

WINDOWS

INTO

HEAVEN

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1.	THE BEAUTY OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:9-21
CHAPTER 2.	THE CLOTHES OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 7:9-17
CHAPTER 3.	THE COLORS OF HEAVEN based on Rev.21:9-21
CHAPTER 4.	EATING IN HEAVEN based on Rev. 22:1-6
CHAPTER 5.	THE GLORY OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:22-27
CHAPTER 6.	THE GOLD OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:9-21
CHAPTER 7.	HUMOR IN HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:4
CHAPTER 8.	THE JEWELS OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:9-21
CHAPTER 9.	OCCUPATIONS IN HEAVEN bases on Rev. 22:1-5
CHAPTER 10.	THE LOCATION OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:1-8
CHAPTER 11.	THE MUSIC OF HEAVEN based on Rev.15:1-8
CHAPTER 12.	THE ORDER OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:9-21
CHAPTER 13.	RECOGNITION IN HEAVEN based on Luke 16:19-31
CHAPTER 14.	THE RIVER OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 22:1-2
CHAPTER 15.	THE SUN OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:15-27

1. THE BEAUTY OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:9-21

Among the world's famous short stories is the one called, *The Lost Words Of Love*, by the French writer, Mendes. It is the fascinating tale of how an evil spirit sought to ruin man by stealing three words out of his vocabulary. The three words were, I love you. The spirit succeeded in this vicious vocabulary vanishing trick, and the results were tragic. Friends drifted apart, couples broke up, and quarreling and depression spread like a

plague. People stopped singing, poets stopped writing, and it appeared that hell on earth would soon be a reality. The story ends happily, however, because the spirit himself falls in love, and the world recovers the lost words of love.

It may sound weird, but it does have a message of profound truth. For if you destroy man's love he is as good as in hell, and without love there can be no heaven. In verse 8, John lists for us those who are excluded from heaven and cast into the lake of fire. They are all products of hatred. They hate God, and do not believe; they hate man and thus they murder; they hate what is pure, and thus they pollute and corrupt the beauty of human love; they hate the truth and thus they are habitual liars. Hatred on earth is the beginning of hell, just as love on earth is the beginning of heaven. Love and hate--heaven and hell, are almost parallel phrases.

The ugliness of hate is what will determine the environment of hell. Earl Panzram murdered 23 people, and was executed in 1930. His last words were, "I wish the whole human race had one neck and I had my hands around it." God will cleanse the new heaven and the new earth of all such hate. The world itself will be cleansed by fire, and all that blots the beauty of God's creation will be eliminated. Love only, will be allowed in heaven, and they result will be beauty beyond our wildest dreams. Love will reign supreme and no evil spirit will be able to rob men of it. D. L. Moody recognized the connection of love and beauty in heaven. He wrote, "Heaven is the only place where the conditions of love can be fulfilled." Then he quotes the poet-

Beyond these chilling winds and gloomy skies;
Beyond death's cloudy portal,
There is a land where beauty never dies-
Where love becomes immortal.

Heaven began in the beauty of God's love. John 3:16 begins with God's love, and ends with God's heaven--everlasting life. In between is the gift that links us to both His love and His heaven--God's Son. He is the source of all that is beautiful in both time and eternity. Just looking at the beauty of this fallen and this sin stained world, is enough to make us marvel at what the beauty of heaven must be. Someone looking up at the stars said, "If the suburbs are so beautiful, how beautiful the city of heaven must be. All of our enjoyment of the beauty of this world is a mere faction of the creative work of God. Much is never seen by anyone.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
And waste it's fragrance on the desert air.

Since we know this to be true, we know by God's own handiwork that He is a lover of beauty. This means, even if the Bible had nothing in it about heaven, we would still know that James Montgomery spoke true theology when he wrote--

If God hath made this world so fair,
Where sin and death abound,
How beautiful, beyond compare
Will paradise be found!

The Bible tells us much about the beauty of heaven. John was caught up to see it for himself, and he tells us much of what he saw. First of all,

he compares the holy city to a bride in verse 9. Back in verse 2 he had stressed the beauty of the bride by saying she was adorned for her husband. The bride adorned is the universal symbol of beauty. She represents not only the beauty of love, but the beauty of the physical. Her gorgeous gown and magnificent jewelry set her apart as the object of adoration.

All commentators agree that the bride represents the church in it's ideal state. This being the case, the beauty of this heavenly bride is relevant to all believers. They will be a part of the beauty of heaven just as the lost will be a part of the ugliness of hell. The eternal destiny of all men is either beauty or ugliness. It is safe to say that every Christian will be eternally beautiful. The Bride of Christ will be without spot or wrinkle. No Christian will bear any defect of any kind. Paul will not longer have his thorn in the flesh, and every physical problem will cease to exist, when we receive our resurrected bodies. Joni stresses her hope of being rid of her wheel chair and dancing with the angels. There is no reason to doubt that her hope will be fulfilled.

Imagine what this hope must have meant to the first readers of the book of Revelation. Christians were of the poor class. Many were slaves, whose bodies revealed the lack of adequate food and care. The hard life of millions of Christians left them scarred and maimed. Like Lazarus at the gate of the rich man, the only medical care they had was that of the dogs, who came and licked their sores. What a glorious hope heaven was to them. Even with all our progress in medical care, we still experience enough of the problems of the flesh to appreciate John Mason Neal's joyful poem of heavenly expectation--

O how glorious and resplendent,
Fragile body, shalt thou be,
When endued with heavenly beauty,
Full of health and strong and free,
Full of vigor, full of pleasure,
Thou shall last eternally.

No one in the Old Testament was allowed into the presence of God who had any bodily defect. No sacrifice was acceptable that had even the slightest blemish. All of this was to stress that God is a God of beauty and perfection. Nothing short of perfect beauty can please Him. This being the case, all who love His Son are assured of being perfectly beautiful forever. If Christ is our Savior, we will be a part of this lovely bride adorned for her heavenly husband. We may not always appreciate our photograph now, but we shall all be satisfied when we awake in His likeness. Meanwhile, with all of our defects, we can still let the beauty of Jesus be seen in us, if we heed the wisdom of Paul and focus our minds on what is true, noble, and lovely. Christian people should have the highest standards in every realm of life. Quality and beauty should characterize all that they appreciate. Margerie Holmes writes,

Lord, let me take time for beauty.

Time for a jug of flowers on the table, or a plant if flowers
arn't in bloom. Time for a dap of lipstick or a fresh blouse
before the family comes home. Don't let me settle for the
dingy, the shabby, the ugly--either with myself or with my
house, just because I'm too lazy to make the effort.

Give me the energy and the will to provide a bit of beauty.

You've made the world so beautiful, Lord, let me take time

to see it. Even as I'm rushing to the market or driving children to their destinations, let me be aware of it: The glory of hills and woods and shining water. The colors of traffic lights and yellow buses, of fruit stands and lumberyards, of girls wearing bright scarves that dance in the breeze.

She goes on to describe the beauty in her own back yard, the beauty of her children, the beauty they see in nature, and the beauty everywhere that we tend to ignore. She closes with this prayer--

Dear God, to live at all is such a miracle--whether as bug or bird or creature of any kind. To come into existence upon this planet and be able to witness it's beauty is such a privilege, especially for human beings.

Help us to cherish and be a part of that beauty.

Let me take time for beauty, God.

What you focus upon, is what you become, and this is preparation for being a part of the beautiful bride of heaven. All the beauty of nature, family, marriage, and all of life that we can experience in time is a taste of heaven. We are not to wait until heaven, but we are to start living a life of beauty in all areas now.

The next thing we want to notice is that the environment of heaven is beautiful. The beautiful people will have a beautiful place in which to dwell. In verse 11 John says the holy city has the very glory of God. It radiates with the brightness of beautiful jewels--like Jasper, as clear as crystal. In verse 18 we see that the whole city was pure gold, and verse 19 says the walls were adorned with every jewel, and verse 21 says the gates were of solid pearl. Whatever else this description may mean, all agree that it means the dwelling place of the Bride of Christ--the Church--will be a place of unmatched beauty. All the splendor of the royal courts of Babylon, Egypt, and Rome cannot match the magnificent marvels that will surround the saints in heaven.

Again, can you imagine what this meant to the poor and persecuted Christians of the first centuries? They lived in poverty and were often oppressed by the wealthy. The only time they ever saw the glory of gold and precious stones in when they were brought before royalty to be condemned. The message to them, from Jesus, was to be faithful even unto death, and they would receive the crown of life. This crown of life involved a quality of life that was far superior to that of Caesar himself.

There is no way to escape the physical appeal of heaven. Christians long to have nice things, and to live on the level of the highest quality. They do all they can to beautify their environment. They carpet their floors, put art on their walls, and decorate with things of beauty. They enjoy the plush motel as much as anyone. The desire for beauty is natural and is a part of the image of God in us. It can easily be perverted and become idolatry, but in itself, it is a good thing to love beauty. God dwells in glory and splendor. Jesus said he was going to prepare a place in the Father's house for the redeemed. Can you imagine the work of this divine architect being less plush than that of the best on earth? Can you imagine some of the saints in heaven saying, "This is nice, but I stayed in a luxury motel in Florida that was even nicer." What Jesus has gone to prepare will be beyond comparison with the best of time.

Billy Graham, in a sermon on heaven said, "Very few people have their

homes as beautiful as they would like to have them, but everyone in heaven will find it beautiful beyond every imagination. Heaven could not help but be so, because God is a God of beauty." Christians were the underdogs, who first read this book, and many have been that all through the ages, but their destiny is to be eternal dignity and wealth. Christians will be rich beyond measure, with none of the vices that go with riches in this life.

This truth about heaven is to have practical effects in time. We are not to grieve as those who have no hope, when we lose the treasures of time. We are to lay up treasure in heaven that can never be lost. D. L. Moody tells of how John Newton, author of Amazing Grace, once called on a family that lost all in a fire. He said to the mother, "I have you joy madam." She was surprised, and said, "What? Joy that all my property is consumed?" He replied, "O no, but joy that you have so much that fire cannot touch." He was urging her not to forget the tremendous treasure in heaven just because she lost her trivial treasure in time. We all tend to do this because of our thoughtlessness about the riches of heaven.

The great saints of the Bible kept their eyes on the things above. Hebrews chapter 11 tells us that faith in God's ultimate reward is what made the great men of God great. Abraham was rich, and could have built a city, but he dwelt in tents and was satisfied. Heb.11:10 says, "For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Moses has the chance to dwell in the royal palace of Egypt, and to enjoy the riches of royalty, but he gave it up to lead the slaves to freedom. Heb.11:26 says, "He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward." We so often try to be more spiritual than the Bible. We fail to appeal to man's God-given nature which desires riches and reward. It is true, this can be a dangerous appeal to what is perverted, but you can't escape the fact that it can also be an honest appeal to what is God-like in man. Heaven appeals to our desire for the very best.

