

## “Heaven” Part 1 “Realizing our Destiny”

**What do you think of when you think of heaven?**

**Are you looking forward to heaven?**

Jonathan Edwards, “resolved to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can.”

True confessions of Christians:

“Whenever I think of heaven, it makes me depressed. I’d rather just cease to exist when I die.”

“I can’t stand the thought of the endless tedium of floating around in the clouds with nothing to do but strum a harp. It’s all so terribly boring. It doesn’t sound much better than hell. I’d rather be annihilated.”

But Paul says in **Philippians 1:23**, “I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far...”

**\*So if being with Christ is better than life here on earth, why don’t more people look forward to going to heaven?**

One central explanation for why so many of God’s people have such a vague, negative, and uninspired view of heaven: the work of Satan.

-In **Revelation 13:6**, we read where Satan blasphemes 3 things:

God’s person

God’s people

God’s place – heaven.

-Satan knows his final destiny and is jealous of ours. After being forcibly evicted from Heaven (**Isaiah 14:12-15**), Satan became bitter towards God, mankind, and the place that was no longer his, Heaven.

-If Satan can convince us that heaven is a place of a boring, unearthly existence, then we will have nothing to look forward to nor have any motivation to share the gospel. In **John 8:44**, Jesus said of Satan, “When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

-Satan’s lies have been so successful that many believers in Jesus Christ fear death! But Jesus delivered us from the fear of death (**Hebrews 2:14-15** says Jesus died to destroy Satan, who holds the power of death, and free those who live life fearing death.)

-Satan has lied to man, and certain men have listened!!

# Christoplatonism

**Plato** – first Western philosopher to claim that reality is fundamentally something ideal or abstract.

“The body is a hindrance , as it opposes and even imprisons the soul.”

In his statement, “Soma sema” (a body, a tomb), he asserts that the spirit’s highest destiny is to be forever free from the body.

He asserted that **pleasure** was wrong, and should be avoided.

**Bible:** our bodies aren’t just shells for our spirits to inhabit, but a good and essential part of our being.

The earth is not a second-rate location from which we must be delivered, rather it was hand made by God for us!

Earth is God’s choice as mankind’s original and ultimate dwelling place.

God is the creator of our body and spirit, both marred by sin, both redeemed by Jesus Christ.

**I Corinthians 15:35-52** – Paul regards the new **body**-not simply the new spirit-as essential to our redemption. A body without a spirit, as well as a spirit without a body, is NOT the highest human destiny, rather a state of incompleteness. **Remember, Jesus died to redeem us and make us whole.**

**God created pleasure!** He is the origin of all that is good!

Plato’s ideas (body is bad, spirit is good) began making inroads into Christian theology through the writings of **Philo** (ca. 20BC-AD50).

An Alexandrian Jew, admired Greek culture and was enamored with Plato.

In an attempt to offer the Greeks the best of Judaism and Jews the best of Greek philosophy, he allegorized (interpreting to find hidden meaning) Scripture.

Alexandria became the home of a new school of theological thought.

Clement of Alexandria (150-215), an early church father, embraced this new thought.

Origen (185-254), and Egyptian born Christian writer and teacher, who embraced Greek philosophy, developed an entire system to allegorize Scripture.

“Educated” people understood “hidden” meanings in Scripture, while ignorant laity took Scripture at face value.

\*This thought has survived and made its way into our Christian culture too!

So when we read **Rev 21-22**, or other Scripture on heaven, we tend to think allegorically, not in physical terms.

\*Was Jesus' resurrected body as material as our present earthly bodies? YES.

So why wouldn't our resurrected bodies be as material?

Why wouldn't the resurrected Earth be as material?

Is there something wrong with material things?

Plato – yes.

The Apostles and Prophets – No.

**An allegorical interpretive approach undercuts Scripture's magnificent revelation that there will be one world, both spiritual and material. The two aspects will coexist in perfect harmony, made by God who forever linked the spiritual and material worlds both by incarnation (God becoming man!) and resurrection (God redeeming what was marred by sin)!**

\*If the Bible is literal in terms of the incarnate God as Jesus, and His resurrected body, then why wouldn't it be literal in its terms of heaven?

-God made Adam and Eve to be spiritual and physical beings – they were not human until they were both

-God often took on human form in the OT (**Gen 18:1-33** to Abraham;

**Genesis 32:24-30** wrestled with Jacob; **Exodus 24:1-2,9-18** worshiped by Moses and Aaron; **Ezekiel 1:26-28, 2:1-5** appeared to Ezekiel; **Daniel 3:25** appeared with Daniel, Shadrach and Abednego in the furnace)

-He was likely in human form when he walked in Eden

-He became human in the NT, as Jesus, not just temporarily, but forever

-The resurrected Jesus ate, walked, talked, and could be touched.

