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### HEAVEN OR HELL? IT'S OUR CHOICE

You and I live in time: minutes, days, years. God lives beyond time in a realm called eternity. God sees past, present and future altogether. I assume that is how he is able to give prophecies about the future to prophets.

In Psalm 22, written by King David about 950 years before Jesus was born, David describes many details about the day Jesus was crucified:

Vss. 7-8: "They sneer and shake their heads, saying 'If the Lord loves him so much, let the Lord save him.'"

Vs. 14: "My life is poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint."

Vs. 17: "An evil gang closes in on me, they have pierced my hands and feet."

Vs. 18: They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing."

God saw all these things before he created the universe. But he does not program or control the decisions people make. He has given us free will, freedom to make every decision during our lives.

One of the reasons that God created time, I believe, was in order to give people many opportunities to choose him.

After people die, they move beyond time and enter eternity. According to the Bible, no one ceases to exist.

God lives in a place called Heaven (over 400 Scriptures). There are people who live with him. They have entered what the Bible calls eternal life. During their brief time on earth, they chose to live with God forever.

The majority of people choose to spend eternity in hell. Jesus said, "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) Jesus also said that hell is a place of darkness where there is "weeping and

wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 28:30) And Jesus said that we should be willing to pay any price to make sure that we go to heaven. (Matt 18)

Can we be sure we are going to heaven?

According to the Bible, we can. 1st John 5:13 says, "These things were written so that you may know you have eternal life." "These things" refers to the little book of 1st John. And the first chapter of 2nd Peter also gives us a list so that we can see if we are on the path to Heaven. Basically, the Bible tells us that there are three tests: (1) the test of belief in Jesus Christ (2) the test of obedience to his teachings (3) the test of love.

### WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

#### **1. GOD IS GOOD**

Psalm 119:68 addresses God and says, "You are good, and you do only good." Note the sequence. God's good actions flow naturally out of his nature.

1st John 1:5 - "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." What a statement! There is no darkness in God whatsoever. "Well," someone might say, "why was there a Holocaust, why do people get cancer?" Well, this is not Heaven, it is a place of testing. And there is a devil, and people often blame God for something the devil has done. And there is human sin and its consequences.

"But if God is good, why did he create a devil and hell at all?" But God did not create the devil, he created Lucifer, a beautiful arch-angel and gave him free will. And God created hell for the devil and his demons, not for men. (Matthew 25:41) And it was God's decision to create man in his image.

As you know, we did not get a vote about being born. If you hate your life and you hate God because he created you, that is your choice. But I am so thankful that God created me and that I am going to Heaven when I die - not because of my excellent performance (Ha!) but because of God's loving decision to send his Son to die for my sins.

Recently my granddaughter and her husband got a new Chevrolet SUV. Can you guess where they

obtained this new car? What happened was that one day the parts of that car suddenly “appeared” in their garage - the radiator, axle, motor, tires, body, transmission, seats, etc. Over 25,000 parts just “happened,” and then they groaned and struggled and slowly assembled themselves into an auto.

Actually, I made that up, but a lot of people believe that the universe just “happened,” that the stars and galaxies just “appeared,” and that goo and worms gradually assembled themselves into men and women. The Bible declares, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) Doesn’t that make more sense?

In Exodus 33:18, Moses asked God to show him his glory (the very essence of God). “The Lord replied, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you.’” God’s glory, his essence, is his goodness, his forgiveness, kindness, and patience.

## **2. GOD IS JUST**

In Isaiah 45, God asks, “Who made all these things long ago? Was it not I, the lord? For there is no other God but me, a just God and Savior, there is none but me.” God is just, God is righteous. That means he always does right things, he is ultimately fair and keeps his promises. In Romans chapter 1, Paul writes that “Through everything God made, his invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature- can be clearly seen.” They are seen both internally and externally through our conscience and through the creation.

God is available to us, all we have to do is look for him. “If you search for me with your whole heart you will find me.” ( Jeremiah 29:13) “Everyonewho seeks finds, and to everyone who knocks the door will be opened.” ( Matthew 7:8)

## **3. GOD IS LOVE**

“Anyone who does not love does not know God for God is love.” (1st John 4:8) “God is love and all who love live in God and God lives in them.” (1st John 4:16) “For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” ( John 3:16)

All of us have had difficult, painful experiences in this life, but you can be certain that none of your pains will be wasted. God loves you and wants you to go to Heaven.

