

## **Salvation / Heaven**

(Rev. 05/25)

## Are there any rules in Heaven?

Yep. The rule is pretty basic:

*Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. - Revelation 21:27 (NLT)*

We cannot put anything above God and we cannot hurt others. That's it! (On the bright side, once we see God, I don't think we will WANT to put anything above God; and when we see others as God sees them, we won't want to hurt anyone either! So it's not really a "rule" as much as it is a chance to see everyone as they really are!)

## Are we predestined or (have) free will for salvation?

All right, I've talked about this a couple of times, but never explored it more fully. So, guess what we're going to do?

There's a HUGE debate between two differing theologies: Calvinism and Arminianism. Calvinism teaches that God predestines – or chooses ahead of time – who will be saved. Arminianism says that God provides grace but gives humans the ability to choose (free will) to accept or reject God.

Real quickly, a couple of verses that support each argument are:

### Calvinism:

*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. - Romans 8:29 (ESV)*

### Arminianism:

*He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. - John 1:10-12 (NLT)*

"See? The Bible clearly says God 'predestined' people," says the Calvinist.

"Ah," the Arminian replies, "But the Bible also mentions people choosing to either accept God or reject Him!"

Both sides of the argument have constructed heavy, detailed, secure boxes, and then claimed that they successfully stuffed God into that box! (I think God is bigger than any theological "box" we try to trap Him in, but that's just me!)

So, which side am I on? Neither. I think both have their strong points, and their flaws. In fact, I think reality is more like a blending of these two ideas. Let me give you an example to show you what I mean:

I LOVE Sherlock Holmes! I have the collected works in both physical and digital copies. When I'm feeling stressed, I curl up with my book and read of Holmes and Watson...for the hundredth time!

Now, when the case begins, do I know how it will end? Of course! Why? I've read it through to the end; I know the outcome. Because of that, the outcome is predestined – based on foreknowledge – and Holmes and Watson really don't have a choice from my point of view because the outcome has already been determined. I already know "whodunit"!

On the other hand, from the viewpoint of Holmes and Watson, they have free will. They can make independent decisions, they can go or stay, they can interview the maid or the duke, and all along they make these choices based on what they think is right! Are they trapped in their choices? Not really! They have free will to investigate the case until the very end!

In my opinion, from God's viewpoint, it's predestination; from our viewpoint, it's free will. In other words, they're both facets – or aspects – of the same truth.

Just my two cents worth.

### **Can you lose your salvation?**

Okay, this one is...fun. Why? Because I've heard some rather...intense arguments from all sides of this debate! But, since you asked, let me answer:

First of all, you have to know what it means to be a "Christian". A Christian is someone who has fully trusted in Jesus, felt sorry for their sins, and asked to be forgiven. In that moment, the Holy Spirit has come into their lives and they are changed.

*This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! - 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)*

As GotQuestions.org puts it:

*A Christian is not simply an "improved" version of a person; a Christian is an entirely new creature. He is "in Christ." For a Christian to lose salvation, the new creation would have to be destroyed. (Source: GotQuestions.org)*

Next, we have the verse in John 10:

*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one." - John 10:28-30 (NLT)*

In this case, Jesus says that both He and the Father (God) are going to protect those He gives eternal life to. "*No one can snatch them away from me...*" This seems to indicate once-saved, always-saved.

"But," I've heard people reply, "What about people who JUMP out of Jesus' hand? They would lose their salvation then, right?" Unfortunately, that's expanding the metaphor, the image, that Jesus uses here, and so it's not useful. The point of John 10 is once-saved, always-saved by the power of God.

Finally, you can check out Romans 11:29:

*For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn. - Romans 11:29 (NLT)*

If salvation is a gift, we can't give it back. If God calls us to salvation, we can't be "uncalled".

Now, what about those who are "Christians" who walk away from their faith? Well, there's two likely scenarios here:

Do you remember when I defined a Christian? I tried to be very specific. Notice that these people in my definition above didn't have to pray "The Sinner's Prayer", they didn't belong to a church, and they didn't have to be baptized. A lot of people may think that they're a Christian because they've done all of these things...but, because they never repented – they didn't feel sorry for their sins and turn away from them – they ended up jumping through hoops rather than kneeling before God. In other words, they weren't really saved!

By the way, this does NOT mean that a Christian can't sin or walk away. There are a lot of examples in the Bible of people who followed God and blew it: David commits adultery and murder, Jonah is mad that God won't kill thousands of people, Elijah gives up in despair after a mighty victory. In each of these moments, a human made a choice that hurt their relationship with God.

Does it mean that they weren't saved? Of course not! Does it mean that they lost their salvation? Not remotely! It just means that they were humans who made human choices with human consequences. And we can do that, too...

### **Did Christians who died before Jesus rose go to Hell? What do you think?**

Um, as far as what I think...I try not to. (And I often succeed! Yay!) There are three main theories about what happened to believers in Christ, or even the followers of God in the Old Testament, before the resurrection of Jesus:

#### Option One: They were in Hell.

I talk to a lot of churches and I've had some argue that these people were condemned to Hell because they died before Jesus arrived. The "proof text" I get is:

*Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. So he went and preached to the spirits in prison— those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood. - 1 Peter 3:18-20 (NLT)*

These people argue that the "spirits in prison" are the people of the Old Testament who believed in God, but hadn't had the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior.

I do have two problems with this. First, we're told that these spirits "*disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat...*" Because of that, this can't

include Abraham, King David, Elisha, etc. because they would all have died AFTER Noah! Second, we're NOT told that this is "Hell". (We're not told WHAT it is, but it's not mentioned that it's specifically "Hell".)

Option Two: They were in Hades.

In Greek, Hades was simply the region of the dead. In this place, all who died were basically hanging out (or asleep). The "proof text" (one of them) that I get is one where Peter quotes King David:

*For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave. - Acts 2:27 (NLT)*

The rest of the "proof texts" talk about "descending to the lower parts of the earth", but that assumes that Hades – or even Hell – is a physical place under the earth. This is, unfortunately, based on misreading texts that refer to Heaven as "up" and Hell as "down". (The problem with these verses is that they aren't really concerned with where Hell actually is!) The Hebrew concept of "Sheol" may indicate the same idea, a place of the dead.

So, taking Acts 2:27 on its own merits, King David is just saying, "I won't stay dead." He doesn't say, "I'll be dead for a while and then come back to life in Heaven." He is saying that God is his hope, even if he should die!

That being said, Psalm 9:17 and Revelation 1:18 both seem to argue that there is a place where the dead sit and wait for judgment. It's not Heaven and it's not Hell; somehow it's in-between.

If someone told me I had to accept this viewpoint, I guess I could. I would still have problems with it, but at least I could justify it Biblically.

Option Three: They were in Heaven.

This one is based on a number of verses, but bear with me:

*Enoch lived 365 years, walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him. - Genesis 5:23-24 (NLT)*

Notice that Enoch, a descendant of "fallen human beings", is able to have such a relationship with God that God takes him directly to Heaven without the need to die and be sent to Hades or Hell.

*And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith. - Genesis 15:6 (NLT)*

In this verse, we're told that Abram is in right-standing (righteousness) with God. In other words, Abram is NOT being condemned for his sins. Because of that, Abram should have been able to enter Heaven upon his death, if his faith produced a right relationship with God.

*As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. - 2 Kings 2:11 (NLT)*

Why is Elijah allowed to go straight to Heaven if everyone else has to wait for Jesus to be resurrected?

I can keep going on, but I think you can see the pattern. What sense does it make to say, “God took some of the righteous from the Old Testament to Heaven, but the rest had to hang out in “Hell” or “Hades” until Jesus rose from the dead? (Read Hebrews 11 if you want to add to the confusion because it talks about people who were role-models for faith. But these people ended up in Hades?)

With this view, the cross and the resurrection become something that is viewed “outside of time”. One of the “proof texts” for this is Revelations 13:8:

*And all the people who belong to this world worshiped the beast. They are the ones whose names were not written in the Book of Life that belongs to the Lamb who was slaughtered before the world was made. - Revelations 13:8 (NLT)*

With this view, Christ’s sacrifice isn’t confined to time; it’s part of eternity both past and future. Because of that, the faithful followers of God from all ages are brought to Heaven the moment they die.

If I had to choose one viewpoint, this would be it.

P.S. I’ve seen topics like this split churches, divide families, and cause a lot of arguments that are never fully resolved and that can distract us from our purpose. We need to remember that we CAN discuss our different views without needing to demand that we’re right! It’s far more important to remember WHO is waiting for us, than to worry about WHEN we go there! ☺

### **Do dogs and cats go to Heaven?**

Dogs definitely do, but cats don't because they're soul-less killing machines!

All kidding aside, we don't know for sure. The Bible doesn't say one way or another. I have seen very good arguments for animals going to Heaven – they are His Creation, after all; and very good arguments against – they do not receive God breathing the “breath of life” into them, as He does with Adam in Genesis.

In the end, the best I could give you is a guess, and my guesses don't count for much, I'm afraid... I do have a quote I would like to share with you:

*The best advice is for us is to love our pets and enjoy them while they are here with us—and trust God in everything for the future. (Source: bibleinfo.com)*

## **Do our earthly relationships follow us to Heaven?**

A couple of years ago, I took part in a Bible Study that went through Randy Alcorn's "Heaven" program. At the end of it, I learned something very valuable that I would now like to share with you: I really don't know!

Don't get me wrong, the study was good. However, every time we met, it seemed that I was more confused about what Heaven is – and is not – like.

