

What We Will Be Like

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible teaches that believers will experience eternal perfection of the whole person--body and soul. Heaven is a perfect place for people made perfect. The purpose of salvation is to make us perfect, so we can dwell in God's presence forever. The ultimate expression of salvation is perfection. The new birth begins the process by transforming the inner person.

A. The New Person

When someone puts his faith in Jesus Christ, he becomes "a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17). Colossians 2:10 says he is "made complete" in Christ. Peter adds that believers have "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). If you are a Christian, the life of God dwells in your soul. You are a new person. In Romans 6:18 Paul says we "became slaves of righteousness." We have new life. Instead of being slaves of sin, we're servants of righteousness. Instead of receiving the wages of sin, which is death, we have received God's gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

B. The Constant Problem

There is a problem, however: our new inner nature is incarcerated in human flesh. In Romans 7 Paul says, "That which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me" (vv. 15-17). Paul was establishing a very important principle: although the believer is a new creation and has a new life principle, that new life isn't able to fully express itself because of the presence of sin. In verse 18 Paul says, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh." By "flesh" Paul means not just his physical body but the totality of human fallenness. His mind, emotions, and will still suffered the effects of the fall of mankind.

Paul continues, "The good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.... I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members" (vv. 19-23). He repeatedly identifies the source of the problem as his flesh, his body, his bodily members. In verse 24 he calls it "the body of this death." In verse 25 he says that with his flesh he serves the law of sin. All those expressions refer to his unredeemed humanness. The authority and dominion of sin is broken in the believer's life, but sin is still present.

So God has planted the incorruptible seed of eternal life deep in the believer's soul. He has the power to do what is right because he has a new heart and the presence of the Spirit, who is the down payment, the first installment on the perfection he will enjoy in the future. Every believer eagerly awaits the day when that perfection is his. Romans 8:23 says, "We ourselves, having the firstfruits of the Spirit [having received the down payment of the Spirit and new life] even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." We've had a taste of what redemption is like, so we want to be completely redeemed.

REVIEW

I. WHAT HEAVEN IS
II. WHERE HEAVEN IS
III. WHAT HEAVEN IS LIKE

LESSON

IV. WHAT WE WILL BE LIKE

A. A Perfected Soul

Sin has crippled our souls and marred our spirits. It has scarred our thoughts, wills, and emotions. We yearn for the day when the eternal seed within us will bloom into fullness and we will be completely redeemed.

1. Required

In heaven our souls and bodies will be eternally perfect. We will lose all traces of human fallenness. In fact, no one will ever enter heaven or dwell there who isn't absolutely perfect. Revelation 6:11 says, "There was given to each of them [those martyred during the Tribulation] a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also." The white robes symbolize holiness, purity, and absolute perfection. In Revelation 7:14 one of the elders says, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Again the Bible is emphasizing the perfection of those who enter heaven.

As believers we have within us the seed of perfection, but our souls are not yet perfect. Our bodies aren't the only culprit; our minds, wills, and emotions sin also because our souls are not yet perfected. But the moment a believer dies, his soul is instantly perfected and he enters God's presence. The body goes to the grave, and the soul goes immediately to heaven. Paul says, "To be absent from the body" is "to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). In Philippians 1:23 Paul says he has "the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better."

All the saints who have died are now in heaven without their bodies. Hebrews 12:22 makes that clear: "You have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect" (emphasis added).

