



World Christian Fellowship

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Heaven

01-What is Heaven?

Biblical introduction to the subject of heaven.

As we studied in the Philippians Bible study, we live in a society of instant gratification. A society where people want to delay and defer absolutely nothing except payments. They certainly don't want to defer the gratification. They just want to defer the pain that goes with it.

We live in a time when everybody wants what they want now, and we have the credit cards that allow us to buy what we don't have the money to buy. To go where we don't have the money to go, to do what we don't have the money to do.

I want what I want, and I want it now!

We are not interested in put off into the future. We are glad to sacrifice the future on the altar of the instant!

We don't want to wait for anything. As a result of living in a society of instant gratification, a society of materialistic

indulgence, the church has fallen prey to that, and we no longer have set our affections above.

Colossians 3:1-2, *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*

We are not committed to laying up our treasure in heaven as Jesus told us to, but rather laying up our treasure here.

TV preachers and ministries are having a great amount of success by promising people that Jesus wants them rich now, healthy now, wealthy now, successful now. We call it “the prosperity gospel,” and it’s very popular because people want all the good now.

The church in general doesn’t have heaven on its mind. As a result of that, it tends to be indulgent, selfish, and self-centred, and weak.

The church is consumed with its own indulgences. It desires to be comfortable with only passing thoughts of heaven. Contrast that with the fact that just about everything that’s precious to us is in heaven.

Matthew 6:9, *“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name.”*

First, our Father is in heaven!

The One who is the source of everything for us, God Himself, is in heaven.

Secondly, not only is our Father in heaven, but our Saviour is in heaven as well.

Hebrews 9:24, *“For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”*

Thirdly, not only is our Father in heaven, and our Saviour in heaven, but our brothers and sisters in the faith are in heaven. Old Testament and New Testament saints are there, everyone who has died in faith in Christ or faith in God in the Old Testament is in heaven.

Hebrews 12:23, *“To the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.”*

Luke 10:20, *“Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this that the spirits are subject to you but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven”*

Jesus referring to His disciples who were casting out demons told them that rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.

- Our Father there,

- Our Saviour there,
- Our brothers and sisters there, and
- Our name is recorded there.

What does that mean?

We have a title deed to some property there.

We are citizens of that place.

Our inheritance is there as well.

1 Peter 1:3-4, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,*

Your eternal inheritance is in heaven.

What does that mean to you?

All the riches of God's glory and grace are set aside for you and for me in heaven.

Our Father is there,
our Saviour is there,
our brothers and sisters are there,
our name is there.

We hold title to a place in that land, and our inheritance is there.

We could sum it up.

Philippians 3:20, *“Our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Our citizenship is there. We are citizens of that place, we belong there.

Matthew 5:12, *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Your eternal reward is there.

Ephesians 6:9, *And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.*

Our master is there.

Jesus said the only treasure you’ll ever possess forever is there, too.

Matthew 6:19-21, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

So, when we think about heaven, we are identifying the place where,

- ✓ Our Father,
- ✓ Our Saviour,
- ✓ Our brothers and sisters,
- ✓ Our names are written,
- ✓ Our inheritance,
- ✓ Our citizenship,
- ✓ Our reward,
- ✓ Our Master, and
- ✓ Our treasure is there.

In short: **Heaven is your home.**

- We are strangers.
- We are pilgrims.
- We are aliens in this world.
- We are like space travellers who are on a planet not our own.
- We don't belong here.

Every time somebody in this world meets us, they are meeting alien beings.

We have arrived here, but our home is somewhere else.

- Everything we love is there.
- Everything we cherish is there.
- Everything valuable is there.
- Everything eternal is there.

Yet, here we are in the church of Christ in this century, committed to indulging ourselves in this alien land.

Self-indulgent Christianity is the kind of Christianity that's lost its heavenly perspective.

The church today doesn't hope for heaven, they hope they won't go to heaven. They don't want to go to heaven until they have had all that earth could possibly deliver them.

When that's exhausted, and they finally are too old to enjoy it or too sick to enjoy it, then they will be glad that heaven is there to receive them.

In the meanwhile, their prayer is that "please, God, don't send me to heaven yet. I haven't been to my favourite beach holiday. I haven't built my dream home yet. I haven't gotten my new car. I want to my children to be married. I want to get a raise. I want a see my great grandchildren. God, please, no, not heaven." What a bored perspective.