What I can tell you is that we won't be married in Heaven:

*For when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. In this respect they will be like the angels in Heaven. - Matthew 22:30 (NLT)*

The purpose of marriage was to help each other (Genesis 2:18) and for procreation (Genesis 1:28). Neither of these are needed in Heaven.

I do know that we'll be surrounded by other believers:

*After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. - Revelation 7:9 (NLT)*

That we will talk with each other and interact:

*Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. - Matthew 17:3 (NLT)*

And that in some inexplicable way we will be recognizable to others:

*Peter exclaimed, "Lord, it's wonderful for us to be here! If you want, I'll make three shelters as memorials – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." - Matthew 17:4 (NLT)*

How did Peter know who these two were? He's never seen them before, but somehow Peter knows who they were by sight. Also, if you read the story, you'll find that Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah; so apparently we will be able to talk with all of our earthly relations in Heaven.

So, we don't get married, but we do have relationships with others. We recognize everyone and can sit down and talk with anyone in Heaven. We will no longer feel lonely or alone, because we're surrounded by a vast crowd of people. Even more than that, we will see God face-to-face.

Based on all of this, I would say that our earthly relationships come with us to Heaven, but they will be different. In many ways they will be purer, more satisfying, and deeper than anything that we could have on earth.

## **Do people who believe in God but follow other religions go to Heaven?**

This one relies on an important verse from the Bible. Jesus tells His followers:

*Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. - John 14:6 (NLT)*

According to this verse, it's not WHAT you know, it's WHO you know!

Do I wish it was different? Yes! And I wasn't the first one to feel this way. Paul, the guy who wrote a lot of the New Testament (the second half of the Bible), said it this way:

*...for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed--cut off from Christ!--if that would save them. - Romans 9:3 (NLT)*

Paul knew what it meant to want as many people to go to Heaven as possible. He also knew, that they needed to choose their own path. If they refused to accept Jesus during their life, then it would be the cruelest thing for God to force them to spend eternity in Heaven with Him in the afterlife.

### **Do you go to Heaven if you're not baptized?**

Let me show you one of the most important verses in the Bible for how we get to Heaven. In Luke, three men are crucified: Jesus and two thieves. As they die, one thief curses Jesus; but the other responds differently:

*But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."*

*And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." - Luke 23:40-43 (NLT)*

As they were dying on the cross, one of the criminals being killed tells Jesus that he believes in Him. He never goes to church, never gets baptized, doesn't celebrate Christmas, and pretty much skips all of the other "religious" things that we stress about...and Jesus tells this man he will be with Him in paradise that day.

It's not about what we do. It's about what we believe. Or, more to the point, Who we believe in...

### **Do you go to Heaven immediately when you die if you believe?**

I believe we do! Why? Because of something Jesus said while being crucified:

*But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."*

*And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." - Luke 23:40-43 (NLT)*



In here, we see that Jesus tells the man “today you will be with me in paradise”. No “sleeping”, you’re not stuck in the ground. After we die, we’re in Heaven. What gets even more confusing is the fact that there IS a resurrection at some point where our bodies come back, but that’s a different question and you didn’t ask that one. So nyaah! (I get the sneaking suspicion that you’re going to ask that next time around, though!)

### Do we have feelings in Heaven?

Yes. We know that we will have joy and sorrow, but probably some others, as well. Here’s the verse for sorrow:

*“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.” - Revelation 21:4 (NLT)*

Based on this, at some point in Heaven, there will be tears. The debate is WHY we cry. Is it because of people who didn’t choose Heaven? Maybe. Is it because we realize our mistakes? Probably. Is it because we’re thankful to God for what He did? Definitely! Or it could be a combination of all of these...or it might be something totally different! We don’t know, but we do know there are tears.

But there’s also joy in Heaven!

*...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. - Hebrews 12:2 (NLT)*

Jesus faced rejection, beatings, torture, and death. Why? Because the joy of Heaven was worth it! So we do know there will be joy and we also know that the joy is worth...anything we go through!

### How do we know we are saved?

This is a great one! Let me give you a couple of quick verses to help you out:

*“I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.” - John 5:24 (NLT)*

And...

*“However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them.” - John 6:37 (NLT)*

In other words, if we've asked Jesus to forgive us...He will. He promises that.

Now with that being said, I NEED to stress something: **Whether or not you FEEL like God has forgiven you is completely pointless.** Our feelings change. Today, I'm feeling tired and mildly stressed. Tomorrow, I will feel joyful and happy. Does that mean that today God hasn't forgiven me but tomorrow He has? Nope!

The way that we know we're saved is that we KNOW we're saved. Let me show you one last verse:

*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. - Romans 10:9-10 (NLT)*

If you've done that, you ARE saved, whether you feel like it or not...

### **How do you find people in Heaven?**

My recommendation is GPS and electronic tags to track them. On a more realistic note, I think we simply will just be able to find them, just like we'll know who people are when we look at them! Besides, no matter how big Heaven is, we do have an eternity to wander around...

### **How do you "give your life to God"?**

There isn't a "magic formula" to becoming a Christian. It isn't the words that we use; it's the desire in our heart. The Bible says that all you have to do is ask for it. You can say something like this:

*God, I know that I've done things wrong. I've made mistakes, and I'm sorry for them. I believe that You sent Your Son, Jesus, to die for me. I need You in my life. I believe in You and Your Son. Please forgive me for my sins. Please be my King. I want to follow You. With the faith I have, I choose you today. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

If you pray that prayer, please understand that it doesn't mean you will never make a mistake again; it just means that forgiveness is there if you ask for it. It also doesn't mean that you won't have doubts; it just means that you have Someone who can help you through it. Being a Christian isn't always an easy road, but in my experience it is the best one!

### **If being saved seems so simple why are there the passages that say heaven is a narrow road and the one where Jesus says "I do not know you"? (Sorry, I don't know the specifics.)**

While I've answered similar questions before, I've never had one show up in NDQ, so I'm excited to deal with this here! The verses in question here are:

*"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. - Matthew 7:13-14 (NLT)*

And...

*"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day*

*many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.' - Matthew 7:21-23 (NLT)*

Note: Both of these passages are spoken by Jesus, so you need that as a reference point.

If salvation is simple, why do most people NOT choose it? I mean, all we have to do is speak some words – like a magic spell, or something – and then \*poof!\* we're instantly going to Heaven, with nothing more to worry about, right? Well, not exactly...

In the first verse, Jesus says that going to Hell is actually easier than going to Heaven. To go to Hell, you have to put yourself first. You have to choose to do things your way; you have to say, "My will be done!"; and you have to spend your life focused on your self and your own wants / desires. Literally, to do this, you just have to be...you.

To find the road to Heaven, you need to put God first. You admit that you've rebelled against Him, that you've sinned. Then, you feel sorry for what you've done wrong, you humble yourself before God, and ask Him to forgive you. Then, you get up and begin the journey with God, focusing on Him and letting Him guide you through your life. It isn't always easy, but God is always worth it!

In the end, though, you have to do what Jesus tells us:

*"But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!'" - Luke 14:28-30 (NLT)*

In other words, before you decide to follow God, decide if you really mean it! And that's what the next verses talk about in Matthew 7:21-23!

In this case, these are people who go to Jesus on Judgment Day and say, "Jesus! Hey Jesus! A long time ago, we prayed the 'magic words'. We never felt sorry for our sins! We never put You in charge of our lives! We never allowed the Holy Spirit to change us! (See Galatians 5:22-23.) And basically we spent our whole lives putting ourselves first! Now, take us to Heaven!"

And Jesus says, "You said words. You went to church. You may have even done great things in My Name. But all along the way, it was for you. You wanted to give yourself glory, not Me. You wanted the world to notice you, not Me. You never felt bad about your mistakes. And you never let Me change you. This life was about you, not Me. Because of that, you get eternity without Me...just like you lived your life all along!"

There IS a final reason why it's difficult to go to Heaven; and, strangely enough, it's linked to the idea of focusing on me, not God.

For some people, they truly DO feel sorry for their sins and they truly DO want to change. But receiving God's gift of forgiveness seems too...simple. "You mean that all I have to do is feel sorry and

ask for forgiveness? That's it? There has to be more!"

And so they try to "earn" Heaven by their good deeds; they try to "earn" salvation by going to church and reading their Bibles; they try to "earn" God's approval by living a life for Him. In the end, though, notice that these people aren't focused on God...they're focused on changing THEMSELVES so that God HAS to accept them!

It doesn't work... Your good deeds will never cover over your sins; your salvation comes from Jesus, not the church; and there is NOTHING that you can do that will make God love you any more...or any less.

In the end, salvation isn't about you! It's about what an amazing, loving God did for you so that you could have a relationship with Him.

So, are you following Jesus to Heaven...or are you trying to go your own way?

### **How is heaven perfect when the devil did something imperfect to God?**

I LOVE this question! Very good thinking! So, let's go for a couple of "fun" verses:

*"How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. For you said to yourself, 'I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north. I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High.' - Isaiah 14:12-14 (NLT)*

Creation gets going and Satan wants God's throne. He loses the battle and is kicked out, along with the angels that followed him. Clearly not a "perfect" Heaven if Satan can rebel, right?

Next, check this out:

*One day the members of the heavenly court came to present themselves before the LORD, and the Accuser, Satan, came with them. "Where have you come from?" the LORD asked Satan.*

*Satan answered the LORD, "I have been patrolling the earth, watching everything that's going on." - Job 1:6-7 (NLT)*

Notice that Satan still has access to Heaven. In fact, Satan comes when God calls, his power is limited by God, and yet God talks to Satan. How can you have a perfect Heaven if Satan can come and go?

Well, we have one final place to look:

*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. - Revelation 21:1-2 (NLT)*

In the end, there is a new Heaven and a new earth. Everything goes back to the perfection it was before sin entered it. That is how heaven can be perfect: God makes everything new in the end!