2. Described

What will the perfected soul be like? God will be able to scrutinize it and find no imperfection or sin. First Corinthians 2 gives us further insight: "Who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (vv. 11-13). Paul is saying it is impossible to understand who we are in Christ apart from the instruction of the Spirit. We can assume it is also impossible to know what we will be in the future apart from what the Spirit teaches us. And the Spirit has little to say except, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

a) Negatively We will experience perfect freedom from evil forever. We will never have a selfish thought or utter useless words. We will never perform an unkind deed or do anything but that which is absolutely righteous, holy, and perfect before God. Can you imagine yourself behaving in such an incredible way? There will be no imperfection in heaven! Revelation 21:27 says, "Nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it." No one who has any stain will ever enter the heavenly city. Revelation 22:14-15 says, "Blessed are those who wash their

robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying." There will be no sin, suffering, sorrow, or pain. We will never doubt God or fear His displeasure because we will never do anything to displease Him. There will be no temptation because the world, the flesh, and the devil will all be conspicuously absent. There will be no persecution, division, disunity, or hate. In heaven there will be no quarrels or disagreements. There will be no disappointments. Prayer, fasting, repentance, and confession of sin will cease because the need for them will cease. There will be no weeping because there will be nothing to make us sad. There will be no more teaching or evangelism. b) Positively (1) Perfect pleasure Psalm 16:11 says, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever." There will be perfect pleasure in God's presence. (2) Perfect knowledge In 1 Corinthians 13:12 Paul says, "Then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known." We are known comprehensively, and we'll know comprehensively. (3) Perfect comfort We will never experience one uncomfortable moment. In Luke 16:25 Abraham said to the rich man, "Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus [the beggar] bad things, but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony." Hell is agony; heaven is eternal comfort. (4) Perfect love First Corinthians 13:13 says, "Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." We will love everyone perfectly and will be loved perfectly. John 13:1 says that Christ loved His disciples to the end--to perfection. That's exactly the way we will love. And God will love us. The love that wept and bled and died on our behalf will engulf us forever. (5) Perfect joy We could summarize by saying that heaven is a place of unmixed and unending joy. Joy in this life is always mixed with sorrow, discouragement, disappointment, or worry. Sin, grief, and sorrow dampen all our joys. An honest look at our world's condition produces only tears. But heaven will be a place of unmixed joy. In Matthew 25 our Lord tells the parable about a man about to go on a journey. He called "his own slaves, and entrusted his possessions to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. But he who received the one talent went away and dug in the ground, and hid his master's money" (vv. 14-18). The parable is discussing spiritual privileges. Some men use their spiritual privileges are blessed. Others waste it. One day the master returned and settled accounts with them. "The one who had received the five talents came up, and brought five more talents, saying, "'Master, you entrusted five talents to me; see, I have gained five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master'" (vv. 20-21). The one who had received the two talents had earned two more. To him the master said, "Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (v. 23). The one who wasted his spiritual privilege lost what he had and was cast "into the outer darkness," where there is no joy, but "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 30). So the dominant characteristic of heaven is joy, which springs from all the other features of heaven. Any joy we experience now is merely a taste of what awaits us. In the simplest terms we may accurately define heaven as a place of unmixed and unending joy. Heaven's joy has to be unending because the conditions that produce unmixed joy never change. Heavenly perfection is never altered. Hell, by the way, is the opposite--it is a place of unmixed and unending pain and torment. But in heaven all the longings of the redeemed soul will be satisfied eternally, and the soul will be perfected forever.

B. A Perfected Body

God made man body and soul--we consist of an inner man and an outer man (Gen. 2:7). Therefore our ultimate perfection demands that both body and soul be renewed. Even the creation of a new heaven and earth demands that we have bodies--a real earth calls for its inhabitants to have real

bodies.

1. The promise of resurrection

Death brings about separation. Our bodies go to the grave, and our spirits go to the Lord. That separation continues until the resurrection "in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds, to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (vv. 28-29). Today the souls of believers who have died are in heaven, and the souls of unbelievers who have died are in hell. But someday the bodies of the redeemed will be resurrected and joined to their spirits, and they will enjoy the eternal perfection of body and soul. There will also be a day when the bodies of the ungodly will be raised from the graves and joined to their spirits, so both their bodies and souls will endure the torments of hell forever.

Revelation 20:11-15 discusses the resurrection of the ungodly. Verses 13-14 say, "The sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades [the grave] gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire." There will be a resurrection unto damnation and judgment.

