

The *Beginning* of *Heaven*

Footpath of our Trek



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PREFACE

THIS TOPICAL STUDY ENTITLED *THE BEGINNING OF HEAVEN* originated as my prepared notes for teaching our local ABF (Adult Bible Fellowship) class on Sunday mornings. As with the other resources at our web site, we make it available to others simply because it already exists. I make no claim to scholarship, special insight, or extraordinary understanding of God's holy word. I have been called in the local assembly to teach (predominantly) senior adults from God's word. Following the example of the early churches, those of us in the kingdom are encouraged to "[share our possessions] with all, as anyone might have need." (Acts 2:45) If others can benefit from this study, then God will be glorified.

The notes have been formatted to:

- make them easy to use on-screen—including on newer media platforms; and
- include complete Scripture passages on the same page, so the user not be required to have his or her Bible alongside.

This is not to say that we *discourage* the accompaniment of God's printed word, but that we wanted to make the notes as accessible and portable as possible.

As with all of our resources, we offer this free of charge, to the glory of God the Father, and the praise of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*David S. Lampel
Winterset, Iowa
February 2012*

EXPLANATIONS

SCRIPTURE VERSIONS

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ABBREVIATIONS

NASB: *New American Standard Bible*

NKJV: *New King James Version*

KJV: *King James Version*

KJVS: Both *King James Version* and *New King James Version*

NIV: *New International Version*

RSV: *Revised Standard Version*

YLT: *Young's Literal Translation*

ESV: *English Standard Version*

OT, NT: *Old Testament, New Testament*

POSSIBLE CITATIONS

Barnes: Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*.

Boice: James Montgomery Boice, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gæbelein, General Editor. Copyright © 1976, Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Brown: Brown's *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*; Colin Brown, General Editor; English Language edition copyright © 1975, 1986, The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and The Paternoster Press, Ltd. Exeter, Devon, U.K.

Clarke: *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*.

Darby: John Nelson Darby, *Synopsis of the Old and New Testaments*.

Gill: *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*.

Goodwin: Frank J. Goodwin's *A Harmony of the Life of St. Paul*.

Grudem: Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*.

Henry: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

JFB: *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* by Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown.

MacArthur: John MacArthur, Jr., *On Worship: The Ultimate Priority*.

Vincent: Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies*.

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION/HEAVEN

This class is to be all about how we, as individual believers, perceive our time here on earth. The *purpose* of this class is to, perhaps, change the way you see your time here. In this class we will examine heaven—heaven both today and tomorrow—and we will examine this earth—the earth today and that which is to come. But all of that will be background; the true subject of this class is to be *how we as believers live and think—day by day, hour by hour—in light of the hope of our eternity with Christ.*

In the coming sessions we will consider

- The tension that exists for the believer:

We want to be in heaven with our lord, but we are stuck here

We *do* want to be in heaven with our lord, but there are many things we actually enjoy about our time on earth, and there are days when we don't wish to leave

- How we are to think of and use our time on earth
- Seeing this world through God's spectacles
- Living a life of continual communion and worship—because that is a description of our eternity with God

HOW DO THE UNREDEEMED THINK OF HEAVEN?

- Nothing: this (earth, life) is as good as it gets.
- Nothingness: darkness, void, end of existence.
- Nothing: Resigned to the torment of hell.
- A generic utopian state *for all*: “peace and love, man.”

HOW DO THE REDEEMED THINK OF HEAVEN?

- A generic utopian state *for believers only*: “peace and love, man.”
- An unfocused “eternity with God”.
- Dwelling in a final and completed state of grace: purity, knowledge, health, joy, peace.

WHAT DOES GOD'S WORD HAVE TO SAY ABOUT HEAVEN?

Ours is not going to be an exhaustive study of heaven, but for our purposes we must come to an understanding of what heaven is, physically, and what it should mean to a believer. As important as heaven is to the Christian, and as central as it is to our faith, it may surprise you to learn that the Bible is quite loose with the term. There is no specific, special word that represents God's dwelling place.

The English Bible uses the same word for the visible **sky** above earth; **space**, the dwelling place of the stars and planets; and **heaven**, the dwelling place of God and the angels. The principal Hebrew word in the OT is

heavens = *shāmayim* (shaw-mah'-yim) = [plural] dual of an unused singular *shameh*, shaw-meh'; **from** an unused **root meaning to be lofty**; the **sky** (as aloft; the dual perhaps alluding to the visible arch in which the clouds move, as well as to the higher ether where the celestial bodies revolve)
:- air, × astrologer, heaven (-s).

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Deuteronomy 26:15

Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the ground which You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers.

Matthew 11:25

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants."

Psalms 19:1

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

Psalms 14:2

The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God.

Nehemiah 9:27

"Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them, But when they cried to You in the time of their distress, You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors.

Luke 15:21

"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

The principal Greek word in the NT is

heaven(s) = *ouranos* (oo-ran-os') = perhaps from the same as <G3735> (oros) (through **the idea of elevation**); the **sky**; **by extension heaven (as the abode of God)**; by implication happiness, power, eternity; specially the Gospel (Christianity) :- air, heaven ([-ly]), sky.

Because both of these words are so flexible, even generic, we must use context to determine their scope. For the purpose of *our* discussion, we will define our use of the word "heaven" as follows:

the actual place where God is enthroned, and is worshipped by the angels, the heavenly creatures, and the redeemed saints (from Grudem)—[or, more succinct,] heaven is the abode of God, and of those closely associated with Him (from *New Bible Dictionary*).

Beyond this, we will also clearly differentiate between heaven *now* and heaven *future*—that is, the heaven we would go to now were we to die, and the new heaven created in association with the new Jerusalem after Christ's return.

HEAVEN (NOW) DEFINED

As I considered how to describe heaven now, physically, I realized that God's word emphasizes one thing—and one thing above all—about it.

- Heaven is not about place, but people.
- It is not about the terrain or the buildings, but about the myriad saints worshipping God.
- It is not about the perfect weather, but about the glory of God which permeates it.
- It is not about the fauna and wildlife, but about the angels and seraphim giving honor and glory to God.

In short, heaven is not about *place*, but *God*. Heaven is...

The dwelling place of God

Read Deuteronomy 26:15.

God the Father is Lord over it

Read Matthew 11:25.

From heaven (or "the heavens") God...

reveals His glory

Read Psalm 19:1.

reveals His wrath

Read Romans 1:18.

observes people

Read Psalm 14:2.

hears prayer

Read Nehemiah 9:27.

His word bears out this emphasis on the physical heaven being synonymous with God Himself. In fact, Professor and theologian Donald Guthrie writes that when we search God's word for a picture of heaven,

We shall not expect...to find a description of a place, so much as the presence of a person.

Psalm 51:4 tells us that when we sin, it is against God Himself:

Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.

And the story of the prodigal son associates this with heaven itself:

Read Luke 15:21

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Daniel 4:24-26

this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes. And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that it is Heaven that rules.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

Philippians 1:21-24

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

We would expect the prodigal to say that he sinned against his (earthly) father, but instead the son confesses that he sinned against heaven—not against a place, but a person. In this context, heaven = God.

Another use of the term “heaven” to stand in for God Himself is in heaven’s “rule.” For an example, consider the scene in which Daniel interprets the troubling dream of King Nebuchadnezzar:

Read Daniel 4:24-26.

This is why “Heaven” in this passage is capitalized in most translations: it stands for God Himself—not the *place*.

While it may be a pleasant and harmless pastime to wonder about the *place* heaven, God’s word emphasizes that the most important aspect of it is not the place, but the One who is its Lord.

Let’s close by taking just a quick look at what happens when we get to see heaven firsthand.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE (BEFORE CHRIST’S RETURN)?

Our soul (or spirit), but not our flesh, goes to be with the Lord.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-8.

(the body does not go to heaven with us)

The flesh and the spirit part company.

Read Philippians 1:21-24.

(Note what Paul *doesn’t* say: “to depart and live on streets of gold,” “to depart and live in a mansion,” “to depart and have perfect health.” No, he says he has the desire to “depart and *be with Christ*.”

YOUR NOTES

Mark 13:31

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."

Philippians 2:10

so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Psalms 24:1

The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it.

John 1:9-10

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

Psalms 65:9-10

You visit the earth and cause it to overflow; You greatly enrich it; The stream of God is full of water; You prepare their grain, for thus You prepare the earth. You water its furrows abundantly, You settle its ridges, You soften it with showers, You bless its growth.

Psalms 102:25-27

"Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end.

As so often happens when one studies God's word, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the riches found there. And what was intended to be covered in one session must now be spread over two.

UNDERSTANDING THE TERMINOLOGY

I don't want to get too pedantic about this, but I did want to just mention the key words for the earth and world used in the OT and NT. The differences between them are not dramatic, and the meanings seem to overlap considerably.

earth (OT) = *eres* (eh'-rets) = from an unused root probably meaning **to be firm**; **the earth** (at large, or partitively a land) :- × common, **country**, earth, **field**, **ground**, **land**, × nations, way, + wilderness, world.

earth (NT: **Mark 13:31**) = *ge* (ghay) = from a primary word; **soil**; by extension a region, or **the solid part or the whole of the terrene globe** (including the occupants in each application) :- country, earth (-ly), **ground**, **land**, **world**.

on **earth** (NT: **Philippians 2:10**) = *epigeios* (ep-ig'-i-os) = from <G1909> (epi) [on, upon] and <G1093> (ge); **worldly (physical or moral)** :- **earthly**, in earth, **terrestrial**.

the **world** (OT: **Psalms 24:1**) = *tebel* (tay-bale') = from <H2986> (yabal); **the earth (as moist and therefore inhabited)**; by extensive the globe; by implication its inhabitants; specifically a participle land, as Babylonia, Palestine :- **habitable part**, **world**.

world (NT: **John 1:9-10**) = *kosmos* = probably from the base of <G2865> (komizo); **orderly arrangement, i.e. decoration; by implication the world** (in a wide or narrow sense, including its inhabitant, literal or figurative [moral]) :- adorning, world.

creation (NT) = *ktis'-is* = from <G2936> (ktizo); original **formation** (properly the act; by implication the thing, literal or figurative) :- **building**, creation, **creature**, ordinance.

HOW DO THE UNREDEEMED THINK OF EARTH?

- Mother/Mother Goddess: Gaia
Note "earth" above from Mark 13:31: Greek *ge*; Gaea or Gaia; from Greek mythology, the earth personified as a goddess, mother of the Titans; identified with the Roman goddess Tellus.
- As good as it gets
- The totality of existence
- Home: "This world is their preferred home, and they have invested all that they are in the hope of its redemption."

GOD'S ANSWER

- He *does* care about earth: **Read Psalm 65:9-10.**
- But the earth as we know it will not be "redeemed" as they think of it, but will pass away: **Read Psalm 102:25-27.**
- As we will see later, the earth *will*, however, experience a death and resurrection much like believers.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Isaiah 42:5

Thus says God the Lord, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it,

Deuteronomy 10:14

"Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it."

Acts 17:24-25

"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things..."

Genesis 2:7

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Matthew 16:16-17

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Galatians 6:8

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

HOW DO SOME OF THE REDEEMED THINK OF THIS (PRESENT) EARTH?

- A waiting room for heaven (biding their time)
- In good times, a template for heaven; in bad times, a template for hell. Think about it: there are certain components of your life on earth that you hope continue for eternity, but there are painful components that cause you to think in comparison to heaven, this must surely be hell.

WHAT DOES GOD'S WORD HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THIS EARTH?

He (They) created it

Genesis 1:1 tell us that God (not the single *el*, but the plural, *elohim*) created (formed, shaped) the heavens (plural, *shāmayim*: everything over our heads) and the earth (*eres*, the firm ground beneath our feet).

Listen to how Isaiah describes God the Creator:

Read Isaiah 42:5.

offspring, that which comes from it = from <H3318> (*yatsa'*); **issue, i.e. produce, children** :- that which cometh forth (out), offspring.