### **How old will we be when we get to Heaven?**

Completely honest answer? No one knows. All the Bible really says about it is found in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44:

*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. - 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 (NLT)*

Some people use other stories in the Bible to make guesses. For example, they point to:

- 1 Samuel 28* - When the vision(?) of Samuel show up to confront Saul, he is called an “old man”. This could mean that the vision is the same age as Samuel when he died. (We’re told in 1 Samuel 12:2 that he is “old” and “gray-headed”.)
- Matthew 17* - Moses (who died) and Elijah (who went to Heaven in a chariot of fire) both show up on the Mount of Transfiguration. They are identifiable, which means they weren’t children, teenagers, or zombies.
- Luke 24:36-49* – The resurrected Jesus looked like the Jesus who had been with them. No difference in age, although He DOES still bear His scars.

So, what does this tell us? Pretty much nothing, really... People are popping in and out, all different ages, and looks, etc. However, the ONLY person we know who shows up in a resurrected body is Jesus. Because of that, anything we come up with is only a guess!

If I had to guess – and this is only a guess – I would go with what I heard a theology teacher once say. This man, whom I deeply respect, said he thinks we’ll all be around 33 years old. When asked why, he said, “Because that’s the age Jesus was when He died, was buried, and was resurrected.”

If you don’t like that answer, however, you’ll probably have to wait to get to Heaven to find out! ☺

### **If you belong to a tribe that has never been told anything about God, do you go to Heaven when you die?**

Wow! This is tough... I’ve actually struggled with this one for years.

A long time ago, I read a book called [A Wideness In God’s Mercy](#) by theologian Clark Pinnock. (I got to hear him speak at a conference, too, but he was really boring and it has NOTHING to do with your question, so I’ll skip that.) In the book, Pinnock argued that someone who has never been told about

God is not held to the same standard.

While Pinnock DOES argue that you can be saved without Jesus, I think his arguments are kind of...questionable. In most of the books that I've read like this, the arguments are more about making the author feel good than trying to answer the question.

Can you be saved without saying "the prayer of salvation"? Certainly! There are no magic words or special rituals, we just have to believe in God. And because there isn't a required set of words we need to speak, there may be hope for your tribal person who never hears the name "Jesus"! Let me show you:

*For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. - Romans 1:20 (NLT)*

*But from there you will search again for the Lord your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him. - Deuteronomy 4:29 (NLT)*

Based on these two verses, we can make some conclusions:

1. You don't need a church to believe that God exists.
2. You don't need a missionary to tell you that God exists.
3. If you seek God, you WILL find Him!

If someone from a tribe looked at the stars and realized that there must be a God and then chose to spend their life trying to learn more about that God, the Bible promises he WILL find Him! Does that mean that person gets to go to Heaven? I think "yes"!

But if you think about it, there's a BIG problem with this idea: How hard it is for us in America – with all the churches, camps, Bibles, and youth groups – to actually believe in God! How much harder must it be for that person in another country, trying to figure out God on his own?

By the way, what can we figure out about God by simply looking at the world around us is:

1. God is BIG! (When you consider the size of the world, whoever made it must be bigger than all of it!)
2. God is powerful! (To create all living and non-living things, God NEEDS to be very, very powerful.)
3. God is creative! (The diversity of living things tells us that God is creative.)
4. God likes beauty! (Beauty is a bonus, not a requirement. The world could be just different shades of gray and it would still work just as well; the colors of a sunset or a flower are indications that God likes beautiful things.)
5. God likes order! (Everything in our world is part of an intricate dance. We now know that even the smallest changes would cause our universe to cease; we know that life follows set rules and can restore itself when things get out of balance.)
6. God loves us! (To create a world like this, one that we CAN enjoy – not that we always DO enjoy it! – means that God must care for us a lot!)

Based on this, there's a good chance that someone COULD discover enough about God to put their faith in Him and be saved, even if they're from a tribe that has never heard about God or been to church. (The Book of Hebrews spends a lot of time talking about people who had amazing faith!)

But if you think about it, there's a BIG problem with this idea: How hard it is for us in America – with all the churches, camps, Bibles, and youth groups – to actually believe in God! How much harder must it be for that person in another country, trying to figure out God on his/her own?

**Barry's Note:** Just so you know, I really DO encourage people to do missions and ministry! Even if there's a chance for someone to believe in God without hearing someone share the Gospel, why leave it to "chance"? Let's go and share the Gospel so we can be sure!

### **If you follow God but don't go to church all the time, will you still get to Heaven?**

Great question! Guess what? Going to church does NOT mean you get to go to Heaven! Don't believe me? Then find a verse that says, "The people showed up to church and, because of that, God forgave them of their sins!" It doesn't exist...

The Bible tells us that it's faith that saves us. Let me show you what it says in Ephesians 2:8-9:

*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. - Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)*

Notice that there's no mention of "church" there! Want more? Try:

*But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." - Luke 23:40-43 (NLT)*

As they were dying on the cross, one of the criminals being killed tells Jesus that he believes in Him. He never gets to church, never gets baptized, doesn't celebrate Christmas, and pretty much skips all of the other "religious" things...and Jesus tells this man he will be with Him in paradise that day.

It's not about what we do. It's about what we believe. Or, more to the point, Who we believe in...

So does going to church determine whether you go to Heaven? Nope. But if you've asked Jesus to save you, if you believe in Him, if you think He's your friend, why wouldn't you want to learn more about Him?

**Barry's Note:** You do NOT have to come to MY church! We would love to have you here and I think you might find that we're not like a lot of other churches. What I will tell you is that if you're not getting anything out of the church you're going to, if it's not helping you to learn more about God, deal with the problems in your life, or help you to discover who



God wants you to be, you may want to find one that does. That's not always easy as a teenager, but church should be about your relationship with God; not just some more rituals that don't mean anything.

### **If you go to Heaven, does your life start over? Will my broken bones still be broken? Will we remember all about our past life?**

This is a ton of questions rolled up into one! Wow! In Heaven, we are who we are (Ke\$ha anyone?). We know what we've done in the past, we know our mistakes and what we did wrong, which is one of the reasons why I think Hell would be so terrible!

However, for those who believe, our life is actually just starting, not ending! We get our tears wiped away by God, we get an eternity with people who care for us, and we get perfection. No more hurts, no more suffering, no more pain, and no more death. It's a "respawn" with a walk-through thrown in so we don't make any more mistakes. (Channeling my inner gamer there, sorry!)

Will your bones be broken? I don't know, but there's an interesting idea I heard presented once:

*Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" - John 20:27 (NLT)*

Here, after Jesus has risen from the dead, He still bears the holes, the scars, and the marks. One theologian (a guy who studies God) argued that we WILL still have scars, but they will be badges of honor, NOT "ugly" or "painful". If this guy is right, then you may still have the marks, but they won't hurt, they won't slow you down, and they won't be something that makes you look bad.

In fact, if he's right, then anyone who suffered and died for Jesus will be proud of their scars, because they tell the story of how much they gave up for Christ!

### **If you put Heaven above God, is that a sin?**

Simple answer? Yes. Any time we want something more than God, we make it an "idol". An idol is something that we chase after, something we think is the most important thing in our life! If we want Heaven more than we want God, then we need to look at our priorities: do we really want to live in Heaven if we're stuck there with God? That may not be a happy choice!

I know a family in Florida that I can use to help explain this:

The father is a diplomat who travels the world, he has pictures of himself shaking hands with all of the recent Presidents of the United States, famous world leaders, and international business figures. His decisions, the conversations he has, help to shape the world we live in. If you were to sit down with him and talk about the problems you're facing in your life, he could literally hand you \$1 million, he could give you a new house, or he could sit down with Congress and get some new laws passed that would help you to always be able to succeed.

The cool part is that this man is so generous, he helps people out without having to even meet them or know them! When my son, Isaac, was born, he had medical problems. My parents flew from



Wisconsin to Florida with absolutely no clue where they were going to stay. This man and his family heard about our situation and, since they were gone, gave the entire mansion to my folks to live in while they were in Florida! They didn't know us, they didn't know my parents; they just knew that someone was in trouble and that they could help...and so they did!

My parents told me that the mansion was...incredible! It was huge, with tons of bedrooms, private rooms, bathrooms, kitchens – yep, “kitchens” plural! – and more. It was surrounded by gates, and the grounds around it were like a park! You could see all sorts of wildlife; beautiful, tropical flowers; and enjoy walking around in total safety and privacy. The mansion was like a museum, with collections of photos, autographs and room after room of amazing things! (It was so overwhelming, that my parents chose to stay in the “Guest House”, a building bigger than their own house, but not nearly as large as the mansion!)

Now I'm going back to Florida someday, and I would like to meet this family and thank them for helping us at a very tough time in our lives. I'm going to invite you along. When we get there, it's going to be like meeting a genie – this person who is so gracious and kind and will help you out with anything that you feel is wrong in your life! You need money for college? Done. Your family needs a new car? Done. You want to tour the world? Done. He's a nice guy and he wants to do good; so you only have to sit down, talk with him, and he's going to help you out! He even calls you up to see how you're doing and if you need anything for the trip and you respond with, “Yeah, whatever! I just want to see your house!”

We go to Florida, but all the way there you're talking about the mansion we're going to. I keep pointing out that the guy is pretty amazing, since he BUILT the mansion, but you don't care about the guy – you just want to tour his house! I tell you that this guy could help you out, but you don't care about that; you just want to see the pictures on the walls! I point out that you get to meet the guy IN the pictures, but you don't care about the guy!

