

Essential Truths I: Living With God

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Eternity

The subject of eternity is of vital importance to every person. **Ecclesiastes 3:11** tells us:

“[God] has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

God is called “the Eternal God” (**Genesis 21:33; Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 93:2; Jeremiah 10:10; Romans 16:26**), but he has also created you and me as creatures of eternity. God has purposed that this eternity, which has been built into our very being, should flavor our day-to-day lives down here on earth.

The first thing we need to understand about eternity is that God has prepared an eternal dwelling for every believer in Jesus Christ – a place called heaven.

Heaven

Read **Philippians 1:21-26**

What is heaven like? Heaven is a place far beyond anything we can possibly conceive (**1 Corinthians 2:9; 13:12**). The Bible doesn’t paint for us a totally clear picture of what heaven is like, but it does give us some clues as to its nature. Heaven is:

- ➔ A place of great glory (**Isaiah 6:1-5; Daniel 7:9-10; 12:3; Matthew 13:43**)
- ➔ A place of continual worship (**Revelation 19:1-6; 5:11-12**)
- ➔ A place that will never end (**2 Peter 1:11; 1 Peter 1:4**)
- ➔ A place untainted by evil (**Revelation 21:27**)

- The Word
- God
- Origins
- Jesus
- The Cross
- The Blood
- Resurrection
- Repentance
- Faith
- Grace
- Water Baptism
- Holy Spirit
- Temptation
- Fellowship
- Generosity
- Kingdom of God
- Worship
- Prayer
- Eternity**
- Second Coming
- The Call

The book of **Revelation** describes the New Jerusalem, coming out of heaven, as a place without night (**22:5**), without curse (**22:3**), without pain (**21:4**), without crying or sorrow (**21:4**) and without death (**21:4**). This is because the nature of heaven is a product of the nature of God. Heaven is the full manifestation of God's glory. It is a place totally defined by the presence of God. That means that what God is like, heaven is like: a place of holiness, full of glory and without end.

Read John 14:1-3

Before returning to heaven, Jesus promised that he would return to "take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." This is the most important thing we need to understand about heaven – *heaven is where the Lord is!* As Jesus prayed, in **John 17:24**:

"Father, I want those you have given me *to be with me where I am*, and to *see my glory...*"

Our Link With Heaven

As believers, we are not only destined for heaven, we also now live our lives on earth in a special relationship with heaven. This is because:

- We belong to heaven (**Hebrews 12:22-23; Philippians 3:20**)
- We are seated in heaven (**Ephesians 2:6**)
- We have our source of blessing in heaven (**Ephesians 1:3; Psalm 16:11**)
- We have our names written in heaven (**Luke 10:20**)
- We have been sent from heaven (**John 17:16,18**)
- We have our mind set on heaven (**Colossians 3:1-4**)
- We have our treasure in heaven (**Matthew 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:3-4**)
- We have been called back to heaven (**Philippians 3:14**)

We have been linked to the very throne of God through Christ. We can now view life from heaven's perspective. But heaven is only half the picture that the Bible paints of eternity. There is also another place – a place just as real as heaven and just as eternal.

Hell

Read Luke 16:19-31

Heaven is not the only eternal place spoken of in Scripture. There is another place called hell, a place described in the Bible as "the punishment of eternal fire" (**Jude 7; Matthew 25:41**), "the fire that shall never be quenched" (**Mark 9:44**), "blackest darkness" (**Jude 13; 2 Peter 2:17**) and "everlasting destruction" (**2 Thessalonians 1:9**). Jesus described it as being like a "fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (**Matthew 13:42**).

Hell was not originally prepared for people, but for Satan (note again **Matthew 25:41**). But when Adam sinned, all of mankind aligned itself with Satan and be-

came enemies of God (**Colossians 1:21**). The Bible reveals that all who refuse God's offer of salvation are destined to join Satan in eternal separation from God.

It is not currently in vogue to speak of hell. There's no problem to speak of heaven, but to speak of hell is considered medieval and theologically backward. Yet Jesus bore testimony to the reality of hell (see **Matthew 5:22; 10:28; 23:33; Mark 9:43-48**).

The two concepts of heaven and hell – of eternal life and eternal punishment – cannot be separated in the Bible (**Matthew 25:46; Daniel 12:2**). You cannot have a correct theology which includes one but excludes the other.

Read Romans 2:5-11

Notice the qualifications that Paul lists for entrance into hell:

- Stubbornness and an unrepentant heart
- Self-seeking
- Rejecting the truth
- Following evil

Read Matthew 7:13-14

Jesus here paints a clear picture of two paths that lie before each and every person.

- **The wide path** – a broad and easy highway that leads toward hell and destruction.
- **The narrow path** – a focused and straight road that leads toward life and heaven's glory.