1 John 2:15, *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

There are many people who claim to love Christ, but the fact that they love the world so much means that they are not heavenly citizens at all.

We need to learn to live in the light of heaven. That hope should fill our hearts, should change our lives, filling us with the joy of anticipation that loosens us from this passing world. We can get so tied down to this world. We consume things in this world that will perish, instead of laying treasure in heaven.

Some people think heaven is an imaginary place.
Others think heaven is the immortality of truth and beauty.

But the Bible says heaven is a place.
It is a place, and all the people who love God are either there already or going there.

Heaven is a place and all the people who genuinely love God are either there already or are going there to live forever in complete perfection and glory.

Apostle Paul was under a lot of persecution.

2 Corinthians 4:8-12, *We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So then death is working in us, but life in you.*

2 Corinthians 4:16-17, *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*

Whatever we endure in this life can't be compared with the glory that it's producing in the life to come.

The more you suffer here, the more glory will be there!

So, whatever you go through here is being compensated for eternally. A little temporal trouble for eternal glory.

2 Corinthians 4:18, *while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

We have an eternal perspective.

We endure whatever the world has to give because we know it causes that we shall have a greater weight of glory in the eternity to come.

We keep our focus on Heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:1, *For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

We have another life. We have another form, another house.

Our earthly tent is in the process of being torn down!

We look to heaven where we will have that eternal weight of glory, that new house from God.

2 Corinthians 5:2, *For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,*

We groan in this house.

I know we do. You do, I do, we all do!

We groan because of the infirmities of our physical being.

We groan because of the sin that reigns in our flesh.

We groan because we cannot be what we ought to be and do what we ought to do.

We continuously in this human form, and so we groan along with all the rest of creation.

Romans 8 says. "Groan," waiting for the glorious manifestation of the sons of God, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven. We want our heavenly body.

2 Corinthians 5:3-4, *if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.* ⁴*For we who are in this tent groan, being*

burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

Where is your desire?

Where is your longing?

If you look at the church today, we would witness that people are so fixed on crying for the earthly things.

Very few people only fixed their desires to be with the Lord in Heaven.

That's sad!

- Burdened by sin,
- burdened by sickness,
- burdened by death,
- burdened by tears,
- sorrow,
- sadness, and
- pain.

It's not enough just for us to have our spirits go into the presence of God, we want our bodies as well.

So here is a man who is literally longing for his heavenly form, longing to be in that eternal place.

2 Corinthians 5:5, *Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

The Spirit is a pledge,” as Paul calls Him.

Ephesians 1:14, *who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

The Greek word is **arrabon**, means “an engagement ring.”

When God gave you His Holy Spirit, that was an engagement ring indicating that someday you are going to be His bride and you are going to be married to Him when you get to heaven.

So, the Holy Spirit is the pledge of our immortality, the pledge of our new form in the glories of heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8, *So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ⁷For we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.*

Can you say that?

Can you say that the deepest desire of your heart is to be absent from the body and present with the Lord?

That’s hard for us to say because we hold so tightly to this life because it’s all we know.

Because we experience love and the meaningful relationships that life brings to us, we become captive to this life. But we need to be unequalled.

I pray that in God's grace over the next few weeks as we study heaven, it will help us to loosen us from holding this life so tightly.

Imagine saying, *"I prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."*

That's home for us, with the Lord, and that is where we belong.

Heaven is where,

- ✓ Our Father,
- ✓ Our Saviour,
- ✓ Our brothers and sisters,
- ✓ Our names are written,
- ✓ Our inheritance,
- ✓ Our citizenship,
- ✓ Our reward,
- ✓ Our Master, and
- ✓ Our treasure is there.

That's our home well.

We long to go home.

Heaven is referred to in Scripture about 550 times.

If we are going to be heavenly-minded and longing to go there, then we must know about it.

The Old Testament's key word for heaven is '*shamayim*'. It means, it's a plural, it means "the heights,"

The New Testament key word is '*ouranos*', from which the planet Uranus was named. It means "that which is raised up."

So, it's a general term in the sense that it means something that is high and something that is raised up.

Now, when we look up in the sky and we look at the night sky or the daytime sky, we are looking at heaven.

Our eyes, however, can only go so far.

2 Corinthians 12:2, *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven.*

This verse makes it very clear that there are three heavens.