We get there and the guy opens up his home and tries to give you a hug and tell you how glad he is to meet you. You duck under his arms and begin walking through his house, totally ignoring him.

What do you think his reaction to you would be?

A lot of people spend their time focused on “how great Heaven will be” instead of “how great God is”! By doing that, we miss the relationship we COULD have with a God who loves us. More than that, we miss out on the opportunities God puts in our lives. Does this mean that our lives would be perfect if we chase after God? Nope. It means that the pain we experience is less than the God we serve. And that does make a difference!

**In John 6:40 is it saying that when you die you're “asleep” until Jesus' second return and then you will go to Heaven; or do you go to heaven right after you die?**

All right, the best place to begin to answer this is by looking at John 6:40:

*“For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day.” - John 6:40 (NLT)*

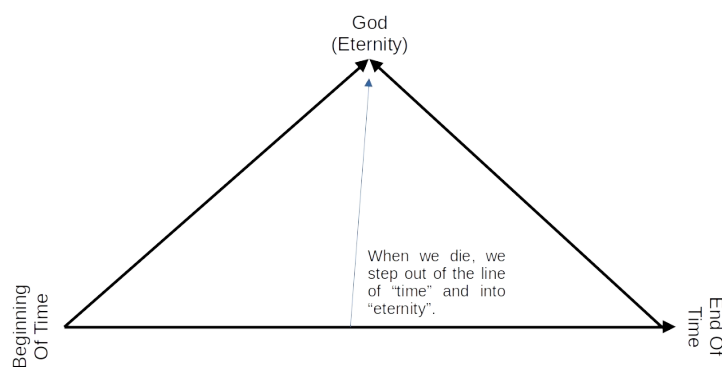
Within the context, Jesus is talking about being saved. In this, He tells people that we will all have eternal life and be raised up. But does it mean that we sleep first, or do we go right to Heaven?

What gets confusing is the fact that there IS a resurrection at some point where our bodies come back – that’s what Jesus is saying in John 6:40! Some people read that to mean that we will sleep until we’re called to wake up.

There are two possible ways to deal with this:

- First, we do sleep. Have you ever gone to sleep, just closed your eyes, and then someone woke you up? When you woke up, you thought you were asleep for just a couple of minutes, but it turned out the whole night had passed? If we’re dead, we may literally close our eyes and then open them at the resurrection, totally unaware of how much time passed.
- Second, we step out of time into eternity. Humans are bound by time; God isn’t. When we die, maybe we step into God’s view of the universe. Instead of needing to wait until God calls us, we automatically cross the “finish line”. In this case, no time passes for us while the rest of time passes for earth.

Is that second one confusing? Let me give you a drawing to try to help:



For me, I don’t believe that we sleep; instead, I believe that we go right to Heaven. Why? Because of something Jesus said while being crucified:

*But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”*

*And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” - Luke 23:40-43 (NLT)*

In here, we see that Jesus tells the man “today you will be with me in paradise”. No “sleeping”; you’re not stuck in the ground. After we die, we’re in Heaven.

Do I know if this is correct? Nope. I haven't died, yet, and most of the people in history who have died haven't come back to tell us how it works. I also realize that this doesn't fully explain John 6:40, but it's the best that I have!

### **Is it possible to lose your salvation?**

Okay, this one IS debated by people who study the Bible. While I could point you to a lot of other verses – Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 8:31-39, Jude 24 – and build an argument that way, I want to give you an object lesson, instead.

In John 18, we find this story:

*Simon Peter followed Jesus, as did another of the disciples. That other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, so he was allowed to enter the high priest's courtyard with Jesus. Peter had to stay outside the gate. Then the disciple who knew the high priest spoke to the woman watching at the gate, and she let Peter in. The woman asked Peter, "You're not one of that man's disciples, are you?"*

*"No," he said, "I am not."*

*Because it was cold, the household servants and the guards had made a charcoal fire. They stood around it, warming themselves, and Peter stood with them, warming himself.*

*Meanwhile, as Simon Peter was standing by the fire warming himself, they asked him again, "You're not one of his disciples, are you?"*

*He denied it, saying, "No, I am not."*

*But one of the household slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Didn't I see you out there in the olive grove with Jesus?" Again Peter denied it. And immediately a rooster crowed. - John 18:15-18, 25-27 (NLT)*

When Jesus rises from the dead, how does He treat Peter? Does He go up to Peter and say, "That's it! You've lost your salvation! Idiot! How dare you deny me? How dare you screw up like that?"

No, in John 21, Jesus says this:

*After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"*

*"Yes, Lord," Peter replied, "you know I love you."*

*"Then feed my lambs," Jesus told him. - John 21:15 (NLT)*

After questioning Peter, Jesus restores him! I would argue that if Jesus doesn't kick Peter out for his choices, we're pretty safe! By the way, my favorite quote on this is:

*“If I cannot do good works to get saved, then how can I do bad works to be unsaved?”*

That being said, if you're not living your life for the One you claim to follow, are you sure that you're a Christian..? (If you're not sure, check out Roman 10:9!)

**I've heard that all sins are equal. Is this true? If so, how can that be? A swear word = murder = molestation, etc.**

Wow! What a great question! Also, forgive me, but there seems to be a little...frustration...at this thought? (Maybe it's just me reading into the wording...) Anyhow, let's try to answer this for you.

To begin with, let's look at the first sin of the Bible, way back in Genesis 3:

*The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”*

*“Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. “It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”*

*“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”*

*The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. – Genesis 3:1-6 (NLT)*

So, what exactly IS the sin mentioned here? Is it eating a piece of fruit? No! It's Adam and Eve deciding that they wanted to be like God, to know everything, to decide what was “right” or “wrong”; in the end, they wanted God's throne!

Notice that Eve listens to the arguments from Satan and then decides that he's right, not God! Why? Because it matches what Eve wants to do! She takes her eyes off of God, puts them on her own desires, and **then** she sins.

Let's go to Romans 1 for our next text:

*But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

*Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds*

*became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. – Romans 1:18-23 (NLT)*

Right after these verses, Paul gives a laundry list of sins, ranging from arguing to murder! But what's the sin that starts all of these other sins? They took their eyes off of God, refused to acknowledge Him, and went their own way. In the end, they wanted God's throne!

With these verses in mind, let's go back to the question:

#### A swear word.

In Ephesians 5, we're told:

*Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. – Ephesians 5:4 (NLT)*

If someone swears after God tells us NOT to swear, that person has decided that their opinion is more important than God's! They take their eyes off of Him, put their focus on themselves, and then refuse to follow God's commands. Who have they decided is in charge at that time: God or them?

#### Murder

In Exodus 20:13, we're told:

*“You must not murder.” – Exodus 20:13 (NLT)*

Pretty cut-and-dried. But why would someone murder someone else? They want what the other person has! The other person hurt them! They're upset with the other person! They think it'll be fun! Whatever the reason, instead of focusing on God, they focus on...themselves. they then take the role of God by judging the other person as unworthy to live; and they follow it up by taking a life that never belonged to them! Who have they decided is in charge at that time: God or them?

#### Molestation

In Mark 9:42, we're told:

*“But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone hung around your neck.” – Mark 9:42 (NLT)*

Before we go on, I want to let you know that many theologians don't read this to mean molesting a child. Instead, they view it as causing a new believer to fall away from God. Because of that, let me give you a second verse – the very next verse, in fact:

*If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of hell with two hands. – Mark 9:43 (NLT)*

Molesting a child is about using a child for pleasure. Someone does this because they want to; because it makes them feel good. They ignore what God says, they treat a child as less than who God made them to be – they view the child as an object for their lust rather than a person created in the image of God – and they decide that what they want is more important than what God wants. Who have they decided is in charge at that time: God or them?

Are you seeing a trend here? In each case, I decide that God isn't final authority for the rules, that my desires are more important than His commands, and that God isn't serious about the consequences of my sins.

And speaking of consequences, let me show you what God says:

*For the wages of sin is death... - Romans 6:23a (NLT)*

Because our sin is a rebellion against a holy and perfect God, the consequences for all sin – any sin – is death. We deserve to die because we spit in God's face and went our own way.

But there IS another thing we need to consider here: the object of our rebellion.

If I got mad and slapped my wife, I may or may not go to jail, right? But if we're honest, I'm only going to be locked up a short time. Why? Because slapping my wife, in our society, wouldn't be viewed as a "big deal". (Not saying that's "right"; just saying it's "true".)

If I got mad and slapped a police officer, I'm probably going to jail for a longer time. In the eyes of our society, an officer holds a higher place than my wife. In fact, slapping them would be considered "assaulting a police officer" and so I'd be in jail for a while.

Finally, if I got mad and slapped the President of the United States, now things just got serious! At the very least, I WILL be tackled, handcuffed, and hauled off to prison for a Federal crime! In a worst case scenario, the Secret Service may actually shoot me...and it would be considered an appropriate response. Why? Because in our society the President is more important than a police officer.

The "sin" in each case is the same – I slapped someone in anger – but the penalty that I pay changes depending on who I slapped, right?

But what if I slapped a holy and perfect God? If He's the one who gave me life in the first place, does He have the right to take it? Certainly! Even more than that, because I rebelled against Him, does He have the right to remove me from His presence forever? Absolutely! I've decided I was more important, that He was less than me, and I treated Him as such...and the penalty for offending an eternal God is an eternal punishment!

In closing, though, I DO admit that this can be tough to understand from a human viewpoint. We can't give life, so murder is a worse crime. We can't "undo" someone being molested, so it's serious. Swearing may offend someone, but it's unlikely to leave lasting damage. Because of that, we put murder and molesting a child in a more serious category; while swearing is less important.