The very essence of the Gospel message is that a choice lies before every man and woman – the choice between life and death (**Deuteronomy 30:19-20**), be-

What is Hell?

There are a number of words used in the Bible for "hell," but each has a distinct and special meaning.

- *Sheol* – this Hebrew word means "the unseen state." Prior to the Cross, it was the holding place for all who had died, both righteous and unrighteous, but since the Cross, it is the holding place for the unrighteous, those who are awaiting the final judgment of God. The word Sheol is often translated "grave" in the NIV (see **Psalms 16:10**) or "the depths" (see **Psalms 139:8**).
- *Hades* – this is the Greek equivalent of *Sheol*. It means "the unseen world." *Hades/Sheol* appears to be located in the nether regions of the world (note **Isaiah 14:9; Ephesians 4:8-9**).
- *Tartarus* – this appears to be a spiritual prison, a special place reserved for angels that rebelled against God. It is a word borrowed from Greek mythology (as was the word Hades) to describe the lowest and darkest part of hell. It is only mentioned once in Scripture – in **2 Peter 2:4**.
- *Phrear* – this is the Greek word used for the Pit or the Abyss. This is not technically a part of hell, but appears to be a prison for demonic spirits when driven from people (note **Luke 8:31**). Just prior to the return of Jesus, the Pit will be opened, releasing demons that will cause much suffering on the earth (**Revelation 9:1-11**). The Bible records Satan being chained in the Pit for 1000 years (**Revelation 20:1-4**).
- *Gehenna* – this is the word used for hell as the place of eternal punishment. It is described in **Revelation** as "the lake of fire" (**19:20; 20:10**) and "the second death" (**2:11; 20:14-15**).

tween God and Satan (**Acts 26:17-18**), between heaven and hell. And that choice focuses on the person of Jesus as Lord and Savior – the Lord of heaven and the Savior who rescues us from hell.

What is hell really like? No one really knows, but again the Bible provides us with certain clues:

- **Hell is total separation from God** – Just as heaven is defined by the *presence* of God, so hell is defined by *separation* from God. This is what Paul calls being “shut out from the presence of God” (**2 Thessalonians 1:9**).
- **Hell is a place of eternal punishment** – The Bible describes hell as a place of torment (**Luke 16:23,28**). And just as heaven is eternal, so is hell (see **Revelation 14:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:9**).

It is against this dark news that the good news of the Gospel shines with a powerful brilliance. For God intervened into human destiny and established a fork in the road – and that fork in the road was the Cross of Calvary.

Read John 3:17-21

The wonderful news of the Gospel is that Jesus became the escape route from eternal judgment in hell. He became our passport to heaven.

Read John 3:16

Eternal Judgment

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Eternal judgment is a fundamental tenet of the teachings of Christ. It is the foundation upon which the Gospel is built. In **Hebrews 6:1-2**, Paul’s list of the “elementary teachings about Christ” includes:

“...the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”

In **Hebrews 10:25-28**, the writer seeks to parallel the principle of eternal judgment with the method of God’s salvation:

- Man is destined to die *once*, then to face judgment
- In the same way, Christ died *once for all*, to fulfil that judgment on our behalf

Without understanding the truth of eternal judgment, we can never fully comprehend the salvation of the Cross. The two concepts are inextricably linked. So let’s take a look at what this eternal judgment is all about.

Read John 3:36

The issue of eternal judgment revolves around the acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ. In **John 3:14-21**, we see several principles revealed:

- Everyone who believes in Christ receives eternal life (**verse 15-16**)
- Christ's mission was not to bring judgment, but to save people from judgment (**verse 17**)
- Whoever believes in Christ is not condemned (**verse 18**)
- Whoever does not believe in Christ is already condemned (**verse 18**)
- The verdict of God's judgment has to do with a person's love for the light or love for the darkness (**verse 19-21**)

Read Matthew 4:16

Read John 1:5

Read John 8:6-8

Read John 12:46

Read Ephesians 5:8

Read Colossians 1:13

By rejecting Christ, a person remains in darkness. We read in **Romans 2:5** how those who refuse to obey the truth are “storing up wrath against [themselves] for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Read Galatians 6:7-8

Read 1 Timothy 5:24

The judgment of God is often described in terms of harvest. By sowing evil, a person reaps the judgment of God – and the Bible is clear that there is no escape from this.

The Bible describes two types of judgment at the return of Christ:

The Great White Throne Judgment

Read Revelation 20:11-15

Notice how *all* the books are opened – all the records of a person's life, everything that has been done right or wrong. But despite the popular notion that God will weigh up a person's good and evil (and hopefully the scales will tip in your favor), the hinges on one thing and one thing alone – whether a person's name has been entered into just *one* of the books – the Lamb's Book of Life.