First Heaven:

The first one is what we could call the atmospheric heaven.

The space immediately above the earth. That is the air we breathe. That is generally called the troposphere. Sometimes when the Bible talks about heaven, it is referring to that first heaven.

The atmosphere around the earth, it's the air we breathe, it's our environment in which we live.

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, for as the rain and snow come down from heaven.”*

The first heaven is the atmospheric heaven where the rain and the snow come down. It says they don't return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater.

The hydrological cycle, which is the water cycle, occurs in the first heaven.

There are several references in the Psalms to that atmosphere as well.

Psalms 147:8, *Who covers the heavens with clouds, Who prepares rain for the earth, Who makes grass to grow on the mountains*

Second Heaven:

The second heaven is the planetary area.

The area where the stars and the moons and all of the planets move about.

Scripture also refers to this heaven. I

Genesis 1:3-5, *Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.*

Heaven there is the heaven of the planets.

The heaven of the stars and the moons.

The psalmist refers to that as the heaven as well.

Third Heaven:

This is the divine heaven, where God dwells.

This is where God dwells with His holy angels.

This is where God dwells with all the saints of all the ages who have been redeemed.

This is the heaven we want to concentrate.

1 Kings 8:27, *“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!*

Now, here the Scripture says that on the one hand, and even the highest heaven, or literally in the Hebrew, “the heaven of heavens,” can’t contain God.

How can we say on the one hand that the heaven of heavens can’t contain God, and on the other hand that the heaven of heavens is His abode?

That’s what the Bible says.

You can understand it from a simple human illustration.

I have a place where I live, but there’s a sense in which my house cannot contain me.

It cannot always contain me bodily, and it certainly cannot contain the effect of my life, the effect of my influence and so forth and so on.

So, in a very common way, we can understand that God can dwell in heaven. Yet heaven cannot contain God.

But there is a heaven of heavens where God dwells.

It is His place.

It is His home.

It is His dwelling.

Isaiah 57:15, *For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

God has a place where He lives, a real place, a dwelling place.

Isaiah 63:15, *Look down from heaven, And see from Your habitation, holy and glorious. Where are Your zeal and Your strength, The yearning of Your heart and Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained?*

That tells us where the place is, it's in heaven.

God has a place! God calls it Heaven!

Psalms 33:13-14, *The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. ¹⁴ From the place of His dwelling He looks On all the inhabitants of the earth;*

It's the heaven of heavens, the third heaven.

Psalms 102:19, *For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; From heaven the Lord viewed the earth,*

In the New Testament we do have reference.

Revelation 3:12, *He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.*

The New Testament identifying God with heaven. God lives in heaven.

Matthew 5:16, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

Matthew 5:34, *But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;*

Matthew 5:45, *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Matthew 6:1, *“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

Matthew 6:9, *In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.*

Matthew 7:11, *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*

Matthew 7:21, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

Jesus keeps repeating this.

Matthew 10:32, *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.*

Matthew 12:50, *For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.”*

Matthew 16:17, *Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.*

Matthew 18:10, *“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*

Matthew 18:14, *Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.*

Matthew 18:19, *“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.*

Matthew 18:35, *“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother ^[a]his trespasses.”*

Now, you get the feeling that Jesus wants us to understand that God’s in heaven.

Over and over and over He repeats it.

John 6:33, *For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*

John 6:38, *For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*

John 6:41, *The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.”*

John 6:42, *And they said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”*

John 6:50, *This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.*

John 6:51, *I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.*”

John 6:58, *This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.*”

I am sure by now understood that heaven is a place, and God lives there, and Christ came from there.

It is not a figment of imagination, it is not a feeling, it is not an emotion. It is a place. It is God’s place. It is the place where God lives.

It is so much God’s place that heaven became a synonym for God. You find that in the New Testament.

Matthew 23:22, *And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.*

Heaven there is synonymous with God. You swear by heaven, you are swearing by God.

They are really one and the same. Heaven is the place where God is, and it is so much His place that you can refer to one or the other and mean both.

Luke 15:7, *“I tell you in the same way there will be joy in heaven.”*

What does that mean?

Joy on the part of God.

Luke 15:18, *I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,*

Whenever the Scripture refers to the kingdom of heaven, what does it mean?

Kingdom of God.

It’s just another way to express God.

Why did they substitute the word ‘heaven’ for God?”