In God's eyes, though, are all sins the same? Absolutely! They're all attempts to put ourselves on His throne, and that's something God can't – God won't – allow!

**Barry's Note:** I debated exactly WHERE to put this question. The reason I finally settled on "Salvation" is because we need to be aware that God doesn't want our "better than"; we're not "saved" by doing "lesser sins". All sin IS sin and it separates us from God!

### **Just because you're baptized, does that mean you're going to Heaven?**

This, by the way, is a great question! I grew up in a church that taught this. Then, later on, I went to another church that taught something totally different. I was confused! How could two churches have two different answers? Then, one day, I was told to go back to the Bible and skip what the humans who made the churches might believe. In other words, don't take human answers for it; take God's!

After doing some research, I found two verses that seemed really important:

*For they don't understand God's way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God's way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God. - Romans 10:3-4 (NLT)*

And...

*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. - Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)*

Notice both of these passages are talking about how God, through Jesus Christ, has already paid our debt and made us right with God. In other words, it's not about what we do; it's about what we believe and, more importantly, WHO we believe in!

So, do you need to be baptized to be saved? No. Should you be baptized after you are saved? The Bible tells us "yes"; and, if you haven't been we can do a baptism service. If you want more information about it, be sure to talk to me afterward.

### **Someone was told that when someone close to you dies a star is made in the sky for them?**

That's a beautiful idea, but it's not in the Bible.

### **Somewhere in the Bible it says that children of parents that were never married "aren't children of God". What does that mean and does that mean I won't go to Heaven?**

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you for asking this question! Someone asked me this question a long time ago, and I told them that I didn't know of ANY verse that talked about this! Because you asked



me the question, though, it gave me a GREAT excuse to dive deep and see where this comes from.

And guess what? It's actually found in the Bible...sort of...(not really)! Check out Deuteronomy 23:2:

*“If a person is illegitimate by birth, neither he nor his descendants for ten generations may be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.” - Deuteronomy 23:2 (NLT)*

Does this seem like it matches the question? It really doesn't! When the Nation of Israel was going into the Promised Land, they were told by God that they could NEVER marry the people found there! (Groups like the Hittites, Philistines, etc. sometimes did some pretty terrible stuff, including burning their own children to death to honor one of their “gods”!)

Because of the difference in their beliefs, Israel was told to keep themselves “pure”; to not mix with the religions of the people already in the land. This verse says that if someone from Israel DID marry someone who was from the surrounding countries, they were not allowed to enter the tabernacle (their version of a church) for ten generations!

So, if your biological parents lived in Israel in about 4,000 B.C. and one of them was from the Nation of Israel and the other was a Moabite, then YOU could not step foot in their version of church... (You COULD still worship God, though!)

Other than that, the Bible says NOTHING about the children of people who aren't married.

Great question, though, and thank you for reminding me of this!

### **The Bible says that everyone has sinned, but what about the newborn babies that die without sinning? How does that work?**

I LOVE this question. Do you want to know why? Because I was challenged on what I believed by a teenager, and she convinced me that I was...wrong! Me? A guy with a degree in Theology? A guy who studies the Bible? Wrong? Yep!

Most of this comes down to how we interpret a single verse in the entire Bible: Psalm 51:5. (Go look up this song!) Anyhow, let me show you how different Bibles translate this:

*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. (NIV)*

*For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. (NLT)*

If these Bible translations are right, then we are sinners at CONCEPTION! That means that if a baby dies, they are sent to Hell! Pretty horrific, right? Well, what if I told you that these two Bibles actually did a poor job of translating the Hebrew? Let me show you the actual Hebrew words:

*“Behold in iniquity was I was brought forth and in sin conceived me my mother.” (HEB)*

Okay, according to this, who sinned? My mother! So, my mom sinned, not me. If we read it this way, then infants are NOT sinners at conception, which means that they must wait until they reach an age



where they can CHOOSE to sin! Until then, they are in a “state of grace”, which means that if they die, they go to Heaven.

By the way, if you want a copy of the answer I gave to the young lady who challenged me on this, please let me know! (It’s a lot longer, so I don’t usually run them off unless people want to see it!)

Also, just so you know, this MAY be controversial for some families and/or churches. If you disagree with me, please let me give you a copy of the document that I wrote and you can show me how I got my theology wrong! (You will NEVER offend me by teaching me something about God!)

### **What are you planning to do in...Heaven?**

The question was asked about the Millennial Kingdom / Eternity, so forgive me if I go for eternity! So, here’s what I would do:

- I would nap. (Hoping naps are still allowed, even if not needed.)
- I would make a list of at least 1,000 questions to ask God. (I have more than that.)
- I would go find God, stare at Him, and spend the next 1,000 years or so trying to wrap my head around the Trinity. (I don’t think I’ll understand God even in eternity!)
- When my brain reengaged, I would ask my questions. (I hope we get to do that!)
- Finally, I would ask for a tour of the universe so that God could show me all of the cool things that He put out there that we never discovered!
- Then I might nap again...

Please understand, I’m not actually being flippant or disrespectful. After 30+ years of ministry, it does wear on you. Don’t get me wrong, I LOVE what I do and wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world! But a nice long nap wouldn’t hurt me... I also really do hope that God will show us how He did things, even the ones we never saw!

Other than that, I want to spend as much time with Jesus as I possibly can!

### **What do you look like in Heaven?**

You look like...you! Let me show you a verse:

*Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. Peter exclaimed, “Lord, it’s wonderful for us to be here! If you want, I’ll make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”- Matthew 17:3-4 (NLT)*

Jesus goes up on a mountain with some of His disciples. All of a sudden, Moses and Elijah appear! Peter, not wasting any time, whips out the DNA sequencer and fingerprint test kits to try to figure out who the strangers are, right? Nope! In an instant, Peter KNOWS who they are, even though Moses died about 2,000 years before Peter was born; and Elijah was taken up to Heaven over a thousand years before Peter lived!

Because of that, we have to assume that we will see each other as we really are. We will, in some way, be recognizable to everyone around us. They will simply KNOW us at a glance.

### **What happened to those people who died before Jesus was born to forgive them?**

Do you want to know something quirky? I ALWAYS struggled with this when I was a teen. I finally asked a youth leader at my church and he said, “God just did it! Next question!” Needless to say, I wasn’t very satisfied with that answer!

So, let me share with you what I believe, based on what I read in the Bible. In the Book of Hebrews, we find these verses:

*Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. - Hebrews 1:1 (NLT)*

Based on this, before there was Jesus, God spoke to the people through individuals – called “prophets” – who He chose to give messages to. These people would then either act on the message – they would do what God said – or share the message – they would tell everyone around them.

One guy named “Abram” did what God told him to do, and we find this in Genesis 15:6:

*And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith. - Genesis 15:6 (NLT)*

Righteousness means “right standing” with God; in other words, you’re not in trouble with Him! So, what is it that made Abram right with God? Faith! He believed what God said and he did it! In the Old Testament, people who had faith in God, had right-standing (or “righteousness”) with Him, too!

But then, Hebrews goes on:

*And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is greater than their names. - Hebrews 1:2-4 (NLT)*

Okay, so SINCE the Old Testament, who do we have to put our faith in? Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

But, if you think about it, since Jesus IS God – welcome to the whole idea of “The Trinity” – our faith hasn’t changed. We still worship God, we still have faith in Him, but we’re focused on Jesus, God-in-the-flesh, who came to save us.

By the way, there ARE other arguments for this, depending on what church you go to. For me, it just seems to make sense to believe that we’re saved by faith both in the Old Testament and New Testament! Why? Because of two other verses in the New Testament:

*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a*

*gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. - Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)*

This is a great question, and I hope that I answered it for you!

### **What happens when we die?**

This is another one of those deep questions! In fact, it's SO deep that three different people wrote basically the same question! So, let's take this step by step, okay?

#### Step One: We die.

I know that seems to be obvious, but we should begin at the beginning, right? But there's another reason we need to talk about death, itself:

*And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him. - Hebrews 9:27-28 (NLT)*

According to the Bible, we get to die...once. (We're skipping stories about the medical community resuscitating people. Why? Because even though those bodies had stopped working, they weren't absolutely, totally dead! (As evidenced by the fact that they can be resuscitated!)

This also eliminates the idea of "reincarnation" which says that you get to live one life after another! Your born, you die, you get born again, etc. God tells us that we only get this one life and that's it!

So we die one time.

#### Step Two: Judgment

Next, we're told that after we die, we're judged. This judgment is pretty simple: Did you ask Jesus to take away your sins...or not? There are a couple of places that I could point to, but let's go for a description found in the Book of Revelations:

*And I saw a great white throne and the one sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up their dead. And all were judged according to their deeds. - Revelation 20:11-13 (NLT)*

Now some people argue that you just have to be "good enough" to get to Heaven. We'll skip the fact that lots of verses – including John 3:16-17, Hebrews 9:27-28, etc. – all say that salvation comes from faith in Jesus Christ. Instead, let me ask you a question:

### **How good is "good enough"?**

If you're trying to earn your salvation by being "good enough", the simple answer is...you're not.

None of us are! We can't be good enough to impress God because we've already been bad enough to walk away from the relationship with Him! Nothing we do after we've sinned the first time is going to make up for sinning the first time!

So, instead of trying to get to Heaven on your own, why not accept the gift that God freely gives us? If you want to do that, please ask a Counselor!

Anyhow, let's get back to the topic:

### Step Three: Rewards

We are judged and then we receive our reward. If you're a Christian, that means that we go to eternity in Heaven with God. What is that like?

*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." - Revelation 21:1-4 (NLT)*

I get to be face-to-face with God. All the old is gone! No more pain, no more sorrow, no more crying! Instead, I get to spend time on a new earth with an eternal God, surrounded by people who are saved from their sins...just like I am.

