

Question: Isn't salvation all about going to heaven someday?

Some people think they need to be saved only as a way to avoid hell and enter eternal life in heaven when this world ends. Those who have been saved from their former life of sin do live in the confident hope of eternal life in heaven, but to think of salvation only in terms of heaven as a reward is actually rather selfish. Jesus Christ paid the price of his blood to redeem us from a life of sin in order to begin a new and abundant life in the present time (John 10:10). This new, abundant life is not a way of ease and pleasure; but it is a way in which we are transformed into the very likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself for all people.

The apostle Paul urged that believers offer their “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.” He then added: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:1-2). By living sacrificial lives with a new way of thinking, we learn even through suffering to obey, serve, forgive and love like Jesus did (Hebrews 5:8). This is the kind of life that makes a difference in our world. Another apostle wrote: “Now we are children of God . . . But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2). However, he added that “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he [Christ] is pure” (1Jo 3:2-3). Those who do not purify themselves and grow into the likeness of Jesus have no hope in heaven.

Salvation in the New Testament is actually in three tenses: past, present and future. Take time to read Titus 2:11-14 and notice the following: (1) The grace of God that brings salvation appeared *in the past* in the gift of his son who died to save us from our sins. Christ gave himself to redeem and purify us in order that (2) *in the present* we might be his very own people, a people eager to do good works. Living this present life as his people means saying no to ungodliness and worldly passions and saying yes to an upright and godly way of life. (3) Finally, we wait for the blessed *future* hope and appearing of our savior, Jesus Christ. At that time, he will give those who have remained faithful to the end a crown of eternal life and welcome them into God's presence in heaven (Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:10).

Yes, salvation from sin does include avoiding hell and entering heaven, but there is much more. God's greatest desire is for people to fall in love with him and desire to serve and be like Jesus in this present world. People who do not love the Lord himself enough to serve him in the present could not be happy in heaven. I don't think he will want people who are unhappy in heaven. To serve God and Christ forever will be the greatest joy imaginable for those who have grown in their love for him and their faith in him. We must decide if we love God or if we only love what he can give us.

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