God owns it and has authority over it

Read Deuteronomy 10:14.

God = *elohim*

highest heaven = "heaven of heavens"

Read Acts 17:24-25. (Paul at the Areopagus on Mars Hill)

This earth is the birthplace of flesh (but not life itself)

Many consider earth to be their real home because it was here man began. Even if one doesn't subscribe to the creation epic of the Bible, one knows that man began, somehow, on this globe. But what God's word says is that while man's *flesh* is of this earth, that flesh was given *life* from above.

Read Genesis 2:7.

Note the two sources here: Our flesh is from the earth, but our life—our eternal spirit, our soul—is breathed into us by God. And we can track the difference through Scripture. Remember what Jesus said to Peter:

Read Matthew 16:16-17.

Lampel Paraphrase: *You didn't get this truth from the corruptible and corrupting things of this earth, Peter, but from Father God Himself, by means of the Spirit.*

And the apostle Paul continues this difference in his letter to the Galatians:

Read Galatians 6:8.

So the believer understands that though his flesh may be of this earth, his real life—his eternal soul—is permanently connected to heaven because it is a gift of God.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Genesis 3:17

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life."

Genesis 6:11-12

Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

The "flesh" of this world is cursed because of Adam's flesh—

Read Genesis 3:17.

Here not the globe, but the globe's "skin":

ground = *adama* = from <H119> ('adam); soil (from its general redness) :- country, earth, ground, husband [-man] (-ry), land.

—and it is corrupt because of sinful man.

Read Genesis 6:11-12.

earth = *eres*

corrupt = *shābat* (shaw-khath') = a primitive root; **to decay, i.e. (causative) ruin** (literal or figurative) :- batter, cast off, corrupt (-er, thing), destroy (-er, -uction), lose, mar, perish, spill, spoiler, × utterly, **waste**.

So from the uncorrupted, perfect soil of this earth God made man—from *adama* came forth Adam. But once God gave the flesh life, it sinned, and that corruption was passed down not just to succeeding generations, but to the very soil from which man had been made.

YOUR NOTES

In the previous session we began looking at God's relationship with this earth, how

- the Godhead created it
- God both owns it and has lordship over it
- this earth is the birthplace of man, but not of the life within him
- and that the soil of this earth is cursed and the entirety of the earth corrupt because of man's rebellion against God

—how this earth was created in perfection by a perfect God, but man in his arrogance and pride rejected that perfection. The previous session had, in a sense, the bad news.

In this session we continue by looking at some of the *good* news about God's earth for man.

Numbers 14:19-21

"Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." So the Lord said, "I have pardoned them according to your word; but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord."

Numbers 14:22-23

"Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it."

Psalms 33:4-5

For the word of the Lord is upright, And all His work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Lord.

This earth, though corrupted by sin, nevertheless reveals or contains God's qualities

For a transitional point, of sorts, let's look at Jehovah's response to Moses when he prayed for God to withhold His wrath against Israel's sin.

Read Numbers 14:19-21.

Here in the context of His gracious but limited pardon, God declares—essentially a warning—that the earth (*eres*) will be filled with His glory (*kabod*).

glory = *kabod* = from <H3513> (kabad); prop. **weight**; but **only figurative in a good sense**, splendor or copiousness :- glorious (-ly), glory, honour

He will not destroy them for their sin, but He will not be trifled with. His awful splendor permeates this world, and they will indeed pay a price for their rebellion. All these people had been witness to His glory, but had not taken it seriously, so their generation would not come into *their* glory in Canaan.

Read vs22-23.

Oh, that we and all people of this earth would take God seriously. If the earth is filled with His glory, that means we dwell *in* it—we are surrounded by it, we walk in it, we *imbibe* it every day. Yet we play fast and loose with His glory—His honor, His *weight*.

Even so, the earth is filled with another attribute of the Lord.

Read Psalms 33:4-5.

lovingkindness^{NASB}, **goodness**^{KJVS} = *chesed* = from <H2616> (chacad); **kindness**; by implication (towards God) piety; rarely (by opposition) reproof, or (subjective) beauty :- **favour**, good deed (-liness, -ness), kindly, (loving-) kindness, merciful (kindness), **mercy**, pity, reproach, wicked thing.

Spurgeon: Come hither, astronomers, geologists, naturalists, botanists, chemists, miners, yea, all of you who study the works of God, for all your truthful stories confirm this declaration. From the midge in the sunbeam to leviathan in the ocean all creatures own the bounty of the Creator. Even the pathless desert blazes with some undiscovered mercy, and the caverns of ocean conceal the treasures of love. Earth might have been as full of terror as of grace, but instead thereof it teems and overflows with kindness. He who cannot see it, and yet lives in it as the fish lives in the water, deserves to die. If earth be full of mercy, what must heaven be where goodness concentrates its beams?

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Acts 14:16-17

"In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

Psalms 104:5

He established the earth upon its foundations, So that it will not totter forever and ever.

Psalms 104:8

The mountains rose; the valleys sank down To the place which You established for them.

Psalms 104:10-14

He sends forth springs in the valleys; They flow between the mountains; They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst. Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell; They lift up their voices among the branches. He waters the mountains from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of His works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth,

Psalms 104:18-24

The high mountains are for the wild goats; The cliffs are a refuge for the shepherds. He made the moon for the seasons; The sun knows the place of its setting. You appoint darkness and it becomes night, In which all the beasts of the forest prowl about. The young lions roar after their prey And seek their food from God. When the sun rises they withdraw And lie down in their dens. Man goes forth to his work And to his labor until evening. O Lord, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions.

Even though the Lord punished the earth for the sin of man, just as He did with Israel He did not utterly abandon it. Look at what Paul and Barnabas declared to the crowd at Lystra:

Read Acts 14:16-17.

Here's how *The Message* paraphrases this:

"In the generations before us, God let all the different nations go their own way. But even then he didn't leave them without a clue, for he made a good creation, poured down rain and gave bumper crops. When your bellies were full and your hearts happy, there was *evidence of good beyond your doing.*" (italics added)

He cares about and is active in this world

Read Psalm 104:5, 8, 10-14, 18-24.

Spurgeon: [He] works in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth, works which abide the ages, works which come to perfection and pass away in a year, works which with all their beauty do not outlive a day, works within works, and works within these - who can number one of a thousand?

They are all his works, wrought by his own power, and they all display his wisdom. It was wise to make them - none could be spared; every link is essential to the chain of nature - wild beasts as much as men, poisons as truly as odoriferous herbs. They are wisely made - each one fits its place, fills it, and is happy in so doing. As a whole, the "all" of creation is a wise achievement, and however, it may be chequered with mysteries, and clouded with terrors, it all works together for good, and as one complete harmonious piece of workmanship it answers the great Worker's end.

YOUR NOTES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 1:29-30

Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so.

Genesis 4:3-4

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering;

Genesis 9:1-3

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant."

God entrusted the stewardship of this earth to man

While it may be a pleasant pastime to imagine, at times, we have heaven on earth, the truth is that the earth today is pretty far afield of heaven. In fact much of what we consider natural and good—even ordained by God—became so only after the Fall and the Flood. One has to go all the way back to the earliest days of Eden, and as far forward as the end times when the earth will have gone through a "complete transformation...into the kingdom of God" (*K&D*), for even the smallest glimmer of heaven on earth.

At his creation, man—male and female—was given dominion over the rest of God's creation.

Read Genesis 1:26-28.

But notice below what that "rule" does not include.

Read Genesis 1:29-30.

I don't mean to start a protracted debate over vegetarianism. I bring this up to demonstrate how, in its present fallen state, this earth and its people are not what God originally intended. Commentators are not in total agreement on this, but most take this to mean that man, in his created state, did not eat the flesh of animals—and neither did other animals. As *K&D* points out, this does not mean that animals did not die, but that their deaths were natural and nonviolent.

Notice that only after the Fall were blood sacrifices instituted.

Read Genesis 4:3-4.

And only after the Flood do we have God explicitly giving permission to man to eat flesh.

Read Genesis 9:1-3.

Remember what Jesus said about divorce in Matthew 19?

He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way." (Matthew 19:8)

What is perfectly normal and natural to us—predators eating other animals, humans eating the flesh of animals, husbands and wives divorcing instead of remaining as one—was not part of God's original design for a perfect earth. These changes have been instituted—even by God—because of man's condition of sin.

YOUR NOTES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Isaiah 11:6-10

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea. Then in that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious.

Hebrews 11:13-16

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

Psalms 104:31-35

Let the glory of the Lord endure forever; Let the Lord be glad in His works; He looks at the earth, and it trembles; He touches the mountains, and they smoke. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; As for me, I shall be glad in the Lord. Let sinners be consumed from the earth And let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!

The prophet Isaiah brings it full circle for us, in his description of the earth when Christ comes to reign.

Read Isaiah 11:6-10.

What is missing from this (future) earth? (Sin).

Because our true life—our eternal self—is not of this earth but from above, we are only pilgrims here

Even though God has given man dominion over the rest of this created earth, for the believer it is not home.

In the last session we discussed how man's flesh may be of this earth, but his spirit, his soul, his true *life* is of God. Because of that, believers—those who acknowledge this truth and place their trust in it—will always feel like someone estranged from their true home.

This is the trigger for the tension that exists between our earthly life and heavenly hope.

Read Hebrews 11:13-16.

There are other aspects of God in this earth that we will consider in a later session. But for now let's conclude by returning to Psalm 104.

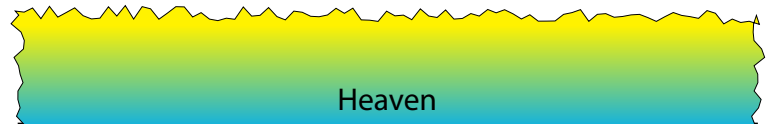
Read Psalm 104:31-35.

YOUR NOTES

For the last few sessions we have been looking at, first, the present heaven—concluding that heaven is less a place than a *Person*—and this present earth—how God created it and has continued to make His presence, indeed His *glory* known in it.

BACKGROUND

In this session we want to begin considering the tension that exists between these two places. And right off the bat we realize it's not going to be easy. The difference between the two is not black and white—as it would be if we were comparing heaven to hell. But earth lies somewhere *between* heaven and hell, with elements of each mixed in.



God created this earth and is still active in it, but at the same time Satan has been let loose upon it.

The earth was created as perfect as heaven. [Genesis 1:31](#) says

God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.

very good = wholly, abundantly pleasing, precious

If man was made in the image of God, so too was the Garden of Eden made, in a sense, in the image of heaven.

K&D: ...everything perfect in its kind, so that every creature might reach the goal appointed by the Creator, and accomplish the purpose of its existence. By the application of the term “good” to everything that God made, and the repetition of the word with the emphasis “very” at the close of the whole creation, the existence of anything evil in the creation of God is absolutely denied, and the hypothesis entirely refuted, that the six days’ work merely subdued and fettered an ungodly, evil principle, which had already forced its way into it.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Genesis 3:4-5

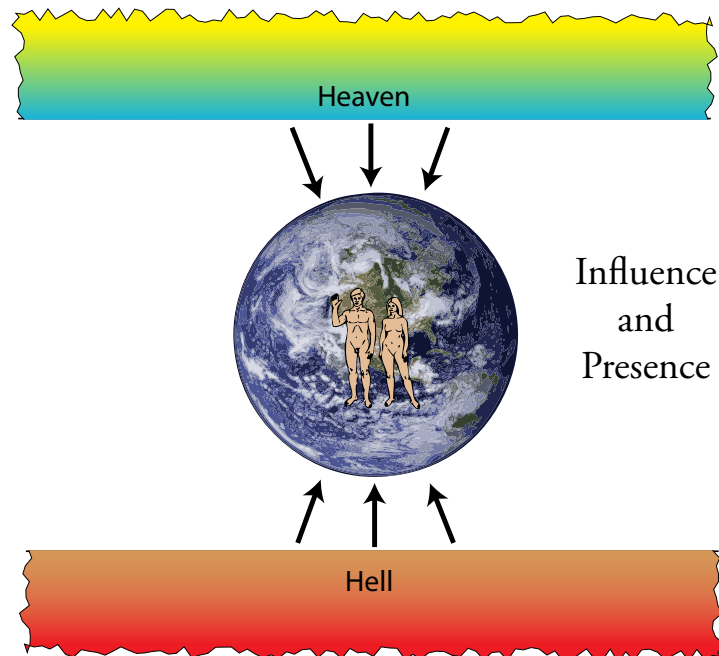
The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Genesis 3:22-24

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Unlike heaven, however, the pristine Garden was susceptible to corruption because it contained something not (yet) found in heaven: Man—the *wildcard* of Man.