By the way, I hope that we can ask God questions when we see Him. I could spend a good part of eternity just asking Him why He did things the way He did; what it felt like to wake up after being resurrected from the dead; and why He loves me like He does. Oh, and I also hope that God let's me explore His creation! I'd love to have God give me a tour of the universe and explain what's out there!

So Heaven is beautiful, peaceful, all things are new, and we go back to the relationship with God that Adam and Eve threw away in the Garden of Eden. And all of this is a free gift from God, if we choose to believe in His Son, Jesus.

But what if you're not a Christian?

In Matthew 25:46, Jesus explains the two options this way:

*"And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life." - Matthew 25:46 (NLT)*

If we choose not to accept Jesus while on earth, we don't get a chance after we die. God offers us forgiveness now that we can carry through eternity; but once we've died, it's too late to receive that gift. For those who die without Jesus, they go to an eternity away from God; the Bible calls this "Hell".

Now, I have a slightly different view of Hell than others do. After a lot of research, I'm not sure I believe that Hell is a burning place of fire, like many pictures show it. Does the Bible talk about a place of fire? Sure. But it also talks about it being a place of "darkness" and that people will "gnash their teeth". But gnashing your teeth in Greek doesn't usually mean physical pain, like you would expect in a place of fire; instead, it means emotional pain.

From what I've come to believe, I think that Hell is simply a place of darkness removed from God's presence. We KNOW what we could have had, we've seen what Heaven would be like, and we are aware of what we're missing out on...for eternity.

More importantly, as I'm sitting in the dark, I'm alone with my thoughts. If I had to choose between an eternity where I could do nothing but think about all of my failures, all of my mistakes, and every time I hurt someone else or an eternity burning, I would sincerely choose the flames.

Why? Because I've spent a large part of my life trapped in my own head, struggling with terrible memories, hating myself, and not able to shake free of it until God helped me. The thought of living with that for eternity? I can't imagine a worse form of torture! And the worst part is that I will have done it to myself!

So, after we die, we live out the consequences of our choices here and now. Either we've chosen God and go to Heaven to be with Him; or we've chosen to reject God, and we go to Hell without Him. In either case, God is actually honoring us by allowing us to choose where we want to go...

I'm sorry if this answer is kind of...scary. My goal isn't to "scare you into Heaven"! Instead, I want you to know that you DO have a choice because God loves you enough to send His Son to die for your mistakes. And, if you choose Him, if you ask Jesus to forgive you, you get to spend eternity with an awesome, incredible, loving God!

What will you choose?

### **What if a really bad person truly repented? (For example, Hitler.)**

A long time ago, I taught a series in which we tried to define "good people" and "bad people". What we found is that when we talk about "good" and "bad", we mean it from our own viewpoint.

Someone who gives us money, we consider good; someone who punches us in the nose, we consider bad. But that's just our viewpoint! If they punch us in the nose because we're about to do something colossally stupid, then they're really being "good", even though we think that they're bad! (Confused yet?) Our viewpoint, what we think about them and their actions, determines good and bad for us!

God, on the other hand, doesn't actually need anything from us. There's nothing we can do to help Him – He's all-powerful, all-knowing and everywhere – so there's not much that a limited human can do for Someone like that! At the same time, and for the same reasons, there's no way we can hurt Him, either!

Because God sees us as we really are, because His view isn't based on what we can or can't do for Him, His view of "good" and "bad" is going to be perfect. To make it easy for us to understand, God

has a pretty way of figuring this out: if you live an absolutely perfect life and never make a mistake, you're in the "good" category; if you mess up – even one time – you're in the "bad" category. Simply, right? God doesn't worry about adding adverbs on to the description like "really bad"; that's a human thing. God says that one mistake, one time = bad!

So, if all of us make mistakes – and we do! – then we're all bad! By the way, God doesn't really call us "bad"; instead He says that we've sinned! We **MAKE** mistakes, not that we **ARE** mistakes! But God also says that our mistakes can be forgiven! Let me show you this:

*If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. - 1 John 1:8-10 (NLT)*

In other words, God tells us that if deny that we've ever made a mistake, we're just fooling ourselves. If we say, "I don't need God because I haven't done anything wrong!" then we're calling God a liar and we can't choose to follow Him.

But – and you really have to pay attention here! – God tells us that if we admit that we've done things wrong, if we feel sorry for the times we've hurt others and disobeyed God, if we're willing to apologize to God and others then He **MIGHT POSSIBLY** forgive us some day... Whoops! That's not what the verse says! ***It says that God WILL forgive us.***

So what does this have to do with Hitler? It means that we're spending too much time focusing on other people's sins and not enough on our own. It means that we've missed out on the fact that in God's eyes even one mistake is one mistake too many! It also means that we're not thankful enough for God's forgiveness if we're worried that He would forgive other people, too!

Would God forgive Hitler if he had genuinely felt sorry and asked for it? Certainly! God was even willing to forgive me for all of the times I've screwed up! And to me, that's all that really matters...

### **What if what you believe will happen to you happens to you when you die?**

Before you read the answer, re-read the question a couple of times. ☺

Actually, we've had a few questions like this. People were saying they like the idea of reincarnation, simply falling asleep, everyone going to Heaven, and other stuff like that. You know what? I agree! Wouldn't it be wonderful that if you thought you would get to Heaven, you would? Wouldn't it be great if you screwed up in this life there's another chance? Of course this would be great! Unfortunately, the Bible has something different to say. Let's take a look at God's Word:

*And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment... - Hebrews 9:27 (NLT)*

If the Bible is true then there are no "second chances" after we die. We don't get a "respawn" option, we don't get a do-over, and we don't just end. Eternity starts when this life ends and the choice we made here – to follow God or not – is going to determine how that works.

Next, what if my idea of Heaven is different than yours? Whose Heaven wins out? Are there an infinite number of Heavens? For some religions, Heaven involves great rewards, some involve singing, some reward only men, others reward only those who are poor. Who gets to decide what Heaven looks like?

In this case, we end up with Heaven being a place that's just for me! Kind of sad to spend eternity alone. More than that, if I get to go to my version of Heaven and you cease to exist, it kinda sucks to be you. Also, if you're reincarnated, you get to spend eternity working on "getting it right" while someone who is a mass-murderer gets to enjoy their own version of Heaven. Does that sound fair?

Finally, we have to look at authority. Who do we know that has died and then rose again? If we could find someone who's done that, they could tell us what exists when life is over, right? Let's take a look at something:

*...For Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. - Romans 8:34b (NLT)*

Jesus claims to have died – and a bunch of people saw Him die; to have risen again from the dead – and a bunch of people saw Him alive again; and then He entered Heaven – where a bunch of people, both living and dead, have seen Him. If that's true, then we're stuck with only one reality and only one way to get to that reality: through Jesus.

Look at the claims of other religions, if you want to. Find out who returned from the dead to speak about the afterlife and decide if you believe them. But don't base your faith on a "wish" or because it's a nice thought; instead, find your faith like the Bible writers did:

*We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. - 1 John 1:1 (NLT)*

They were convinced because of what they had seen and heard, not just because of what they wanted to be true.

### **What prevents us (humans) from sinning in Heaven if Lucifer was able to?**

It's not often that I use this phrase, but: "I don't know." The Bible doesn't tell us what changes. My personal thoughts on the subject? The reasons we won't sin are:

1. God is amazing.  
When we see God, face-to-face, we won't have any desire to disobey Him.
2. Jesus died for us.  
When we see Jesus and find out what it was like for Him to leave Heaven, come to earth, live as a human, suffer, be tortured, and die in our place, we will never want to hurt Him again. (I think that if we could see how our sins were paid for by Jesus, we would never have any desire to sin again.)



3. The people around us are made perfect.

People have looked at me and called me ugly; in Heaven, when we get to see everyone as they really are, why would we ever want to insult them and insult God for making them? Why would we carry the greed that hurt us in our lives? Why would we want to make someone else cry, suffer, or feel alone?

I can't prove any of these, but I do believe them to be true. (By the way, no one has EVER asked me this question, so thank you for giving me the chance to sit and think about what I believe and why I believe it. It's good when these old gray cells of mine are made to work!)

### **What would've happened if Jesus didn't die on the cross for us?**

There are two different parts to this answer.

The first is that someone has to die for sins. Since their our sins, logically we should be the ones to die, right? Let me show you how this works:

*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. - Romans 3:23 (NLT)*

So we've all done things wrong, we've all sinned. And what's the price for sin?

*For the wages of sin is death... - Romans 6:23a (NLT)*

So someone has to die for sin. Logically it should be us, right? We sinned. We rejected God. We should pay the price for what we've done wrong. But check this out:

*When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. - Romans 5:6-8 (NLT)*

It's our sin that the problem. We deserve to die for it. But Jesus steps down and dies in our place. The payment for sins is made, right? Someone has to die, and Jesus becomes the "Someone" who dies.

And get WHY He dies. It's not because of how amazing we are; it's because of how amazing He is. He loves us more than we will ever know! And even when we were spitting in God's face, demanding our own way, and disobeying Him; Jesus dies for us.

Then, let me show you one other set of verses:

*If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved... For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." - Romans 10:9-10, 13*



(NLT)

If we ask Jesus to forgive us, if we believe in Him, then we are saved. That's all that's required.

But if Jesus didn't die, then the debt is still owed. Someone still has to die...and that's us. That's what happens if God doesn't save us!

Even more important is this verse:

*And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. - 1 Corinthians 15:14 (NLT)*

If Jesus just died, then we're still going to die. Why? Because a lot of people claimed to be able to save others...and they died. However, Jesus rises from the dead to prove that what He said was true!

