

How We Will Relate to One Another

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

American humorist Mark Twain had a cynical view of life. Atop the third chapter of *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) he wrote, "Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world." Twain's view of heaven wasn't any better. He reportedly quipped on one occasion, "You take heaven; I'd rather go to Bermuda." That statement demonstrates his shallow, short-sighted treatment of eternity.

Such a view goes against the grain of the human heart. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has set eternity in the heart of man. Man yearns for an afterlife and generally finds it difficult, if not impossible, to believe that he ceases to exist after this life. Only the cynic sees life as nothing but a mistake, a failure, and foolishness. We who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ have hope. Since our hope is in heaven, the church needs to return to focusing on it. Our modern, self-indulgent life-style has affected us. As society has made our lives here more comfortable, our longing for the life to come has abated. The subjects of heaven and hell often go unmentioned in the pulpit and on the printed page. It seems that during the last fifteen years the only people interested in the life to come are in cults, Eastern religions, psychic circles, or studies of near-death experiences. There has been a deluge of books about such experiences, describing mystical lights, tunnels, and floating sensations, but they seem to relate more to the psychic and occult world than to the church of Jesus Christ.

Our world population is now over five billion. The United Nations has estimated that about 11 percent of the population dies each year, so that means more than fifty million people will die this year. Today alone over 130 thousand people will go to either heaven or hell. Tomorrow another 130 thousand will follow. For the most part people seem unconcerned and uninterested in such a reality. But there is in the heart of every individual a sense of the impending reality of death. The purpose of this study on heaven is to for you to get excited about heaven's realities beyond death. We need to set our affections on things above--to accumulate our treasure in heaven, not on earth.

REVIEW

I. WHAT HEAVEN IS

II. WHERE HEAVEN IS

III. WHAT HEAVEN IS LIKE

IV. WHAT WE WILL BE LIKE

LESSON

V. HOW WE WILL RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER

A. Our Relation to Angels

Martin Luther believed that an angel is a spiritual creature without a body created by God for the service of Christendom and the church. (Moody: Documentation hopefully to come.) Angels move about always attending to the presence of God. Since God is in heaven, angels will be as well. Scripture indicates that repeatedly. God is often called the Lord of hosts--a title that refers to His

being surrounded by His holy angels. God always has holy angels in His presence. First Thessalonians 4:17 says we will always be with the Lord, so we will be with angels, too. But how will we interact with them?

1. Communing with them

Hebrews 12:22 says, "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels." "Myriads" refers to an innumerable number. When we enter the heavenly Jerusalem, we will be in the company of the angels and "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, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant" (v. 23). The elect angels and the elect saints form the elect company of inhabitants in the new heavens and earth.

The angels are spirit beings. They do not have bodies although they can and do take human form when God desires. Some don't understand how we in glorified bodies will be able to interact with spirit beings. But we interact over the telephone with people we can't see. In heaven we will be able to perceive what to us in the physical world is now invisible.

2. Rejoicing with them

Some Christians may wonder if the angels, who have exclusively enjoyed heaven and doing the work of God, will be jealous when we are perfected. But there can't be a war between glorified saints and elect angels because both are absolutely and eternally holy.

In Luke 15 the three great parables about the lost coin, lost sheep, and the lost son illustrate the heart of God. When the man found his lost sheep, he called "together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'" (v. 6). Then Christ gave the point of the story: "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (v. 7). God and His holy angels rejoice over the repentance of a sinner.

In the second parable a woman lost a coin. When she found it, she called "together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me" (v. 9). In verse 10 Christ says, "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Here we find the angels rejoicing. They're not jealous of the redeemed church; they rejoice over it. The story of the prodigal son also depicts that truth. It ends with the father's saying to his other son, "We had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found" (v. 32). All the servants of the father were called to the feast and rejoiced with him. Those three parables show that God and the angels rejoice over the conversion of sinners. And if they rejoice over our conversion, how much more will they rejoice over us when in perfected souls and bodies we become the epitome of what God began in our redemption.

To the angels we will be a source of eternal joy. They will love us. They will be thrilled with what has been done to perfect us and bring us to the holy presence of the God they worship and adore.

3. Worshiping with them

Revelation 4 explains that we will join the angels in worshiping God. Verse 4 says, "Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads." I believe the twenty-four elders symbolize the church. Some argue that twelve represent Old Testament saints, each from a different tribe, and that twelve are the apostles representing New Testament saints. But regardless, the elders refer to redeemed saints.

Verse 6 says, "Before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind." Those creatures, resembling the ones in Ezekiel 1, are angels. They, along with the twenty-four elders, representing redeemed men, cry, "'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.' And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits

on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne saying, 'Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God'" (vv. 8-11).

Revelation 5:8-9 portrays a similar scene: "The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy art Thou.'" They are singing to the glory of Christ. The apostle John interjects, "I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain'" (v. 11). Verse 13 says that "every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.'" So we will praise and worship God with the angels forever.

4. Being served by them

Hebrews 1:14 says of angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" Angels are ministering spirits whose duty is to serve the heirs of salvation. In Hebrews 1 they are contrasted with Christ: Christ's destiny is to reign, angels', to serve. They were created to serve the redeemed not just in time but also in eternity. We will reign with Christ, and those who serve Christ will serve us.

