

Eternal Destiny

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Eternal Destiny (Part 1): Second Death

The New Testament has three different Greek words translated by the English word “hell.” They are Hades, Gehenna, and Tartarus. The word Hades has a Hebrew counterpart, Sheol, used in the Old Testament to refer to the same place. Both Hades and Sheol refer to the place where the soul-spirit goes for all those who lived their lives opposed to God and His ways without forgiveness and justification bestowed upon them. It is a sort of holding place for those waiting for their final trial before God. Luke 16:23 tells us this is not a pleasant place. This Luke 16 passage also describes the place where the forgiven and justified go as a place of comfort and reassurance.

Luke 16:19-26: “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' ”

Notice particularly what Jesus said in verse 26. “And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.” God has separated the unrepentant, unforgiven ones from the repentant, forgiven children of God. Why the separation? Two reasons: justice and protection. All through the Old Testament the believers are identified as the meek, gentle, trusting ones who are exploited and persecuted by the selfish, greedy, violent, lying ones. The separation involves God's recognition of the difference and shows us He notices and cares. God is the justifier and He can justify those whom He will and He

has chosen to justify all those who trust Him with their souls, who have sought forgiveness and transformation by His hand.

The separation also involves the protection of the meek from the unrepentant, exploiting ones. How can there be comfort at Abraham's side if there are liars, cheats, schemers, and exploiters lurking around the corner? In human prisons and jails it is the fellow prisoner or resident who makes the stay a miserable place. For beyond the lack of freedom and deprivation of many of the former enjoyments of life, there are the fears of being abused, attacked, and exploited by other residents. It is this fear that leads to many sleepless nights and anxious days. In God's mercy His children of faith do not have to worry about being abused in any way. The place can truly be a place of comfort.

Notice something else about the place described in Luke 16. It is not the final residence of God's people. There is more for them than they are experiencing now. Turn to Revelation 7:9-17.

Revelation 7:9-17: "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!' Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

Those described here are the martyrs in the yet future Great Tribulation who were killed because they represented God to a god-hating world. The place they are described as being in is most likely the place all believers go when they die—Abraham's side, a place of comfort and waiting. Where

this is we do not know. And whether the actual place was moved after the resurrection of Christ, we also do not know. But we do know that it refers to the Abrahamic Covenant. It is a place of comfort and waiting for all those who by faith rest in the redemptive promise of God--the Abrahamic Covenant.

Read verse 17 carefully. It says the Lamb will shepherd and lead them to living fountains of waters and will wipe every tear from their eyes. These events are reserved for a future time when something greater and better than the comfort of Abraham's side will be given.

The same is true for the residents of Hades. While the wholesome and holy enjoyments of those at Abraham's side will be greater in the future, the residents of Hades will experience greater discomfort and agony at a future time.

Another word translated "hell" is Tartarus. It is used in 2 Peter 2:4 to name the place that some of the fallen angels were sent to hold them for a future judgment. "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment..." Tartarus is a holding prison suitable to restrain the wickedness of these angels.

Interestingly, all of the New Testament references to the final place of residence for all who are opposed to God, man and angel, are made by Jesus, except one. That other place is James 3:6. "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." The word James uses is Gehenna. The same word he heard Jesus use years before. James does not use Gehenna to describe a place but the character of the acts done by those who are found in hell.

James tells us what he means by the verses that follow. James 3:7-10: "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be." As the tongue utters poison, blasphemy, curses, and deceit, so those who end up in hell are characterized as poisonous, blasphemous, cursing, deceit-filled individuals. James tells us about the character of all those who will reside in hell but does not describe it as a place. Only Jesus describes hell as a place.

Jesus uses the word Gehenna to describe the place of final residence for all the unrepentant ones eleven times. These verses are: Matthew 5:22, 5:29, 5:30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 23:33, Mark 9:43, 9:45, 9:47, Luke 2:5. Gehenna was a literal place that Jesus used as a reference point to teach those He was speaking to about the destiny of the unforgiven, rebellious sinner.

