

HEAVEN & ETERNITY

F o u n d a t i o n s o f F a i t h

ETERNAL LIFE MEANS ETERNAL LIFE

I don't know about you, but I don't really like the idea of "becoming one with the universe," or spiritually floating around the clouds, playing a harp. I want to be me!

Because of the influence of Plato, and his philosophical thought, many people have the idea that eternity is a place where spirits float around in the clouds. "Heaven" is thought to be this cosmic soup where the "ghosts" of the dead glide through a cloud covered paradise. Other people think that heaven is where we will all be chubby little angels playing harps.

None of these come close to the biblical descriptions of heaven and eternity. The wonderful truth of eternity is that believers will truly live forever. When the Bible says we will have eternal life, it really means life! We won't live for eternity simply as spirits floating around in space somewhere. We will have real physical (although perfected) bodies. We will be real people in the presence of the real Jesus. You will be you forever, I will be me. Everything and everyone we know here, we will know there. We won't lose anything. The only difference is that we will live forever: no more death, no more getting old, no more sickness or pain. There will be no more sin and no more sorrow. Life will truly be perfect in the fullest sense of the word.



Returning to Paradise
The last chapter of Revelation presents the new heavens and the new earth as a return to the perfection of the Garden of Eden. We will live eternally the way Adam and Eve were supposed to. The Tree of Life will be there (Rev. 22:2) just as it was in the garden, and we will eat of it forever in the paradise of God.

BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

Jesus went before us

Our journey through death into eternity will follow the pattern that Jesus set in His death and resurrection. The Bible says, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2).

At death Jesus' spirit went to heaven

At his death, Jesus said, "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). When he died, Jesus' spirit went to be with the Father. In the same way, the spirit of believers goes immediately into the presence of the Lord.

"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (2 Co. 5:8).

"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:" (Phil 1:23).

Upon death, believers go to heaven. They are in the presence of the Father and Jesus Christ. This is a place of peace, comfort, and rest. (Luke 16:25). However, this is not where we will spend eternity.



Every aspect of our being is "saved" from the corruption of sin and death.

After 3 days Jesus returned to His body

Jesus' spirit returned to His body after 3 days in the tomb. In this same way, the spirits of believers will return to glorified bodies at Christ's second coming, when the heavens and the earth are remade. After the resurrection, Jesus' body was healed. It was certainly a physical body (Luke 24:39), yet He could appear and disappear at will (Luke 24:36). He ascended into heaven, both body and spirit, and He remains forever in His physical body.

In the same way, believers will live forever in a physical body. After the return of Christ, we will live forever with Him in the New Jerusalem. This will be real life, not just spirits floating around in the clouds. There is every biblical reason to believe we will live, work, and eat in eternity.

What Kind of Body will we have?

Paul answers this question in 1 Co. 15:35-38 "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body"

Paul compares our new bodies to different types of seeds. A seed is only the initial form of the plant. The seed must die and then the plant's true perfect form will emerge. However, there is similarity between the seed and the plant. A corn seed doesn't really look like a fully grown corn stalk, but the DNA of a corn seed is exactly the same as the corn plant. In the same way, believers will be perfected in their new bodies, but their identity will be the same. I will still be me and you will still be you.

The plant's DNA doesn't change when it dies and sprouts into a perfected plant. Neither will our identity change when we are perfected in the presence of God. We will be who we are, yet without sickness, suffering, pain, or dying



WHAT WILL ETERNITY BE LIKE?

What was Eden Like?

Everyone is familiar with the Genesis account of Adam and Eve in the garden. We have no trouble thinking about what it might have been like. The beauty of the garden, the perfection of the immortal Adam and Eve...what it might have been like to walk with God in the cool of the day. They were completely innocent, without sin, without death and disease, and in perfect relationship to God.

When we think about what eternity will be like, however, we often think about spirits floating in space or a cosmic soup of life forms. This is not the biblical presentation of eternity. The bible begins with the fall of man, and the whole Bible is God's redemptive plan to bring men back to that perfect position we once had in the garden. When you ask, "What will eternal life be like?" the answer is directly related to what the garden of Eden was like.

