

# Heaven and Hell

Every now and then you will hear someone expound on the meaning of heaven and hell and soft-pedal the interpretation and meaning

according to their own personal philosophy. Three scenarios that will hopefully inspire some further thinking on this subject are now given.

**Scenario1:** On a monastic retreat a learned and elderly monk kind of shocked us listeners when he said:" the longer I live the more I think that heaven and hell are the same place!" He followed with a simple example. Imagine two persons being shipwrecked and surviving on a deserted island and while there was plenty of food it consisted only of bananas with one person loving bananas while other hating them: it was a kind of heaven for one and at the same time a hell for the other.

My perspective on this is to consider the heavenly Jerusalem with great light in the center of this eternal haven with a vast area of increasing darkness proceeding from the center outwards. Everyone arriving is greeted at the narrow gate with an embrace from Jesus, an encounter in which his love, compassion, kindness and holiness permeate the meeting and if these virtues were practiced in this life the encounter will joyfully resonate with Jesus; but if these virtues were not practiced the encounter will impact as something unfamiliar and very uncomfortable causing the person to simply move away and back off into the darkness by their own

volition. The way a person lives life on earth will result in their own judgment of whether they remain in the heavenly light or move into the darkness of hell. *And if your light is darkness, how deep will the darkness be!*

(Matt 6:23b)



**Scenario2:** Regardless of personal beliefs many believe the spirit of man is eternal and lives on when we pass from this life but what happens in this next state seems to have a lot of different opinions. Let us assume all these living spirits arrive in this new and unique spiritual dimension. The interaction between them can be quite different since the Christian following Jesus will receive a new and resurrected body and their interactions with each other will be similar to what we experience at present. *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will bring your mortal bodies to life also, through his Spirit dwelling in you.* (Romans 8:11). The others, without such a body, will exist in spirit not being able to interact in their form even though they may see, hear but are not seen or heard. Clearly this would be a hell in eternity.



**Scenario3:** Imagine a space explorer who found a planet where human life could exist without the usual aging. Returning, his first thought is to share this wonderful place with earth's inhabitants but upon more reflection he decides it might be best to be somewhat discriminatory otherwise the same earthly attitudes would only be repeated and he further realizes there are many kinds of people he would not like to spend eternity with. Perhaps, he thinks, I need to formulate an application, but what should the questions be????? What kinds of questions would you ask? But even then, he thinks, we know people often say one thing but then act otherwise; paying lip service (Mark 7:6) is simply not enough. Some people are obvious in their malicious speech and *ignite much malice, its fire is kindled by hell*. (James 3:5-9). Even Jesus says many, who were not truly with me, will call to me. "Lord, Lord" and I will say, "I do not know you."



So where is this heaven? Our heavenly Father has such a place and he sent us his Son as an example to show us "the way" we are to follow. The application is ongoing in the life we live where we do our best to conform to his image, to the love he expressed in his cross and resurrection, and to his love for the Father and man. Jesus himself mentions "paradise" and "Gehenna", analogs of heaven and hell; the first to the man crucified along himself who said of



Jesus, "this man has done nothing wrong", with Jesus responding, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43) and the second in a warning to be aware of those who can cast into



Gehenna where both body and soul can be destroyed. Gehenna was thought of as the fiery dumping ground of trash just outside a city.

One of the most brilliant scientific and mathematical minds of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was Blaise Pascal whose life dramatically changed after a mystical experience with light on an evening when he was contemplating the meaning of infinity. He then left his normal life and went to a monastery to meditate upon God. He is famous for a book called *Pensees*, originally written in French, and for his "Great Wager" about God. Paraphrased it offers a pragmatic reason for believing in God, namely, the potential reward of eternal life is infinitely great and that not believing loses so great a prize.

The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man,  
to see if there be one who is wise and seeks God.

(Psalm 14:2)

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