Unger tells us the significance of Gehenna as a reference point used by Jesus. "In later times it served as a receptacle of all sorts of putrefying matter, and all that defiled the holy city, and so became the representative or image of the place of everlasting punishment, especially on account of its ever burning fires; and to this fact the words of Christ refer when he says 'the fire is not quenched.'" Gehenna was basically the garbage dump of the city. It was the place where all that polluted the city was sent to be burned. Things were sent here, including live animals, to preserve the cleanliness, or purity, of the city as well as to protect the city from the putrifying effects of this garbage. We remove garbage from our midst because we want cleanliness. We also remove garbage from our midst because we want good health. One of the chief components of good health is the avoidance of disease and infection. Pestilences of the past have been stopped because areas were cleaned up. A chief technique of avoidance of disease and infection today is frequent washing of hands. Notice the protection connection with the chasm fixed between Abraham's side and Hades. The putrifying garbage is separated from the city to promote and preserve the purity of the city for the benefit of those who live in the city.

Looking at these eleven verses, Jesus gives points of analogy between Gehenna and the final abode of the unforgiven, polluting ones.

Matthew 10:28 – a place of destroying both soul and body

Matthew 23:33 – a place of condemnation

Mark 9:43-44 – fire never quenched (unending supply) and where the worm dies not (unending corruption)

Mark 9:45 – fire never quenched and where worm dies not

Mark 9:47 – fire never quenched and where worm dies not

Luke 12:5 – a place of casting (being thrown into something against one's will because one is helpless to avoid it)

The other references made by Jesus to Gehenna were given as warning to the listener to avoid such an unpleasant place and that no pleasure of this life is worth experiencing it later. Jesus tells us, no, warns us, that the final

abode of the unforgiven ones will be a very unpleasant place.

Without using the place Gehenna to describe the final abode of the unforgiven sinner, Jesus also refers to this place several other times. These are Matthew 8:12, 13:42, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30, Luke 13:28. And the common two concepts in these verses are “outer darkness” and “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” What can we learn from these concepts? The “outer” of outer darkness is the comparative degree of out. It means without. It means to be sent to someplace where there is an absence of something. An absence of what? Light! To be cast into the outer darkness means to be sent to someplace that is devoid of the light. And the response of those who end up here is “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” This is a response of extreme anguish and regret. As is common throughout the Bible, light not only refers to physical light but moral and spiritual goodness. Darkness, therefore, not only refers to physical darkness but moral and spiritual badness (opposite of goodness), restlessness (opposite of peace), and decay (opposite of health and vitality).

There is one more passage in Revelation 20:11-15 that refers to this place but does not use the words Gehenna or outer darkness. “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” In this passage we are given two bits of information—the lake of fire and the second death. The lake of fire is reminiscent of the Gehenna passages. But is there a connection between outer darkness and second death?

What is the first death? The first death involves the separation of the body and the soul-spirit. The body ceases to function and the soul-spirit leaves the body and goes either to Hades or Abraham's side. Death involves separation. What then is the second death? What is separated in the second death? As pointed out above the outer darkness refers to a place where there is moral and spiritual badness, restlessness, and decay. Where is moral and spiritual goodness, peace, and health and vitality found? In God and anyone else He blesses with these things. So, to be

cast into outer darkness involves separation from God and all His blessings.

Those who push God away in this life will eventually get what they want. But since they are wilfully blind to God's workings and provision in this world, they do not comprehend what separation from God really means, what it really entails. They want to be left alone to do as they please without regard to what God thinks or wants. But they still want the world God created to behave in a favorable way toward them. They want the blessings of God without any obligation of obedience toward Him. They want a world that has conditions favorable to life but not the One who made it. Most people do not claim to be atheists but many live as if they were one. For all intents and purposes God does not exist to them.

Romans 1:18-32 is an important passage for our understanding: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of

those who practice them.”

This passage tells us that God’s judgment for these rebels is to give them over to their sinful desires. He gives them over to their sinful selves. And out of the sinful self comes perverted and shameful thoughts and behaviors. The results are a depraved mind and perverted behaviors. They entered into moral and spiritual darkness when God “gave them over” to themselves. Because they have repeatedly rejected Him and His word, He gives them what they want. But in doing this they become less than they were created to be and corrupt themselves and those they come into contact with.