If you have to believe in someone, believe in the guy who came to life again! Just sayin'.

### **When we die and go to heaven what will we look like? Will we be the age that we died?**

Um... We don't know? The Bible doesn't say what, exactly, we will look like. We know that Jesus LOOKED like Jesus after He rose from the dead. He had the scars and marks from life, but they weren't disfiguring, they were marks of honor. (I had a college professor who believed that all those who were tortured or killed for the cause of Christ would wear the scars in Heaven as a badge of honor for what they went through on earth. I don't know if I agree, but it's a cool thought and matches the body that Jesus has.)

These bodies will not be limited by space and time (Jesus appeared and disappeared at will). What age will we be? That's tough, too; again, the Bible doesn't say. Unfortunately, the best I've got is that we won't decay; we won't have injuries, aches and pains; we won't have birth defects or disabilities.

### **Where are Heaven and Hell?**

And the correct answer is...I have no idea... Did you know the Bible never mentions where Heaven and Hell are located? (Cartoons show the location of Heaven and Hell all the time, but I'm not sure they're a reliable source!)

Some people think that Ephesians 4:9 says that Jesus descended into the bowels of the earth – into Hell – and that means Hell is down below. The literal Greek says that Jesus went into the lower parts of the ground; but this should NOT be taken to mean that Hell is “down”.

At the same time, some people think that Acts 1:9 – where Jesus gets taken up in a cloud – means that Heaven is somewhere above our heads. Again, the Greek simply says that Jesus was “lifted up”. Does that mean Heaven is above our heads? Nope.

Unfortunately this is one of those questions that we will find out the answer to after we die.

## Where did Old Testament people go if they died while [a] sinner before Jesus came?

Okay, I've answered this (somewhat) before, when I was asked, "What happened to those people who died before Jesus was born to forgive them?" Since then, I've had a few people ask for more information. Because of that, we'll go for the "more than complete" answer! To do this, there are a few options that we need to explore to try to answer this:

First, they all went to Hell. If you take a hard view of this topic, then because Jesus was not around, yet to pay for their sins, they went to Hell. The Apostle's Creed implies this when it says "[Jesus] descended into Hell". The reason for the visit? To retrieve Abraham, Moses, Noah, David and all of the other Old Testament figures who had died before He came.

Second, they simply were asleep. This idea comes from Jesus' use of the phrase; as well as verses like 1 Corinthians 15:51 which says, "...*we will not all sleep...*" From this standpoint, we sleep until we are called upon for the judgment.

Third, the righteous go to Heaven to be with God while the sinners go to Hell. Now part of this depends on a passage that has been used to support other arguments, too:

*Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. - Luke 16:19-23*

If you read this passage in Luke, you find that after both the rich man and the poor man die, they are both conscious; in a different location; and one faces healing while the other faces torment. Since Jesus is the one telling this story, it seems likely that He's describing what actually happens, right?

Well...not exactly! You see, a Jewish man explained to me that this passage has NOTHING to do with "Heaven or Hell". Instead, Jesus is yelling at the Nation of Israel because of their unfaithfulness to God! So, if that's the case, this has NOTHING to do with the question we're discussing.

However, for the sake of argument, let's assume that it DOES talk about what happens when we die! If that's the case, where it gets sticky is that some people argue that both of them end up in the "place of the dead", but that it's split by a great divide. Abraham and the righteous dead are still dead, but they're waiting for the Messiah; the tormented spirits are still dead, but they're not ever going to get out. I have a problem with that interpretation, but the argument is out there. I'm not going to deal with that scenario here.

But, let's take a look at some other passages:

### The Testimony of Enoch

*When Enoch was 65 years old, he became the father of Methuselah. After the birth of*

*Methuselah, Enoch lived in close fellowship with God for another 300 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Enoch lived 365 years, walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him. - Genesis 5:21-24 (NLT)*

The Bible makes it pretty clear that there are none that are righteous – in other words no human has made it through life without sinning. However, Enoch is a man that is trying to follow closely after God and, as a result, He is taken by God. However, this is all BEFORE Jesus comes to die for his sins, so the question becomes where did God take Enoch?

If God took Enoch to Hell to wait for Jesus' death, then this is NOT a reward! If God took Enoch and put him to sleep, then Enoch misses out on a relationship with both God and his family. Again, not a reward. If God takes Enoch to Heaven, then this is a reward!

### The Testimony of Abram

*And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith. - Genesis 15:6 (NLT)*

The phrase “righteousness” literally means “right standing”. But Abram died long before Jesus arrived on the scene, so how could he have right standing with God? If he's free from guilt before God, how could that be? Also, if Abram is free from guilt, how can God send him to Hell? It doesn't make sense. “Hey Abram,” says God, “you're innocent. Oh, and by the way, I need to send you to Hell until my Son shows up to set you free...”

In this verse (and others) we see that he's given his righteousness from God because of his faith. In other words, he's saved by his faith; just like believers in the New Testament are. (See Ephesians 2:8-9.)

### The Testimony of Elijah

*As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. - 2 Kings 2:11 (NLT)*

Just like Enoch, Elijah doesn't even die; he's simply taken up to Heaven! Again, like Enoch, if Elijah is taken straight to Hell or sent to sleep, that doesn't make much sense to consider it a reward! Even more than that, it directly violates what this verse says – it says Elijah is taken to Heaven! So, it seems like Heaven is a real place and Elijah is allowed to enter in immediately, despite the fact that he lived 1,000 years before Jesus came to die for his sins!

Elijah's story goes one step further. In Matthew 17, Jesus and some of His Disciples go up onto a high mountain and Moses and Elijah also appear. Does this mean that God woke them up or dragged them back out of Hell to appear in this place at this time? Seems unlikely...

## The Testimony of Solomon

*For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. - Ecclesiastes 12:7 (NLT)*

Okay, Ecclesiastes is a tough book and is rather depressing! But this passage from Solomon seems to indicate that when we die our soul goes back to God. If that's true, either: (a) God is in Hell; (b) God is in the place where the spirits are sleeping; or (c) God is in Heaven. Based on that, I think the likeliest interpretation is that God is in Heaven.

## The Testimony of Jesus

*One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!" But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." - Luke 23:39-43 (NLT)*

In our final example, I want to go back to the words of Jesus. The situation is that Jesus has been crucified and is dying. One of the criminals beside Jesus didn't believe Him and spent his dying breaths mocking Him; the other knows he's a sinner and asks Jesus to forgive him. Jesus' response? *"...Today you will be with me in paradise."*

Apparently Jesus didn't realize that He first needed to descend into Hell, retrieve the lost souls, bring them back up to Heaven and then meet up with the criminal... Or, Jesus knew that after death, those who had faith would stand in Heaven.

In closing, there are a lot of other examples I could bring out, but I just wanted to give you the start of the argument. The important thing to remember here is that, in the end, it doesn't really matter... That may seem like a strange thing to say, but think about this, if Old Testament people went to:

- ...Hell and had to wait to be rescued, that's already happened.
- ...Sleep, they don't know anything until they wake up in God's presence.
- ...Heaven, then they experienced God first-hand immediately upon death.

At no time and in no way does this question have anything to do with "salvation" because, in the end, all three of these scenarios end up with the Old Testament believers in Heaven. The only thing this question is dealing with is what happened to them between death and Jesus' death and resurrection.

All-in-all, this is a great question. Unfortunately, it's also one that I don't think we will truly know the answer to until we reach Heaven. What I've given you is my opinion, based on my research, so take it for what it's worth!

**Why did God choose sacrifices to cleanse our sin? Couldn't He have chosen**

## something else?

This is a GREAT question and it pushed me to challenge my theology. The first question I asked was not: “Couldn’t He have chosen something else?” My question was: “Was there a reason that God had to choose sacrifices in the first place?” To my surprise, there IS a reason God chose sacrifices, and that comes down to a couple of verses:

*Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person. - Genesis 2:7 (NLT)*

God creates us in Genesis by “getting His hands dirty” and forming us from the dust. Then He breathes His breath into our lungs and we become a living being – both body AND soul!

Now, fast-forward a few thousand years and you find this:

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. - Romans 6:23 (NLT)*

The cost of our sin is the fact that we have to give back to God our life. It makes sense though, doesn’t it? Let me break this down for you:

1. God gives us our life. (It’s God’s gift to us, not our gift to ourselves.)
2. We reject God, go our own way, and sin.
3. We have to give the gift of life back to God because it isn’t ours.

When Adam and Eve sin in Genesis 3, death begins. Adam and Eve grow old and die...just like we all do. Even worse, if we never repent – feel sorry for our sins and turn back to God – then we die spiritually, as well. Death is all bound up in sin, which is what Romans 6:23 is saying!

Now, in the Old Testament, God sets up a sacrificial system. Instead of you having to die for your sins, another dies in your place. It’s a costly transaction, it’s gruesome, and it reminds us of the price for our rebellion: death. (We always think of the Temple as a beautiful place, but on days of sacrifice it would have been a charnel house filled with blood, dead animals, and stench!)

Then, we find this:

*When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. - Romans 5:6-11 (NLT)*

So now let's revisit our list:

1. God gives us our life. (It's God's gift to us, not our gift to ourselves.)
2. We reject God, go our own way, and sin.
3. We have to give the gift of life back to God because it isn't ours.
4. Jesus comes and gives His life, instead.
5. We no longer owe our life and can go back to our relationship with God.

God HAD to choose sacrifices – a life for a life – until the final sacrifice, His Son Jesus, could finish it once and for all.