Jesus promised his disciples that they would receive ten times whatever they gave up to follow and serve him. Heaven is pictured as so beautiful, to encourage God's people to be willing to make sacrifices for Christ, so as to lay up treasure in the New Jerusalem. We only deceive ourselves if we pretend we have no desire to be rich, and to dwell in great splendor. God is the author of our nature, and the expert on psychology, and he appeals to our love of beauty and wealth. If our hearts have no desire for God's best, then there is something wrong with our hearts, and we will not be looking for the coming of our Lord to take us to the mansion he has prepared.

The good, the true, and the beautiful are three goals man has always sought. All three will be achieved and fulfilled completely in the Holy City. H.C. Stanton said, "Christ loves beauty, otherwise He would not be forever creating it." If we lack a love for beauty, there is something wrong with our love for the author of all beauty. Love and beauty go together, and they will for all eternity.

An old English story tells of how the Lord of Burleigh found and won the heart of a simple village maiden. She had no idea of his position and wealth. After the wedding she expected to be taken to his cottage. They passed one beautiful dwelling after another until--

.....a gateway she discerns
with armorial bearings stately,
And beneath the gate she turns,

Sees a mansion more majestic
Than all those she saw before;
Many a gallant gay domestic
Bows before him at the door.
And they speak in gentle murmur,
When they answer to his call,
While he treads with footstep firmer,
Leading on from hall to hall.
And while now she wonders blindly,
Nor the meaning can divine,
Proudly turns he round and kindly
"All of this is mine and thine."

She was suddenly, by marriage, Lady of Burleigh, a woman of great dignity and wealth. So it will be for all who are a part of the Bride of the Lamb. Every dream, and every fantasy of having all the resources possible for happiness, will suddenly be a reality in the mansion Jesus has gone to prepare. This means, the ugliest thing a person can do is to refuse to receive Jesus as Savior, and the most beautiful thing a person can do is to receive him as Savior. This is the only way to be a part of that Bride who will enjoy unmatched glory forever, in the beauty of heaven.

2. THE CLOTHES OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 7:9-17

A taylor who used an apple as a trade mark was asked why he used that particular symbol. He replied, "If it hadn't been for the apple, where would the clothing business be?" He had a good point. The clothing business did start in the garden of Eden because of sin, and the need to cover the bodies of those who had started sin by eating of the forbidden fruit. Clothing is not a part of the origin of sin, but rather, a necessity to overcome the emotions set loose by sin.

God was the first taylor to create garments for man. Adam and Eve had sewn fig leaves together to cover their bodies, but shortly thereafter we read in Gen. 3:21, "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them." From that point on, clothing has played a major role in the life of man. Scripture is literally packed with references to clothes and their significance.

Man is the only creature that God created who has a desire to adorn itself with clothes. No animal has any appreciation for styles, and for a variety of clothing, or for jewelry. Males often wish God would have made females more animal like in this respect. Wilfred Funk calls the daughters of Eve the Insatiable Sex. He goes to great extremes to express himself in poetry.

If I scaled the heights of Venus
And ransacked ten million stars
Of their fineries--Orsinus,
Mercury, Arcturus, Mars.

Plucked the pleiades and hung them
Flaming on your ivory breast,

With the shining moon among them
As a diadem and crest.

Seized the Milky Way and tore it
From the skies to make a gown
For you, dearest, and you wore it
With Orion as a crown--

Would it help you? Would you try a
Little thrift then? No! my guess is
You would merely go and buy a
Dozen other hats and dresses!

Most of the humor directed at clothing is connected with women, but the facts of history reveal that men have been just as involved in the fashion fuss, vanity, and folly connected with clothing. The history of men's pants is a joke if there ever was one. Battles have raged over them from ancient Persian times. Church councils have met, sermons have been preached, and pamphlets have been written declaring them to be designed by the devil. A ruler in Germany in 1790, ordered all criminals in chain gangs, working on the roads, to be clad in long trousers, in order to deride and discredit the fashion. In 1820, it was forbidden in England for any clergyman to wear long trousers in the pulpit. Nothing could stop the onward march of a good idea, and so, we all now feel perfectly comfortable in what has become a traditional garment with us.

Men, of course, did not wear pants in Bible days, but they wore what we would call a robe. They were as proud of their robes however, as the modern man is of his suits. Joseph had a robe of many colors. It made him the best dressed man in his big family. It was a garment of great value and was an expression of his fathers affection.

Wealth was often determined by the number of garments a man possessed. Samson is usually portrayed as half bare, to show his great muscles, but his goal was to become the best dressed man in Israel. In Judges 14, he made a deal with 30 men at a feast. If they could guess his riddle, he would give them 30 linen garments and 30 festal garments. If they failed, however, they would give him the 60 outfits instead. Samson was confident that he would start out married life with a huge wardrobe. It turned out, he lost, and had to pay them their 60 garments. The whole transaction reveals that clothes mean a lot to men, just as they do to women.

Clothes mean a lot to God as well. Numerous are the references to the holy garments that God ordained for the priests to wear, and to the beautiful jeweled garb of the high priest. Several references are even made to the garments of God. We read in Psalm 93:1, "The Lord reigns; He is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed, He is girded with strength." In Psalm 104:1-2 we read, "O Lord, my God, Thou art very great! Thou are clothed with honor and majesty, who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment." Looking at God's wardrobe is like looking into the sun. Don't you wonder what kind of clothes we will wear in the presence of God? If He demanded holy garments on those who served Him here on earth, what will he demand when we are before Him in heaven? The book of Revelation answers this question for us, not just to satisfy our curiosity, but because clothing has such important symbolic meaning.

John makes it clear, that there is no going back to Eden's innocent nudity, but a moving ahead to cosmic clothing and divine dress. The future fashion will be garments of glory. Jesus modeled this garment briefly when He walked the earth, His daily garments were, doubtless, of fine quality, and He had a special robe of unique value. The soldiers at the cross gambled to possess His robe rather than throw it away. Even His daily attire had to be attractive, to convince the seriously sick woman that a touch of the hem of it, could heal her.

His earthly clothes were of fine quality, but they were still earthly clothes. Only briefly did He model the garments of glory. This He did on the Mt. of Transfiguration. We read in Mark 9:3, "...his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them." White was the common color, and so a lot of bleach was used in that day, but no bleach could create the whiteness the disciples saw that day. Your favorite detergent could not match the whiteness produced here, for it was not due to any miracle product, but to a literal miracle. Christ was suddenly clothed with the garment He will wear in glory. Mark 17:3 says, "His garments became white as light." Only one other time did the disciples ever see clothing so white, and that was when they saw visitors from heaven. In other words, angels also wear these bright white garments of glory. In Matt. 28:3, the angel at the tomb is described like this-"his raiment was white as snow." If white is the color that always describes the garments of heaven, then we could guess that white is what we will wear also. There is no need for guessing, however, for Scripture makes it clear, white will be the color of our garments of glory.

This fact has much meaning, or otherwise, it is hard to understand why the book of Revelation stresses it over and over. I counted 17 uses of the word white in this book. Jesus promises, that those who conquer, will walk with Him in white. In our text, twice the vast multitudes of heaven are described as being clothed in white robes. If we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, white is to be a part of our spiritual menu. The white garments are a way of saying, we will be partakers of the divine nature, and will share in the very glory of God.

There are many things in nature more beautiful than man. Jesus said even Solomon in all his glory could not match the beauty of the lilies. Isaac Watts lamented the fact, that man cannot make any clothes to match the beauty that God has given to lower creatures. He wrote,

The Tulip and the butterfly
Appear in gayer coats than I.
Let me be dressed as fine I will,
Flies, worms, and flowers exceed me still.

This will no longer be true, however, when we get our garments of glory. We will then possess the beauty of the Creator of all beauty. Let's focus on these garments of glory and consider the reasons for their whiteness. The first reason most commentators suggest is-

I. WHITENESS SYMBOLIZES PURITY.

Eccles. 9:8 says, "Let your garments be always white." To keep unspotted by the world is the Christian ideal, but it will never be completely accomplished until we become the Bride of Christ, without spot or wrinkle. The only clothes we will ever have that never need washing will be the bridal gown of heaven. No sin will ever stain this garment again. Charles Spurgeon preached one

of the greatest sermons I have ever read on these white robes. He says they refer to the actual character of the saints. They are not symbolic of the righteousness of Christ, for his righteousness is not washed in the blood of the Lamb. It is the righteousness of men, which once was filthy rags, but now has been washed in the blood of Christ, and made perfect. What is now inputted, will there, be imparted.

He points out that white is the union and blending of all the colors of light. White is the symbol of perfection, because it is the perfect combination of all colors. Spurgeon says, "In the character of just men made perfect we have the combination of all virtues, the balancing of all excellencies, a display of all the beauties of grace. Are they not like their Lord, and is He not all beauties in one?" No color but the combination of all colors, could express the balance and completeness of our perfection in heaven.

These garments of glory are our assurance that in heaven we will be able to stand before God, and not feel guilt because of our sinful past. They are to challenge us to keep unspotted by the world in this life. Peter, after saying we look for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, says, in II Peter 3:14, "Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by Him without spot or blemish." The Christian is not to look back at his spotted past, but to look ahead to the pure white garments of the future. The poet said,

Waste no tears
Upon the blotted record of the lost years,
But turn the leaf, and smile, oh, smile to see
The fair white pages that remain for thee.

For the Christian, the future is always bright, and we will walk forever with Jesus in white. The second reason white is stressed is-

II. WHITENESS SYMBOLIZES JOY.

It is no accident that wedding gowns are white. White is a universal symbol of the joy of marriage. No other color can portray the joy of love between two people. No other color can convey the joy of the marriage of the Lamb and His Bride. These beautiful garments of glory are to fill us with anticipation.

All through history, generals have ridden into conquered cities on pure white horses, to symbolize they are victors. Jesus is pictured as riding on a white horse as He rides to victory. The great White Throne Judgment symbolizes the victory of God over evil. White is the color of joy because it is the color of the victor. When the enemy runs up the white flag they are saying, we surrender, you win.

These white robes are to fill the Christian with the joy of anticipation. Just having such a future to anticipate is the basis for Christian joy. The English novelist, C. P. Snow, was asked what he regarded as the main difference between the world in which he grew up, and the world we share now. His immediate response was, "The absence of a future." That is one of the problems, in the thinking of man, that leads to the devil may care attitude-let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. Where there is no future, nothing matters but the now. The lack of a future robs man of a motive to live with eternity's values in view.