The second death involves this same principle. It is God’s final “giving over.” They want God out of their lives and refuse to repent so God does the only thing He can – He gives it to them. But what they do not realize is that with this divine departure comes all the blessings that are rooted in God, as well. God cannot continue to bless disobedience and rebellion with conditions favorable to life without becoming an enabler and without losing the beauty of His own nature. He would have to turn a blind eye to evil. We recognize in our courts of law that aiding and abetting a crime is a punishable offense. For God to do this for all of time would make God guilty of injustice. He delays punishment now because He is merciful and does not want any to perish but all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). But this time of mercy will end and He will demand an accounting.

Read the Bible and you will notice that the very things He would have to ignore are the same things He is against. To allow evil to go unpunished would go against what He has said and who He has revealed Himself to be. He would have to allow Himself to be corrupted, to become less than He is. God does not say no to evil just for His sake but for ours, as well. God loves and values His own goodness not only because He is holy but because His goodness overflows to those who seek Him. He loves Himself and us too much to allow Himself to be corrupted. The second death is therefore necessary.

While you might think the second death sounds logical, what about the lake of fire? Why is that necessary? That sounds harsh. That seems revengeful. But if God is truly holy and just then His actions cannot be revengeful. Revengefulness is born from an angry, self-indulgent spirit. If the lake of fire does not involve divine revenge then what is its significance? Look at our universe. When is there fire, burning? Does fire represent order or chaos, building or destruction? Matter does not organize itself. Without His design, natural laws, and preservation there

will only be chaos and disorder in our material universe. Could it be that the lake of fire represents the destruction of the present material order as God's preserving presence is withdrawn and material collapses into eternal flames? And since the God-defiant rebel worships and cherishes the creature more than the Creator, he or she will be forever attached to it, forever identified with it (2 Peter 3:10). The second death represents the internal anguish and corrupting condition of the forsaken. The lake of fire represents his environment, his home.

With this understood, one can understand Jesus' revelation that there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth." There will be pain, sadness, and regret. In their memories for all time will be all of God's blessings during this life for which they did not give God glory. They will also be aware of the gifts of God they could have had had they simply trusted in Him. They will know what they missed and that their fate is justified.

The second death in the lake of fire is bad. There is pain and agony with no hope of escape. But it is necessary. The blessings of heaven require the separation that is hell. Even those who have not yet sunk to the depths of human depravity in this life but who remain opposed to God and His ways would pollute heaven if they ever entered it. They would want to arrange things to suit themselves rather than value God's arrangements and plans. Heaven would cease to be heaven without hell.

The great promise God's children await is the future remaking, the great change, the great transformation when they will be made to be like Christ. This seeking is what is involved in salvation. A sinner repents and gives God permission to remake him. The unrepentant sinner never gives God this permission. Revelation 21:7-8 say this: "He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of fire. This is the second death." Notice, forgiven former sinners are called sons. There has been a transformation in them and their relationship with God. The unforgiven sinners are still characterized by who they really are. They are unchanged. When they die they remain as they are. And nothing can be done with them but to separate and isolate them from all that God deems precious.

Revelation 20:1-10 show this to be true. "And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss,

and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Even after having full revelation of Jesus Christ and His ways, Satan is able to gather a multitude against Him and His people. The multitude he is able to gather against Christ and His people represent all who have died apart of Christ and His redemptive forgiveness. They show us the recalcitrant nature of rebellion and the subsequent need to separate them from God and His people. That separation is the second death.

Max Lucado in *Grace for the Moment* tells us why hell is necessary; why justice requires it. “If there is no hell, then God is not just. If there is no punishment, God is apathetic to the rapist and the pillagers and mass murderers of society. He just doesn't seem to care. If there's no hell, God is blind toward the victims and has turned his back on those who pray for relief. If there is no wrath toward evil, God is not love because love hates that which is evil. To say there is no hell is also to say God is a liar and his Scripture untrue. The Bible repeatedly and stoutly affirms the dualistic outcome of history. Some will be saved. Some will be lost.”