Hebrews 2:7 says that God "made [Christ] for a little while lower than the angels." That happened in His incarnation, when He humbled Himself and died the ignominious death of the cross. But He was made lower than angels only for a little while, then was exalted and crowned with glory and honor. Now Christ reigns. Likewise we are lower than the angels only for a little while. When we enter heaven, we will reign with Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:21 says that Christ is head over "all rule and authority and power and dominion"--a reference to angelic beings.

In Revelation 3:21 Christ says, "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." God has promised that we will sit on the throne with Christ at God's right hand. We will reign; angels will serve. Hebrews 1:13 says, "To which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet'?" We will commune with angels, rejoice with them, and praise God with them, but we will rule over them. They will serve us in heaven.

First Corinthians 6:1 says, "Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" Paul was telling the Corinthians not to sue other believers in a secular court. He continued, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?" (v. 2). When Christ establishes His earthly kingdom, believers will be His ambassadors, rulers, kings, and princes. We will carry out the verdicts of Christ. Verse 3 goes further: "Do you not know that we shall judge [lit. "rule" or "govern"] angels?" Throughout eternity, angels will serve us as we rule with Christ. They will do what we ask them to do in joyful expression of their intended purpose.

B. Our Relation to Family

People often ask me, "Will I be married to the same woman in heaven? Some say, 'I don't want to lose my wife; I can't imagine going to heaven and not being married.'" Will we have family love and fellowship? Will our relationships in heaven be like they are here? When considering those questions, it is important to remember that we will all be perfect. No one will ever do, say, or think anything wrong.

1. 1 Corinthians 7

Scripture speaks specifically to the issue of marriage and family in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul said, "This I say, brethren, the time [of the Lord's arrival] has been shortened, so that from now on both those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not

weep; those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form [Gk., sch[ma]ema] of this world is passing away" (vv. 29-31). In the context Paul lists some of the things that are passing away: marriage, weeping, earthly rejoicing, and ownership. All the sch[ma]ema of the world is passing away. Sch[ma]ema refers to fashion, manner of life, and a way of doing things. Paul was saying we should take what life brings, yet keep from being engulfed in it because all those things are part of a sch[ma]ema that is temporary. Although the responsibilities of marriage are wonderful, don't allow your marriage to become an excuse for your failure to serve God, put treasure in heaven, or set your affections on things above. We should experience sorrow and joy and buy what we need to buy, but we must not let our emotions and possessions control us so that we become entangled by this passing world.

Verses 32-33 say, "One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife." So if you can remain single, do. Concentrate on the things of the Lord because marriage is a temporary provision. That doesn't mean we are to become indifferent to our marriages. Rather, it means that God has given us a wonderful gift in the present scheme of things, and we need to enjoy it to the fullest. It is the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7), but it is passing away.

2. Matthew 22

Verse 23 says, "Some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Him [Jesus] and questioned Him." The Pharisees taught that after the resurrection each person would have the same relationships he has here. He would be married to the same woman and have the same family forever. They believed the next life would be just like this one. But the Sadducees didn't believe there would even be a resurrection, so they tried to paint an absurd portrait of the Pharisees' theology in the guise of asking Jesus a question.

They said, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies, having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up an offspring to his brother'" (v. 24). That's a Mosaic principle taught in Deuteronomy 25. Next the Sadducees presented their hypothetical scenario: "'There were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother; so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. And last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection therefore whose wife of the seven shall she be? For they all had her.' But Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven'" (vv. 25-30). All the angels were created at one time, and angels don't procreate. Christ's words teach that men here will be men in eternity, and women here will be women in eternity, but there will be no marrying or giving in marriage in heaven. In that way we'll be like the angels.

Why will there be no marriage in heaven? Because the reason there is marriage here is man needs a helper, woman needs a protector, and God has designed both to produce children. In heaven, man won't need a helper because he will be perfect. Woman won't need a protector because she will be perfect. And no one will be born in heaven because only the redeemed can live there. Someone might be thinking, But I'm happily married. I love my wife. She's my best friend and my dearest companion in every area of life. That's good! You will enjoy that companionship with her in heaven forever--and with every other person in heaven as well. If having such a deep relationship with your spouse here is so wonderful, imagine how wonderful to enjoy the best of human relationships, glorified to the point that you enjoy the same relationship equally with every human being.

C. Our Relation to Other Believers

1. Unchanged identity

We will be forever who we are now. Genesis 25:8 says, "Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people" (cf. Genesis 35:29; 49:29; Numbers 20:24; Judges 2:10). Often when a person died, the biblical writers said he

was gathered to his people, implying that those who died maintained their identities--they went to their people.

In 2 Samuel 12 David's child died. In verse 23 David says, "Now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." David knew that both he and his child would maintain their identities. In heaven everyone will maintain his identity. We will be a diverse company of individuals.

Also the New Testament illustrates that our identities will be unchanged. While sharing the Passover meal with His disciples Christ said, "Take this [cup] and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the Kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:17-18). Christ was saying that He and His disciples would drink the fruit of the vine together again.

