish terms: "golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints" (Rev. 5:8).

The apocalyptic description of heaven (Rev. 21:1f) speaks of the "Holy City" Jerusalem, with its walls of jasper, and other precious stones; its street (singular) of gold; twelve gates, each made of a single pearl, named after the twelve tribes of Israel. The tabernacle (KJV) of God is there, but this is the true abode of Jehovah - not a "tent" in which the "presence" of God is indicated by a cloud of glory. In fact, we are told *"I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it"* (21:22). God is on His throne - for the authority of God is eternal. There is plenty of water, and trees, including the *"tree of life"* (restoring that which was lost when man was separated from Eden). The high imagery is further indicated by the measuring of the city *"the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal"* - a perfect cube (21:16b).

Materialists may literalize heaven to a point of absurdity: as though heaven will be the fulfillment of their most covetous and lustful appetites. We sing, "I want a gold (mansion) that's silver lined" - forgetting that the street is made of gold. It seems we should realize that Bible descriptions of heaven which emphasize its beauty, its value, the peace and lack of pain that prevails, etc., are relating heaven's wonders to the human realm. We cannot improve on God's way of describing heaven, and would be foolish to try it. But there is ample evidence God is telling us that holiness, righteousness, purity, and praise of God find perfection there. This means little to worldly people, but is given its true significance by the genuine child of God.

Paul wrote: *"Our citizenship is in heaven: whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Phil. 3:20). Philippi was a Roman colony, where citizens were mostly retired soldiers, given full citizenship in the "mother" city Rome. Though far from that city, they dressed Roman, spoke Latin, observed Roman morals, were governed by Roman magistrates, *"remained unshakeably and unalterably Roman"* (cf. Barclay). Paul was saying the Christian, no matter where he is, must never forget he is a citizen of heaven; and his conduct must match his citizenship. To this kind of people, heaven is "going home." Oh what a wonderful thought to those who have practiced heavenly citizenship, longing for the day when they will dwell in God's presence. "Home to heaven" will be a happy trip for those who, on earth, hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matt. 5:6). But what of those who have no such taste? Can we expect them to long for a life totally different from what they now pursue?

The passage in Philippians continues: *"(Christ) who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory. . . ."* In Romans 7 the body, with its fleshly appetites, is seen as a "law" (force) which wars against the inward man or mind desirous of doing God's will. The conflict results in a *"wretched man,"* captive

to sin in his members, and delivered only by forgiveness through Christ (7:18f). The Christian must strive to *"put to death the deeds of the body"* (8:13). Paul then promises that though we, *"groan and travail in pain... now"* (8:22); we wait for our adoption, to wit, *"the redemption of our body"* (v. 23). This body, with appetites which war against our desire to serve God, will be changed in heaven - the conflict will be over. How wonderful for those who war against the flesh here! But what of those who "let themselves go," and revel in appetites of the flesh? Do they long for a body change, with fleshly appetites removed?

I am persuaded heaven is not for everyone. It is a prepared place for a prepared people. Heaven's invitation is not limited; its glories are available to all. But many are ill prepared for heaven, and I cannot believe God would force heaven upon anyone. There is an old story about a slave whose "Massa" had died, and who was asked if he thought the Master had gone to heaven. He said the "Massa" always talked about places he planned to visit, and made great preparation for going there. But "Massa" never talked about heaven, and made no preparation for that destination. "Chances are he ain't makin' dat trip!"

Sorry - I can't tell you any more about heaven than what you can read in the Scriptures; and I can tell that only in terms used by the Holy Spirit to give us some idea of its wonders. But God's word clearly warns us of an ultimate *"last day"* when judgment shall be declared, and we shall face one of two eternal destinies. The righteous dead shall be there (1 Thess. 4:16), and so shall the wicked. *"Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment"* (Jn. 5:28-29). Christ makes it clear that the destinies are the same duration: saying, *"And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life"* (Matt. 25:46).

Whatever heaven will be like, it will be "home" for the Christian, and an end to the struggles of this life. Those who are striving to serve God in the here and now, are going to love it. I doubt that those who ridicule the godly life would be happy there. And that is doubly sad, for it is highly unlikely they will like the other place.

"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

1 John 3:17