The earth was so far perfect. It contained the presence and influence of holy God—but it also contained the presence and influence of Satan.



The tension between heaven and earth began in that fateful moment when the serpent presented a choice to Eve. Until then evil did not exist on earth; sin and corruption were unknown. But when Man gave into the temptation to be not just perfect, but *like God*—knowing good and evil—sin was introduced into the earth of Man.

Read Genesis 3:4-5.

And like poisons that flow out of a factory, into the river, then into the stream to leach into farm fields, the sin of Man flowed from him into the soil of the perfect Garden, and into all of the earth.

Man did not know there was evil until he gave into it, and when he did, he learned about something else for the first time: death.

Read Genesis 3:22-24.

(Just as an aside: Isn't it interesting how in the beginning it took just one small whisper from the Serpent for Adam and Eve to give into sin, while it often takes repeated calls from the Holy Spirit for someone to give into righteousness.)

So ever since that moment Man is pulled downward: His flesh pulls him down to an earth that has been corrupted by sin, while his spirit—his god-space, as it were—remains empty. Put another way, every person is born with his allegiance pre-cast for the one to whom his first ancestors gave in.

And he is born dying.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Ephesians 2:1-3

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Ephesians 2:4-5

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2 Corinthians 5:16

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.

SPIRIT-KIND

In Psalm 51:5 David states that

I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

And the apostle Paul agrees.

Read Ephesians 2:1-3.

But now we leap ahead to Calvary and the empty tomb. Now Man is given another option. He may be born in sin and death, but now he can accept the gift of righteousness and life to be found in Christ.

Read Ephesians 2:4-5.

When Man accepts this gift he becomes a new creation.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Based on this change we now look at *each other* in a different way.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16.

Here's how *The Message* paraphrases v16:

Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore.

God's word says that when we accept the gift of salvation in Christ we are no longer people of "the flesh" but people of the Spirit. As such, we see Christ not simply as a person, a human being, a wise prophet and teacher, but as who He really is: Spirit-kind, the Son of very God. It is the indwelling Spirit that gives *our* spirit this insight. So we, too, are now Spirit-kind.

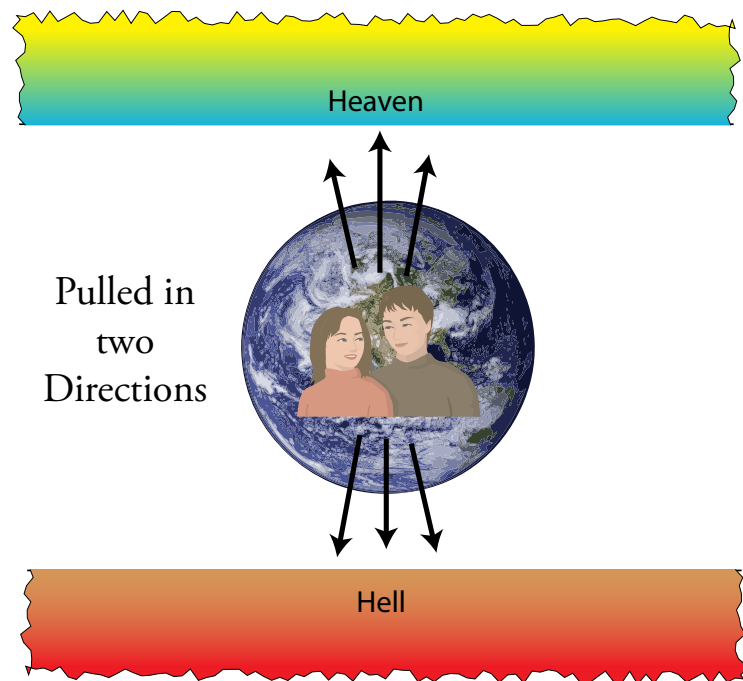
But every morning when we rise we realize it is not as simple as that. When we look in the mirror we do not see spirit—we see flesh. And when we catalog the day's failings as we wearily turn in for the night, we do not think of ourselves as spirit, but flesh.

This is the first manifestation of the tension that exists in the believer: the tension between Spirit and flesh. God tells him that he is a new creature in Christ—Spirit-kind—but more often than not he feels just like the old creature—flesh-kind.

YOUR NOTES

HOME

With *that* tension in place, the believer is primed for the next: the tension between heaven and earth. Man's flesh pulls him down to an earth that has been corrupted by sin, while his spirit (informed by the Holy Spirit) pulls him up to heaven—the place of its birth.



At times this tension in the believer can become uncomfortable—even painful. One consolation is that it exists at all! Isn't it one mark of a true Christian that even while he loves serving his Lord in *this* life, he still longs for his new life in the next? There is something reassuring about the existence of that tension. What might it say about someone who claims to be a Christian in which there is no tug upward to an eternal home? What might it say about that same person if he never feels the tug to live a substantial, meaningful life here for the Lord?

Something happens within the believer at the point of conversion. Because it is associated more with sanctification (progressive) than justification (immediate), it very often seeps into the consciousness over time—a gradual realization that he is dwelling in a foreign land, homesick for a place he has never seen. The conversation of his old friends begins to sound tinny, and strange; activities to which he was once drawn begin to interest him less; practices and concepts that were once utterly foreign, even comical in their strangeness, begin to seem comfortable—the start of new habits.

Though some may try, this metamorphosis is not from conscious effort. In fact, it doesn't work very well to mechanically speed the process along. It is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of flesh, and is best left up to Him. (*Listening* #051)

I want to be very clear here: *This* tension is not the conflict between sin and righteousness; that we discussed a few moments ago. We're not talking about the *activities* of the flesh (sin) versus the *activities* of the spirit (righteousness)—of which the apostle Paul wrote so eloquently in Romans 7: the conflict of our two natures.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; Like the crocus It will blossom profusely And rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, The majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, The majesty of our God. Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you." Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. The scorched land will become a pool And the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, Grass becomes reeds and rushes. A highway will be there, a roadway, And it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, But it will be for him who walks that way, And fools will not wander on it. No lion will be there, Nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, And the ransomed of the Lord will return And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away.

What we are talking about here is the conflict between our *aspirations*, our *longings*, our sense of place. Where are we *at home*? Are we more at home with the things of this earth, or are we more at home with the things of heaven? If we think of our life as a gradual incline, ascent, from earth to heaven, where are we on the incline? Are we stubbornly rooted at its base, or have we set out on the trek upward?

The believer may honestly and heartily agree with the poet Carrie Breck, who wrote

Only faintly now I see Him, with the darkling veil between;
But a blessed day is coming, when His glory shall be seen.

Face to face! O blissful moment! Face to face—to see and know;
Face to face with my Redeemer, Jesus Christ who loves me so.

—but at the same time be loathe to leave this life on earth.

The question is this: Are you embracing your *new* creation (spirit-kind), or are you still clinging to your *old* creation (flesh-kind)? Put another way, How do you think of this earth? Here's an illustration of this point:

Many serious scientists remain in creative pursuit of the colonization of the earth's moon. They have devised fantastic means by which man might live there—not out of an unnatural desire to dwell in the gray dust that comprises its surface, but because the moon would supply a launch platform from which our kind could more efficiently explore the outer reaches of space. With its more modest gravitational pull, it would be far less expensive to initiate flights of discovery from the moon than it has always been from earth.

The Christian should not be in love with earth for its own sake, but should look upon it as a new opportunity to begin the migration up to heaven. This world is not a dismal substitution for heaven, nor is it a barrier to it. This world is merely the physical path we take to get there.

When we are in the deep end of the pool, and our lungs are running out of oxygen, if we are hovering midway, there is nothing to push up from. But if we are all the way at the bottom we can launch ourselves upward by pushing off from the solid pool bottom—upward to light and air and *life*.

The prophet Isaiah presents a fascinating illustration for us. The context of this oracle is both historical, for Judah & Israel, and prophetic, looking toward the salvation of Israel by the coming Messiah. But it also offers rich imagery of life in Christ—more than that, I suggest it offers a beautiful illustration of a people on what the prophet Isaiah calls the "Highway of Holiness."

Read Isaiah 35:1-10.

This earth, as beautiful as it can be, is, spiritually, a desert. It is dying, it is dead. But God sent His Son to save us, and we believe, and we are changed from flesh-kind to spirit-kind, and though the earth remains a desert, we now see before us a road, a pathway—a “Highway of Holiness.” And on this highway there is peace and joy and hope. It crosses the barren land of earth, but sin and corruption are not found on that pathway.



On the “Highway of Holiness”

1 John 5:10-13

The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

We typically think of the relationship between heaven and earth as reaching a point where the former ends and the latter begins. *This is my life now, but at some point I will cross the threshold into my eternity.* But the truth is that our “eternity” has already begun, and for the believer it is an eternity with God.

This should be more than just an established fact, tucked away in the Christian’s back pocket for his peace of mind. God’s word makes it clear that this assurance should mold and shape how we think and act right here and now. It should affect our mind-set—our world-view.

I discuss this at greater length in our study entitled *Gaining Christ*, but let me lift out just a small portion of that study to support my point here. Turn to John’s first epistle.

Read 1 John 5:10-13.

Here we have the full picture: the promise for both the future and the present:

v11: “God has given us **eternal** life...”

v12: “He who has the Son **has the life**...”

has = a primary verb; **to hold** (used in very various applications, literal or figurative, direct or remote; such as **possession**, ability, contiguity, relation or condition), use.

Let’s take just a moment to work through the meaning of this phrase “eternal life”—*zoe aionios*—(dzo-ay ahee-o’-nee-os).

from *Brown* (Vol. 3, p827ff):

- In Homer, *aion* is often parallel with *psyche* (= soul, life); in Hesiod it denotes a life-span.
- The frequent occurrence of *aionios* in both OT and NT shows that we are concerned here with a characteristically biblical concrete idea which must be understood in relation to the whole duration of a man’s life.
- The expression “eternal life” (*zoe aionios*), corresponding to the basic meaning of *aion*, lifetime, as defined by the OT, is to be understood primarily as *life which belongs to God*.
- The word “eternal” here indicates a definite quality: it is a different life from the old existence typified by hate, lack of love, sin, pain and death.

Eternal life does not therefore just begin in the future, it is *already the possession of those who have entered upon fellowship with Christ.*

“Eternal life” is far more than the believer’s hope of heaven after death. That eternal life begins the moment the Holy Spirit draws us into a life in Christ.

- Eternal life with our heavenly Father after death is a *promise*—nothing we do or do *not* do will change that.
- *Participating* in that eternal life *now*, however, is an elective. It is a benefit held out to us, but many choose not to take it as their own.

Think of it this way: Let’s say someone gives you a gift of a month-long luxury cruise of the Mediterranean. It is worth many thousands of dollars. You and your spouse will be sailing on the largest, most luxurious cruise ship in the world. The amenities are without parallel. The food bountiful and sinfully delicious. On board are offered a boundless list of activities for every interest. The ports of call include such fascinating sights as Alexandria and Cairo in Egypt; the Holy Land and Petra; Istanbul; Athens, Greece; Naples and Rome, Italy; the island of Patmos; Corinth; the Isle of Crete; Monaco; Barcelona, Spain; and Morocco. All your expenses have been paid; all you need do is enjoy.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

1 Corinthians 13:9-12

For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

2 Peter 1:1-9

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

Then, upon boarding the ship, you spend the next four weeks shut in your cabin, eating from the trunk load of miserable sack lunches you brought with you.