Read John 5:24

As believers in Christ, we have bypassed the judgment at the Great White Throne! The wonderful truth of the Gospel is that, for the believer, the judgment of God has *already* taken place – at the Cross. If we receive the judgment that was meted out *upon Christ* at the First Coming, then we will not receive the judgment that is meted out *by Christ* at the Second Coming. The verdict has already been declared. The Great White Throne Judgment is simply the final sentencing against a condemnation that already rests upon the person who has rejected Christ (note again **John 3:18-19**).

Read John 10:28***The Judgment Seat of Christ*****Read 2 Corinthians 5:10**

In this verse, Paul tells us that “we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.” The Greek expression Paul uses here literally means “the sum total of us.”¹

He is talking to us as *Christians* – those who have been redeemed and rescued from the judgment of hell. Although we have escaped the judgment of eternal separation from God, this does not mean that we don’t have to face a reckoning before God for how we have lived the lives that he has given us.

The Greek word for “seat” that Paul uses in “the judgment seat of Christ” is not the same as the word for “throne.” The judgment seat was a first-century Roman concept – when a governor presided over a tribunal, he would sit on a *bema*, a judgment seat. At this seat, he would decide on the case, meting out rewards or punishments as were appropriate.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

The judgment seat of Christ does not involve the issue of heaven versus hell. That issue was already settled for us at the Cross of Calvary. What is being judged now are the *works* that a Christian has done, the “building” he has built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. Paul states:

“If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his *work* will be

Confidence on the Day of Judgment

In **1 John 4:17**, we read:

“Love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.”

As believers in Christ, we have no reason to fear the Day of Judgment because:

- God’s love has been poured into our hearts (**Romans 5:5-10; 1 John 4:18**)
- The Holy Spirit has sealed us as belonging to God (**2 Corinthians 1:22; 1 John 3:19-21,24; 2 Timothy 2:19**)
- Our offences against God have been pardoned and the “death sentence” lifted (**Romans 5:1; Ephesians 1:7**)
- Our names are written in heaven, in the Lamb’s Book of Life (**Luke 10:20; Hebrews 12:22-23**)
- Jesus, the Judge, is the One who died to save us from judgment (**Romans 8:31-34; 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:10**)

In **Jude 24**, we discover the basis of our confidence on the Day of Judgment:

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...”

shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire *will test the quality of each man's work*. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; *he himself will be saved*, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

Note that even in the worst case, where a person's works are counted as worth absolutely nothing (note **1 Corinthians 13:1-3**), the person's salvation is never in question. “...he himself will be saved,” writes Paul, “but only as one escaping through the flames.”

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Each one of us has been given a “trust.” This trust involves:

- Our lives
- Our families
- Our gifts and talents
- The Gospel itself

Each one of us wants to hear those matchless words from the Lord, found in **Matthew 25:21** (NKJV):

“Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”

Living in the Light of Eternity

Read 2 Timothy 1:9-10

At the core of the Gospel is the message of eternal life (**Romans 6:23**). Eternal life is part of the total package of salvation that has been presented to us in Jesus Christ. This eternal life is certain because we are now in Christ (**John 5:24; 6:40; 10:28; 1 John 5:11-13,20**). But it is one thing to *have* eternal life. It is another thing to *use* it.

Read 1 Timothy 6:12

You cannot have a revelation of the eternal life that is in Christ without that having a profound impact upon your day-to-day life (read **Hebrews 11:13-16**). We are described as “heirs having the hope of eternal life (**Titus 3:7**). The faith and knowledge that leads to godliness is said to be founded upon this “hope of eternal life” (**Titus 1:1-2**).

Read 2 Peter 3:11-13

Here is the big question. If you understand the truth of heaven and hell, if you have even an *inkling* of the eternal glory that awaits those who love God (**1 Peter 5:10**) and the wrath that awaits those who do not, then the question you must answer for yourself is:

“What kind of a person ought I to be?”

Read 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

An understanding of the “eternal glory” that lies ahead makes the “light and momentary troubles” you face pale into comparative insignificance. A revelation of this “eternal glory” causes you to fix your focus on “what is unseen.” As Paul explains:

“For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

We are called to live each day in the light of eternity (read **2 Corinthians 5:1-10**). Eternity should impact our decisions and plans and priorities. All the things that most people run after - the “American Dream” (or however else consumerism may be packaged) – are revealed as transitory and low priority in the light of God’s eternal glory.

As Sir Thomas Browne once said:

“The created world is but a small parenthesis in eternity.”²

We have the choice now as to where our lives will be simply a small parenthesis in eternity, or whether our lives will define both our eternity and the eternity of those around us.

Eternity is far more than just endless days. It is defined by the eternal presence of God and the eternal purpose of God, into which we have been called (**Ephesians 3:10-11**). As that wonderful refrain from the hymn “Amazing Grace” declares:

*When we’ve been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise
Than when we’d first begun*

Read Jude 24-25

¹ Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p.467.

² Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), quoted from *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

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