Turn to the only God who can give you peace

and security. Say, “ Lord, I repent for doubting your goodness and justice and loving nature. I don't want to go to hell. I choose to believe in Jesus Christ, and I repent of all my sins.. I turn the reins of my life over to you and trust you to guide my life. Thank you, Lord.”

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## **MOUTH-TO-MOUTH RESUSCITATION**

When I was pastor of The First Methodist Church in Loveland, Colorado, in the 1970s, I was trying to learn how to play golf. I played at least once a week, and one day we heard people hollering on an adjacent hole. A man had collapsed. We ran over to try to help. The man was in his 50’s. This was before cell phones, so someone went to the clubhouse for help and to call an ambulance. The man started turning blue. His wife screamed, “Help him, he's dying!” We all looked at each other.

Finally, I decided I would give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. This was in the era when that was the treatment described in the media. I wasn't trained to do it, but I got down, held the man's nose, put my mouth over his mouth, breathed into his lungs several times, took a breath, and did it again and again. I thought that help would never come. I have a low gag-reflex and thought, “I’m going to throw up!” After 10 or 12 minutes which seemed like an hour, a cart came from the clubhouse with oxygen and took over. Shortly after that an ambulance came. The man died. We learned that he had a massive coronary and nothing could have revived him.

On the way home from the golf course I gagged and gagged until I dry heaved. That kept up until late that night and for several subsequent days. It still makes me sort of nauseous to think about it. It was one of the most disgusting experiences of my life. Given the same context, would I do it again? Of course, just as you would. Even though it is an unpleasant experience, I would hope someone would do it for one of my loved ones.

When people die on the cross, they usually die of suffocation. Hanging by your hands in such a position eventually causes cramps and an inability to breathe. The victim must push himself up by the nail through his feet, which is agonizing beyond description, so that he can take another breath. When his strength gives out, he slumps down and suffocates.

That's the death that Jesus Christ died for you and me. Jesus was God, but he was also human. He did not want to die on the cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane, sweat poured from him like blood, and he prayed to his Father, "Please take this cup away from me, but your will be done, not mine."

I know that the physical pain that Jesus went through from being flogged and beaten and crucified was agonizing, but I don't believe that's why Jesus begged the Father as he did. It was because he understood that he was taking the sins of the world, your sins and my sins, on himself. We can't imagine the darkness and horror that descended on Jesus in those hours. God can't tolerate sin, so his Father turned away from him at the time of his deepest need. Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

God is a just God, and Jesus' suffering was the just for the unjust. I believe as Jesus died of suffocation he gave mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to you and me. He gave his very breath that we might live eternally. (Breath and Spirit are the same word in both Hebrew (*ruachh*) and Greek (*pneuma*)).

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## **GUADALAJARA TRIP**

(No, not recently. A little over 20 years ago I made a trip to Guadalajara, Mexico.)

I got to preach in the large church of David Huerta and was inspired by the example of his faith, His church facility is exceptional with beautiful tile, ponds, plants and flowers. He also has a nice home, but not opulent, and a new van. He said that some of his pastor friends expressed jealousy and think he is taking advantage of his congregation to enrich himself. He said that his secret is giving. He has given away his homes and automobiles on several occasions as he felt God directed him. On every occasion, God gave him another home and car in his time and has blessed his church so they can reach out in evangelism and missions. He is not giving to manipulate God but in obedience to God. Wow!

I thought of Proverbs 11:24, "One man gives freely yet gains even more; another withholds unduly but comes to poverty." And remember Jesus' words, "Give and it will be given to you, running over and poured into your lap." (Luke 6:37) So many people are struggling with finances, but God is able and willing to take care of us if we trust him and learn to be givers.

\* Guadalajara is the second largest city in Mexico, with some eight million people. One morning I went to Ciudad Guzman, about 2 hours from Guadalajara, and went hiking with the pastor in an ecological park on the side of a mountain overlooking a puffing volcano. Also took my one day off, a Saturday, at Lake Chapala but was not able to go flying with my friends in their ultralight planes because of turbulent wind conditions.

\* I preached in a church service almost every night, and on two Sundays I was in two different churches, and on one Sunday I was in three churches. I love to preach! Lynn Cumming came down for the last week and helped greatly with the counseling and had three large women's meetings in another church.