The Christian has future goals that radically affect his present behavior and joy. They can be summed up in these three statements-

1. To be in Christ.
2. To be like Christ.
3. To be with Christ.

All three of these involve the color white. To be in Christ is to be forgiven and delivered from sin. It is to be given the spotless robe of His righteousness. To be like Christ, is to keep unspotted from the world, and to stay clean by confession and forgiveness. To be with Christ, is to walk with Him forever in white. All of life is a sort of getting dressed for the greatest of all parties.

Karl Olson, in his book, *Come To The Party*, expresses the fact that the Gospel is like an invitation to a party. When the Prodigal Son returned, the father was concerned about the clothes he was wearing. He said in Luke 15:22, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." After he was dressed for the occasion, they began to make merry. Beautiful clothing and joyful times, go together.

The message of the Gospel is the good news that God has a great party planned, but only those who are dressed properly can get in. Unless you are clothed in the bright white garments of glory, you will be excluded. There is only way to get your garments white enough to be fit for this party. All the soap in the world will fail; all the scrubbing of good works will fail. Only those who wash there robes in the blood of the Lamb will have a whiteness fit for the joys of heaven.

That is why the song of the saints gives all the glory to God and to the Lamb. They are not congratulating themselves on being clever spot removers, but recognize that all the whiteness of their garments is due to grace alone. The white robes are symbols of the joy and the victory of the cross. No words can describe the total victory over sin like the message of these white garments.

They are whiter than snow, or the feathers of a dove.

They are whiter than the lilies below, or the clouds which are above.

Whiter than is a moonlit sail, whiter than the foam of the sea.

Whiter than fleece or chalk or hail, lime, cotton, or pearl or ivory.

No whiteness man has ever seen on earth or in the skies

Can match the whiteness of the garments of glory we'll wear in paradise.

The most important thing you can do in life is to get ready for that party, and the only way to do it is to put your trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. When you do this you are ready to wear the garments of glory.

3. THE COLORS OF HEAVEN based on Rev.21:9-21

Mr. Jones was having her living room painted, and she was explaining to the unsympathetic painter just what she wanted. "I want a light green blue, which will be sort of a cross between a darker blue and a light bluey blue", she said. The painter replied, "Lady, there ain't no such color. What you are describing is nothing but a pigment of your imagination." Colors may

exist in our minds that do not exist in reality. But God is an artist who invites us to use our imagination to try and conceive of the beautiful colors of heaven.

You can go into most any jewelry store and see many of the gems that are seen here in the walls of the Holy City. The colors are very bright and beautiful. I bought Lavonne a pink ice ring recently, and when the sun hits it just right, it startles me with its beauty. In the shade it is just a dull piece of matter, but in the sunlight it is a sparkling piece of beauty. This is the picture we get of heaven, and the New Jerusalem. It is transparent like glass, and there is brilliant light bouncing off millions of jewels. The beauty of this scene is beyond our grasp. Man would need all the jewels of the world just to copy a fraction of the jeweled wall described here. Dr. Criswell, who was for many years the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, tries to describe the color of heaven, in these words-

What a proliferation of color! What incomparable, brilliant iridescence it possesses! It looks like frozen light in diamonds, sapphire, ruby, emerald and pearl. It looks as if God were mingling together the azure blue of the sky, the surf of the sea, the rainbow of autumnal glory, and the fire of an August sunset.

There is no eloquence adequate to describe the color of heaven. Probably, the best we can do is to compare the experience of the 18 year old boy who was born blind, but who by surgery was made to see for the first time at age 18. One year later, reporters asked him what the most wonderful thing about seeing was, and he replied, "Color." He said he never dreamed that color was so beautiful. He had always thought of it as being like our conception of black and white with contrasts and highlights. He said the beauties of the various colored flowers fascinated him beyond all human imagination. He said everything in this world was more beautiful than he ever dreamed.

So it will be for us in heaven. It will be like the blind seeing for the first time. The colors will be brighter and more beautiful than the brightest rainbow we have ever seen in time. We will say, as did the Queen of Sheba, when she saw the glory of Solomon's empire, the half was not told me. We will say, more than likely, the hundredth or the thousandth, was not told me. But, since God has revealed some of the glory of the colors of heaven, we should do our best to try and see it as He wants us to see it.

The first thing we want to observe is the color of the people. Heaven is the ultimate in the melting pot of colors. This is implied in the gates of the New Jerusalem that face in every direction. People from every direction are welcome to enter these ever open gates, and this implies universality. But we do not need to depend upon symbolism. In Rev.7:9 we read, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." It is not a matter of speculation or inference, it is a Biblical fact, stated clearly, that every color of skin will be a part of the eternal kingdom of God. Colors are not just temporary and incidental accidents of time, they are part of the color scheme of God's eternal city. The song, red and yellow, black and white,

they are precious in His sight, is right, and not a poetic fiction. Any color that you try to imagine is not in heaven, is a pigment of your imagination.

A church hired an artist to paint them a picture of Jesus with little children. When he finished it, he felt it was his best work ever. He could almost hear them singing, "Glory! glory! glory be to God on high." He was so pleased that he called the committee from the church to come and see it the next day. That night he had a dream, and saw himself walking into his studio and finding a stranger with his thumb through his artists palette painting on his picture. He rushed over and cried for him to stop for he was spoiling his work. The stranger said, "No, you have spoiled it. You have 5 colors on your palette, but you have used only one on the faces of the children. I have used the other 4 colors, for these little ones have come from many lands in answer to my call." "What call?" he asked. The stranger responded, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Then the artist knew it was the Lord, and he suddenly awoke. He rushed to the studio, and saw all the faces were still white. It was only a dream. But he knew it was a dream with a message. He took his palette and began to paint with all the colors. When the committee came to see it they loved the picture. It was just what they wanted, something that represented the whole family of God. It takes all colors to do that. No one will feel they are the wrong color in heaven for heaven is the color of God's people, which means, it is all colors. This truth inspired me to write the poem, Heaven Is The Color You Are.

WHAT COLOR IS HEAVEN YOU ASK
TO ANSWERS A COMPLEXING TASK.
THE REASON IS SIMPLY QUITE PLAIN
IT WILL EVERY COLOR CONTAIN.

THE RAINBOW OF COLOR THAT'S THERE
MAKES HEAVEN A PLACE OF SUCH FLAIR,
OUR EYES WILL FOREVER ENJOY
A VISUAL FEAST THAT WILL NOT CLOY.

II.
THE COLOR OF GOD WE WILL SEE
IS WHAT ANY COLOR CAN BE,
FOR ALL COLORS COMBINE IN WHITE,
AND GOD'S NATURE IS, GOD IS LIGHT.

GOD IS LIGHT AND THUS HE IS WHITE,
WHICH IS EVERY COLOR IN SIGHT.
THE ANSWER IS VERY CLEAR THEN,
HEAVEN'S COLORS COVER ALL MEN.

III.
WE SING RED, YELLOW, BLACK AND WHITE
THAT ALL ARE PRECIOUS IN HIS SIGHT,
SO NO ONE ON COLOR NEEDS SPAR,
HEAVEN IS THE COLOR YOU ARE.

HEAVEN IS THE COLOR YOU ARE
THE MOST COLORFUL PLACE BY FAR,
FOR THERE EVERY COLORS A STAR
HEAVEN IS THE COLOR YOU ARE.

Keep in mind, the New Jerusalem is a symbol of the people of God--The Bride of the Lamb. The 12 tribes and the 12 apostles represent the O.T. and the N.T. people of God. That is why the 24 elders are considered as a symbol of the total people of God. I looked up the 24th element in the building blocks of the universe, and I discovered it is chromium. What is of interest is this is called the color element. It comes from the Greek word for color because it is the element which gives color to the jewels we so much treasure, and which are a part of the color of heaven. The emerald, for example, is green because of this 24th element. The ruby is red because of it, and the sapphire is usually blue because of it.

The basic compounds of many gems are colorless. It is the chromium that gives them their color. Many of the paints you buy are red, green, yellow, and orange because of chromium. Almost every color possible is determined by the quantity of chromium that is mixed with other elements. If God follows the natural laws He has formed for time, in eternity, the 24th element will go on forever being the source of color and beauty in our heavenly environment.

If 24 is the color element, not by accident or coincidence, but by the design of God, then we can see the possibility of the Bride of Christ being the source of color for much of the beauty we will see in heaven. The people of God will represent, not just the red and yellow, black and white, but every imaginable color, and millions we can't imagine. One thing is for sure, heaven will be the most colorful place we will ever be. The light of God will bring out every color the mind of God can conceive. It is always light, and never night, and this means never ending color and beauty. Spurgeon wrote,

"Light is the cause of beauty. That is obvious to you all, Take the light away,

and there is no beauty anywhere. The fairest woman charms the eye no more than a heap of ashes when the sun has departed. Your garden may be gay with many colored flowers, but when the sun goes down you cannot know them from the grass which borders them. You look upon the trees, all fair with the verdure of summer, but when the sun goes down they are all hung in black. Without light no radiance flashes from

the sapphire, no peaceful ray proceedeth from the pearl. There is naught of beauty left when light is gone. Light is the mother of beauty. In such sense the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the light of heaven; that is to say, all the beauty of the saints above comes from God incarnate."

I love the prayer poem written by Harold Kohn, which he calls, The God Who Loves To Color.

O God,
In whose colors
 of sunrise and sunset,
 golden day and black night,
Yellow wildflower and red garden rose,
Rich, brown soil and white mantle of snow
We delight,
Forgive us
Where we have rejoiced
 in all the glorious hues
 of Thy world

Excepting
 the
 skin-color
 of
 Thy
 children,
 Father of us all,
 Forgive
 If we have dared despise
 The pigments of skin
 that
 Thou hast honored
 with Thy creative care,
 Thy loving touch,
 and with the indwelling
 presence
 of
 Thy Spirit.

Bless
 All Thy colored ones, O Father.
 May they,
 and we,
 with Thee,
 Rejoice in the beauty
 of
 Their blackness,
 brownness
 and yellowness.

Let them,
 Let us altogether,
 Praise Thee,
 The God who loves to color
 the heavens,
 the earth,
 and even
 Thy
 children.

-AMEN

Let's face it, heaven will be a place of incredible color, with people of all color ,and gems of color, and a rainbow of color, and a God who loves to color. Infinite color is what we are trying to grasp here. The practical implications of this are that we as Christians are to be people who love color. We have gotten away from the black only Bibles, and the black only at funerals, but few have written so boldly of their color-filled hope as Gertrude Knevels.