That is how many in the family of God live out their days—a bare-bones, Spartan existence all the while surrounded by unimaginable luxury and wealth. Our eternal life in Christ—not just heaven, but the life we are living right now—has been bought and paid for by someone else. Anything we would ever want has been supplied for us. All we have to do is enjoy.

And then we sit in our windowless rooms, nibbling on our meager dry crackers and stale cheese.

Too many Christians today settle for the small “part” they have now, putting things on hold until they see “in full.”

Read 1 Corinthians 13:9-12.

But Peter tells us that our present eternal life is not to be simply on hold until the Day.

Read 2 Peter 1:1-9.

v1

same kind = equal value

v2

Peter sets the tone of this passage by saying, even in his greeting, “...grace and peace be *multiplied* to you.” Not just grace and peace be yours, once and for all, but **increasing, abounding**.

The grace we understand at the point of our conversion is a mere glimmer of the fullness of grace available to us. The peace we experience at conversion is only a foretaste of the deep peace we can experience as we grow in the things of Christ.

YOUR NOTES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

John 17:1-3

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

2 Peter 1:3-5

...seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge,

v3

We need not settle for a life of stale crackers and cheese when He has granted to us "everything pertaining to life and godliness." What riches are available to us! Even in the here and now.

What does this have to do with eternal life? Keep your finger here and turn to the gospel of John.

Read John 17:1-3.

knowledge = *epignōsis* (ep-ig'-no-sis) = from <G1921> (epiginosko); recognition, i.e. (by implication) **full discernment**, acknowledgment :- (ac-) knowledge (-ing, -ment); "know exactly, completely, through and through."

This verse and this passage speak about the gracious investment God has made in us—and how we are encouraged to take full advantage of that gift by investing ourselves in *Him*.

What: *everything pertaining to life and godliness*

From: *His divine power has granted to us*

Through: *the true knowledge of Him*

v4

Let's return to the 2 Peter passage.

By these = *His own glory and excellence*

Granted what? *His precious and magnificent promises.*

To what purpose? *we might become partakers of the divine nature!*

partaker = *koinonos* = from <G2839> (koinos); **a sharer**, i.e. associate :- **companion**, × fellowship, partaker, **partner**.

divine = *theios* = from <G2316> (theos); godlike (neuter as noun, divinity) :- divine, godhead.

nature = *physis* (foo-sis) = from <G5453> (phuo); growth (by germination or expansion), i.e. (by implication) natural production (lineal descent); by extensive **a genus or sort**; figurative **native disposition, constitution** or usage :- ([man-]) kind, nature ([al]).

Note the irony: What Adam and Eve tried to obtain through rebellion (and thus were punished by God), God offers every believer in Christ Jesus as a free gift!

v5A

this very reason = our new life in Christ, with its associate promises

Most translations have "add to your faith..." This is not inaccurate, but might lead one to think Peter is saying that our faith, by itself, is incomplete, and *requires* the human efforts that he itemizes in the following verses. the NASB has "in your faith supply..."

Either translation is fine so long as one understands how the word "add" would have been understood by readers at the time.

applying = *pareispherō* (par-ice-fer'-o) [only here in NT] = from <G3844> (para) and <G1533> (eisphero); to bear in alongside, i.e. introduce simultaneously :- give; **to bring in (eisphero)**, **besides (para)**.

diligence = *spoude* = from <G4692> (speudo); "speed", i.e. (by implication) **despatch, eagerness, earnestness** :- business, (earnest) care (-fulness), forwardness, haste.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

2 Peter 1:5-8

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

add^{KJVS}, **supply**^{NASB} = *epichorēgeō* (ep-ee-khor-ayg-eh'-o) = from <G1909> (epi) and <G5524> (choregeo); **to furnish besides, i.e. fully supply**, (figurative) aid or contribute :- add, minister (nourishment, unto).

This is not the idea of adding to complete something that is insufficient, but

Edwin A. Blum: In NT times the word “add” was used of making a rich and lavish provision. Originally it referred to a person who paid the expenses of a chorus in staging a play.

Ah-hah! Now we can understand it. The play is perfect as it is, but we can add some depth, emphasizing portions of the dialogue by adding in a chorus, paid for by the local, wealthy merchant.

v5B-7

Peter then lists the means by which we do this.

v8

The writer in me wonders why Peter concludes this thought in v8 in negative rather than positive terms, but so be it.

Read v8.

Peter has offered what the NASB refers to as “qualities” (what Matthew Henry terms “graces”) as examples—I doubt that any list so compiled could be considered finite—for a productive lifestyle in Christ—a profitable, useful *eternal life* on earth.

Moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love...

If these are yours and are increasing...

increasing = from <G4119> (pleion); to do, make or **be more**, i.e. increase (transitive or intransitive); by extension **to superabound** :- abound, **abundant**, make to increase, have over.

they render you...

render you = *kathistēmi* = from (kata) and (histemi); **to place down** (permanently), i.e. (figurative) to designate, constitute, convoy :- appoint, be, conduct, make, ordain, set; **to set in order**, appoint.

neither useless nor unfruitful...

(The KJVS “barren” is not a helpful translation of *argos*, since it makes it redundant with “unfruitful.” The NASB is better.)

useless = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and <G2041> (ergon); **inactive, i.e. unemployed**; (by implication) **lazy**, useless :- barren, **idle**, slow.

unfruitful = [obvious] without fruit

in the true knowledge of...

Vincent's Word Studies: more correctly, *unto*. The idea is not idleness *in* the knowledge, but idleness in pressing on and developing toward and finally reaching the knowledge.

The Message paraphrases this verse for us:

With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus.

If we rendered this verse in *positive* terms, it might read, *If you take possession of these righteous character traits and devote yourself to developing them and maturing in them every day, they will make you an active and fruitful student in the true knowledge of Christ.*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

2 Peter 1:9

For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

John 17:3

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

v9

v9 describes the one who chooses not to pursue this way of life.

Read v9.

Here is the picture of the Christian who sees temporal life as a flat, featureless plateau, just waiting for his passage through the Pearly Gates. He is either blind or short-sighted. But in either case he does not see that his eternal life has already begun. Instead of life *in* Christ, his is a life waiting *for* Christ. And it is an empty, wasteful life indeed.

We have stepped into eternal life with God when we gain the capacity to *know Him*. That is the connection made by Christ Jesus in **John 17:3**. We gain that capacity when we accept Christ as Savior and Lord, and acquire the indwelling Spirit. Thus at the point of conversion you have the ability to step upon the "Highway of Holiness"—that holy glide slope upward to heaven.

Put another way, you also have the *choice*. You can remain idle, useless—or you can be useful, maturing, active, fruitful in your ongoing eternal life in Christ.

YOUR NOTES

Acts 7:55-56

But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

John 14:1-3

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

Hebrews 1:10-12

And, "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the works of Your hands; They will perish, but You remain; And they all will become old like a garment, And like a mantle You will roll them up; Like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end."

Hebrews 12:26-29

And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

In our previous session we discussed how our eternal life is not set somewhere at an uncertain future date, but has already begun. We are already living in it. In our *next* session we will begin looking at some specifics of just what this early eternity should look like. Put succinctly, *How are we to think of and use our time on earth?*

In *this* session, however, in preparation for that, we need to first examine more closely what our lives will be in the future, for that future should inform our present.

HEAVEN: AN ACTUAL PLACE

I have earlier stated that heaven is less about place than a person—namely, God. But do not assume from that that I am suggesting that heaven is *not* an actual place, but just some mystical state of mind. Admittedly we have only God's word as a source of information about heaven, but, if we can have only one source, we can have none better than holy Scripture. And His word makes it clear that while it does exist in a spiritual dimension cloaked to (most) human eyes, heaven is a real, physical place. If not, why would God bother giving us resurrected bodies?

Read Acts 7:55-56. (Stephen martyred)

Read John 14:1-3. (Jesus to His disciples)

place = *topos* = a primary word; **a spot** (genitive **in space**, but limited by occupancy; whereas <G5561> (*chora*) is a larger but particular locality), i.e. location (as a position, home, tract, etc.); figurative condition, opportunity; specially **a scabbard** :- coast, licence, place, × plain, quarter, + rock, room, where.

The same word (*topos*) translates the Hebrew in the Septuagint in Deuteronomy 16:6 for the Jerusalem temple, when the Lord told Israel that only at "the place" of His choosing could they make sacrifices to Him.

...but at the **place** that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it, there you shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt.

One cannot read the passage in John 14 and think Christ refers to some mystical, never-never land, state of mind only. He can only mean an actual, physical place, suitable not just for *His* resurrected body, but ours as well.

NEW HEAVEN(S) AND EARTH

Somehow, at a time unknown by us and in a manner we cannot yet comprehend, heaven will be renewed. As Jesus states in Matthew 24:35

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."

We cannot say for certain if God will absolutely destroy that which is old and replace it with something totally new, but it seems clear that whether it is a wholesale replacement, or just a thorough scouring, it will not be a pretty sight. Let's do a quick survey of what God's word says, beginning with how the writer of Hebrews describes it (quoting Psalm 102):

Read Hebrews 1:10-12.

Read Hebrews 12:26-29.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

2 Peter 3:10-13

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

Revelation 20:11

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

Read 2 Peter 3:10-13.

So far, it is possible these refer only to the "heaven" we see overhead. Remember, the word translated "heaven" or "heavens" is fairly malleable, and can refer to the blue sky we see on a summer day, known space containing the planets and stars, or God's dwelling place. But the apostle John in his revelation makes it more specific:

Read Revelation 20:11.

Read Revelation 21:1-5.

Still, this need not refer to the globe of this earth being obliterated and the first heaven exploding into nothingness and both being replaced by an earth and a heaven that are brand spanking new.

Alan F. Johnson (in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*): John's emphasis on heaven and earth is not primarily cosmological but moral and spiritual... The Greek word for "new"—*kainos* (kai-nahs)—means new in quality, fresh, rather than recent or new in time (which would be the Greek *neos*). What makes the new heaven and earth "new" is above all else the reality that now "the dwelling of God is with men... They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God" (v3). The heaven and earth are new because of the presence of a new community of people who are loyal to God and the lamb in contrast to the former earth in which a community of idolaters lived. The "sea"—the source of the satanic beast (13:1) and the place of the dead (20:13)—will be gone. Again, the emphasis is not geographic but moral and spiritual. The sea serves as an archetype with connotations of evil. Therefore, no traces of evil in any form will be present in the new creation.

YOUR NOTES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Romans 8:19-23

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Matthew 5:3

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:5

“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Revelation 5:9-10

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

Revelation 22:3-4

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

Wayne Grudem takes the position that if God *were* to obliterate the old earth, that would be “an acknowledgement that sin had frustrated and defeated God’s purposes.” But what it will be is a restoration of the old to its original pristine state—a resurrection. We see this in what Paul writes in Romans 8:

Read Romans 8:19-23.

So, since it seems we are speaking more of *resurrection* and *renovation* than replacement, let’s take our cue from Johnson and Grudem and focus on the “moral and spiritual” aspects of this new heaven and new earth. What will be different?

ON THE NEW EARTH

Perhaps one of the most surprising things, for some Christians, about these times we have been describing is the realization that they will not be spending their eternity in heaven—at least heaven as we think of it now. God will, in a fantastical way, *combine* heaven and earth on the “new” earth. Admittedly it can be difficult to say with certainty which aspects of the new heaven and earth are literal and which are symbolic—e.g., will each gate of the new Jerusalem really consist of a literal, huge single pearl? (Where does one put the hinges?)—but it is clear enough that God’s Kingdom will be established on this new earth, and those whose names are written in the Book of Life will not just be sitting around eating bon bons.

God’s word gives us clues about these days. Let’s do a quick survey:

Read Matthew 5:3 & 5.