\* On my way home, had a five-hour layover in Phoenix where I had an interesting encounter. An older gentleman approached my table and we fell into conversation. His name is Hollis Black, age 86. He went to Dallas Seminary and has been a pastor and missionary for many years. He told me that his wife died some years ago, he remarried, and now he and his new wife think that God may be calling them to go to Australia and start a new ministry. Good night! He is 86, has a new wife, and is ready to go on another adventure for God.

I know some folks in their 60s and 70s who are sitting in their recliners, feeling bored, and thinking they are too old to serve God. "Wake up, oh sleepers, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." Take inspiration from Hollis Black. It ain't over till it's over.

While I am not interested in getting remarried, Hollis' example has set me to thinking. It wouldn't hurt to put out some feelers. If you know a mature Christian lady who would be interested in marrying me, and how could they not be?, please have them send me a resume, a photo, and a statement of assets. If their assets are over \$1 million dollars the photo is optional.

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PS - The part about marriage was written over 20 years ago when I was only 77. I am now older and wiser and in spite of many tempting proposals and one near-miss, I have decided to remain single for a while.

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## **MANY ARE CALLED, BUT FEW REPORT FOR DUTY**

I believe that God calls everyone on earth to come to him. He calls us through our conscience and through the creation. I believe that God calls everyone personally in all kinds of ways to come to him and be saved from their own wicked nature and from the wickedness in the world. It is his desire that all be saved and come to understand the truth. (1st Timothy 2:4)

God doesn't just call us once, he calls us again and again. His invitation is, "Come, follow me." Many years ago I read a phrase that has stayed in my mind ever since. The phrase was, "The upward receding Christ." The writer explained that Christ is always calling us up to a higher level. He is always whispering to us, "You are doing great, my precious son or daughter. But I have even more challenges for you. Come up higher." I can't imagine anything more fulfilling and exciting than working with the Creator of the universe.

Father Cedric recently had a great insight about the Sistine Chapel. Remember that wonderful painting showing the encounter of Jehovah and Adam? Adam is relaxed, languid, kind of bored, with one finger accidentally extended out. And then there is Jehovah: fierce, focused, burning with passion, surrounded by cherubim and storm clouds, extending his finger to Adam to give him ..... what? What's going to happen when God touches Adam? It's going to awaken him from his lethargy and give him.....**LIFE!** The Bible reveals that man in his natural state is dead to God. (John 3-5; Ro 3-8) Man's spirit is dead, and only a touch by God can awaken him, just as Jesus touched the young man who was being carried to his grave. (Luke 7:11)

God speaks to us in Ephesians: "Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins." (Eph. 2:1)

"But God is so rich in mercy and loved us so much that even though we were dead because of our sins he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead." (Eph. 2:4)

Do you understand that Christianity is not a method to help people live a more moral life? You could live a pure, moral life, doing kind things for other people, feeding the hungry, being good

stewards of the environment, taking care of the sick, and go to hell. Everyone should be doing those things, but we don't do them in order to earn our way to heaven.

Some people came to Jesus one time and said, "We want to do the things that please God. What should we do? Jesus answered, "This is the work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29) Are you believing, trusting in Christ alone for your salvation?

## **IF YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN BUT HAVE BACKSLIDEN INTO SOME OLD SINS AND HAVE BECOME COMFORTABLE, YOU MIGHT WANT TO SKIP THIS PART**

James writes in his concluding remarks, James 5:19-20, "Dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back will save him from death (or "perdition" in the King James translation) and bring about the forgiveness of many sins." The footnote in the NLT says: "To save a sinner from death refers not merely to physical death but to eternal death, the punishment of departing from the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ." The footnotes refer also to Hebrews 6:4-8 and to Galatians 6:1.

Is this saying that a person can be saved and then be lost because of going back into his sinful ways? It is clear that it is saying exactly that, and it is what the Bible consistently teaches. Of course, none of us is perfect, and struggle to overcome habits and addictions. God understands our nature very well. What James is talking about is falling back into the practice of sin and being comfortable and even defiant about it. James may also be describing people who were once Christians but have renounced Christ.

Oh, dear friends, if this describes you, repent while you still have time and bow before the God who created you and loves you. Jesus has promised to help you overcome controlling sins.

God bless,

Glenn