-Jesus explicitly stated he was not a ghost!

-God created mankind **in His image** (or likeness)

-God will raise people with eternal physical-spiritual bodies and then come down to inhabit the New Earth with them.

**\*Jesus died to restore to us the fullness of our humanity – spirit and body. He rose to lay claim to and exemplify our destiny, to walk and rule the physical Earth as physical beings, to His glory. He died to lift Earth's curse and rose to guarantee that the earth itself would rise from misery and destruction to be a realm ruled by righteous humanity, to God's eternal glory!**

**\*What do we truly desire for an eternity?**

What God made us to have desires, and therefore what we do desire is exactly what He promises to those who follow Jesus Christ: Perfect Peace in a Perfect World: a resurrected life in a resurrected body, with the resurrected Christ on a resurrected Earth. Trying to develop an appetite for a disembodied existence in a non-physical

heaven is like trying to develop an appetite for gravel! We weren't made to desire gravel, so we don't!

## Naturalism

**Naturalism** – the belief that the world can be understood in scientific terms, without recourse to spiritual or supernatural explanations.

What we can't see must not exist

We can only believe in what we can see and touch

Satan's focus is on ruling the earthly kingdom, marred by sin and evil – **Matthew 4:8-11** (Satan tries to tempt Jesus with all of the kingdoms of this world, but Jesus' focus was on the kingdom of Heaven, and He commanded Satan to depart from Him.)

Today, naturalism has flooded Christian theology:

Discounts the supernatural work in Christ

Explains away miracles of the Bible

Treats Scripture allegorically

Many "believers" do not walk by faith, but by sight

Despite Satan's attempt to blind us to the reality of heaven, we're told in **Colossians 3:1-2**, "...set your hearts on things above...set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."

-“set” in Greek is *zeteo*, which denotes man's general philosophical search or quest. It's in the present tense, suggesting an ongoing process.

-*zeteo* is used in **Luke 19:10**, “the Son of Man came to seek...what was lost.”

Also in **Matthew 18:12** to describe how a shepherd looks for a lost sheep.

God desires for us to continue in our search for knowledge about heaven.

-**I Corinthians 2:9-10** says, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him – **but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.**”

This is not just referring to “heaven” but all spiritual mysteries of God.

\*It is crucial that we live Christ-centered lives, so that we can continue to gain knowledge and insight into the things of God. With our growing knowledge comes growing anticipation, excitement, and a growing burden for the lost.

**\*Is Heaven our default destination...or is HELL?**

Heaven is NOT our default destination.

**Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Romans 10:9, John 14:6, John 3:16**

**The reality of Hell.**

**Revelation 20:12-15** tells us that Hell will be inhabited by people who haven't received God's gift of redemption through Jesus Christ. **John 5:28-29** tells us that there will be a resurrection of believers for eternal life in Heaven, and there will be a resurrection of unbelievers for an eternal existence in Hell.

**Matthew 25:41** records Jesus' words regarding evildoers who will spend an eternity in an **eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels**.

Hell is a place of utter misery:

**Matthew 13:42, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30**

**Luke 13:28**

Why is it important to believe in the reality of Hell?

It gives us a proper burden for lost people

It validates Jesus' death, burial and resurrection! Theologian William G.T. Sheed put it this way, "The doctrine of Christ's vicarious atonement logically stands or falls with that of eternal punishment."

What did Jesus say about Hell?

He refers to it as a literal place, using graphic terms

Raging fires

The worm doesn't die

Weeping and gnashing of teeth (**Matthew 8:12**)

**Luke 16:19-31** – Jesus taught that in Hell, the wicked suffer terribly, are fully conscious, retain their desires, memories, and reasoning, long for relief, cannot be comforted, cannot leave their torment, and are stripped of all hope.

Eternal punishment (**Matthew 25:46**)

Everlasting destruction, void of the presence of God and His majesty (**2**

**Thessalonians 1:9**).

Loneliness (**Luke 16:22-23**) No "regrouping of buddies," no community, fellowship, or friendship.

Nothing good or pleasurable.

Inactivity and insignificance

Eternal regret and diminishing of personhood, but never vanishing

Dark

**\*The BEST news ever: YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO TO HELL!!!**

**Admit your sin - Romans 3:23; Believe in Jesus - Romans 6:23; Confess that belief - Romans 10:9**

**NOTES:**