Read Revelation 5:9-10.

Read Revelation 22:3-4.

YOUR NOTES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Daniel 7:13-18

"I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed. As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. I approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: 'These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth. But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.'

Daniel 7:27

'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'

Let's take a quick look at another picture of the end times. Turn to the prophecy of Daniel. The details and sequence of this setting are beyond the scope of this study, but I want to just point out from this passage our—believers'—occupation during this time.

Read Daniel 7:13-18 & 27.

There are differences of opinion on just what, specifically, the saints will be doing. For instance, will they be literal governors and priests, actually ruling with authority, or do these passages simply refer to the saints sharing in Christ's glory and authority—sharing *positionally*.

But for our purposes here it is sufficient to understand that during these times—the time of a literal, physical, earthly Kingdom, ruled by Christ Himself, those who are His will have responsibilities. We will replace the fallen earthly kings and have some level of responsibility in this new Kingdom.

BEFORE THE THRONE

Finally, and most important, everything we do will be oriented toward the throne. This applies both during Christ's Millennial reign and the heaven in place where we to enter it before He returns to earth, and the resurrection of the saints takes place.

It has always been my habit to go directly to Revelation 4 for the picture of worship in heaven—with good reason. It is the first thing John saw when he, in the Spirit, passed through "a door standing open in heaven." It is a glorious, breathtaking scene of worship, climaxing with the refrain

"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." (Revelation 4:11)

But there's only one problem with that: There is no mention in that scene of the multitude of saints. It refers only to the elders and the "four living creatures."

YOUR NOTES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Revelation 19:1-6

After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and he has avenged the blood of his bond-servants on her." And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great." Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

So I thought a more appropriate passage would be the one in Revelation 19, referred to as the "Fourfold Hallelujah." Mind you, one need not search out the visions of John's revelation or Daniel's or Isaiah's prophecies to know the occupation of heaven's inhabitants.

God's word, from beginning to end, is filled with His worship and praise—it is a central and unifying theme. And even if we didn't have the reportage of John and Daniel and Isaiah, we could safely conclude that once we are actually in the holy presence of God Almighty (*El Shaddai*), rather than just standing on this fallen earth, our worship of Him would not diminish, but increase—in fervency, in volume, and in length. In Revelation 19 we get this fuller picture.

Read Revelation 19:1-6.

Now, if you think that when you get to heaven you're just going to sitting around eating bon bons, sipping iced tea in a hammock in the shade, then I've got news for you. Oh, I can't say that you'll *never* do those things. But in all of Scripture the predominant occupation of the saints is to give praise and honor and glory to God who sits upon the throne, crying "Hallelujah!" ("praise to Jah!"—the sacred name, expressed vehemently)

YOUR NOTES

1 Corinthians 13:12

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

2 Corinthians 7:1

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

2 Timothy 2:19-22

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

1 Peter 1:13-16

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Revelation 22:12

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done."

In the previous session we took a close look at the future that is out there for every believer—our future as rulers and priests on a new earth and new heaven.

The genesis for *this* session came out of some head-scratching over the seeming paradox between two established facts in Scripture.

1. The fullness of knowledge we will have in heaven, and (in spite of this) **Read 1 Corinthians 13:12.**
2. Our determined pursuit of progressive sanctification while on earth. **Read 2 Corinthians 7:1.**

Think about it: Why bother with the latter if the former is true? Why bother pursuing knowledge and a deeper understanding of Christ and Father God, and holiness, if once we enter heaven we instantly have all that in full?

The first and obvious answer has nothing to do with heaven. What would that be?

We grow and mature in Christ because we serve and worship Him in the here and now.

Read 2 Timothy 2:19-22.

also:

Because we are commanded to. Peter seems to cover both bases in his first epistle.

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16.

But if we consider this in the context of our study—the seamless trek of our eternity from earthly life to heavenly life—then it leaves one wondering, *What's the point?*

Sidebar: This very quandary is an example of an excellent way to do just that—pursue sanctification. As one grows in Christ, the thinking person is often confronted with "head-scratchers"—things that he either doesn't understand, or just seem nonsensical. We continue to grow in Him when we use this (confusion, uncertainty) as the basis for deeper study.

Here is what I came up with when I pondered this—here is the proposition:

Can we say with certainty that at least part of our heavenly reward will not be based on the level of maturity and purposeful obedience we have attained while on earth?

or expressed without the negative:

It is possible that at least part of our heavenly reward will be based on the level of maturity and purposeful obedience we have attained on earth.

REWARDS

We begin with the truth that the believer will be rewarded in heaven, as Jesus Himself states in Revelation 22. **Read Revelation 22:12.**

(Jesus said this same thing in person in Matthew 16:27.)

reward = *misthos* = apparently a primary word; **pay for service** (literal or figurative), good or bad :- hire, reward, **wages**.

"Originally taken from commercial life, denoting the payment paid to a worker." (In other words, *owed* to someone who had *earned* it.)

render = *apodidōmi* (ap-od-eed'-o-mee) = from <G575> (apo) and <G1325> (didomi); **to give away, i.e. up, over, back**, etc. (in various applications) :- deliver (again), give (again), (re-) **pay** (-ment be made), perform, recompense, render, requite, restore, reward, sell, yield.

"Originally, giving something up or back which one must give up because of some kind of obligation (thus to pay out a wage, to pay one's vow, etc.)" This could be either good or bad.

according to/as = probably adverb of comparative from <G3739> (hos); which how, i.e. **in that manner** (very variously used, as follows) :- about, after (that), (according) as (it had been, it were), as soon (as), even as (like), for, how (greatly), like (as, unto), since, so (that), that, to wit, unto, when ([-soever]), while, × with all speed.

has **done** = *ergon* = from a primary (but obsolete) **ergo (to work); toil (as an effort or occupation)**; by implication **an act** :- deed, doing, **labour**, work.

A literal rendering of this last phrase would be “as his work is.” There seems to be no reason for the KJV translation of “shall be,” which makes it future tense. Every other translation—including NKJV—puts this in the correct tense. In fact the NKJV is an excellent rendering of this, without adding the extra words “has done.” But the meaning is that we are rewarded for the works accomplished *prior to* that reward—not those after.

Now, we often think of our future, heavenly rewards in terms of good and pleasant things. We also, I think, associate our future rewards with our *actions*—our deeds, or service in the Lord’s name. To put it in blunt terms, we imagine that Billy Graham will receive more rewards than the one who has been a believer for just one day before he dies. We figure that martyrs like Jim Elliot, Nate Saint and Ed McCully received from the Lord rewards in excess of those received by one who spent the entirety of his Christian life sipping iced tea in a hammock.

If we, with the twenty-four elders, are to immediately cast our “crowns” in worship at the feet of God upon His throne, then we often think of our rewards less as something to put in our pocket than as something that simply passes through our hands for a moment.

Driving home after the original ABF class for the previous session, my good wife suggested the possibility that our *relationships* here on earth may be preparatory for our work on the new earth—that perhaps God has put us together in the here and now with those who will be our co-workers for eternity on the new earth. Whether that is true or not it is an intriguing thought—and a good segue into my point here.

My proposition is that our *earthly* sanctification—our growth and maturity in Christ—goes beyond its use in the here and now, and is preparatory, as well, for our work in the eternal *future*. God’s word regarding this is ephemeral—much as is most everything else regarding our eternity with God. The Bible does not offer succinct, detailed bullet points about such things, but offers us for the most part just tantalizing clues.

Consider the possibility that our rewards—our “crowns”—might include our *responsibilities* in heaven, on the new earth and in the new heavens:

- just as in the giving of our offering in a church service: earn -> render in worship
- note the continuity between earth and heaven

Just as a new president rewards his faithful campaign workers and contributors with cabinet posts, judgeships, or ambassadorships in his administration, perhaps God, too, apportions new-earth judgeships on the basis of our level of obedience, or the progress we have made in our sanctification while still on the old earth.

But of course our purpose here is not to conjecture or guess, but to confirm with God’s word. There are many passages in Scripture that are better understood—that come into full flower, so to speak—when we read them with this seamless perspective in mind. I’ve selected just one, found in Philippians 3, to illustrate this.

The heading given to this chapter in the NASB is “The Goal of Life.” Since these headings are not holy writ, I suggest that for our purposes we alter that to “The Goal of *Our Eternal Life*,” remembering that we are already *in* our eternal life.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Philippians 3:7-11

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:12-14

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul opens this passage and sets its focus with the call for his brethren to “rejoice *in the Lord*.”

Read Philippians 3:7-11.

v8: What did Jesus say eternal life was? that we “may know...the only true God, and Jesus Christ.”

v10: What does knowing Him look like? v10-11.

Read Philippians 3:12-14.

v12

“that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus”

Why should we think that that for which Christ laid hold of us would end the moment we pass from death to life?

v13

reaching forward = like a runner stretching out his whole body toward the finish line

v14

Feel the crescendo here: (v13 into v14)

This verse is kind of confusing. The reader’s mind thinks it is going in one direction, but then, suddenly, it loops back on itself. The end of v13 starts us on a heavenward path. Using the imagery of a runner in the public games, Paul gives us the picture of the Christian heading toward the finish line with determined purpose. He is not looking back, but forward, intent on winning the race, crossing the finish line. And he hints at heaven at the end of v13 with “...to what lies ahead.” Crossing the finish line for him means being with Jesus in heaven.

v14 continues this heavenward process, each word lifting us higher:

- press on (continue pursuing)...
- toward...
- the goal (winning the race)...
- for the prize (and we are thinking “crown of righteousness”)...
- of...
- the upward (and we are thinking, “upward? in the *direction* of up? aren’t we already *there* by now?)...
- **call** of God in Christ Jesus.

Wait a minute. God “called” us way back in the beginning—way back at the start of this race! *That* is the prize? Something we already have?!

This passage seems to blossom all the more when one considers it through the idea of a seamless transition from earth to heaven, from death to life. Somewhere in the back of our heads is this notion that we are to spend our time here on earth occupied with holiness, sanctification, growth and maturity in the things of God. But then we cross over the threshold of heaven and... what? What was all that work for if no matter how much effort was or was not expended on earth, we are all the same in heaven?

I believe Paul speaks to this in v14, that we were called not just to be saved, not just to serve the Lord while on earth, but we were called to a specific purpose that will be continued in heaven. Paul “presses on toward the goal for the prize”—the prize, the reward due him: to continue to use in the Lord’s service in heaven (and, more specifically, on the new earth) those spiritual muscles developed on the first earth.

Even before the moment the Christian came to Christ, he or she was “called”— called not just to salvation and earth-bound discipleship and service, but to worship and service in the *new* heaven and on the *new* earth.

So this brings us back to the question of why we are to develop our spiritual muscles on earth. Why would God let those developed muscles atrophy once we reach His presence? Why wouldn’t those skills become part of our due reward—the reward of continuing to serve Him even in a glorified state!

YOUR NOTES

SESSION 8: WHAT IS IMPORTANT

In our last session we discussed the importance of our calling and spiritual development—not just for our edification in the flesh, but in preparation and training for our future eternity in heaven and on a new earth. How, as Jesus Himself stated in his parable of the talents, the gifts and skills we develop here on earth may be put to use in His future eternal Kingdom.

For some time now we have been focusing on the future, but for the remainder of this class I would like to shift our focus more to the here and now. I don't want to leave you with the impression that everything we do on earth has value only for a distant tomorrow. The development of our spiritual muscles does indeed impact our future eternity, and we will not be ignoring that, but it is important that we understand that the benefits need not be postponed for that uncertain date.

INCONSEQUENTIALS

When I was a child, the minutia of life was an endless fascination. In detail I knew the texture of the bark of the hackberry tree that bore my tree house. The nooks and crannies of our garage's attic were a catacomb of discovery and imagination, in which I fashioned forts and caves, and secret dwellings. I knew the aroma of the first day of spring, and the excruciating cold of delivering newspapers on a winter's eve. I was familiar with every bend, every tide pool and miniature cataract of the tiny creek that meandered behind Franklin School.