Shall I wear mourning for my soldier dead-
 I, a believer? --give me red;
 Or give me royal purple for the King
 at whose high court my love is visiting;
 Dress me in green for growth, for life made new;
 For skies his dear feet march, dress me in blue;
 In white for his white soul; robe me in gold
 For all the pride that his new rank shall hold;
 In earth's dim gardens bloom no hue too bright
 To dress me for my love who walks in light.

Here is a woman who takes the colors of heaven seriously, and wants to bear a clear witness to her faith in the God of all colors. My godly aunt had it arranged, so that at her funeral, many colored balloons were released, and we watched them soar up into the sky. It was a symbol of her conviction that we should be joyful, and even in a mood of celebration, when we enter God's presence, and when a loved one does so. Color is a part of celebration.

The reason man could not be content with black and white television is because it is not natural. Real life is in color, for God made color a basic part of His creation, and no scene is complete without color. Because man is made in the image of God, he can never be satisfied without color. Charles Goff in, *A Better Hope*, quotes Criswell who said, "God must like color. For example, do you ever see the sunset in the evening when the clouds are burning with fire and there is gold, crimson, orange, blue, all the riot of the rainbow in the sky? Is there a man who ever lived who could tell us any earthly, utilitarian use for a sunset? Do you hug them, can you plow them, can you water with them? What good are the colors of the sunset? Just this, that God loves color and things beautiful. So it is with His holy city. Beyond imagination is the flooding of color in that incomparable city. All of these stones named here are exquisite with color."

T. DeWitt Telmage, the great preacher in the early part of the century, said in one of his sermons, "I think heaven must have a material splendor as well as a spiritual grandeur. Oh, what grandeur...when that divine hand which plunges the sea into blue, and foliage into green, and sets the sunset on fire, shall gather all the beautiful colors of earth around His throne."

J. Vernon McGee in his famous *Through The Bible* series says, "The New Jerusalem is a city of light and a city of color. God is light and He is there. All of this color will be coming out and flooding God's universe." He sees the light of God creating more colors than we find in time. He writes, "The light shining from within through the Jasper stone, acting as a prism, would give every color and shade of color in the rainbow--colors that you and I have not even thought of yet."

In a book of children's prayers, I read this one from Eugene--"Dear God, I didn't think orange went very good with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool." The ultimate in cool will be the Niagara of color that will pour into our eyes in the New Jerusalem.

We could go on quoting the hopes and visions of the saints, but the question is, does this colorful hope of heaven have any practical value for us time, beside the thrill of anticipation? The answer is yes! God made color to play a more important role in life than we realize. Color plays a major role in your physical, mental, spiritual health. Studies show that people who live in a drab world, devoid of pretty colors, get depressed with life. People flock out to see the country side in the fall, because it is uplifting, and gives one a feeling of optimism and well being. The bright colors are a form of therapy that brings encouragement. Man is learning that he can be healthier by changing the colors of his surroundings.

The British airways had a high number of passengers suffering from air sickness. They changed the color inside from yellow to sky blue, and there was an immediate improvement. The colors in your environment affect you for good or bad. Color makes everything more fun, enjoyable, and romantic. Color is one of God's best gifts for the joy of life.

Al Koran has a chapter on the magic of color. He writes from a secular

perspective, but if you listen to what he is saying, you can see what a powerful impact the colors of heaven will have on our eternal health and happiness. He writes,

"Do you wear colored shoes? Have you a colored umbrella, pair of gloves, or coat? Do you cook in colored saucepans, drink from colored glasses, wash with a colored sponge, and dry yourself with a colored towel? Do you sleep between colored sheets? Are your nightclothes bright, and your slippers gay? Is your car and your traveling case a color that cheers? There are thousands of people wanting to be a mental magician, but few of them turn to color. Your day should be full of fascinating colors, your favorite color predominating. Have you seen the sun shining through colored glass ornaments? It is beautiful. Colored glass attracts the light with a brilliance undreamed of, and these colors help to bring magic into your life."

One of the reasons Christmas is such a joyful time of the year is because it is the most colorful time of the year. A merry Christmas is greatly aided by the lovely colors everywhere. The New Jerusalem will be lit up like a perpetual ice palace, with sparkling jewels reflecting the light of the Lamb, and with color greater than any Christmas display we have ever seen. Color and joy are linked in time and eternity.

Color has an effect on our emotions. We say he is seeing red, to convey his anger, or he is feeling blue, to convey his depression, or he is feeling green with envy, or purple with rage. He may be feeling in the pink, or be in black depression. If he does you a kindness, that is white of him. If he refuses to take a chance, you think he is yellow. Color is a part of the psychology of life. Faber Birren, the color expert, in his book, *Color In Your World*, writes, "My profession is color, I use research to measure human preferences in color trends in consumer goods. I decorate factories, offices, schools, hospitals, stores, not merely to make them more attractive, but also to achieve practical ends--to increase production, lower accident rates, aid convalescence, relieve psychological and physical fatigue, and of course to promote business."

Studies show red light increases blood pressure, respiration rate, and muscular tension. Blue light, on the other hand, will retard them. Red will arouse, and blue will calm. The person who wants to have a wild time will want to be surrounded by red. The one who wants to relax will prefer a blue setting.

Mary Crowley, the first woman to be on the board of the Billy Graham association, and the founder of the multimillion dollar business, Home Interiors, wrote in, *Women Who Win*, "God instilled in every human being the hunger for stimulation, excitement, and romance. That's why He created the world in color! He could have made it in black and white, and it would have functioned just as well, but God knew that this aesthetic creature called man would need color and beauty to inspire and excite him. What wonderful things God has given us for pure enjoyment!"

The first words of God in the Bible are, "Let there be light." That was also the beginning of color. Creation began in a blaze of color, and the consummation of God's plan will also be an everlasting blaze of color. Those who do not receive Jesus as their Savior will have a colorless eternity of darkness. Where there is no light, there is no color, and hell is darkness.

Those who do take Christ as Savior will dwell in eternal light and color that never ends. In Jesus there is the promise of everlasting joy and happiness in the color of heaven.

4. EATING IN HEAVEN based on Rev. 22:1-6

Benjamin Franklin formed a very close friendship with a Frenchwoman, who was 40 years younger than himself, when he was the American Minister in Paris. They wrote numerous letters to each other and though she refused all his proposals, she did finally agree to marry him in heaven, and live on roasted apples. If that was the best he could hope for, he wrote back and endorsed the plan. In the next world he said, they would eat the apples of paradise roasted with butter and nutmeg and they would pity those who were not dead.

People tend to get fanciful in romantic settings, but the question we want to focus on is this-will the pleasure of eating be one of the pleasures that we enjoy at God's right hand forever? Will there be literal eating in the eternal kingdom? Most people who give the matter any thought feel it would be a shame to waste one of God's best ideas-the sense of taste. This is the sense that gives us, here in time, a great deal of pleasure. The average person eats about one ton of food a year, and this means taste is a ton of pleasure a year. If the other senses will be a part of our resurrection bodies, then why not this one? We will certainly be able to see and enjoy the jewel-splendored New Jerusalem, and hear the joyous praise of the angelic choir. We will be able to touch the golden streets of gold as we walk with our Lord, and smell the perfume of heaven, referred to in Rev.8. Why should it be doubted that we will enjoy the sense of taste?

The reason for doubt is the powerful anti-body influence that began in the 4th century. The heroes of the Christian faith were, at that time, those who were ascetics. They denied the body the pleasures of life, and devoted themselves to a focus on the soul. They renounced sex and stayed celibate. They wore drab clothes, and ate only basic foods, avoiding anything fancy or too tasty. The better saints lived on bread and water. The body was the enemy, and the source of all our sins. To deny it was the highest virtue. This movement within the church got its greatest spokesman with the conversion of St. Augustine. He was a wild liver, satisfying his lust with every woman he could. He lived with a woman who bore him a son, and he wrote in his confessions, that he had descended to the dark hell of lust.

When he was converted, he discovered that segment of the church that stressed the evil of matter, and especially the body. The flesh was carnal, and the goal of the Christian was to escape all its carnal desires. This led to his thinking about the joy of heaven as being anti-sensual. The joys of heaven were to be pleasures of the soul, and not of the body. The mystical was the essence of heaven. It was eternal meditation and spiritual ecstasy, with the body ignored.

It makes sense why this happened, for if the physical pleasures of the body were seen as evil, how could they preach that they would all become good in heaven? Christianity had taken a radical turn toward rejecting the body and its senses, as having an eternal place in God's plan. Christians were to focus on spiritual beauty. The goal was to set the soul free from the body and its senses. St. Augustine said the mental and the spiritual is all that matters for eternity. This had a powerful

impact on the history of Christian thinking about heaven. The ideal life was an escape to the monastery, where you denied your body to develop your soul. For centuries, through the dark ages, Christianity became an anti body religion, totally contrary to the revelation of God's Word. The very idea of physical pleasure in our resurrected bodies was a scandal. This has influenced Christians to this very day.

St. Augustine was a slave to his lust, and it was God's will that he be saved from his body-centered life style. The body is the tool Satan uses to lead us into temptation. The flesh does war against the spirit. The body does need to be controlled, or it will lead us astray. But to throw out the baby with the bath water is folly. The goal of salvation is not just to save the soul, but the body as well. The body is to be delivered, sanctified, and glorified.

The resurrection of the body is what sets Christianity apart, as unique, in the religions of the world. Christianity says that the body is good. It is made by God, and He said it is very good. His Son took on a literal body in the Incarnation. He raised up His body and took it to heaven in the Ascension. His plan is to raise up all the redeemed in their bodies. The body is a key part of God's plan for man. God intends to save the bodies of men forever.

The value of looking at a subject like eating in heaven, is that it helps us get back to a balance view of the role of the body in God's plan. All through history Christians are influenced by the times, culture, the circumstances, and their own personality, to teach things that are not Biblical. That is why the Bible has to be our soul authority for faith and practice. Even the best of godly men can be led astray if the Bible is not the foundation for their views. So let's look at the Biblical evidence to support the idea that the resurrected bodies will enjoy the pleasure of eating.

The most conspicuous evidence is the tree of life. Verse 2 says it bears 12 crops of fruit, a new crop every month. The implications are numerous. We will stay on the yearly cycle in heaven, with 12 months in a year, and we will all belong to the fruit of the month club. Will we get to eat this fruit? That is what it says in verse 14 where we read, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life..." It is not much of a right if you don't get to eat this heavenly fruit. Even if we did not have this verse, it would be a logical conclusion that we would enjoy this fruit, for it keeps growing a new crop every month, and, therefore, it must be harvested and eaten. If this was not the case, the new Jerusalem would be a heaven for fruit flies only, for it would become a garbage pit.