We all agree that heaven is a comforting doctrine, but what is overlooked, is that hell is comforting too. Our papers are full of stories of rape and child abuse and murder, but in the presence of an all-knowing God, there will be no unsolved murder. There will be no unknown child abductor, no hidden bribe. There is justice and there is choice. Without it, there would

be no choice. Without it, there would be no justice. Without it, there would be no real heaven.

Imagine being in heaven and knowing there was never justice done for someone who had slaughtered six million Jews. Being there and knowing such a man was not transformed because he never turned his life over to God. He's not punished. He's just existing in heaven exactly as he was on earth only now with a forever body and more powerful. That would not be heaven. That would just be earth all over again. That would be hell. Without a literal hell, there is not justice, there is not real choice and there's not a real heaven. Heaven is a literal real place and so will hell be.

This matter is so serious that God Himself got involved in a way the angels could not comprehend. The eternal Son of God left the throne of heaven, humbled Himself and died a horrible death at human hands. But worst of all, He and the Father experienced a separation as He became sin for us (Mark 15:34). The Son hung alone as the Father turned His face from Him. He experienced the separation so that we do not have to. To enter into God's provision is to be saved from eternal separation from God and receive His eternal blessings instead. To deny Him and His provision now is to be separated from Him later – the second death.

Eternal Destiny (Part 2): Eternal Life

The defining reality of the eternal destiny of the lost, the unforgiven and unredeemed, is also the last words given in Scripture for that topic – the second death. As we saw in Eternal Destiny, Part 1, the second death involves the separation of the unrepentant, recalcitrant sinner from God and all His blessings. In contrast, we will learn that the defining reality of the saved, the forgiven and redeemed, is the eternal intimate presence and blessings of God Himself. Hell's curse is the divine departure of God. Heaven's blessing is the unprecedented presence of God with His people.

Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 2:9 that the effects of God's intimate presence and works on our behalf is beyond our imagination. Paul being taught by Isaiah 64:4 says, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." It will be unlike anything we have and will experience now. It will be such a glorious thing that God Himself rejoices, "Look, I am making all things new!" (Rev.

21:3).

The present creation order of things was largely designed to run on natural laws so that there can be a separation between God and man and so that we can learn about God. Man is a learning creature. We come to know God by His works and self-revelation one step at a time. The present order of things afforded God the opportunity to reveal His innermost self to all His creatures and to turn unbelief to belief as sinners are redeemed back to Him. In the present order of things even the angels are being taught about the attributes of God. Not in their wildest speculations could they imagine a God who would leave heaven's outward splendor, humble Himself by putting on human weakness, and subject Himself to human cruelty and death. It is astonishing to realize that the one who caused the angels in Isaiah 6 to shield their eyes and cover their faces because of His holy glory, would allow Himself to be ignominiously spit on, beaten, and hung from a blood-stained cross. And it is in the present order of things where that could be revealed. So when God said the present creative order was good, He meant it. It is just right for His present purposes.

But it is not the final product of His creative plan. The end that He had in view before He started the creative process described in Genesis 1 and 2 is given to us in Rev. 21:1-7. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, 'Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.' And the one sitting on the throne said, 'Look, I am making everything new!' And then he said to me, 'Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.' And he also said, 'It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.'"

Those who look on the Savior as seen at Calvary will know Him better than any angel who experiences the outward glory of His throne. The next point is overwhelming. Normally, we think of the new heaven and new earth as being the place where all our hopes will be realized. We long for it. Set in contrast with the sufferings and hardships of this world, it stands out as desirable and comforting. But God wants it more! God Himself rejoices (Rev. 21:5) that "[My] home is now [with] [My] people! [I] will live with them,

and they will be [My] people. [I] [my]self will be with them.” God started the whole creative process with this end in mind. Before one creative motion took place God Himself laid Himself on that cross! The cross of the gospels was a prerequisite to the glorious fellowship of Rev. 21. Rev. 21 does not just describe the fulfillment of our hopes but God’s heart’s desire. After all that takes place between Genesis 1 and Rev. 21, God says in Rev. 21:6, “It is finished!” One can almost see God standing before His people with arms outstretched as He gives them a heavenly hug saying, “Ahh!, it is so good to be with you.”