As Christians we eagerly await the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23), for what 2 Corinthians 5:1-2 calls "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." First Thessalonians 4 describes the believers' resurrection: "We do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord" (vv. 13-17). At the rapture, the event Paul is describing in 1 Thessalonians 4, first those believers who are dead will be united with their perfected bodies, then those who are still alive will be caught up and changed. So every Christian still living on the earth when Christ comes will be perfected at the rapture.

We can look forward to the promise of God: a glorified body as well as a glorified spirit. In 2 Corinthians 5:1 Paul says our earthly tent will be torn down, and we will receive a building from God.

2. The body of resurrection

First Corinthians 15 is the definitive chapter on bodily resurrection.

a) Its distinctiveness Paul said, "Someone will say, 'How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?' You fool!" (vv. 35-36). That is a severe rebuke. He then goes on to explain himself. (1) Illustrated by the death of a seed In verses 36-38 he says, "That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own." When you plant a seed, it bears almost no resemblance to what it will produce. The life principle is in the seed, but if you hadn't previously seen the plant it produced, you wouldn't know the seed would produce that kind of plant. The first thing a seed does is die. It goes into the ground, decomposes, and then gives life. Similarly our bodies will die, be placed in a grave, and then be raised, just as a seed dies and produces a plant you could never have seen in the seed. Our resurrection bodies will be similar to the one that was buried but also different. We will be ourselves, but we'll be perfect. The decomposition of the body isn't an obstacle to the resurrection. Just as a seed decomposes and brings forth life, so the resurrection body will come from the death of the original body. (2) Illustrated by the differing animal bodies In verse 39 Paul says, "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish." The flesh of animals are determined by amino acids, of which there are myriad combinations. Each combination of amino acids produces a certain kind of flesh. We always produce our own flesh regardless of what we eat. If I were to eat chicken

constantly, I wouldn't grow feathers, because the amino acids in my body will only reproduce my own flesh. The amino-acid structure that God put into flesh keeps it distinct. Paul's argument is that God wasn't restricted to one kind of flesh in creation, so why should He be restricted to one kind of flesh in resurrection? We can't fully understand what the resurrected body will be like just as those who are familiar only with the flesh of birds can't fully understand horses.(3) Illustrated by the differing celestial bodiesIn verse 40 Paul says, "There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another." Since God made everything from a tiny, crawling bug to a massive sun, He can make any kind of body He wants. Verse 41 says, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory." There are no two trees or seeds on earth exactly alike; there are no two animals alike; there are no two people exactly alike; there are no two celestial bodies alike. Nevertheless, some people still question God's ability to create a resurrection body. Verse 42 says, "So also is the resurrection of the dead." Nature and astronomy illustrate that God can make any kind of body He wants. As one body differs from another, so the resurrection body can differ from what we now know. God may well create a unique body that preserves our personality distinctions in a state of eternal perfection. The graveyards of men are the seed plots of resurrection.b) Its characteristicsThe resurrection body "is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (vv. 42-44).(1) ImperishableOur heavenly bodies will be imperishable--they will never decay. They will be permanently and eternally perfect. You will never look at your hand and notice something you haven't noticed before. You will never notice a lump growing beneath the skin. There will be no cancer X-rays in heaven. No one will develop anything there. There will be absolute, imperishable perfection.(2) GloriousOur bodies will also be glorious, reflecting the glory of God.(3) PowerfulPaul says our bodies will be raised in power. They will have abilities beyond imagination--the power to fly, to accomplish everything it desires.(4) SpiritualThey will be spiritual bodies in the sense that they give expression to a perfect spirit. Those bodies will be adapted for living in heaven, an existence we know little about.(5) ChristlikeVerse 45 takes us further by saying, "It is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living soul.' The last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving spirit." Paul contrasts the heads of two families. Adam sinned and brought death on the human race; Jesus Christ brought life. Verses 46-49 say, "The spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." Just as we are like Adam now, in heaven we will be like Jesus Christ, who is incorruptible, eternal, glorified, powerful, and spiritual--His perfect spirit expresses itself through His glorified humanity. According to Philippians 3:21, God will transform our bodies "into conformity with the body of His [Christ's] glory." Romans 8:29 says we are "predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." First John 3:2 says, "We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is."The best picture of what we'll be like in heaven is Jesus Christ after His resurrection. In His glorified body Christ ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9). After His resurrection He suddenly appeared in rooms where all the doors were shut (John 20:19, 26). He ate with the disciples on several occasions (Luke 24:42-43; John 21:12-14). Revelation 22:2 says there will be fruit-bearing trees in heaven. Just as Christ ate after His resurrection although He didn't need to, so in eternity we will eat the fruit of heavenly trees not because of need, but for enjoyment. We will have a body fit for the full life of God to indwell and express itself forever. It can eat but won't need to. It will be a body that can move rapidly through space and matter. It will be ageless and not know pain, tears, sorrow, sickness, or death. It will be a body of splendor. In a promise to the Old Testament saints, the Lord compared our glorified bodies to the shining of the moon and stars (Dan. 12:3). Christ's glorified body is described as shining like the sun in its strength (Rev. 1:16).