### **Why did God have to die?**

This is probably the most important question in all of Christianity. It's the main idea of the Bible AND it's the whole point of history! (That's kind of a big statement and, if you want to know more, we can talk about it!)

The first thing you have to understand is something called "sin". Sin is an archery term that literally means "to miss the mark". In other words, I shot for a target and missed. But what was the target we were shooting for? In Romans 3:23 we're told:

*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. - Romans 3:23 (NLT)*

In other words, God created us to be in a relationship with Him. To do that, though we can NEVER make a single mistake! We can't tell a lie, we can't gossip about others, we can't fight, we can't be selfish, we can't do...anything wrong...EVER! Why? Because God is perfect; He never sins.

So, God's standard for us, the thing that He requires, is perfection. I don't know about you, but I'm certainly NOT perfect! I've missed the mark! And by the way, if you miss the target by two inches and I miss it by two feet, who failed worse? Well, according to God, it doesn't matter! If you miss, you miss. Two inches? Two feet? There's no difference because we both failed!

Now, there's another verse we need to look at:

*For the wages of sin is death... - Romans 6:23a (NLT)*

The price for sin, the penalty for missing the mark even by the smallest amount? It's death. It's being separated from God for eternity. It's missing out on a relationship with the greatest Friend you could ever know! That's the price.

Now, we have a HUGE problem! If we've all chosen to sin – and we all have – and if the price for our sin – any sin – is death, how do we fix it? How do we humans undo the problem we've created? It's like taking a towel, dunking it into thick mud, and then trying to use it to clean the existing mud off of a piece of glass! We can smear it around, but we can't ever get it clean. Why? Because we're using something dirty to try to remove the dirt, right?

Someone has to die to pay the price for our sins. Because of that, our only hope is to find someone who can be born, who can live a perfect life, who never sins, and then get them to die in our place!

Oh, and that's exactly what the Bible says happened:

*... but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. - Romans 6:23b (NLT)*

We screwed up, it was our choice to walk away from God. Because we missed the mark, we needed to die. But God sent His Son, Jesus, to die in our place! He took the punishment we deserved, He paid the price we couldn't, and He made a way for us to return to God!

If Jesus didn't die for us, then we could never stand before God. But, if we believe in Jesus, if we ask Him to forgive us, then we're given the gift of being made right with God and getting to spend eternity in Heaven with Him!

That's why God had to die.

Now one other question phrased this question a little differently. In it, they asked, "Why did Jesus die on the cross?" The reasons for Jesus to die we've just talked about.

Why did Jesus die on the cross? Because, at that time, it was considered the most terrible way to die. It was painful, you suffered a long time, and it was considered the ultimate humiliation. Even more than that, anyone who was crucified was considered "cursed". (Galatians 3:13)

This all fits into the idea that Jesus took the curse for our sins. It also fulfills the prophecy in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 which says:

*"If someone has committed a crime worthy of death and is executed and hung on a tree, the body must not remain hanging from the tree overnight. You must bury the body that same day, for anyone who is hung is cursed in the sight of God. In this way, you will prevent the defilement of the land the LORD your God is giving you as your special possession." - Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (NLT)*

Jesus became the One who is cursed for our sins so that we can be set free.

Oh, and by the way, it wasn't enough that Jesus DIED for our sins! Lots of people throughout history have claimed to be the Son of God...and a lot of them have died. But, according to history, only One actually rose from the dead to prove what they said! Care to guess Who that was?

**Why did God have to send His Son to save us? Couldn't there have been another way?**

I've dealt with part of this question already, so we're going to go for a shorter answer. (If you want more, come find me!)

In Genesis 2:15-17, God says this:



*The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.” - Genesis 2:15-17 (NLT)*

This is the first choice for humans in the Bible. Adam and Eve can: (a) live eternally in paradise, walking with God in the Garden of Eden; or (b) disobey God, eat the fruit, and then die. And Adam and Eve chose...wrong. (Before you get upset with them, have you ever sinned? If so, then don't assume you would have passed this test, either!)

So now you have a situation where someone HAS to die for the sin committed! Adam and Eve will die physically, but they're also going to die spiritually, eternally separated from God! This leads us to another simple choice: (a) we all die and go to Hell because we've all rebelled against God; or (b) we find someone who has NEVER sinned and talk them into dying in our place!

If a perfect person dies when they didn't have to, then their death takes the place of mine! It's a swap, if you will: that perfect person dies for my mistakes, and I get to live the life they should have had.

And that's what Jesus did for us:

*When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. - Romans 5:6-9 (NLT)*

So, the only option was a trade. Think about this If God said:

- “Well, I said you would die but I didn't really mean it!” then He's a liar.
- “Well, I said sin has a consequence, but I'm not going to enforce it!” then He's not just.
- “Well, you rejected Me, but I'm going to force you to come back!” then He's not loving.

God had to pass the sentence on us to be God...and then He paid the price for our mistakes because He's a loving God!

I hope that helps!

### **Why does Hitler go to Heaven after 12 months?**

Wow! This one fired up a LOT of you! Before I answer this, however, please understand what I did say, *“According to SOME of the world's religions, Hell is only a temporary place and all who disobeyed “god” in those religions only spend SOME time in Hell. It's not permanent. In THOSE religions, even Hitler would only spend up to 12 months in Hell before he went to Heaven.”*

What I did NOT say was, “As a Christian, Hell is a temporary place and Hitler is in Heaven right now.”



Again, we're dealing with rules made up by humans. The people who created these religions may have claimed to SEE God, but none of them claimed to BE God, like Jesus did. These people wanted some sort of punishment for people who do bad things; and judging by your reactions, you agree with them! We all want to see "bad people" punished; we just want to make sure we're not one of those "bad people", right?

If the other religions are right, then Hell is temporary and Hitler, John Wayne Gacy (a serial killer). and any other "bad person" in history only had to spend a short time in Hell and now they're waiting to hang out with us in Heaven. Does that seem fair?

Jesus says that Heaven and Hell work very differently than that:

*"And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life." - Matthew 25:46 (NLT)*

Jesus says the punishment is for eternity. How long does eternity last?

If Jesus is right, then the only question that remains is, "How good is good enough?" What level of goodness do I have to reach before I'm guaranteed to go to Heaven? The Bible has an answer for that:

*For the wages of sin is death... - Romans 6:23a (NLT)*

In other words, one sin, one time, is enough to keep us from Heaven. Have you ever told a lie? Have you ever hit someone? Ever opened a magazine or looked at a website that you shouldn't have? Ever talked about someone behind their back? Guess what? The price of that is...death. Pretty harsh, right? Let me explain it this way:

You are standing on the edge of a very deep canyon that you need to get across. You size up the distance and, being a pretty good jumper, you think you can make it. You move back, get a running start and then leap. Now let me ask you this: are you better off if you missed making the jump by one foot or six feet?

The answer: neither! If you fell one thousand feet onto the rock below, it doesn't matter how much you missed the jump by; all that matters is you missed the jump!

Jesus knew that we were going to miss. How do I know it? The Bible tells me in the rest of the verse:

*...but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. - Romans 6:23b (NLT)*

Jesus came down and died for my sins. Someone had to die, Jesus chose to do it, instead. If I believe He died for me, if I ask Him to forgive me, then He creates a bridge to get me to the other side. I don't have to "jump"; I simply have to trust God and let Him take care of it for me.

### **Why does it even matter what I believe?**

There are so many ways I can answer this and I'm not even sure which way to go!

I could go “old-school” on you and preach like they did in the 1700s about how everyone deserves Hell. I could go “new-school” on you and preach about God's love. I could go “Billy Graham” on you and talk ask, “What are you going to do with God tonight?” I could go “David Wilkerson” on you and tell you how much I love you and would die for you.

There are so many ways to say it, so many appeals to make, so many words I can use. But tonight, I won't...

What I will ask you is simply one question: Why?

- If your life could be better, why would you not choose it?
- If you need a friend, why wouldn't you accept one?
- If you feel lonely and alone, why not reach out to someone who is always there for you?
- If you don't know what love is, why not experience it?
- Finally, and most important of all, if you aren't even sure God is real, why not find out?

I cant decide for you. I can't live your life for you. I can't protect you from pain. I can't heal your hurts. To be honest, I can't promise you I won't fail you. I'm human. God isn't...

So why not reach out to Him?

Maybe tonight, it's time for you to think about giving your life to God. I want everyone to bow their heads. You may be sitting here tonight saying, “God? Maybe I want to give you a try.” If that's the case, then say repeat after me:

*God. I want to believe in you. I want to try you. I want you to be in charge of my life. I need something better; I need You. Please forgive me for the things that I've done wrong. Help me to be a better person. Help me to follow you. Thank you for loving me. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

By the way, if you prayed that tonight, be sure to tell one of the adults. We're not going to be creepy about it; we just want to know so we can pray for you.

### **Will I share a house with my family in Heaven?**

I guess my response is: Do you want to? The Bible doesn't say exactly how the housing situation is going to work out. There are two views on Heaven, one has a Bible verse to back it up and the other is...a guess!

The guess says that we will all have mansions of our own, live separately; and that each person's house will be based on the amount of good deeds they did on earth! (Remember, being “good” doesn't get you to Heaven!) If this is the case, then the more we serve God, the bigger and brighter our mansion is. For this viewpoint, however, you also NEED to remember that a shack in Heaven is better than an eternity in Hell!

The second view says that we will all live together...somehow... This is what Jesus told His disciples:

*There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. - John 14:2-3 (NLT)*

If this is really what Heaven is like, we all get to have our own rooms in God's house, live with God (and Jesus), and hang out with each other. We're not separated from each other, no one is treated any better (or worse), and God is the focus, not our "good works".

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