Our Lord, speaking about the millennial kingdom, is even clearer about this issue in Matthew 8:11: "I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be there, and we will too.

Revelation 19 says, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.... Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (vv. 7-9). There will be a marriage supper in heaven for the Lamb and His bride, the church. The guests are the Old Testament and Tribulation saints. All the redeemed will maintain their identity forever, only in a perfected form. We will be able to have fellowship with Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Samuel, Moses, Joshua, Esther, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, David, Peter, Barnabas, Paul, or anyone else we choose, and we all will be ourselves.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration proves that even though they died centuries before, they still maintained their identity (Matt. 17:3). Peter, James, and John recognized them (v. 4), which implies that we will be able to recognize people we've never seen before. We will instantly know everyone and enjoy their company, never ceasing to be who we are. Jesus told the thief on the cross, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). They reached heaven together as distinct persons.

When the Sadducees tried to trap Jesus about the resurrection, He cited Exodus 3:6: "I am the God ... of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," commenting, "He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (v.32). Christ meant that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still living, and that God continued to rule over them, not merely in the past. In Luke 16 the rich man died and went to hell.

The beggar Lazarus died and went to heaven. Both maintained their identities, and so will we.

Revelation 2:17 says, "To him who overcomes ... I will give ... a new name." In heaven our identities will not change, but our names will. Revelation 3:5 adds, "He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father." Christ will confess our perfected, eternal names before God. Verse 12 continues, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name." Every believer will be there with all the redeemed, genuinely bearing the name of God and Christ.

2. Loving reunion

People often ask if we will be reunited with our family and friends in heaven. That each person will retain his identity implies we will be reunited with them. In fact, after 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 promises the rapture of the church, verse 18 says, "Comfort one another with these words." That comfort comes from the prospect of reunion. Some Thessalonian believers feared that those who had died might miss the rapture. Paul encouraged those fearful believers to comfort one another, assuring them that those who died would not miss His coming. Christ will come, bringing believers who have died with Him, and will give them and those who are alive glorified bodies. We will all be

together forever from then on. Since we will know everyone, we will therefore know our loved ones. In Revelation 21:1-4 John says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I [John] saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain.'" There will be fellowship without tears, separation, pain, death, sorrow, or anxiety. The things that make fellowship difficult on earth will all be removed. We'll have relationships like we've never experienced. There will be beauty in heaven. There also will be perfect humor in heaven because that, too, is a gift from God.

CONCLUSION

Theologian A.A. Hodge wrote, "Heaven, as the eternal home of the divine Man and of all the redeemed members of the human race, must necessarily be thoroughly human in its structure, conditions, and activities. Its joys and its occupations must all be rational, moral, emotional, voluntary, and active. There must be the exercise of all faculties, the gratification of all tastes, the development of all talent capacities, the realization of all ideals. The reason, the intellectual curiosity, the imagination, the aesthetic instincts, the holy affections, the social affinities, the inexhaustible resources of strength and power native to the human soul, must all find in heaven exercise and satisfaction" (Evangelical Theology [Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth, 1976], p. 400).

Is it any wonder that the psalmist said, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones" (Ps. 116:15)? Should it surprise us that the apostle Paul said, "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)? What a hope we have--glorious relationships await us!

Focusing on the Facts

1. Explain what Ecclesiastes 3:11 is saying.
2. What does the title "Lord of hosts" refer to?
3. The elect _____ and the elect _____ form the elect company of inhabitants in the new heaven and earth.
4. What insight do the parables of Luke 15 give into the angels' attitude toward us.
5. In general, whom do the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures in Revelation 4 represent?
6. What does Hebrews 1:14 explain about our relation to angels?
7. According to Hebrews 2:7 Christ was made "for a little while lower than the angels." When did that happen?
8. What is the point of 1 Corinthians 6:1-3.
9. What does sch[ma]ema mean? Using that definition, explain 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.
10. What disagreement with the Pharisees sparked the Sadducees' question in Matthew 22?
11. Give scriptural support for the assertion that our identities will be unchanged in heaven.
12. Why is Matthew 17:4 significant in light of our discussion on heaven?
13. Will we be reunited with family and friends in heaven? Explain.

Pondering the Principles

1. Revelation 4-5 stresses that the elect angels and redeemed saints will worship God together. In fact, worship characterizes heaven. Since worship will be such an important part of life in our glorified bodies, it should be a priority now. The Bible constantly reminds us that worship is an earthly responsibility, as well as a heavenly expression. A life filled with worship focuses on God rather than self. Is your life characterized by worship? Or are you self- focused? Begin using a psalm a day as

the basis for your prayers, concentrating on the psalmist's attitude of praise and worship.

2. Although it is true that this present sch[ma]ema is passing away, our Lord commanded us to be good stewards of what He committed to us here. Marriage, for example, is a serious responsibility. In fact, our marriages are to be living portraits of Christ's relationship with His church. How well does your marriage picture that? Does your love for your spouse remind those around you of Christ and His Bride? Decide today to renew your efforts at being the right kind of spouse and at reflecting Christlike love to all you see.

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