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Doctrinal Outlines

WILL YOU GO TO HEAVEN?

I. Introduction

- A. Heaven! This one short word summarizes the blessed goal of all Christians. It gives the very meaning of the purpose of life, and the essence of the hope of life after death. Or does it?
- B. Millions of professing Christians think so. But are they correct? Is heaven what they think it is -- namely, the prayed-for and worked-toward reward of the saved?

II. The Basic Doctrine

- A. You need to know the truth! And even if you already know the truth, you need to be able to prove it.
- B. No doctrinal question strikes closer to the heart of traditional Christian belief than the truth of the biblical teaching on the doctrine of heaven.
- C. Quite surprisingly, the biblical teachings about heaven can be easily summarized in a brief sentence or two: In short, heaven is the celestial place of God's throne, His headquarters of government of all things seen and unseen. It is decidedly not the promised reward of saved Christians, however.

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III. The Usual Teachings of This World

- A. No doubt that last sentence -- the one saying that heaven is not the promised reward of the saved -- would shock most professing Christians. Most have been taught, and have blindly accepted without proof, that heaven is indeed the goal and hope of life itself.
- B. Most persons, even though not having seen heaven, carry with themselves a mental image of it. Usually this image is of a sort of spiritual paradise, replete with adorning clouds populated by angels (with wings, halos and long, flowing, golden hair).
- C. Also to be found there are the "souls" of the faithful, clustered together in holy groups, playing

BEATIFIC
VISION

on harps or beholding the face of the Lord in trance-like fixation millennia after millennia.

- D. Yes, this is probably most people's belief about heaven -- what it is for, and what it is like. But it is not the picture the Bible gives!

IV. The Bible Teaching

A. It is best to first show what heaven is, and then what it is not.

B. Many are surprised to find that the Bible speaks of not just one but three heavens.

1. The first heaven is our earthly atmosphere -- the blanket of life-sustaining gases that encircles our globe, the heaven where the birds fly (Genesis 1:20) and from where the dew falls (Deuteronomy 33:28).

2. The second heaven represents the expanse of this great universe -- the outer space where we find the sun, moon, stars, comets and planets. It is of this heaven that God spoke when He said that the sun, moon and stars were to be for lights (Genesis 1:15-17).

3. The final heaven -- the "third" (II Corinthians 12:2) -- is indeed the location of God's holy throne and the seat of the ruling authority of all physical and spiritual reality. And it certainly does have some of the qualities traditional Christianity assigns to it.

a. For example, this third heaven is a type of spiritual paradise. The apostle Paul said as much in II Corinthians 12:4 when he briefly described the place and called it "Paradise."

b. Further, it is plainly the seat of God's throne and of His power, for we are taught by Jesus Christ not to swear by heaven, because "it is God's throne" (Matthew 5:34).

c. God further draws back the curtain and reveals more about His throne in Revelation 4, where, in a few sweeping verses the apostle John tantalizes us with panoramic glimpses of the celestial pageantry and power of the heavenly throne room.

d. Of the specific layout and furnishing of the place we know but little. However, in

addition to the items listed in Revelation 4, we are told that the lampstand, table, showbread and other artifacts of the earthly tabernacle were merely physical counterparts of heavenly things (Hebrews 9:1-5, 23), although an exact explanation of what this means is not given.

SERMON IDEA

C. But we need not guess about whether heaven is the reward of the saved. We are directly told, in no uncertain or ambiguous terms. And the answer will shock many!

D. Jesus plainly taught, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man" (Jesus Himself -- John 3:13). Astoundingly, that scripture means just what it says: No man -- not Abraham, Isaac or Jacob -- no one -- has gone to heaven! There are no souls of the saved in heaven. It cannot therefore be the reward of the saved.

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E. People do not like to believe this plain statement of Jesus. Yet even King David, said to be a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22) and one who found favor with God (Acts 7:46), was not in heaven even after Jesus' death. As the apostle Peter said, "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). Peter then added, "For David did not ascend into the heavens" (verse 34).