The tree of life grows on both sides of the river, which flows down the middle of the great golden street. That is 1,400 miles on each side, which means an orchard 2,800 miles long, producing a new crop of fruit every month. This is a flow of fruit that would feed multiplied billions every month. This whole picture is meaningless if this fruit is not enjoyed by the saints in glory. The picture conveyed here is that we will enjoy the best of both worlds-the city life developed by centuries of civilization, and the ideal environment of the original paradise in Eden. The city and the country lovers will all be satisfied.

To add to this picture, we have the wedding supper of the Lamb in Rev. 19, which is the way heaven will begin. A wedding feast with all the color, music, and luxury that is worthy of the Son of God being united with His Bride-the Church. It is hard to get excited about a wedding supper if there is nothing to eat. We have no reason to reject the idea of literal feasting, for the Bible clearly reveals

that the resurrection body can enjoy the consumption of food. Jesus ate in His resurrection body on at least two occasions. He even made His disciples a fish breakfast one morning on the beach. He not only ate in His resurrection body, He taught that eating and drinking would be a part of the eternal kingdom. In Matt. 26:29 Jesus said, after instituting the Lord's Supper, "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." Beyond the cross and the grave, Jesus said I will again enjoy with you the pleasures of the table.

Will the apostles go on eating and drinking in their resurrected bodies? It is a matter of clear revelation. Jesus said to them in Luke 22:28-30, "You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel." It is a rejection of Christ's promise to deny the reality of eating in heaven. Jesus enjoyed eating in time, and He will go on eating with his own for all eternity. He was not embarrassed about the image of heaven as a feast. He said in Luke 13:29, "People will come from the East and the West and North and South, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God." Jesus told parables depicting the Kingdom of God a great banquet. Jesus was not anti-body at all. He had no place for a heaven without the body.

On the first Easter evening, when He appeared to the disciples, they were fearful and thought they had seen a ghost. Jesus cleared this up immediately and said in Luke 24:39-43, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, do you have anything here to eat? They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence."

Eating was the final proof that Jesus was no ghost, but a real live body. By His Easter eating, Jesus proved the resurrection is not just a spiritual event of the soul, as heretics all through history have tried to teach. It is a physical event of the body, and thus, the body will be a part of the eternal kingdom of God. The disciples could accept that Jesus returned as a ghost, that is, a disembodied spirit. This has been a universal belief. But the message of the resurrection is not about the immortality of the soul, but it is about the immortality of the body. No man is fully Christian in his thinking until he believes in the resurrection of the body. It sounds spiritual to be concerned only about the soul, but that is being more spiritual than Jesus was, and this means it is really being unspiritual, for anything that is not Christlike, is unspiritual.

When Peter shared his testimony of experiencing the reality of the resurrection to the Gentiles, he made a point of telling of the food they enjoyed with Jesus after His return from the grave. In Acts 10:39-41, we read, "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree. But God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people. But by witnesses whom God had clearly chosen-by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead."

What was the key evidence of the reality of the physical resurrection of Christ's body? It was the fact that after He died He came back to eat and to drink again-the main acts of a living body. The resurrection body is a body that eats and drinks. We do not know how many meals the disciples shared with Jesus, but in 40 days we can assume it was quite a number. It is folly to spiritualize the resurrection, as many have done. It is a flat rejection of God's Word to do so. The resurrection body

is physical, and it enjoys the physical pleasures of eating and drinking. Since every picture we have of heaven includes feasting, there is no logical reason to deny that we will enjoy the pleasure of eating forever.

In the first letter of the seven letters to the churches, Jesus gives the first of His promises to the church of Ephesus. We read in Rev.2:7, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." This is not a very enticing offer if it is only symbolic, but there is no reason to doubt it is literal.

In Rev. 7:16 we are told that those who suffered great tribulation will never again be hungry, and never again suffer thirst. The spiritualizers say it is because they no longer have taste buds, and no longer a need for water. The literalists, who take the Bible at face value, say it is because there will be abundant provisions to meet their needs forever. The Shepherd will lead them to springs of living water and they will feast at His table forever.

Jesus portrayed the rich man in hell, as having the capacity to enjoy a drop of water on his tongue. What a paradox that would be if He gives those in hell bodies with taste buds, but denies them to the saints at the wedding feast in heaven. One of the great values of the heavenly hope of enjoying food forever, is that it makes it easier to face our limitations in time. We all know we have not tasted all of the delights God has created in this world. There are thousands of dishes we have never had a chance to try. There is every reason to believe that in heaven we will be able to taste everything God has created, not only on this planet, but everywhere else in the universe.

Are there foods in the universe, which are not on this planet? The Bible reveals there is at least one. Psalms 78:23-25 has this fascinating account, "Yet He gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; He reigned down manna for the people to eat, He gave them the grain of heaven. Men ate the bread of angels;..." The grain of heaven, and the bread of angels, could just be poetic language, but it also could point to the reality of foods in heaven. Maybe we will enjoy a real angels food cake in heaven. It is likely that we only know a fraction of the foods that God has made possible in this universe. For all we know, none of the 12 fruits on the tree of life will be fruits that we have tasted. They could all be new ones, just made special, for the Bride of Christ. Would anyone dare to say that God exhausted His creative ability, when He made this universe. The Bible tells us it is but the work of His fingers. What might God be able to make with both hands? The point is, it is a foolish limiting of God to think that eternity will lack abundance and variety beyond our imagination. The Bible says we only have a taste now of the things to come. The best is yet to be.

The disciples did not fast when Jesus was with them, but Jesus said they would when He, the Bridegroom, left them. Fasting is not appropriate for a time of joy, which is to be a time of feasting. Those who portray heaven as an eternal fast have missed the whole point. It is an eternal feast, for we will be with the Bridegroom forever.

The communion table is symbolic of the hope of believer's to one day be with Jesus, at His table in the Father's house. This symbolic meal shows forth His death till He comes. It is but a taste of the good things to come. It is of interest that Jesus wanted us to remember Him always, by means of this symbolic meal. Eating with Jesus in heaven will be the fulfillment of all that He did for us on the cross.

Charles Spurgeon preached, "Heaven is a place where they shall eat and drink and rejoice together. Heaven is the meeting place of those that triumph, and the state room of them that feast. All the

enjoyments that can be imagined, and more, belong to the beatific state of the glorified." Horatius Bonar put it in poetry-

Feast after feast thus comes and passes by
Yet, passing, points to the glad feasts above,
Giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy
The Lamb's great Bridal feast of bliss and love.

If God surprises us with something we cannot now conceive, that is all the better, but until then, the literal hope of the enjoyment of eternal eating is, not only legitimate, it is demanded by the revelation of God's Word. Until someone can explain just what that greater pleasure would be, that is symbolized by eating, we have an obligation to thank God and rejoice in the hope of eating in heaven.

5. THE GLORY OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:22-27

Try to picture in your mind a cake of ice one and a half mile square. Just imagine a total square mile of ice, and half of the next mile, and then imagine that enormous block rising into the sky, not just to the height of an ice cube, not even to the height of the Empire State Building, but rather, to the height of 93 million miles. In other words, from the earth to the sun. Scientists have calculated that this gigantic cake of ice could be completely melted in just 30 seconds, if the full power of the sun could be focused on it.

This is power so staggering that almost anything you can say about the sun is an understatement. It's like the guy who watched the first atomic bomb test, and said after the explosion, that stuff is dynamite. The sun is so powerful we do not have terms to describe it's energy. At it's core, where the temperature is 13 million degrees centigrade, 4 million tons of hydrogen explode every second. Man has not, since the dawn of civilization, used that much energy. The sun does this every second of every day, and has done so since God created it.

Believe it or not, the children of God will go on shining and radiating with even greater energy than the sun, even after the sun has passed away. John says in verse 23, that this great light will not be needed in the new Jerusalem-the heavenly city. The glory of God is so great that no created source of light is necessary. Neither sun nor moon are needed, for there will never be a night. There can be no darkness in the presence of God.

Here we see an example of how the final paradise is not a replica of the first paradise. We are not just getting back to Adam and Eve in Christ. Salvation is much more than mere restoration. The first paradise was far from perfect, for it had in it the potential for the fall. In Christ we go forward to perfection, and to the fulfillment of God's ideal plan. The first paradise did need the sun and moon, for God had not revealed His full glory, as He will in the final paradise. The poet has said,

No need for the sun in that glory-filled land,
The sun would itself there be dim!
That land where the shadows or twilight ne'r come,

Where the light and the glory are "Him."

This was the glory the prophet Isaiah promised to Israel in Isa. 60:19, "The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night, But the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory." There will be no dark ages in the New Jerusalem, as there was in the old Jerusalem. Many of God's people have had to endure seasons of darkness, but never again in that city, for as verse 25 says, there shall be no night there.

He who is the Light of this world, and the Creator of all light, will be the lamp of the city. He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, and thus, He becomes the Lamp of God that takes away the darkness forever. There can be no night in His presence.

There is no night of things unknown, uncertain,
Things which now try the heart to make it strong.
There is no night-there is no veiling curtain,
Just light, and bliss, and joy, and endless song.

Take away the sun from our solar system, and we are plunged into endless night. So will it be, for those who are not in the holy city. Hell is always pictured as a place of darkness, in contrast to heaven where there is only light. There are only two destinies-light and night. The persecuted Christians, who first read this book, and who lived in the darkness of Catacombs of Rome, would be so encouraged to know that their future would be one of never ending light and glory.

John lists all kinds of things that will not be heaven, for there is no way to describe the positives, except by the absence of their opposites. What will not be there is enough to boggle the mind, and give us endless motivation to speculate on what it must be like to be where no evil can ever be.

Not all that is absent from heaven is evil. There is nothing evil about the sun or the moon, and even night is a blessing in this world where we need sleep. It is not just the bad that is gone, but even the good, when it is not the best. Many good things will be absent just because the good is not necessary in the presence of the best. If you are in a dark room, because the storm has knocked out the lights, you are grateful for the candle. But when the lights come on again, you do not continue to burn the candle. It was good, but it was not the best. It goes back into the drawer, for when you have the best the good is not needed.

This is illustrated by John telling us in verse 22, that there will be no temple there. What a vacuum this would have created in the old Jerusalem. It was the most dramatic tragedy in Judaism when the temple was destroyed. Christians did not need to get bent out of shape over it, however, for John makes it clear, the temple is not eternal, but only temporal anyway. It was only a means to an end, and when the end is achieved, the means are no longer necessary. When the building is completed the scaffolding is removed, and nobody misses it, for it is no longer needed. The phone is an excellent means of communicating with someone, but if that person is present, the phone is no longer a help, but a hindrance. The phone is good, but the presence is best, and when the best is here the good is gone.