To have a heart after God’s own heart, we are to want that fellowship like He does. Colossians 3:1-5 tells believers that this is actually vital to the growth of the new life that is in them--“Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don’t be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. ”

Our hearts are purified and influenced for Christ as we live according to our longing for truths shown us in Rev. 21 and 22. The Pharisees of Jesus’ time and the legalizers described in Galatians did not see this. They had their ‘Revelation’ in Isaiah 64-66. Many of the same things shown to us in Revelation were revealed in Isaiah. Read those chapters and you will recognize Revelation 21 and 22 in them. Hebrews 11:10-16 tells us that the people commended for their faith persevered and lived in a way that was pleasing to God because they longed for the vision painted in Isaiah 64-66. They longed for that “city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God,” “a better place, a heavenly homeland.” And for this reason “God is not ashamed to be called their God.” They wanted what God wants. And by this they were emotionally and spiritually connected with Him.

Legalizers live as though Christlikeness is created by human effort. Paul’s main theme through all his epistles is that that is not true. Again Colossians 3:1-2: “Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God’s right hand in the place of honor and power. Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth.”

What are the “realities of heaven” we are to “set [our] sights on?” Besides the chief reality of “the home of God is now among his people,” Scripture does reveal some specific blessings that are included in God’s new design for all things.

Commenting on Rev. 21:3-7, John MacArthur, Jr., in *The Glory of Heaven*, says this:

“Here Scripture promises that heaven will be a realm of perfect bliss. Tears, pain, sorrow, and crying will have no place whatsoever in the New Heaven and New Earth. It is a place where God’s people will dwell together with Him eternally, utterly free from all the effects of sin and evil. God is pictured as personally wiping away the tears from the eyes of the redeemed.

Heaven is a realm where death is fully conquered (1 Cor. 15:26). There is no sickness there, no hunger, no trouble, and no tragedy: just absolute joy and eternal blessings. It is frankly hard for our minds, which have never known anything but this sinful life and its calamities, to imagine” (P. 96). That alone should make us long for this future heaven.

But there is more to admire and wait with anticipation for. The centerpiece of our existence will be a brand new place called the Holy City or New Jerusalem. Without going into speculative detail its description in Rev. 21:10 and Rev. 22:5 shows it to be a beautiful place where all of the colors of the rainbow will be magnified like light shining through a prism. It will be a place where all our physical needs (Rev. 22:1,2; Rev. 2:7) will be supplied; where there will be no competition for the resources for living; where there will be no *haves* and *have nots* but where all God’s children (John 1:12) will receive access to all things because each is an heir (Rom. 8:17, Gal. 3:29) in the Father’s house. If you are a father or mother, think of how it is with your children. If someone is your child, they have access to all common parts of your house, respecting privacy. God’s children will also have access to all common parts of the Holy City. There will not be some more privileged than others.

However, individual experience and responsibilities assigned by God may be different. Based on what is done in this life (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-27), God will assign responsibilities to individuals that may yield greater depth of blessing in certain experiences of heaven. All will have blessing in all areas of the future life with God in the Holy City but God’s reward for service now may be depth of blessing in specific areas of that future life. And then those who have received greater depth of blessing

may then minister to others who can learn from them.

A central truth of God's character is His loving, giving nature. Will that truth cease in the future heaven? And if we are to be like Christ (Rev. 8:29, Eph. 1:4) that attribute will also be true of us. But who do we minister to? Who do we teach and nurture? I think, not knowing God's total plan for the New Heaven and New Earth, at least in part, we will be teaching and nurturing each other. Each individual will partner with Christ to be a blessing to others in some way. The rewards of God may be related to these ministries. Think, if Jesus being perfect from birth but yet able to grow in that perfect righteousness (Luke 2:40-52), why can't we? In keeping with the ministering nature of Christ and our conformity to His image, I think it is plausible that we will be ministering to each other in the New Heaven and New Earth and exactly what we are given to do will to a large extent depend on the service and faithfulness we show Christ in this life (2 Cor. 5:10).

