

Session 10

Review

Last time we talked about Heaven. We debated whether Heaven has a physical location or is a spiritual state we just don't know how to describe. We also discussed the privileges and responsibilities of our heavenly citizenship. Finally, we took up the question of the status of the eternal souls of babies who die in infancy. We also briefly discussed the so-called "Gap Theory" used by many to rationalize the presence of Satan in the otherwise perfect Garden of Eden.

Shall We Know Each Other in Heaven?

Now in our final session on Death and Resurrection, we will leave behind our discussion of the nature of Heaven itself, and turn our focus on the human citizens of Heaven. The question at hand is whether or not we will recognize each other in Heaven. A corollary question is whether or not it really matters whether we recognized each other in Heaven.

Dr. Strauss points out that the idea that we will recognize each other in Heaven is a virtually universal hope of all mankind. Furthermore, acceptance of this hope is also nearly universal. I have never heard it preached anywhere that we will **not** recognize each other in Heaven.

But just because an idea is universally accepted doesn't prove it correct.

A lie doesn't become truth, wrong doesn't become right, and evil doesn't become good, just because it's accepted by a majority. Booker T. Washington

One can easily point to dozens of examples throughout the history of human learning and achievement of theories and practices like the [Phlogiston theory](#) and the treatment of diseases by blood letting that turned out to be patently false. This is a cautionary tale for us today who are tempted to "Trust the Science," because "the Science" has proven to be false so many times in the past that it begs the question what currently accepted theories – like [Uniformitarianism](#) – might eventually be proven false.

But is this the case with the idea that we shall recognize each other in Heaven? In order to establish our footing in discussing this question, let's remind ourselves of the founding principle of our Becky Bereans group...

Now these Jews [in Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Acts 17:11 [ESV]

Our only valid basis for what we believe to be true can be and must be the living Word of God under the enlightenment of the Spirit of God within our hearts Whom Jesus foretold to His disciples would "...guide you into all truth".

Unfortunately – as with most of the questions we have discussed in this series – the Bible has little to say about the question of whether we shall recognize each other in Heaven, and much of what it **does** say is only by implication.

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For example, Dr. Strauss points to the repeated use of the phrase “*...gathered to his people...*” in the stories of the deaths of the Hebrew patriarchs. The implication in these instances is that it wouldn’t make any sense for God to use this figure of speech if either the soul of the dead remained with the lifeless body (as we discussed when we examined the idea of “soul sleep”), or remained in some eternal state of solitude. Although we trust that God is able to do all things, it is difficult to conceive how He could maintain fellowship with our eternal souls and the souls of all the other true believers who have been “gathered” to Him, yet keep us somehow in isolation from each other.

Another example is David’s statement in 2 Samuel 12:23 regarding the death of the baby son David had fathered with Bathsheba. We discussed this passage briefly last time in connection with the question of whether babies who die go to Heaven.

21Then his servants said to him, “What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.” 22He said, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, ‘Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’ 23But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” 2 Samuel 12:21-23 [ESV]

Clearly David believed that the soul of the child was still alive and with God in Heaven. Furthermore, he must also have believed that when he himself died, his soul too would depart from his body to be with the LORD. Finally, the passage seems to imply that David believed he would again share fellowship with his departed son – i.e. that he would recognize his son in Heaven.

Dr. Strauss mentions that the story of Jesus’ transfiguration recorded in Matthew 17:1-13 and Mark 9: 2-13 provides strong evidence that we shall recognize each other in our glorified resurrection bodies. Somehow, Peter was able to recognize not only Jesus his daily companion, but also Moses and Elijah.

And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Matthew 17:4 [ESV]

This of course begs the question – exactly how did Peter (and presumably the sons of Zebedee) recognize Moses and Elijah whom the disciples had never met before? Was there something about their manner? Perhaps Moses cast his staff down and it turned into a snake. Maybe Elijah still had the odor of smoke about him left over from his ride in the chariot of fire. God clearly imparted recognition of the two ancient prophets into the disciples’ minds by some supernatural means.

The story of the Mount of Transfiguration can hardly be called a proof text for the idea that we shall know each other in Heaven. Consider the counterexamples of Jesus’ close associates who didn’t initially recognize Him in His resurrected form. Mary Magdalene didn’t recognize the risen Jesus until He called her by name (John 20:16). Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple who encountered the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus were kept from recognizing Him until He took bread, gave thanks, and broke it (Luke 24). Even Peter, James, and John didn’t recognize the risen Lord on the shore of the Sea of Galilee even though He had told them He would meet them there until Jesus reminded them of the day He had first called them with a miraculous catch of fish.

It seems clear then – at least to me – that our spiritual recognition of each other in our glorified form must be a gift from God just as our earthly fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ is. Will

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God give us all this gift in Heaven, or will it be like His other Spiritual gifts – given at specific times to specific people for His specific purposes?

Ironically, near the end of his paper, Dr Strauss uses the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) that first brought us into this series of discussions on Death and Resurrection as another “proof text” of the concept that we shall know each other in Heaven – pointing to the fact that the Rich Man recognized Lazarus the beggar who had suffered at the rich man’s gate in earthly life. Of course, if we really stop to take a hard look that this “proof” that we shall know each other in Heaven, we find a few holes. First off, neither the Rich Man nor Lazarus were actually in Heaven per se in the parable story. But more importantly, we must remember that the parable is a story told by Jesus to impart a spiritual lesson, not necessarily a historical narrative about the earthly and eternal lives of these two specific men.

Dr. Strauss finishes this final chapter of his Death and Afterward book with two intriguing Bible passages that seem imply the social nature of our future Heavenly lives in fellowship with other children of God.

I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 8:11 [ESV]

¹⁹For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 [ESV]

So what shall we say in conclusion of this series of studies and discussions. Many challenging questions have been raised, but for better or worse, we have discovered few hard and fast Biblical answers to them. Nevertheless, the joy is in the journey, not the destination. Let us conclude as Dr. Strauss did with a great encouragement from Paul to the church in Corinth (and by extension to us)...

¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:12-13 [ESV]

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Discussion Questions

1. What exactly do we mean when we say we shall know each other in Heaven?
 - a. Will we recognize only our own family, friends, and acquaintances or will we automatically know everyone there even if we never met them in earthly life?
 - b. Will we recognize others by their facial features as we do here on earth?
 - c. Will we know others by reputation as we might a famous stranger here on Earth?
2. In Revelation 2:17, Jesus gives an intriguing promise of a new name to be given to those of the church at Pergamum who “conquer...”

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’ Revelation 2:17 [ESV]

- a. Will new names be given to all who “conquer” or only to those from Pergamum?
 - b. Will the new name given by Jesus to those who conquer replace or be given in addition to our/their earthly names?
 - c. Who exactly are those who conquer anyway?
 - d. Will we know each other by name in Heaven?
3. If none of us know each other in Heaven, would you still want to be there or not? Why?
 4. Can we prove that we shall know each other in Heaven biblically or is it just a fond hope?
 5. Do you believe (without proof) that we shall know each other in Heaven? Why?
 6. Has anyone ever heard of someone preaching/teaching that we shall **not** know each other in Heaven?
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So we have now come to the end of our discussion series on Death and Resurrection

1. What next?
2. Is everyone satisfied with beginning a new series on “Yeah buts,” or would you rather go into something else? If something else, what?
3. If “Yeah buts”...
 - a. What “Yeah but” should we start with?
 - b. What “Yeah buts” would you like to discuss in our series?
 - c. Is anyone ready and willing to lead us in discussing a “Yeah but” they are interested in sharing about?