In heaven there is no need for a place to go to worship God. He is everywhere present to all His people. God and His Son are the temple, and they are everywhere. There is no need for a special

place to go to be in their presence. We will dwell in that presence, and there will no longer be a distinction between secular and sacred. The temple, therefore, becomes totally obsolete in heaven. Here is a great city that needs no church. In heaven we never have to go to church, for there is no church to go to. This may be a real appeal to many-no more church forever. But keep in mind, the reason you never have to go to church is because you are always in church-that is, you are always in the presence of God.

The temple was the center of worship in Israel, but in Christianity the center is a person, and not a place. Jesus Christ becomes our center of worship, and so the church becomes a transition between Judaism and the eternal kingdom. The church never completely gets away from the idea of place, however. The building, the church worships in, becomes known also as the church, and so the place still is a vital part of the concept of church. In heaven, the place will fade completely, and the person will be all in all, for there will be no place-no temple, in which worship takes place. Heaven is Christianity finalized and fulfilled.

This has a powerful lesson for time. The goal of history in God's plan, is to eliminate the distinction between the sacred and the secular. In heaven we do all for the glory of God. If it be eating at the marriage banquet of the Lamb, or enjoying the fruit from the Tree of Life, or admiring the jewels sparkling in the city walls, or serving God in manifold ways, all is sacred. The more we can bring the two together now, the more we will enjoy a truly spiritual life. To be able to enjoy the secular life as a part of the sacred, is the ideal. We need to learn to do all that we do for the glory of God. Our secular tasks will then be a part of our spiritual life.

When we get to heaven, all that was symbolic of the best to come, will be gone. You do not cling to the picture of a loved one, when the loved one walks into your presence. Symbols will no longer be needed, and that is why the temple will be no more. On the cross, Jesus removed the veil in the temple. When He comes again, and receives us to Himself, He will remove the temple itself. No one will ever have to come to God again, for God has come to all. Christians argue a lot about whether or not the temple will be rebuilt, but there is no doubt, the temple will not be a part of the eternal Jerusalem. It will be a templeless eternity, because it will be a Christ-centered eternity. Spurgeon wrote, "What a glorious hour when God and not His creatures, God and not His works, but God Himself, Christ Himself, shall be our daily joy! Plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea, and lost in His immensity." Such will be the glory of heaven.

6. THE GOLD OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:9-21

On our vacation in South Dakota, we stopped in the small town of Keystone. Almost every store in town had a variety of Black Hills Gold on display. Seeing all this gold made me want to study gold in the Bible. The streets of the New Jerusalem are to be made of pure gold, and that means gold will be a part of the eternal environment.

There are at least 367 references to gold in God's Word. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states, "No metal has been more frequently mentioned in Old Testament writings than gold, and none with more terms applied to it." There are about a dozen different words for gold in the Bible. In the New Testament gold is mentioned 41 times, with 21 of them in the book of

Revelation. 16 of the 21 are very positive, with only 2 negative, and 3 are neutral.

The first reference to gold is in Gen. 2:11-12. The first river that flowed from Eden wound its way through the land of Havilah, where there is gold, and the gold of that land is good. The first reference to gold in the Bible, and the last, refer to it as a good thing. It is the first and last precious metal mentioned in the Bible, and all through the Bible gold is a symbol of glory and wealth.

Every major kingdom in history, in an out of the Bible, was noted for its abundance of gold. This is why the final kingdom of God's people is pictured as one of pure gold, for that has been the test of the glory of all the kingdoms in history. If God's people are to have the best in the end, then gold streets are a necessity to make their city the greatest ever.

In Athens, the most renowned sculptor of Greece, Pheidias, made a 38 foot ivory and gold statue of Athene, the patron goddess. It was completed in 438 B. C., and looked out over the city from the Parthenon, high on the Acropolis. More than a ton of gold was in robes alone. Next, he made a 60 foot statue of Zeus, which sat on a throne of gold, and wore a golden crown, held a golden sceptre, and wore golden sandals.

Alexander the Great conquered the world in search of gold. He first conquered Egypt, with its vast wealth of gold. Then he marched to Babylon, where gold was so abundant their chariots were trimmed with gold. The Bible always pictured Babylon as a city full of gold, but where it was greatly abused, and worshiped as an idol. Gold was the god of Babylon. The great image that Nebuchadnezzar set up was a gold image 90 foot high and 9 foot wide, according to Dan. 3:1. The only negative references to gold in the book of Revelation are those dealing with the idolatry of Babylon. Alexander captured all this gold, and most of the gold of the rest of the world, but he died at 33 in Babylon, and was buried in a gold coffin.

Rome was the next gold hungry empire, and Caesar soon had the gold of the world flowing into Rome. Augustus Caesar had so much gold he decided to set up a mint, and make coins of it. The mint was set up in the temple erected to Juno Moneta, and the coins made there became known as "money." When Nero came to power, he was a gold fanatic, and built himself a palace called The Golden House. At the entrance he had a statue of himself complete with golden curls 120 ft. high. It was so heavy that it took 24 elephants to drag it away, when a later emperor wanted it removed. The Golden House had over 100 rooms and gardens, and a pool so large it was more like a sea. Guests washed their hands in water that flowed from golden taps.

The point of all this is to show that the world of the early Christians was full of public gold. If John would have had a vision of the eternal city that was less impressive than that created by scoundrels like Nero. The Christian message would have lost its credibility. If God can not create a richer, more beautiful environment than the emperor, why should people give up emperor worship to follow Jesus?

We need to see the golden city of Revelation as a legitimate appeal to the materialistic heart of man. Man is a gold hungry creature. He desires wealth and luxury, and all the beauty and glory that comes with gold. This is not a bad thing, for if it was, God would not appeal to this desire by giving us this description of beauty beyond our imagination. The gold, the jewels, the beautiful garden fruit trees, and the clear flowing stream from the throne of God, are all a part of the final

paradise. Peace and prosperity forever is just what man most craves. That is what the search for gold has always meant to people. To get enough gold, so as to have complete security in a fallen world, is the hunger of every human being. That is why the lottery is so popular.

The Gospel is the good news that this hunger can be satisfied through Jesus Christ. He is God's gold that will make you rich forever, and guarantee you a place in the eternal city of gold. This Gospel in gold is not my idea, but comes from the very lips of the Lord to the church in Laodicea. In Revelation 3:17 Jesus rebukes these Christians by saying, "You say, I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." Jesus is saying even good Christians can be blinded by the wrong kind of wealth. My godly grandmother had a plaque on her wall for years that impressed me as a child. It said, "all is not gold that glitters." She was never wealthy in this world's gold, but grandma had the riches of Christ.

Bob Ricker, the president of the Baptist General Conference, spoke at an annual meeting, and he said his father made a statement that he never forgot. He said, "I'm so glad I didn't waste my life making money." He did, as we all do, spend a lot of his life making money, but that was not the primary value for which he lived. There is greater treasure in life and the Laodaceans were missing it. Listen to what Jesus says to them in verse 18, "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich." Gold refined in the fire is pure gold. All the impurities are removed by the fire. Jesus is the greatest gold dealer in the world, and he has a monopoly on this absolutely pure gold that makes you rich forever.

The point of Jesus is that these Christians has riches, but they were not the real thing. They had fools gold. We saw all kinds of this in the Black Hills. You could buy chunks of it for 30 cents. It glittered and was shining and attractive, but it was of no value. Early gold miners were fooled into filling ships with this stuff, and sailing back to Europe only to be told they were not rich, but poorer than ever, for all they had to pay to transport this worthless rock. Jesus is saying, all the wealth of the world is fools gold. It is not the way to true riches. Only the gold He can give will make you rich forever.

This text should create a Christian gold rush, for Jesus is telling His church the way to get gold that will provide for eternal luxury. We need to get as excited about this gold as men get about the gold of earth. The gold rushes of history have made people willing to risk everything for what gold could provide. When the great 1849 gold rush to California started, the laborer in the East was making about a dollar a day. No wonder they left by the thousands. 35,000 choose to sail around South America to get there. This 18,000 mile journey took 5 months. Others crossed the Isthmus of Panama and risked tropical fevers and poisonous snakes. 50,000 chose the overland route, and faced the mud of the prairies, and waterless deserts, steep mountains, and Indians. The routes were littered with abandoned wagons, the carcasses of animals, and rough crosses, marking the graves of those who did not make it. They were often the fortunate ones, for those who made it did not find paradise, but a purgatory.

The towns were crowded, and the prices were sky high. The average family could only afford to eat flapjacks. One egg cost a dollar, and a candle for light at night sold for 3 dollars. A comb to comb your hair would set you back 6 dollars. The 49'ers were a very unhealthy lot, and most of them died poor. If they worked from sunup to sundown, they could average 12 to 16 dollars worth of gold a day. It was just enough to survive. The stories of the few who made it big, spread, and kept

the myth alive that brought a steady stream of people from all over the world to California.

In 1897, when the rush to the Klondike in Alaska began, men faced temperatures so cold that many died. Others lost limbs, and others went blind, but gold motivated them to take any risk. 3000 horses and mules died trying to get men to the Klondike. Still, 33,000 people made it because of the powerful lust for gold. The stories of suffering and sacrifice to get gold are almost endless. Then, of course, there are others that are remarkable for the ease with which some got rich.

On Feb.15, 1869, John Deason and Richard Oats were returning to their cabin with a cart load of provisions. They got stuck in a mud hole, and cursed their rotten luck. In digging out they hit a rock that glittered like gold, and to their amazement, it was the largest nugget ever discovered-200 lbs. It was so heavy it broke down their cart. This happened in the gold rush in Australia. But this was a rare story. Many paid with their lives and their health to find this precious ore.

By 1939, the U. S. had more than half of the world's gold stock--17 billion dollars worth. That is why they had decided to build Fort Knox 30 miles south of Louisville, Kentucky to house and protect all this gold. It was completed in 1936. The vault door weighs over 20 tons, and to open it takes several people with combinations known only to them. If there is any tampering the door releases poisonous gas.

The largest storage of gold, however, is five stories beneath the New York Federal Reserve Bank. Here, the gold of other nations is stored. It is protected by a 90 ton revolving steel door. By 1949 the U. S. had three quarters of all the world's gold stock. The hoarding of gold is not just the practice of governments, however, for in much of the world, gold is the only security for the individual.

Women are loaded with gold jewelry, because if their husband dies they have no social security, no medical coverage, and no savings account. She has only a legal right to her own jewelry, and this is what she will need to save her and her children from starvation. It is a paradox, but the poor of the world are the great hoarder of gold. Their stock pile of just a few hundred dollars each accounts for over 13 billion dollars of the world's gold.