As I grew older, the objects of my fascination changed. I discovered cars, and sports—and girls. But I still had the time and luxury to know them all in lingering detail: It was important that I knew the various models and types of cars. I read books about baseball, played in Little League, and knew the rich, leathery smell of my glove's palm, and the comfortable feel of swinging my own bat. And, of course, by a certain age the fairer sex became a powerful distraction from just about everything else. Suddenly my clothing, the cut of my hair, the scented liquid I applied after a shower, the popular songs playing on the radio—all became very important to me.

Even when I was old enough to go off to serve in the navy, I became intimately acquainted with the mirror-like shine on my shoes, the perfect crease in my trousers, the brevity of my haircut. During my stint as a mess cook, I memorized the smell of a walk-in reefer filled with vegetables, and the wilting steam coming off a serving table. Overseas I knew the cloying aromas of a Hong Kong marketplace, the smell of gray paint on a steel deck, and the sweet feeling of freedom when on liberty after a month at sea.

Life, during my youth, consisted of all these small things—absorbed and memorized, pigeon-holed, categorized—that became the catalogue of everything important. Small things were important because youth experience life by minutes and hours. Time passes slowly for the young.

Time for adults, on the other hand, passes at breakneck speed. During some hazy, unrecorded point in my adult life, small things became less important—almost invisible. Youth experience their life through a microscope, down to every tiny detail, while adults experience life through a wide-angle lens. The teenage girl knows the eating and grooming habits of the very latest pop heartthrob, but the adult woman already has her attention filled to capacity with the raising of her children, management of house and husband, or the daily rigors of the workplace.

I no longer have the luxury of studying the bark on each tree; I must do my work, then move on. The vehicle I drive is no longer selected for its appeal to others, but for its low price, and its reliability in moving me from Point A to Point B. I no longer listen to the popular music of the day; I listen to the news and the weather.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

John 17:1-3

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

John 17:20

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word."

John 15:21

"But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me."

Matthew 10:22

"You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved."

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:11

When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

In one sense the whole purpose of this class is to encourage each of us to "do away with" the childish things—the unimportant inconsequentials of earthly life—in favor of the *consequential*s—those things that have more to do with our eternity, and the God who has fashioned it.

JOHN 17

C. S. Lewis: If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

Aim at heaven and you will get earth "thrown in"; aim at earth and you will get neither.

So the challenge for the believer is to live and be effective in this temporal world, but with a mind (and heart and spirit) set on the eternal.

Let's spend some time in John 17 to see what Jesus had to say about this. As we saw before, He opens this prayer/treatise with His focus on the eternal, and He defines for us—by heaven's standards—what eternal life really is.

Read John 17:1-3.

v3

This is our starting point. Jesus declares that eternal life consists of knowing God and knowing His Son—and we might add, by means of the third member of the Trinity: the indwelling Holy Spirit.

For the purpose of our study I would like to emphasize two threads in this chapter. The first is Jesus' reference to "name." The second thread is His reference to "word." Both of these are pertinent to our eternal life—our *knowing* Him.

And by the way, lest you think this prayer stops at the twelve disciples (because in v6 Jesus refers to "the men whom You gave me out of the world," and in v9 He says "I ask on their behalf"), note v20. **Read v20.**

KNOWING HIS NAME

To appreciate the importance of Jesus' reference to God's "name," we must understand what this meant at the time it occurred and was written. Let's look at two verses that illustrate this.

Read John 15:21.

Read Matthew 10:22.

The simplest way to understand this is to replace the words "my name" with the word "me."

Adam Clarke: A little of the Divine nature was known by the works of creation; a little more was known by the Mosaic revelation: but the full manifestation of God, his nature, and his attributes, came only through the revelation of Christ.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

John 17:6

"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word."

John 17:11-12a

"I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me..."

John 17:26

"...and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

John 10:25-30

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

v6

Read v6.

The word "manifested" means, essentially, to "make visible."

In saying that He "manifested Your name" Jesus declares that He is God made visible in human flesh for all to see—that He displayed the fullness of God's character, attributes, behavior, personality, etc., to the earth. He was not just a *representative* for God; He *was* God. Put another way, as Adam Clarke states, Jesus *completed* the revelation of God to man.

v11-12a

In vs11 and 12 Jesus expresses His concern for those He would be leaving behind.

Read v11-12a.

Just what method does He ask the Father to employ to keep them safe? "...keep them in Your name" We are kept safe—and unified—by the *name*—the power of God manifested in His person." And even while Jesus was with His disciples on earth, He was using the power of God's name to keep and guard them.

v26

Finally in v26 Jesus affirms that He has done what was asked of Him: "I *have*... and *will* make known Your name."

Read v26.

Jesus came so that we could truly and personally *know* God; that could never have been possible without Him—which is to say, we could never have known *eternal life* with God without the Son of God in the person of Jesus here on earth.

So in His death He unlocked the door to the mansion of heaven, gaining us access to eternal life with God, but in His *life* He conducted us down the endless hallway of doors, each of which open upon the grand vista of the personality and qualities of Father God.

The connection between the "name" and eternal life is further expressed in John 10.

Read John 10:25-30.

By the power of His Father's name Jesus has given us eternal life. He can do this because He and the Father are one.

YOUR NOTES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

John 17:6

"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word."

John 17:7-8

"Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me."

John 6:67-69

So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

John 17:13-14

"But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

John 17:17

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

John 17:19

"For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."

KNOWING HIS WORD

Now let's look at what Jesus says about God's word. Jesus *manifested* God's name to His disciples, but He *delivered* God's word to them.

Read v6.

Just how did they have God's word to keep?

Read vs7-8.

Because Jesus delivered to them the words from very God, they believed that He came from Him.

Read John 6:67-69.

How did they come to know Jesus was the Christ? Because He had *words of eternal life*.

Read vs13-14.

Jesus "spoke" all these things—"...the words which You have given me..." (v8)—so that His disciples (including believers today) would "...have My joy made full in themselves."

And in an echo of how He earlier defined "eternal life," Jesus now defines "truth."

Read v17.

Note how the beginning of v17 points us back to the end of v13.

"Sanctify them..." = "...have My joy made full in themselves." Sanctification is having the joy of Christ *in full*. And how is this accomplished? How are we to survive and grow and mature in Him? "In truth." And what is truth? God's word. And v19 repeats this.

Read v19.

YOUR NOTES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

John 17:20-21

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me."

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

John 17:24

"Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."

John 17:25-26

"O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

KNOWING HIM

Finally, I want to point out that Jesus speaks here of a supernatural unity—not just believer with believer, not just the unity of the Godhead, but the unity of believers with the Godhead—even in the here and now.

Read vs20-21.

Jesus' prayer is that His disciples, as well as believers down through the ages, would be unified as the Body, members of His Kingdom, in the same way that the members of the Godhead are unified with each other. More than that, He prays that all those believers would be "in Us."

Notice the time frame: "...that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." This is not speaking of being unified with the Godhead in some vague future date after death. *The only way the world would be witness to it is if it occurred in the here and now.*

Now, before we read v24—which at a glance seems to speak about that future eternity with Jesus—turn to Matthew 28.

Read Matthew 28:18-20.

always = *pas* = including all the forms of declension; apparently a primary word;
all, any, **every**, **the whole** :- all (manner of, means), alway (-s), any (one),
 × **daily**, + ever, every (one, way), as many as, + no (-thing), × **thoroughly**,
 whatsoever, whole, whosoever.

Now back to John 17.

Read John 17:24.

Just where is Jesus? In heaven, certainly, but He is also with us in the here and now. Not just our future eternity, but the eternity we are living today. And he prays that we will be with Him.

One of the most important ways to do away with the unimportant inconsequentials, and concentrate on the *consequential*s—those things that have more to do with our eternity—is, by the power of His *name* and through the truth of His *word*, to **be with Him**.

See how Jesus finishes His prayer.

Read vs25-26.

How *personal*. How *intimate*. We don't just know who Jesus is. We don't just know about Him. We can live *in Him*. And when we do this, that is how we live the essentials—the consequentials. That is how we have the fullness of His joy in the here and now of our eternity.

YOUR NOTES

Isaiah 6:1-7

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven."

Revelation 4:2-11

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.

(continued on next page)

PART ONE

I concluded the previous session with the following statement:

"One of the most important ways to do away with the unimportant inconsequentials, and concentrate on the *consequential*s—those things that have more to do with our eternity—is, by the power of His *name* and through the truth of His *word*, to **be with Him**."

In this session we will look at one of the most important and effective ways we can "be with Him."

From the beginning of this class I have made passing references to today's topic. It is now time for us to dig in. The title of this—and next—week's sessions is *Learning the Language of Heaven*.

From a number of passages we have a pretty good picture of what it will be like for us in our future eternity. We have already discussed the *new* heaven and *new* earth, the differences between them and the present heaven, and how believers will be rulers and priests in this future. Today we examine that which will be our other, more important occupation: **worship**.

And I confess, the challenge for me this week has *not* been coming up with material, for this is a topic near and dear to my heart, one on which I have written extensively. No, the challenge has been how to approach it for the context of this class, and how to present it in a non-offensive way. For on this subject I could easily mount my soapbox and deliver a withering diatribe that would leave some angry, others offended, and just about everyone numb about the ears and brain box.

I will make every effort to avoid that consequence.

I first want to set the scene. Let's briefly look at some vignettes of heaven in God's word, then in the next session we will examine in more detail the passage where Christ Jesus expounds on our subject at hand.

Read Isaiah 6:1-7.

Read Revelation 4:2-11.

YOUR NOTES

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

(continued from previous page)

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

Revelation 7:9-12

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Read Revelation 7:9-12.

These passages paint a vivid picture for us of our second and most important eternal occupation: worshipping Father God and His Son. So if we are to perceive all of the Christian life as a glide slope upward to heaven—as not a preface, but as an integral *part* of our eternity—then we must take a long hard look at the worship we practice here on this first earth.

Defining "worship" is one of the most perilous challenges in the modern church. Among those who care—those who give any thought to it at all—there are many strong, sometimes diametrically opposed, positions.

Many years ago, in another place and time, I wrote and performed the narration for a new worship musical. The local church for which this musical was written—Southern Baptist—did not have the tradition for enthusiastic, demonstrative worship, so there was really nothing in the production that might have been remotely called "charismatic." This church body was conservative, even restrained in its worship, with a large contingent of venerables, and it was not my purpose to offend, but to encourage all of us into a closer, more authentic worship experience of our God.

In spite of the human factor, the Holy Spirit was indeed present. The musical went well. Those who participated—both in the choir and in the pews—experienced a genuine time of worship and praise. While the worship was understated, leaning more toward instruction than dancing in the aisles, there were still a few moments in which the Spirit prodded some of us toward such things as spontaneous praise and the reverent lifting of hands. As the worship leader, however, I was in a good position to observe those in the congregation, and I was disappointed—but not surprised—to see some discomfort, even disgust, on the faces of a few. And so I also was not surprised by a conversation I had a few days later with one of the church members—a leader not only in that local body, but in the regional association as well. This conversation, while cordial at both ends, became for me a benchmark illustration for those who are remarkably fearful of soaring too close to God.

Over the course of a ninety-minute telephone conversation this gentleman explained to me that this was just not how we were to do things here. At great length he pointed out that not only was he, personally, not interested in worshipping in such a manner, but that neither were *we* to do it. To him, the practice of a more demonstrative worship, such as the raising of hands in praise—indeed, even the concept of "worship" itself—was just a fad, just a gimmick. His contention was that believers in his denomination worshipped by *fellowshipping* with each other. Churches that were worship-oriented, he said, traditionally died out, whereas churches that were fellowship-oriented grow in number. We should not be demonstrative in a worship service; it's just "not necessary, and not a Southern Baptist thing." This brother in Christ finished the conversation by making what I found to be a rather astounding statement. I was left dumbfounded when this church leader said, "People like you are on a higher spiritual plane, and we want you to quit dragging us up to God."