The New Testament writers are not necessarily bound by that; they will refer to the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. Jesus refers to the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, but they mean one and the same.

In the period between the Old and New Testament, there’s a 400-year gap called the intertestamental period. During that period the Jews highly developed the tendency never to use the name of God. That tendency had been there even at the end of the Old Testament era. They didn’t like to use the covenant name of God because they thought it was too holy to come through their lips.

So, they began a process of substituting things for the name of God. One of the things that came in the intertestamental period which they substituted for the name God was heaven.

Instead of saying “I worship God,”
They would say “I worship heaven.”

Instead of saying “call upon the name of God,”
They would say “call upon the name of heaven.”

Since God’s name they thought was too holy, they substituted the word “heaven.”

By the time the Jewish culture of the New Testament is settled, any reference to the kingdom of heaven in their ears is simply a reference to the kingdom of God.

So, to enter the kingdom of heaven is to enter the kingdom of God.

Heaven is a place.

Sphere:

Now, let me take it a step further. The apostle Paul says something very interesting in

Ephesians 1:3, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,*

Ephesians 2:6-7, *and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

Ephesians 2:5, *even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*

We aren't in heaven yet. That's a place.

Though we are not in heaven, we are in the heavenlies.

Heaven is where God is.

Heaven is where God rules.

Heaven is where God dominates.

We are not in the place called heaven, but we are presently under the dominion of the King of heaven. So, we are not in heaven, but we are in the heavenlies in that sense.

We have come under the rule of God. When the Bible says Jesus preached the kingdom of heaven is at hand, He meant the kingdom of God is at hand.

When Jesus called people into the kingdom, He called them to salvation. When Jesus said you must be saved, He meant salvation. When He said you must inherit eternal life, same thing, He meant salvation.

So, when you become saved and inherit eternal life and become a believer in Christ, you enter into the kingdom of God. You are under His rule, not in heaven but in the heavenlies.

So, presently we don't live in heaven, but we live in the heavenlies, and that's why we are to have our preoccupation with heavenly things. We have a heavenly life. Our new life in Christ is life in the heavenlies.

We have come into a new kind of humanity, a new kind of community, a new kind of fellowship, a new kind of family. We have come out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. We are no longer under the dominion of Satan but under the dominion of God in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17, "Old things have passed away and behold, new things have come."

We are new creations. We are members of a new family. We are no longer in the family that we once were in. We are children of God. We are children of a new place. Galatians 4:26 says, "Jerusalem is our mother."

Conclusion:

Heaven is an actual place, but it is also a sphere in this world where God rules.

The best of our spiritual experiences here is only a taste of heaven.

Our highest spiritual heights, profoundest depths, and greatest spiritual blessings will be normal in heaven. As we live now in the heavenlies, we are merely tasting the glories of the life to come. To us heaven is now a sphere where we live under God's rule and His Spirit's blessing. Someday it will also be a real place where we will walk in our glorified bodies.

John 17:24, *“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*

John 14:1-3, *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ²In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And 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.*

Jesus is preparing a place where we will live in a glorified, physical form similar to that of the resurrected body of Christ. He walked, ate, and sang, but He also ascended through space into the third heaven.

In ancient times a city was a place of safety and refuge. The nomadic people of those times were especially vulnerable to robbers, thieves, and the elements. Imagine after many weeks or even months of such wandering how refreshing it was to enter the protection of a walled city.

Hebrews 11:10, *for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

Every Christian needs to see himself as a pilgrim, wandering through this world, looking for the city whose architect and builder is God.

A real place where we will live with Christ.

We will be with Him, just as the disciples were with Him after His resurrection.

Like Thomas, we will touch Him. We will sit with Him and sing with Him. The joy we have of walking with Christ and knowing that the Spirit lives within us is the pledge that someday we will live in heaven.

There Is No Purgatory

If you are a Christian, the moment you leave this life you go to heaven. The Bible doesn't teach what the medieval theologians referred to as limbus patrum or limbo.

There is no purgatory. Paul said he preferred "to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (**2 Corinthians 5:8**). He said he desired "to depart and be with Christ" (**Philippians 1:23**).

When we consider that Christ prayed that all who know Him would spend eternity with Him (John 17:24), our hearts should overflow with gratitude. We need to have the heart of Paul--yearning to be clothed with our heavenly form and to exchange this transient world for eternal joy.