The more we understand the history of gold, the more we will be impressed by the New Jerusalem being a city of gold, with streets of solid gold. God is saying, the best of this world's values will be commonplace for God's people. They will be rich with values that go beyond literal gold, for gold will be to them as abundant as dirt is in time.

It is of interest that Jesus says I command you to buy gold from me. His salvation is free, but for his gold there is a fee. Jesus not only wants you saved, He wants you rich. But there is a price to pay to be rich. He paid it all for you to be saved, but you have to pay to be rich. The cost is obviously not money, or only those already rich could afford it. This text is like Is. 55:1-2, which says, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters: And you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." This is a parallel to our text. Buy the best and be rich. The best is to listen to God, and eat His Word. That is just what Jesus is saying. In verse 20 He says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I

will come in and eat with him and he with me." That is the way we buy His gold-not with money, but with a willingness to listen to His voice and let Him into our lives. The richest people in the world are not those who eat in swanky restaurants, but those who eat with Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The gold of Jesus is communion with Jesus. It is sharing with Him in consuming the Word of Life. Everywhere, God's Word is considered to be better than gold. It is God's gold that will last forever, when heaven and earth have passed away. Ps.19:7-11 says,

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple,
The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.
The ordinances of the Lord are sure
and altogether righteous.
They are more precious than gold,
then much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.
By then is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

Love for the Word of God does not just happen. It costs time, effort, and commitment. There is a price to pay to buy this gold, but the payoff is you build what will be lasting riches. Ps.119:72 says, "The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold." The real gold with eternal and infinite value is found in the wisdom of God's Word. In Prov. 8:10-11 wisdom says, "Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her." Then, in verses 17 and 18 she says, "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity."

This is what Jesus is urging us to do-get rich forever by paying the price to enrich your life by consuming the wisdom of God. Every Christian who wants to be rich needs to be in some kind of Bible study. This is the essence of what it is to be buying gold from Jesus. All the wisdom you gather from the Word will be the gold you take into eternity, and this will determine the role you play in God's eternal kingdom. This gold will be your reward. May God motivate us to get involved in the gold rush to obtain the gold of heaven.

7. HUMOR IN HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:4

W. Douglas Roe pastored a large Baptist church in Philadelphia, where he had a weekly radio broadcast. He was also going to seminary, and the load became too heavy, and he had a breakdown.

He was out of the pulpit for many months. He had to learn to relax, and so he became a sort of comedian. He discovered his sense of humor, not only saved him, by bringing healing, but it was a useful tool for saving others for eternity.

He was asked to speak at a noon service in a large industrial plant. He was told about a certain worker who was a ardent atheist. He would never attend the service. Roe deliberately walked up to this man's bench, just before the meeting, and said to him, "Did you ever think how much we have to thank God for?" Before he could respond, Roe continued, "Take your nose for example. If anyone else but God had given it to you, it might have been turned upside down. Then if it rained, you would drown, and if you sneezed, you would blow your hat off." Roe just walked on up to the pulpit. The man was so intrigued by his humor, that he stayed to listen. He heard the Gospel, and made a decision for Christ. Humor became his first step on the way to heaven. Humor never saves, only Christ does, but humor may bring one to Christ.

A study of the great preachers of history, and the most popular in our contemporary world, will reveal that humor is a powerful tool in bringing people to Christ, and thus to heaven. Spurgeon used a lot of humor, and he wrote, "It always makes me laugh when I am called a sour Puritan, because you know there is nobody with a quicker eye for fun, or with a deeper vein of mirth, than I have." D.L. Moody loved to get together after an evangelistic service, and relax by telling jokes. A lady once asked him how he could laugh so soon after the serious labor of dealing with souls. He said, "If I didn't, I'd have a nervous break down at the pace at which I live."

Calvin and Luther, and even Jonathan Edwards, the hell-fire preacher, had a keen sense of humor. Some of the great Christians of history had to learn to control their sense of humor. David Livingstone, who opened up Africa to missions, and who suffered enormous hardships, said to his wife, more than once, as they would recover from their fits of laughter, "Really, my dear, we ought not to indulge in so many jokes. We are getting to old. It is not becoming. We must be more staid." It is almost universally accepted as a fact of life, that it is a great virtue to have a sense of humor. The question is, will we go on in enjoying a sense of humor in heaven? Will we laugh forever, or will laughter be too earthly to be a part of the perfection of the holy city?

The Bible is our only source for reliable information on heaven. Let me share with you those texts which convince me that humor is not merely temporal, but eternal. I am convinced that humor is a part of the image of God, and that it is not the result of the fall. Here in Revelation 21:4, John tells us plenty about what will not be heaven. There will be no tears, no mourning, no crying, no pain, and death will also be no more. The whole point of these negatives, is for the purpose of magnifying the positives. If death is gone forever, then it follows, life is present forever, for there can be no end to it with death gone. If tears and mourning and crying are gone forever, it follows that their opposites, joy and laughing, are free to be experienced forever. There need be no fear that some sudden tragedy will turn our laughter to sorrow, as is the case in time.

If it can be established that laughter and a sense of humor is good, then it follows, naturally, that they will be a part of eternal life, for nothing that is good will be eliminated from heaven. Jesus settles this issue for us in Luke 6:21 where he says, "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh." Jesus could not have called laughing a blessing if it were part of the kingdom of evil. It is, therefore, a part of the goal of Jesus, for the redeemed to cease all weeping, and to enter into laughter. The weeping prophet Jeremiah will weep no more, but enjoy the laughter of heaven's final

victory over all evil. Weeping and gnashing of teeth is reserved for those in hell. It is over forever, in heaven. This promise of Christ can only be perfectly fulfilled in heaven. Many who weep do so in time of persecution, and they are killed as they weep. There's no way this promise can be kept unless there will be laughter in heaven. Deny it, and you empty the words of Christ, of all meaning, to those who die in sorrow.

Laughter must be a part of heaven, just as weeping will be a part of hell. They are opposites, and what is absent from one is present in the other. Rob heaven of laughter, and you drag it nearer the abode of the lost. If God laughs, why should His children be deprived of laughter in His presence. Luther said he would not wish to go to heaven if God did not understand a joke. The Bible reveals that God does laugh, and laughter is already a part of heaven. Look at the three references to God's laughter in the Psalms.

1. Psalm 2:4 "He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision."
2. Psalm 37:13 "The Lord laughs at the wicked, for He sees that his day is coming."
3. Psalm 59:8 "But Thou, O Lord, dost laugh at them...."

God laughs in scorn at the pathetic folly of puny men trying to outwit Him, and challenge His authority. It is the laughter of great superiority. Men trying to plot against God are as silly as nats plotting to attack a tank. It is a joke. It is funny when the weak do not recognize their weakness, and try to use it, as if it were a strength. We have here the humor that makes the husband laugh when his wife tries to overpower him. I have exploded in laughter, as Lavonne, in grim determination, has tried to push me onto the bed, or into a pool. It is the laughter of a parent, when a small child tries to, by sheer force, get it's will done in defiance of theirs. It tickles the funny bone, and you cannot help but laugh.

God cannot help but laugh at the folly of men trying to defy His power. This kind of laughter will cease, for men will no longer be trying such folly in eternity. But the point is, it reveals God's nature, and a sense of humor is a part of it. God is not a machine or a stone. He is a person, and is affected by the reality of humor. God never changes in His nature, and thus we know, He will have a sense of humor forever. In Eccles. 3:4, it says there is a time to weep and a time to laugh. In this life the times vary and alternate. But John says there will be no more weeping in heaven. Therefore, it will be a time for laughter. This does not mean we will spend eternity in laughter, but it does mean, we will spend it in a state of joy, where laughter is always potential.

Humor has been abused and vulgarized by the sinful nature of man. But the abuse of anything is not to be allowed to rob us of it's proper use. Sam Shoemaker in his book, *Under New Management*, writes, "How many of you still have a sneaking suspicion that religion and humor don't mix-that you can be humorous until you mention God, but then you must be solemn? This is heresy-but there are thousands who believe it, and by their solemn piety drive people away from the stream of life!"

We need to think more seriously about the nature of humor to grasp it's importance in the nature of God. If I can laugh at the monkey's, little children, and other funny things of life, but God cannot, then it would mean, I have a positive quality of character that God does not have. This, of course, can never be, for I am made in His image. Laughter must either be a part of that image, or be a result of the breaking of that image in the fall. Since all agree that a sense of humor is a positive quality in man, we have to conclude, it is a quality of God's nature, and will be eternal.

If the angels rejoice over every sinner who repents, I am sure that God the Father and the Son do not sit in solemn silence, but join the celebration. The father of the Prodigal Son called for a celebration when his son returned, and they began to make merry. If that father could go out and sulk with the elder son, and not enter into the joy and laughter of the party, then we would have a picture opposite of what Jesus gives us. He portrays this father, who represents God, as entering fully into the joy and laughter of the celebration. It can be assumed that God will do so in the eternal celebration of heaven.

I link laughter to joy, because it is almost impossible to conceive of a joyous banquet, where there is no laughter. Laughter is a part of a joyous time. It is not likely you would call any occasion joyous, if there was no laughter. If you could sit at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and never laugh, you would be able to say, this is great, but I remember a time on earth that was even greater. You can count on it, there will be no memories in heaven, that recall times on earth of greater joy and laughter. If laughter is not a part of heaven, it will lack a value we all treasure in time. This can never be.

Jim Elliot, the missionary martyr, wrote in his diary, when he was a senior at Wheaton, "God has blessed me with a queer twist that makes me laugh at almost anything." Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse, the great preacher and author, wrote, "There is no objection to laughing at something funny. I read some magazines just to laugh at the cartoons, and then throw them down without reading any of their articles or stories." One of Wesley's favorite sayings was, "Sour godliness is the devil's religion." Proverbs 15:15 says, all the days of the afflicted are evil, but a cheerful heart has a continual feast." Because this is so, we should be a people who long to develop our sense of humor, and pray with the poet-

Give me the gift of laughter, oh, I pray
Though tears should hover near;
Give me the gift of laughter for each day-
Laughter to cast out fear.

This is a worthy prayer, and the good news is, it will one day be fully answered, and all God's people will laugh and enjoy forever the humor of heaven.

8. THE JEWELS OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:9-21

Henry Schober of Edmonton, Canada, was cutting a loaf of bread to make a sandwich, when he his amazement he found a diamond engagement ring. It was later appraised at \$700. As a result of a lot of publicity, the owner of the ring was found. It is not likely that gem favored bread will ever catch on, but the fact is, there are many gems in the Bread of life--the Word of God. Not just gems of truth, but actual literal gems. There are hundreds of verses in the Bible dealing with over 50 jewels and precious stones. It would take hours just to read all that the Bible has to say about gems. The KJV has an astonishing total of 1,704 references to gemstones and minerals under 124 Greek and Hebrew names. You could devote a life time to the study of this subject.