F. We have now seen that heaven is God's throne, and we have read that it most assuredly is not the abode of the deceased souls of the righteous. But, then, what is the future hope and goal of the true Christian?

1. Put briefly, the hope and goal of a Christian is not to enter heaven and play a harp for eternity, but to be born into the Family of God (as a member of the God Family and hence become a literal God) and rule in God's government and Kingdom with eternal life from on the earth. See Revelation 5:10, Daniel 2:44, 7:27 and Matthew 5:5.



EARTH WILL
BE GOVERNED BY
GOD'S GOVERNMENT.

2. Even the plain scriptures cited above, showing that heaven is not the abode of the righteous dead nor the promised reward of the saved, are scarcely ever sufficient to answer the objections of those who believe that Jesus promised heaven to the good who die.

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3. Rather, they point to numerous scriptures that, in their minds at least, seem to say we do go to heaven at death.

MEANS MANY RESPONSIBLE POSITIONS.

- a. For example, some will point to John 14:1-4, which quotes Jesus telling the disciples that in His "Father's house are many mansions" that He was going to prepare for them, and say this passage proves we go to heaven.
 - b. But these verses say no such thing. For the Father's "house" is not heaven, but the Temple of God (John 2:16), which had many chambers or "mansions," each for the use of a specific job or function.
 - c. The disciples correctly understood Jesus to be saying that in His Kingdom were many responsible positions, and that He was going to prepare a job for them, and that He would bring it with Him when He comes again (John 14:3, Revelation 22:12) to set up His Kingdom on earth.
4. Others turn to Philipians 1:23-24 and quote Paul's statement that he desired to "depart and be with Christ" as a proof text for going to heaven at death.

CONCEPT OF RESURRECTION IS MISUNDERSTOOD

- a. But Paul does not in this verse say where he will meet Jesus Christ, nor when.
- b. Paul does in other verses clearly show that he and the rest of the righteous will meet Jesus at the time of the resurrection, and on earth in its "clouds," at His Second Coming (I Thessalonians 4:16-17), not in heaven.
- c. And consider this: If the saved souls of millions are now in heaven, why must there be a resurrection of the dead in the first place (I Corinthians 15)? Obviously because the dead are just that -- dead and in their graves, not in heaven.



OBVIOUS HEAVEN IS ON EARTH.

- 5. Likewise, the oft-quoted scripture saying "great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:12) is misunderstood by many. Often verse 5 of that chapter is not read, where Jesus says the righteous will "inherit the earth."
- 6. Nor is this section compared with I Peter 1:3-4, which says a Christian's reward is "reserved in heaven," and Revelation 22:12, which shows that -- although the reward is reserved in heaven -- Jesus will bring it with Him and give it to us when He returns to earth.

- G. Space fails us to address in detail other misunderstood passages of Scripture such as those concerning the true fate of Enoch and Elijah, whom many falsely suppose went to heaven based upon misunderstood verses, or the story of the thief on the cross, Lazarus and the rich man and Paul's vision of heaven in II Corinthians 12:1-6.

These and related verses are explained fully in our booklets Where Are Enoch and Elijah?, What Is the Reward of the Saved? and Lazarus and the Rich Man.

V. Key Verses

- A. Aside from a knowledge of the oft-misunderstood verses just mentioned, the whole subject of heaven can be grasped by remembering relatively few scriptures.

- B. The main ones are:

1. Matthew 5:34, which says heaven is God's throne.
2. Revelation 4, which describes that throne.
3. John 3:13, which states no man has ascended to heaven.
4. Acts 2:29-35, which states that -- even after Jesus Christ's ascension -- David the righteous had not gone to heaven.

- C. Also, it is helpful to remember a few verses showing that God's Kingdom will be on earth (Matthew 5:5, Daniel 2:44, 7:27, Revelation 5:10).

VI. Conclusion

Yes, the biblical truth about heaven is easily summarized: Heaven is God's throne and current seat of government, but it is not the promised reward of the saved. How wonderful is our God to reveal through His true Church the blessed truth about this important subject in this end age!