CONCLUSION

Our longing for heaven should be intense. It is irrational to find our joy and comfort in this life, because that is idolizing a sin- filled, decaying world and contradicting God's goal, which is to make us like Christ in heaven. If we want to cling to this world and its comforts and accumulate our treasure here, we are irrational and sinful. Furthermore by seeking what will never satisfy, we are aggravating our misery.

It's reasonable to fear pain, suffering, and death--God has built that reaction into us. But it is unreasonable and even sinful to fear the result of death. I'm not longing to die, but I am longing for what death brings. We should desire heaven like a prisoner longs for freedom, like a sick man longs for health, like the hungry and thirsty long for food and water. If we don't, something is wrong. We should be saying with the apostle John, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

If you're not a Christian, don't pity Christians. We enjoy the best of life and will live eternally with God, while those who pity us because of the parties we're missing will spend eternity without God in the torments of hell. All that is glorious, all that is noble, and all that is blessed awaits us in heaven. I hope if you're headed there, your heart yearns for that reunion with Christ.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the purpose of salvation?
2. What is the problem the believer faces? Explain.
3. What does Paul mean by "flesh"?
4. What do the white robes symbolize in Revelation 6:11?
5. The moment a believer dies, his soul is _____ and he enters God's _____.
6. Explain what Revelation 21:27 and 22:14-15 teach about heaven.
7. Describe the perfections of heaven.
8. How can we accurately define heaven in its simplest terms?
9. What demands that our ultimate perfection be both body and soul?
10. What passage indicates that the bodies of believers and unbelievers will be resurrected?
11. Explain the three ways Paul illustrates the distinctiveness of our resurrected bodies.
12. What are the characteristics of our perfected bodies? Explain.
13. Explain 1 Corinthians 15:46-49.
14. What is the best picture of what we will be like in heaven?

Pondering the Principles

1. Too often Christians use their humanness as an excuse for sin. They ignore their own obvious violations of God's law, reminding themselves that none of us will be perfect until we get to heaven. Although that is true, it doesn't excuse any of us from striving toward that goal. Have you been using the "flesh" as an excuse for your sin? Have you avoided taking responsibility for your violations of God's law? Take time now to meditate on Proverbs 28:13 and Matthew 5:48.
2. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and 18, God communicated the truth of the resurrection to comfort believers who have experienced the death of believing friends and family. Are you struggling over the death of someone you love? Read God's comfort to you in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and thank Him for His love and tenderness in providing it. Has someone you know recently experienced the death of a believing friend or family member? Read 1 Thessalonians 4:18 and obey its exhortation.

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