That eye-opening conversation so long ago formed in me a renewed determination to never deny the powerful Spirit living within me, to never deny the yearning I have to live every day of my life closer to God than the day before.

To be fair, my friend was correct about one thing: No one should be "dragging" anyone else up to God. That is the work of the Spirit. Every believer in Christ is equipped with the same connections to God, and it is never another person's responsibility to drag anyone else kicking and screaming toward the throne. We are a body of equal saints before the Lord, and there will always be some uncomfortable in His presence.

My Christian brother failed to understand, however, one important point about worship. What he interpreted as worship that was *self-glorifying*, was in reality a personal determination to connect more intimately with God. We raise our hands in prayer, worship, or praise in an effort to be closer to Him, in an effort to *raise our love up to Him*—which is precisely what worship is all about! Just as an adoring child lifts her arms up to her daddy when he steps in the door, we lift up our hands, crying, “Abba, Father, I love You!”

John MacArthur writes in his volume, *The Ultimate Priority*,

Perhaps the greatest need in all of Christendom is for a clear understanding of the biblical teaching about worship. When the church fails to worship properly, it fails in every other area. And the world is suffering because of its failure.

SPECIFIC WORSHIP

For the purpose of our discussion, I would subdivide worship into two different but complementary kinds—two forms that I have labeled **specific** worship and **common**, or **less-specific**, worship. This week we will look at the first, and next week the second, as well as a study of what Jesus Himself said about the importance of worship.

By subdividing it—by acknowledging that worship can take different forms at different times and different occasions, we can remove at least some of the enmity that exists between opposing camps. But note: we are not free to choose just one or the other. *Both forms are necessary; both are essential* to a healthy, maturing eternal life.

Let us consider, first, what a more specific worship—worship that occurs in the “Holy of Holies”—in fact, is. First, however, let us consider what it is *not*.

- It is not just showing up on a Sunday morning. That is not worship. That is *attendance*.
- It is not shaking hands and being friendly with each other. That is not worship. That is, at best, *fellowship*.
- It is not drinking coffee and eating doughnuts. That is not worship. That is a *kaffee klatsch*.
- It is not just singing choruses or hymns. That is not worship. That is simply *singing*.
- It is not listening to a teacher or preacher with an open Bible on your lap. That is not worship. That is *instruction*.
- It is not serving on a committee, painting the bathrooms, or baking a casserole for the potluck. That is not worship. It is *service*.
- It is not some forms of prayer, for they are not worship, but *supplication*, *entreaty*, or *intercession*.

To be sure, real, specific worship may take place during any of these activities, but they are not in and of themselves, just by reason of their existence—just because they happen to be attached to “the church”—a form of specific worship.

Today, in this church age, we enter the Holy of Holies by way of the heart. We do not pass through heavily gated openings in stone walls. We do not don ornate raiment and headpieces and slaughter innocent livestock. We do not sprinkle blood on a golden mercy seat. Instead, we enter the presence of God with an attitude and thoughts of reverent adoration. In that supernatural joining of our spirit to His, we focus all of our attention and affection on our Maker and Lord.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Matthew 28:8-10

And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."

worship = *proskyneo* (pros-koo-neh'-o) = from <G4314> (pros) and a probably derivative of <G2965> (kuon) (**meaning to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand**); **to fawn or crouch to, i.e. (literal or figurative) prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore)** :- worship.

Thus the purest form of worship is, "I love You, Lord."

Specific worship is always—*always*—**directed upward**—that is, toward the Godhead. It is the humble, reverent believer directing his or her thoughts to and on God. It is not singing *about* God (that is testimony), nor is it singing about the *benefits of salvation* (that is evangelism). It is not even singing *about* worship (that is a *call* to worship, but not the worship itself).

An example of this last—a song about, or a call to, worship—would be, "Come Let us Worship and Bow Down"

- Specific worship is **adoration**. It is one person, or a single-minded group of people, telling God, and meaning it in the heart, "I love You."
- Specific worship is also **exaltation**. That is, it is one person, or a single-minded group of people, declaring that God's eternal and supernatural attributes raise Him higher than anything else in their lives.

Examples of true, specific worship would be, "You, O God, are holy!" and "O Lord, You are pure and righteous!"

In Scripture, what happens whenever a human being tries to bow down and worship an angel or other human being? They are instructed to stop what they are doing. But notice that when Jesus is the one being worshipped, the worshipper is *not* told to cease and desist.

Read Matthew 28:8-10.

Here is a beautiful example of specific worship. The women are not talking about Jesus. They are not in the synagogue chatting about the weather. They are not teaching Sunday School. They are bowed down in humble worship before the Son of God. Their physical attitude (as well as, we can safely assume, the attitude of their hearts) bespeaks both *adoration* and *exaltation*.

In the next session we will look at *common* worship, and then tie this all together with what Jesus had to say about worship.

YOUR NOTES

LOOSE ENDS

Even though many of us know that the word “church” refers to the body of Christ—the people who call upon His name—we still often use the word to refer to a building, or a meeting.

“I’m going to the church to do some work.”

“Sunday morning I attend church.”

Even though many of us know that the word “worship”—especially as used in our study last week of *specific* worship—refers to direct adoration and exaltation of God, we still use the word as shorthand to refer to such things as the meeting that takes place in the church-house on Sunday mornings—which is, in reality, the “worship *service*.”

How difficult it is to compartmentalize these terms—to get past the habits and traditions we have grown up with. Last week we devoted all our time to defining “specific worship”—that is, the direct, intentional adoration and exaltation of the Godhead. I went so far as to say that if we have not done that in a Sunday morning service, we have not truly worshipped.

In the next session we will be studying the passage in John 4 where Jesus Himself defines worship for us—the kind of worship that is pleasing to our heavenly Father. It is important that we under these terms so we can please Father God by worshipping, as Jesus says, “in spirit and *truth*.”

Please understand that the term “specific worship” is tightly focused, and is only one of several acceptable components of the “worship service.” What was defined last week was *not* the worship service as a whole, but *only the worship that should take place within it*. Sunday mornings also contain preaching, teaching, reading God’s word, singing songs that are not worship, all forms of prayer... I am not suggesting in any way that simply because these are not “specific worship” they have no place in the Sunday morning service. Of course they do. They are just not part of the specific, direct, focused adoration of the Godhead—which was the topic of our discussion.

Mark 12:28-31

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

John 21:15-17

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

PREFACE

Read Mark 12:28-31. (quoting Deuteronomy 6)

foremost^{NASB}, **first**^{KJV} = *pro'-tos* = contracted superlative of <G4253> (pro); foremost (in time, place, order or importance) :- before, beginning, **best**, **chief** (-est), first (of all), former.

The meaning used here is clarified by Jesus with, “There is no other commandment *greater*...”

greater = *me-gas* = *big* (literal or figurative, in a very wide application) :- (+ fear) exceedingly, great (-est), high, large, loud, mighty, + (be) sore (afraid), strong, × to years.

The NIV has it correctly: “most important.”

We “love the Lord our God” by *obeying* and *serving* Him—

Read John 21:15-17.

—and *worshipping* Him.

There are a number of important components to the life of the church and in the life of the individual believer: instruction, teaching, reading God’s word, prayer, fellowship—both true *koinonia* and potluck dinners—evangelism, etc. But Jesus says

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Psalms 51:6

Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

Psalms 51:15-17

O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Romans 12:1

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

1 Peter 2:4-5

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

before everything else, the most important is to *love* the Lord God. And the first and most direct way we do this—the equivalent of our telling our husband or wife that we love them—is through worship.

In the last session we examined the highest form of worship, which I have labeled *specific* worship—worship that is direct and intentional. It is undiluted—even with thanksgiving. It contains no other forms of prayer, such as intercession, entreaty, etc. It is clear and direct, focusing on the Lord God and His attributes, expressing adoration and exaltation.

That is, true and specific worship is not, “Lord God, I worship You for answering my prayer for healing.” That is thanksgiving *for what He has done*. Worship always focuses on *who and what God is in Himself*—not what He has done in our lives.

Thanksgiving: “Thank You, heavenly Father for answering my prayer for healing.”

Worship: “Lord God, You are holy and just. I fall down before You.”

Worship need not be limited to the Sunday morning service; it can be performed anywhere at anytime. But it is always directed upward to God. Our physical attitude is less important than the attitude of our heart. We each may worship in different ways: playing music, lifting of hands, speaking in tongues, dancing... (all sanctioned and encouraged in God’s word, by the way) But the two requirements that all specific worship must meet is that it be directed to God, and that we mean it.

It is not the actions; it is the sincerity of the heart.

Read Psalm 51:6 & 15-17.

COMMON, OR LESS-SPECIFIC, WORSHIP

But there are forms of worship I would call *less-specific*, or *common*. As a rule these do not have the tightly focused intensity of specific worship. Perhaps the classic Bible passage for this is found in Romans 12.

Read Romans 12:1.

The KJVS translate this “reasonable service,” which is just fine, but the whole flavor of this verse is cultic—that is, the setting is one of entering the holy place of God carrying the sacrifice to be laid upon the altar.

...present...a living, holy sacrifice, acceptable to God...

But what is different is that Paul is saying that *we*—and specifically our physical bodies—are to be the sacrifice laid upon the altar.

The setting is one of cultic worship, so I think the NASB and NIV are correct in translating this last phrase, “...your spiritual service of worship” (NIV: “spiritual *act* of worship”).

The apostle Peter, in his second epistle, writes much the same thing but in a different way.

Read 1 Peter 2:4-5.

Here’s the idea:

- That which I have termed “**specific**” worship is direct, purposeful, and narrowly focused. Using spoken words or songs—even the silent words of the reverent heart—it expresses undiluted adoration and exaltation of the Godhead.
- “**Less-specific**” or “**common**” worship is less-focused, to the point that it *may* include just about anything we do, *if*—a big if—*if it is done to and for the Lord*.

Let's consider some practical examples, drawing from the list I used in our previous session.

- It is not just showing up on a Sunday morning. That is not worship. That is *attendance*.
But if we enter the church house with a heart overflowing with praise, expectant, eager to worship the Lord, our being there may be a form of common worship.
- It is not shaking hands and being friendly with each other. That is not worship. That is, at best, *fellowship*.
When we greet each other in the name of the Lord, investing ourselves in each others sorrows and joys, empathizing with their situation as a brother or sister (true *koinonia*), that can be a form of common worship.
- It is not just singing choruses or hymns. That is not worship. That is simply *singing*.
If any song we sing causes us to magnify the Lord, causes our spirit to rise in finer communion with His, then the singing of any song may be a form of common worship. For example: If while singing an evangelistic hymn such as “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations” your heart cries out, *O Lord, I love you so much that I want to serve You, I want to answer this call to carry Your message to the Lost out of my devotion to You*, then that may be a form of worship.
- It is not listening to a teacher or preacher with an open Bible on your lap. That is not worship. That is *instruction*.
If that preacher, teaching from God’s word, says something that causes your spirit to soar into the sweet ether of heaven, then it may be a form of common worship—but note: not the preaching, but your reaction to it. However, for the preacher it is possible he fits into the next point.
- It is not serving on a committee, painting the bathrooms, or baking a casserole for the potluck. That is not worship. It is *service*.
This is the easiest example. We can serve the Lord for any number of reasons, but when we serve Him with a heart overflowing with love for Him—when we paint the Sunday School walls or clean the church toilets, or visit a nursing home out of our intense, adoring devotion to Him, that can be a form of worship.
Likewise the preacher on Sunday may be delivering his sermon simply because he is getting paid to do it. But if the Spirit is moving in him and his heart bursts with exaltation of his God during his exposition of God’s word, then that, too, can be a form of less-specific worship.

Whether ours is specific or common worship, it all depends on the heart. For that is what God uses to determine our veracity.