Another key component of our existence in the New Heaven and New Earth will be the bodies our spirits will occupy. They will be different in some key ways. They are called glorified in Rom. 8:23, 2 Cor. 5:2, Phil. 3:21, and 1 Cor. 15:40-53. Hebrews 12:23 says that when we die we will be "spirits in heaven." At that time we will be incomplete. God created us to be physical beings who physically seek and learn the informational treasures God has hidden for us to discover. All who are now dead await a future resurrection in which they will receive their glorified bodies.

Let's look at the four verses above to see what will be gained by these glorified bodies.

Rom. 8:23-24: "The creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it." We will gain freedom. Freedom from what? Freedom from sin, suffering, death and decay.

Consider 1 Cor. 15:40-55: There are also bodies in the heavens and bodies on the earth. The glory of the heavenly bodies is different from the

glory of the earthly bodies. The sun has one kind of glory, while the moon and stars each have another kind. And even the stars differ from each other in their glory. It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies. The Scriptures tell us, 'The first man, Adam, became a living person.' But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit. What comes first is the natural body, then the spiritual body comes later. Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven. Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like the heavenly man. What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever. But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' We will never die (v. 42) (v. 53-55), be full of glory (v. 43), be full of power, not weak (v. 43) and be transformed beings concerned with spiritual things (v. 44).

2 Cor. 5:1-10: This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy. I am writing to God's church in Corinth and to all of his holy people throughout Greece. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the

comfort God gives us. We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us.” Our new bodies will not make us groan and sigh (v. 4) but will live forever (v. 4).

Phil 3:21: “He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.” Our new bodies will be the opposite of weak and mortal.

The central truths seem to be that our new bodies will be physically vital and healthy, not subject to death, disease, or malfunction. It will also be concerned with spiritual, godly things. Our present bodies have physical and emotional needs and passions. Part of a moral life is to subject these needs and passions to right living—they need to be controlled for godly purposes. We struggle daily with this task. Paul even laments as a Christian this struggle in Rom. 7:21-25. In this body we have frustrations and regrets; but not so with the glorified body. The glorified body will have no pulls within it to excess or ungodly passions. There will be nothing to control or suppress within us.

Paul is constantly telling us to look to Christ in heaven in some way so that we can thrive spiritually now. Sometimes he stresses our faith, sometimes our righteousness, sometimes our sanctification, sometimes our physical weaknesses, sometimes our eternal life. As we get a vision for what we will have in Christ in that future time, the Spirit applies it to us so that we can grow in Christ now. Paul tells us in Philippians 1:27-30 to live as “citizens of heaven,” so that we can live in a manner worthy of the “good news of Christ.”

As you read about what God has planned for those who are His, what do you feel? Do you long for that time? Is it enough for it to alter your behavior now? Have you struggled with the things of this world, including your body, enough for you to long for the things God has promised for His children? Or, could you not care less? But be warned. Heb. 6:4-8 tells us that those who have learned about what God has planned but reject it as undesirable are in danger of forever locking themselves away from God. Judas lived with Jesus for three years but in the end rejected Jesus’

heavenly view in exchange for the things of this world, as typified in selling Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Does the plan of God thrill you? Do you long for the beautiful Holy City, the intimate presence of God, God's provision of all your needs, your glorified body, and God's partnership with you in ministering to your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ for all eternity? If so, let it permeate your soul that the Spirit might conform you to be like Christ. If not, be afraid because you might end up being one of those who "are nailing the Son of God to the cross again by rejecting him, holding him up to public shame" (Heb. 6:6). And the end of these people is described in Rev. 21.:8 – "the second death." In contrast, the eternal destiny of those who long for God and His blessings is eternal life – God's unending presence with His people.