Revelation 21-22

The last two chapters of Revelation show us the new heavens and the new earth, where everything is reconciled to God and made new. In 21:6-8, the faithful receive eternal life and the wicked receive eternal condemnation.

Rev. 22:1 says, "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." This is a direct parallel to the river which flowed out of Eden supplying nourishing water. Rev. 22:2 says, "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Remember the tree of life? God banished Adam and Eve after they sinned so they wouldn't eat of the tree of life. But here, after all is said and done, we will eat from the tree.

Rev 22:3 says, "And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:" The curse of Adam (sin and death) will be done away with. We will live with the Father and the Son and we will serve Him forever. Just like Adam, we will be real, alive, and have jobs and responsibilities. It will be real life!

Our eternity will be a return to the way life was supposed to be before the fall of man. We will live forever, yet without sin, death, disease, or sorrow. We will live for eternity with our God and with each other...just the way mankind started.



Genesis 2:9-10

the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.

Revelation 22:1-2

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which

bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

I'VE GOT TO BE ME...



And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Luke 9:30-32

Will I still be me?

One of the most wonderful truths of the Christian faith is that we are created in the image of God and we are created exactly the way God wanted us. The most frightening thing about death is the thought that we may not remember the ones we love or even who we are. However, the truth is that we will lose nothing in our death. We will only gain. The people we know here, we will know there. The things that we know here, we will know there.

On the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus and guess what? They were still Moses and Elijah. They spoke to each other; the disciples recognized them, and there is no indication that they were anything other than who they were in life.

Likewise, the disciples recognized Jesus in his new body. Also David, at the

death of his son (2 Sam. 12:23) said, "I will go to him." David looked forward to the day that he would be reunited with his son.

This points to the wonderful reality that we will still be who we are in eternity. Our bodies will be perfected and we will live in the very presence of our great God

and Savior, but our identity will not change and our thoughts, knowledge, and understanding will only increase. I don't know about you, but this gives me great joy in knowing that the friendships I have, the connections I make, and the things I know will be with me for all eternity.

The only difference between this life and the next is that there will be no more

heartache and pain there. There will be no more disease and death. We will live forever with the ones we love and with Christ.



What About My Spouse?

Jesus' words in Matthew 22:30 trouble many happily married couples. He says, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." Doesn't this mean my spouse won't be my spouse in heaven?

The reality is that you will remember the bond of intimacy you had with your spouse. You will know them there. The difference is that you will experience a level of love and intimacy with all your brothers and sisters in eternity. The same way you are closer to your spouse than any other person on the planet, you will be that close with everyone in the new heavens and new earth. This doesn't mean you will be separated from

your loved ones. It simply means that all of God's children will be bonded together in love and attachment. There won't be any strangers in heaven. There won't be any acquaintances that you don't really know.

All the believers will be knit together in love, a perfect love that comes from God himself.

Don't take this the wrong way, but it is like we will all be married to everyone. I don't mean this in the physical intimate sense. I mean that we will all share the type of close bond that you now enjoy with the one you love most. We will all be the closest of brothers and sisters.

STUDY



1. In your Christian life to this point, have you spent much time thinking about life in the new heavens and new earth?

2. Do you have a strong longing for this in your heart? If not, why do you think that is the case?

3. Are you convinced that the new creation is a place where we will exist with physical bodies that are made perfect? It may be easy to believe with you mind, but do you trust this in the depths of your soul?

4. Imagine a person who was absolutely convinced of the truth of eternal life. How would this person walk through life, in good times and bad times?

5. Has this lesson on heaven and eternity encouraged you or discouraged you about our eventual death and life with Christ? Why?

6. What are some ways in which we are already storing up treasures in heaven rather than here on earth?

7. Sometimes people have thought that they would be bored in the life to come. Why do you think this statement is true or false based on what you have learned?

8. Describe in your own words how you think you will feel when you finally stand in the presence of God and see him face-to-face.