Psalms 96:1-9

Sing to the Lord a new song;
Sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, bless His name;
Proclaim good tidings of His
salvation from day to day.
Tell of His glory among the nations,
His wonderful deeds among all the
peoples.
For great is the Lord and greatly to
be praised;
He is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are
idols,
But the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before
Him,
Strength and beauty are in His
sanctuary.
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of
the peoples,
Ascribe to the Lord glory and
strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory of His
name;
Bring an offering and come into His
courts.
Worship the Lord in holy attire;
Tremble before Him, all the earth.

1 Corinthians 14:13-15

Therefore let one who speaks in a
tongue pray that he may interpret.
For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit
prays, but my mind is unfruitful.
What is the outcome then? I will
pray with the spirit and I will pray
with the mind also; I will sing with
the spirit and I will sing with the
mind also.

PART THREE

From the story of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well we can draw a number of lessons: Tolerance, Forgiveness, Salvation, Repentance, Spiritual Thirst, Purity, Life in Christ, Conviction, Mercy, Grace... and Worship.

As we draw to a close this class on *The Beginning of Heaven*, we will focus on the last: worship. For two sessions now we have been examining this topic. For some it has been an affirmation of deeply held beliefs; for some it has been like cracking open a door onto something rarely considered; for others it has been a challenging, even uncomfortable subject. And the fact that there are such varied responses to this subject of worship underlines the importance of establishing what God's word has to say about it.

One might ask, *Why? What's the big deal?*

First, because we are called to do it now in our eternity present:

Read Psalm 96:1-9.

Second, it will be our primary occupation in our eternity future—as we have already seen in our readings from The Revelation.

And I am sure that some have thought that I have been nit-picking in the last two sessions—too finely dissecting this business of worship.

In this session we answer that.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:14-15,20

On our way to what Jesus says about worship in John 4, let's take a side trip to what Paul says in First Corinthians 14. The context here is Paul's instruction on the proper use of tongues in worship. In v12 he states that we should desire spiritual gifts that edify not ourselves, but the church. His point, which he outlines in vs2-5, is that speaking in tongues without accompanying interpretation is really speaking to God and, if in public, edifies the speaker only. In the church gathering it is better to edify the *church*, through prophesy (teaching), or interpreting tongues.

In other words, speaking in tongues is the outward manifestation of our spirit speaking with God's Spirit, and does nothing for a bystander unless it is interpreted for them.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:13-15.

I love this passage, because here Paul expresses the balance we should have in our communion with God and with each other.

v14

pray = *proseuchomai* (pros-yoo'-khom-ai) = from <G4314> (pros) and <G2172> (euchomai); to pray to God, i.e. supplicate, worship :- pray (× earnestly, for), make prayer.

This is the most common and comprehensive word for "prayer" of a number of types—including worship and praise.

spirit = *pneuma* = from <G4154> (pneo); a current of air, i.e. breath (blast) or a breeze; by analogy or figurative a spirit, i.e. (human) the rational soul, (by implication) vital principle, mental disposition, etc., or (superhuman) an angel, daemon, or (divine) God, Christ's spirit, the Holy Spirit :- ghost, life, spirit (-ual, -ually), mind. Compare <G5590> (psuche).

Brown: "...[pneuma] denotes that power which man experiences as relating him to the spiritual realm, the realm of reality which lies beyond ordinary observation and human control... the human spirit, or perhaps better,

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

1 Corinthians 14:15

What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.

1 Corinthians 14:20

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

John 4:19-24

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

man in so far as he belongs to the spiritual realm and interacts with the spiritual realm... that aspect of man through which God most immediately encounters him." (emphasis mine)

mind^{NASB}, **understanding**^{KJVS} = *nous* = probably from the base of <G1097> (ginosko); the intellect, i.e. mind (divine or human; in thought, feeling, or will); by implication meaning :- mind, understanding. Compare <G5590> (psuche).

Both (mind and understanding) are correct—in fact, best taken together. In Brown's *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (from which the above quote is taken) this Greek word is grouped not under the word group for mind, but under the word group for *reason*. The word can stand for the organ of thought, but also for reason, understanding, logical thought.

v15

What is the outcome then? = What's the answer to this? or What should I conclude from this?

Answer: In my communion with God, whether praying or singing, I will use my spirit *and* my mind. And if I am in public, I will do both so that those around me can understand as well.

The Message: So what's the solution? The answer is simple enough. Do both. I should be spiritually free and expressive as I pray, but I should also be thoughtful and mindful as I pray. I should sing with my spirit, and sing with my mind.

v20

Read v20.

Here is how J. B. Phillips paraphrases v20:

My brothers, don't be like excitable children but use your intelligence! By all means be innocent as babes as far as evil is concerned, but where your minds are concerned be full-grown men!

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

In His conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus offers the original thought from which Paul, perhaps, received inspiration for his teaching.

Read John 4:19-24.

v19-20

Read vs19-20.

The Samaritans had a fascinating history, and I wish we had time to include it here. But let it suffice that after the divided kingdom, after the Babylonian/Persian exile, those in the southern kingdom of Judah considered the Samaritans—the remnant left over from the northern kingdom of Israel—as mongrels, a people who adhered to an incomplete, bastardized version of Judaism. In Jesus' time they were hated, and the Jews would have nothing to do with them, would not even pass through their territory, but would add miles to their journey by going around.

The Samaritans did not worship at the temple in Jerusalem, but on Mount Gerizim.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

John 4:19-24

The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

v21-23

Read v21.

Jesus informed her that something brand new was about to take place—in fact, though no one realized it, Jesus states in v23 that it had already begun. Part of this new thing was that *place* would no longer be important when it came to worshipping Father God.

In v22 He explains the difference between Samaritan and Jewish—that is, Mount Gerizim and Jerusalem—worship, and here he broaches the subject most pertinent for us today.

Read v22.

We get some help from John MacArthur, Jr.

The Samaritan style of worship was done in ignorance. The Samaritans' spiritual knowledge was limited because they rejected all of the Old Testament except the Pentateuch. Their religion was characterized by enthusiastic worship without proper information. They worshiped in spirit, but not in truth. That is why Jesus said, "You worship that which you do not know" (v. 22).

The Jews had the opposite situation. They accepted all the books of the Old Testament. They had the truth but lacked the spirit. When the Pharisees prayed or gave alms or fasted, their hearts weren't in it. Jesus called them hypocrites, phonies, and whitewashed tombs, full of dead men's bones. In Mark 7:6, Jesus told the Pharisees and scribes, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.'"

The worship that occurred on Mount Gerizim was enthusiastic heresy. The worship offered at Jerusalem was barren, lifeless orthodoxy.

Read v23.

This business of worship is changing, Jesus tells her.

true worshipers = *alethinós* (adjective) = from <G227> (alethes); **truthful** :- true; **sincere**.

spirit = *pneuma* = as above

those = *ho* = **including the feminine** he, hay; **and the neuter** to, to; in all their inflections; the definite article; the (sometimes to be supplied, at others omitted, in English idiom) :- the, this, that, one, he, she, it, etc.

worship = *proskyneo* (pros-koo-neh'-o) = from <G4314> (pros) and a probably derivative of <G2965> (kuon) (**meaning to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand**); **to fawn or crouch to, i.e. (literal or figurative) prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore)** :- worship.

truth = *alethia* (al-ay'-thi-a) (noun form of above)

Remember how Jesus defined "truth" in John 17?

"Sanctify them in the truth; **Your word** is truth." (John 17:17; emphasis added)

So our worship is to be energized and expressed by a spirit that is informed by the truth of God's word.

v24

Jesus closes out this treatise on worship by declaring

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

For the third time in our study Jesus answers a question that has not been asked. Here it is as if the Samaritan woman has tugged on His sleeve and asked, *Why? Why does God—whom You are calling 'Father'—seek this kind of worship?*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Jesus answers, *You are man-kind; you are flesh. But God is spirit-kind. Because He is spirit, to acceptably worship Him you must speak in His language—the language of the spirit. But that language must be based on truth—His truth.*

MacArthur: Jerusalem had the truth but not the spirit. Gerizim had the spirit but not the truth. Jesus rebuked both styles of worship when He said, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (v. 24).

The two enemies of true worship are Gerizim and Jerusalem. Sincerity, enthusiasm, and aggressiveness are important, but they must be based on truth. And truth is foundational, but if it doesn't result in an eager, excited, enthusiastic heart, it is deficient. Enthusiastic heresy is heat without light. Barren orthodoxy is light without heat.

The same two extremes are still with us today. On the one hand there are groups who get together and hold hands and sway back and forth and sing songs and speak in ecstatic languages. You can't fault their enthusiasm, but it is often zeal without knowledge.

On the other hand, there are those who hold firmly to sound doctrine but have lost their spirit of enthusiasm. They know the truth but can't get excited about it. Maybe some of them go to your church.

The Father seeks both enthusiasm and orthodoxy, spirit and truth.

From the beginning, the premise of this class has been that we are not to subdivide our existence into earthly life and eternal life—that is, heaven = bliss, earth = waiting room for this future bliss—but to embrace the fact that our eternal life has already begun. We are in it. It is a continuum that has already begun. So the better, and more realistic way to express the two are “eternity present” and “eternity future.”

When we look at our eternity in this way, it should *unify* our life with God in the here and now with our future life with God in heaven and on the new earth. Crossing the threshold of heaven should not be a cold-shower surprise; it should rather be just a continuation of how we have been living all along.

So in conclusion, let us consider what application we can glean from this passage by Jesus about what kind of worship pleases the Father. For, Christ Jesus does not subdivide worship: He does not say, *This is the kind of worship you are to use on earth, and this is the kind you are to use once you are in heaven.* No, He puts no time frame on it, but just describes the kind of worship that pleases Father God at *any* time, from *anyone*.

Because God is spirit, we are to worship *in spirit*:

- **in the language of heaven**, which is spirit-language (Romans 8:26);
By this I do not refer to “speaking in tongues,” but to our spirit in communion with the Holy Spirit, translating our earnest worship into God's language.
- **with joy and expectation**, an eagerness to adore and exalt the Father and Son;
- **with the fullness of our being** (Psalm 103:1);
- **from the inside out** (Psalm 45:1);
That is, from a fullness of heart, an expression of our abundant devotion to our God, rather than by rote, as an expression only of tradition and common practice.
- **as the Spirit moves**, anywhere and anytime (John 4:21);
God Himself is the ultimate author of our praise; we respond whenever His Spirit moves our spirit into worship.
- **with an undivided heart** (Psalm 57:7)—
- **that is yielded** and open.
In the words of that great hymn, “Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee...”

Romans 8:26

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

Psalms 103:1

Bless the Lord, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name.

Psalms 45:1

My heart overflows with a good theme; I address my verses to the King; My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

John 4:21

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.”

Psalms 57:7

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises!

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

John 4:23-24

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Hebrews 10:22

...let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Because God's word is truth, we are to worship *in truth*:

- **the underlying structure** of our worship is to be based on **His Word** (John 4:23-24);
- our worship is to be **truthful, sincere** (John 4:23; Hebrews 10:22; Gospels); Worship without a sincere heart does not count for anything in the eyes of the Lord—just go back and review for yourself how many times and with such vehemence Jesus railed against hypocrisy.

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BIOGRAPHY

We are David and Linda Lampel, and we live in a large country house in the rural area outside Winterset, Iowa, in the middle of the United States. Our home is surrounded by fields of corn and soybeans, and by dense woods that are home to deer, raccoons, possums, wild turkeys, woodchucks, coyotes, and myriad birds of all shapes and colors.

The tranquility and beauty of this place contribute to what we do. In fact, we believe that the Lord brought us to this home because He knew that here we would best be equipped to serve Him and others.

Both of us work at home—Dave with his writing, and Linda (now retired) with her baking, needlework, and crocheting projects that are given to charities. Now that she has been unshackled from the business world, Linda has expanded our gardens, and has returned to baking all our bread—and spending more time with our family of seven cats.

The Lord has given us a good life, and we are most grateful to Him—especially for our 41 years together as husband and wife.

