

Ask the Pastor: Are there Different Levels in Heaven? 5-5-2024

Opening Question: Are there Different Levels in Heaven? That is the subject we will talk about today, since you asked the pastor. If there is one thing we need to get right as followers of Jesus, it is heaven.

1. **It is Important to Differentiate between Biblical and Non-Biblical “Christianity.”** I want to briefly look at two religious offshoots, the Jehovah Witnesses, and the LDS Church (*i.e. The Mormons*), present themselves as Christian, but their theology and beliefs deviate from orthodox Christianity when it comes to God, Jesus, the Bible, salvation, and for the purpose of our discussion, heaven. The two Christian sects believe in a multi-level tier system when it comes to heaven.
 - a. **Jehovah’s Witnesses** believe there are two peoples of God: Two levels of heaven.
 - **The Anointed Class** (144,000) will live in **heaven** and rule with Christ. This is the kingdom of God. Annual Lord’s Supper. Nisan 14 (Jewish Passover). Reserved only for anointed class.
 - **The “other sheep”** (all other believers) who will live forever on a **paradise earth**. John 10:16
 - **Only anointed class** will go to heaven to live with Jesus.
 - b. **LDS Church:** (aka. the Mormons), there are three levels of heaven, or three levels of glory, which they incorrectly base this off what Paul referred to as the third heaven. We will look at that a little later.
 - **The Celestial heaven**
 - **Level of glory. (The glory of the sun),** The Celestial Heaven also has three additional levels itself, the highest, being “exaltation,” where you and your spouse can become gods, govern your own planet. Have spirit children and even create worlds.
 - **To achieve this level,** you must adhere to mormon teachings, get married in their temple (stay married), and practice their ordinances throughout your life. They incorrectly refer to this level as the third heaven based on a misinterpretation of 2 Corinthians 12:2.
 - **Celestial kingdom is permanent residence** of God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost.
 - **Terrestrial heaven**
 - **Level of Glory: (The Glory of the moon).**
 - **Those who inhabit the terrestrial kingdom include those who have lived respectably but “were blinded by the craftiness of men”** and thus rejected the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ when it was presented to them in this life.
 - **It also includes persons who rejected the “testimony of Jesus in the flesh,** but afterwards received it” in the **spirit world.**
 - **Here you receive the presence of the son but NOT the fullness of the father.**
 - **Telestial Heaven**
 - **Level of Glory (The glory of the stars).**
 - **This is the lowest level of glory** in the Mormon Church.
 - **Those who will inhabit the telestial kingdom include those who, in this life, “do not receive the gospel of Christ,** nor the testimony of Jesus.”
 - **Other folks in this lowest heaven includes liars, sorcerers, adulterers, whoremongers, murderers, and idolaters.”** In addition, since they refused to accept Jesus as their Savior, these individuals will remain in spirit prison for 1,000 years during the millennial reign of Christ until they repent, and accept the gospel of Jesus Christ in the spirit prison. In this third heaven, you will be servants of God, but where the Father and Jesus dwell, they cannot come.

In summary, like the JW’s, the Mormons connect faith in Christ + a person’s works according to their organization to achieve their level of heaven, which is Not in agreement with orthodox Christianity.

2. Key Question: What does Paul the Apostle mean in his reference to the “Third Heaven?”

1 Corinthians 12:2-4

² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the **third heaven**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

- **Paul** is NOT referring to different levels of heaven. Instead, he views the heavens like the ancients did in his time. They viewed the heavens in three layers. The sky was the first layer. The second was the cosmos (Outer space, planets, stars, moon). The third level was the spiritual home of God.
- As a result, these aren't three levels all will be together rejoicing with the multitudes. (Revelation 7:9-10).
- In the passage, Paul was caught up to the third heaven, the home of God. There he was given the privilege of experiencing heaven, the place where God dwells. He does NOT boast about it.
- Paul would be the first to admit, he is the worst (chief) of all sinners because he persecuted the church.

1 Timothy 1:15

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

- He always taught that we are saved by grace, through faith, so no one could boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- Today, there are so many people who say they went to heaven. They write a book about it. They go on tour. They want first class tickets to visit your church. I have heard some of these people say things like, I saw cows drive tractors in overalls, I was given a million angels, etc., etc. No real focus on Jesus. No real focus on worship. Missing in their presentation is Paul's humility and lack of boasting.

3. The Bible Teaches there is a Distinction between the Intermediate Heaven and the New One

Philippians 1: 21-23

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

a. Going to heaven is Immediate when you Physically Die.

- To Live is Christ.
- Dying is gain, so you could be with Christ,

b. You will be Conscious, NOT Resting until the Second Coming.

- **There are some churches, like the Adventist Churches** that teach when you die, your body will be unconscious until the resurrection, known as “soul sleep.”
- **The Martyrs of Revelation** demonstrate they are conscious during this intermediate heaven.

Revelation 6:9-10

⁹ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

¹⁰ They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

c. New Heaven / New Earth

Revelation 21:1-4

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

4. **No Levels, but there are Rewards in Heaven.** While there may not be any levels in heaven, there will be rewards.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10

For we must all appear before the judgment (Bema) seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

- **It is hard for us to imagine not being envious of those in heaven** who will have more rewards / more glory than ourselves. In heaven we will all love God, but it would seem because He has given some more rewards than us, we might feel envy.
- Well, that will be the difference between heaven and earth. In Heaven there will be no sin nature. Jonathan Edwards, the 18th century theologian, pastor, and key figure in the great awakening revival taught what the Bible teaches (2 Corinthians 5:10-11, Matthew 5:12; Luke 6:23, 35; 1 Corinthians 3:14) that there are degrees of rewards in the new heavens and new earth. But this will not be the cause of any unhappiness, for it doesn't mean that those with less reward will be only two-thirds happy, while those with more reward will be fully happy.
- **Instead, everyone's cup will be full; it's just that not everyone will have the same size of cup.** In this way, there can be greater degrees of happiness, while at the same time everyone is fully happy. Edwards put it like this.

Every vessel that is cast into this ocean of happiness is full, though there are some vessels far larger than others, and there shall be no such thing as envy in heaven, but perfect love shall reign throughout the whole society.

Those who are not so high in glory as others, will not envy those that are higher, but they will have so great, and strong, and pure love to them that they will rejoice in their superior happiness. Their love to them will be such that they will rejoice that they are happier than themselves; so that instead of having a damp to their own happiness, it will add to it.

And so, on the other hand, those that are highest in glory, as they will be the most lovely, so they will be fullest of love: as they will excel in happiness, they will proportionally excel in divine benevolence and love to others, and will have more love to God and to the saints than those that are lower in holiness and happiness. And besides, those that will excel in glory will also excel in humility.

Conclusion: There are NO levels of Heaven that separates believers. Third = Layers in atmosphere. We Got to get Heaven Right. There is an intermediate and a future new heaven when Christ returns. Lastly, although there are no levels separating believers in heaven, there will be rewards.