

We often imagine heaven as a place of eternal rest where we join with pearly white winged hosts in the singing of hymns and praise accompanied by cloud riding, harp plucking angels. If most of us were honest, this seems rather boring for eternity. In Biblical reality, heaven is gloriously greater and even beyond our finite comprehension.

The Bible reveals some of what to expect in heaven and it provides us great hope. It is important when considering this blessed home and hope that we make a distinction. First there is the temporary paradise and heavenly realm that those in Christ know at their death – when they enjoy the presence of God. At this point, Christians are “*away from the body and at home with the Lord*” (2 Cor. 5:8) – an unnatural and temporary stage of separation from the body. Little is concretely revealed about this paradise (Luke 23:43), but it’s undoubtedly the sweetness of God’s holy presence (Deut. 26:15) and freed from a fallen creation (Psa. 16:11). The Scriptures speak of this stage and what is to follow in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18:

“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

The point of Christ’s return is when we have new resurrected bodies (1 Cor. 15) and then do we enjoy the full consummation of the kingdom (the second and fullest stage) – the complete and final “*Kingdom of Heaven*” (Matt. 7:21; 2 Tim. 4:18). No one knows this fullness yet as Jesus is still “*preparing a place*” with many mansions (John 14:2-3). When Jesus returns he administers judgment and then establishes the full glory of the “*new heavens and new earth*” (Isa. 65:17, 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13) and it is foretold in John’s revelation:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev. 21:1-4)

We can rest assured that the new heavens and the new earth will be all that God intended in the garden of Eden and so much more. At this point we enjoy all the things of a new earth that is not fallen – free from all the influence, power, dominion, and effects of sin and evil *entirely!* While there will be no marriage (Luke 20:35), everything will be enjoyed to the perfect glory of God in working, playing, discovering, talking, learning, and feasting for all eternity in perfect harmony with God and His redeemed image bearers! It is in this new city and kingdom that we walk the famous promised “*street of pure gold*” (Rev. 21:21).

For further consideration, a very helpful and succinct statement with Scripture proofs is our Confession of Faith

Westminster Confession of Faith (Ch. 32)

I. The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption:[1] but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: [2] the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.[3] And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day.[4] Besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none.

1. Gen. 3:19; Acts 13:36
2. Luke 23:43; Eccl. 12:7
3. Heb. 12:23; II Cor. 5:1, 6, 8; Phil. 1:23; Acts 3:21; Eph. 4:10; Rom. 8:23
4. Luke 16:23-24; Acts 1:25; Jude 1:6-7; I Peter 3:19

II. At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed:[5] and all the dead shall be raised up, with the selfsame bodies, and none other (although with different qualities), which shall be united again to their souls forever.[6]

5. I Thess. 4:17; I Cor. 15: 51-52
6. John 5:25-29; Acts 24:15; Job 19:26-27; Dan. 12:2; I Cor. 15:42-44

III. The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonor: the bodies of the just, by his Spirit, unto honor; and be made conformable to his own glorious body.[7]

7. Acts 24:15; John 5:25-29; I Cor. 15:43; Phil. 3:21

Heaven, by Rev. Archibald Alexander (1772-1851)

Heaven is a **reality**, not seen by eyes of flesh, but made known by revelation, and received by faith.

Heaven is a **rest** from toil, trouble, temptation, and sin. Such a rest is very desirable, if it were only a sweet sleep; but heaven is more.

It is a state of delightful **activity**. Every faculty and every affection will find appropriate exercise; and probably latent powers, not needed here, will there be waked into activity—powers suited to the new condition in which the soul exists.

Heaven is full of **light**; all darkness and doubt are absent. Knowledge will there be clear, and will possess a transforming efficacy; still, knowledge in heaven will be progressive; the pleasure will partly consist in ever learning something unknown before.

Heaven is a region of perfect **love**; all the heart and mind and strength will be exerted in love. And if the power of loving should, in the progress of the immortal soul, be increased a thousand-fold, all this increased ability will be kept constantly in full stretch by the loveliness and glory of the objects of affection.

Christ is the center of attraction in heaven. From him radiate the rays of divine glory which enliven, attract, and beautify all the innumerable army of worshipers.

Love in heaven is pure, perfect, and reciprocal. He who loves, cannot be satisfied without a return of affection. And the more exalted and excellent the character of the person beloved, the sweeter the sense of his favor. Heavenly joy consists in loving with all the heart, and in being beloved.

As heaven is a society, the members are happy not only in loving their King, but in mutual love. There will exist no envy, nor jealousy, nor apathy. Every soul will be transparent to every other, and all will see that nothing but pure love exists in every heart.

Heaven is a place of **peace**—sweet peace and uninterrupted harmony; all disturbing elements will be left behind. In the symbolical heavens of the Revelation, we read of wars; but in the heaven where saints and angels dwell and worship, war can have no place. The atmosphere of heaven is exempt from all evil; it is purity itself; all sin and impurity are denied admission into that holy place.

Heaven is a place of **song**: high affections are expressed in celestial music. O how elevating, how delightful the melodies!

Heaven is an **unchanging** state. All change is advancement in knowledge, in dignity, in happiness!