There are three main lists of gems in the Bible, and one of them takes us back to Eden where we thought the only clothes worn were drab animal skins. But there is a lot we do not know about what

was going on in the heavenly realm at that time. It seems that the archangel Lucifer was rebelling against God in pride, and was cast out of heaven before he came to deceive Eve through the serpent. What is amazing is the beauty of this servant of God. Satan is the first being that we have any record of who was clothed with precious stones. In Ezek. 28, he is described as the model of perfection in beauty. Then in 28:13 we read, "You were in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared."

This verse makes it clear that jewelry was not man's invention at all. God was making jewelry of great beauty, with gold and precious stones, before man was ever created. He made Satan a fabulous garment of jewelry when he was created, which was long before man was created. So the study of jewelry is not only prehistoric, but preexistence of the universe. In other words, jewels existed in God's realm of existence in eternity before God created what we know as the universe. Jewels are heavenly elements that existed before the universe, and will be a part of heaven when the universe, as we know it, is no more. There are fascinating histories of great jewels, and how they have been passed down from one royal family to another for centuries. All of them will end up in the royal family of God, who will, in eternity, possess all the jewels God has ever made.

God was a jeweler before He created our world, and thus we see from the start, God is a great lover of jewels. This explains why He is so extravagant with them in the walls of the New Jerusalem. If artists and architects got together to plan the New Jerusalem, they may have thought that a crown of diamonds and rubies over each of the twelve gates would give an elaborate and luxurious look to it. Who would ever dream of twelve strings of precious stones circling the entire 5,600 miles of the city walls. I have calculated that this is equivalent to a necklace which is 67,200 miles long. You don't have to get out your Guinness Book of Records--I can assure you that this is the longest piece of jewelry ever created. It would stretch over two and one half times around the world.

So let's face this fact--God is fanatical about jewels. If you think it is a waste of time to study jewels, you are mistaken. God loves us to study them, just like anyone enjoys people who learn to love their hobby.

God made jewels play a major role in the life of His Old Testament people, in the second great list we see this. The high priest was to wear a special breast piece when he came into the presence of God. It was to be a marvelous work of art made of gold and fine linen. Then we read this in Ex. 28:17-21, "Then mount four row of precious stones on it. In the first row there shall be a ruby, a topaz and a beryl; in the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald; in the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; in the fourth row a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. Mount them in gold filigree settings. There are to be 12 stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the 12 tribes."

God's people had to know their gems in order to obey God, and make this very unusual garment. The high priest would go into God's presence with these 12 shining jewels, and by means of them, God would reveal His will to the high priest. I visualize it as a sort of code. The high priest would ask God questions and God would light up the jewels in a pattern to give him the answer. It was like a computer that God spoke through. God used jewels as a practical tool for communication to

lead His people. This was probably the most practical piece of jewelry ever created.

Jewels are universal symbols of beauty and wealth. God considers His people His jewels, and His goal is to beautify them that they might shine as jewels, and be as durable as jewels. The prophet Zechariah describes the day of God's coming to rescue His people in Zech. 9:16-17, "The Lord their God will save them on that day as the flock of His people. They will sparkle in His land like jewels in a crown. How attractive and beautiful they will be!" I don't know how beautiful the crowns of kings were in Bible times, but the crowns of royalty in modern times are awesome in their beauty. Imagine the glory of God's people, when they are finally saved from all that hinders them from being fully the reflections of God's image. They will be the crown jewels of the King of Kings.

When God wants to describe how precious His people are to Him, He uses jewel imagery. We read in Is. 62:3-4, "You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God..... The Lord will take delight in you." God delights in His people, as men do in their most precious jewels, because they are beautiful and valuable. Jewels are more beautiful when they reflect light. The more light a gem will disperse, the more color it conveys to the eye, and thus the greater its beauty. God's people are to be lights in the world conveying the beauty of God's love for a lost world. Christians who will shine as God's jewels forever, are to shine in time reflecting the light of His love in a dark world.

Ernestine Ramaboa, in May of 1967, was panning gravel in South Africa. For five years she and her husband had been working there 30 foot square diamond claim. They averaged 25 to 30 cents a day finding rice size diamonds. But this day was different--as different as rice is from eggs, for on this day she unearthed an egg size diamond. They only had \$4.00 between them, so they could not afford the \$19.50 air fare to the city of Moseru. So Petrus, her husband, put the egg in his pocket, and they walked for 4 days over the dirt roads. It was well worth their effort, for it was the world's 8th largest diamond. They received \$302,400 for it. It was sent to New York City where it was sold for \$649,000. That was quite a nest egg for an egg size jewel, but that is how precious a stone the diamond is. Many feel the jasper in the walls of the New Jerusalem is the diamond. If so, the city is primarily a city of diamonds and gold.

What is fascinating is the fact that jewels are glorified commonplace matter. They represent what God can do with just plain stuff. They are symbolic of the redemption of sinners--the lowly fallen man made into a gem of infinite worth. The diamond is merely glorified carbon. The ruby, topaz, and sapphire are glorified aluminum. The opal is glorified sand, and so on. C. J. Baldwin says, "Indeed, the jewels that glitter in the regalia of a Queen, have the same ultimate origin with the stones that lie beneath her feet in the road." Jewels are the flowers of the mineral world. They rise out of the soil of the commonplace with a superior beauty, because of the chemistry of God's creativity.

All of this is introduction to our look at the jewels of heaven. In the light of what we have seen, it ought not to be a surprise that God would lavish the Bride of His beloved Son with more jewelry than all mankind combined has ever processed. I always thought heaven was depicted with gold and jewels, because these are great values to man, but the more I study, the more I see it is full of gold and jewels, because these are of great value to God. Man came to value these things, because God valued them first, and made them scarce. The beauty of heaven is not just for us, it is for the aesthetic pleasure of God and the Lord Jesus, and as we have seen, their taste for jewels was

established before man was ever created. The jewels of heaven are for God's pleasure, as much as for ours. God loves jewelry and He uses it to glorify all that He exalts and honors.

God made man in His image, and one of the ways this is manifested is in the desire of man to create the same things God loves to create. In the area of precious stones, man has come a long way. He can now make many fine and flawless jewels synthetically. Man can make a beautiful ruby made of the same material as a natural ruby, and make it flawless 500 times less expensive than mining, polishing, and cutting the natural ruby. Today, man can make many of the jewels that God has enjoyed making, even before time began. This is an area of aesthetics which God and man have in common, and will have in common for all eternity. Jewel making will likely be one of the jobs that some of the redeemed will enjoy doing forever.

Chemistry will also be an eternal subject. The jewels of heaven tell us that the same laws of chemistry that are in time will go on in eternity. Every one of these jewels is a result of a chemical formula. The more complex the formula the less hard the jewel. The reason the diamond is the hardest jewel is because it consists of just one element--carbon. The ruby and sapphire are the next hardest, with two elements--aluminum and oxygen. The beryl's with four elements are softer yet. The study of jewels tells us a lot about God, for they are a study in order.

The book of Revelation revolves around 7's, and all jewels do, as well. Everyone of them falls into one of 7 categories.

The diamond is cubic.

The emerald is hexagonal.

The ruby is trigonal.

And so on for 7 different types. 7 is God's perfect number, and He created all jewels to fall into 7 categories, which reveals His love for order, which is part of the beauty of His creation. Beauty and order will characterize the eternal environment of the New Jerusalem.

Jewels have always been a sign of favor, and therefore, it makes sense why the Bride of Christ would receive the most elaborate jewels the universe has ever seen. This royal rainbow of 12 colors encircling the Bride is a fitting symbol of the King's love for this one He has chosen to be His eternal Queen. In England, when the Queen is crowned at her coronation, the ArchBishop of Canterbury pronounces these words, "O God, the Crown of the faithful, who on the heads of Thy saints placed crowns of glory, bless and sanctify this crown, that as the same is adorned with divers precious stones, so this Thy servant wearing it, may be replenished of Thy grace, with the manifold gifts of all precious virtues, through the King Eternal, Thy Son and our Lord, amen."

If the precious stones are symbolic of the precious grace of God, that bestows on the wearer, His virtues, then the Bride of Christ is endowed with infinite grace and virtue, making her worthy to be the everlasting Queen of the new heaven and earth. When God wanted to convey to His people Israel that His love, as her husband, would never cease, He used jewelry to convey this idea of permanence. In Is. 54:11-12 God says, "I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels and all your walls of precious stones."

The Old Testament imagery of jewels makes it clear what the jewels of heaven mean. They are symbolic of the fact that the Bride of the Lamb need never fear divorce or separation. God is

committed to eternal love. He will not tire of this Bride anymore than He will tire of His eternal love for precious stones. I would love to see the model that has been made of this jewel-ringed Bride. And eminent English jeweler displayed it in London. One who saw it wrote, "Though, to some minds, the Johannine description seems grotesque and incoherent, the remarkable thing was, that when the various elements of the description were gathered together into a unity, a singularly beautiful and charming model was the result,--a model which gathered round it's thousands of distinguished critics, who pronounced it about as perfect a reproduction in precious stones, pearls, gold, and crystal as it was possible for human hands to frame."

If man can make a model so beautiful, what will the reality be like, made by the Master Jeweler Himself. Some of these jewels could very well be the very ones that beautified Lucifer before he fell. The church will be victor over all the powers of Satan, and she will possess the very beauty and power that he lost.

But again, the question comes, is there any practical value in all of this? God says we are to live by every word that proceeds out of His mouth. If He has given us hundreds of words dealing with jewels, we can count on it, there is practical value in the study of jewels. Paul urges us in Phil 4:8, to think on things that are pure, lovely, and admirable. Why? Because the Christian who has a focus on the beautiful will be a better reflection of the beauty of heaven, on earth. Show me the happiest Christians, and I'll show you people who think about lovely things. So, the first practical value of jewels is their psychological effect. They are examples of order and beauty that motivate us to lives of greater order and beauty. The more you look at the things God loves and appreciates, the more you adore the God who loves such loveliness.

Horace Mann, who is known as the Father of American Public School, and who was elected to the American Hall of Fame, had a love for education, like few people in the history of our nation. He said something that illustrates why Christians should be students of all forms of beauty.

"Surely He who created the fragrance and flowers
and music of paradise;..... Surely He who created
all colors, and has mingled them together in the petals
of flowers, in the armature of insects, and the plumage
of birds, and has blended lily and rose in the cheek
of youth; He who has strewed the bottom of the ocean
with pearls, and sowed jasper and amethyst and
chrysolite among the rocks,--was no contemner
of adornment."

This revelation of the jewel bedecked Bride of Christ makes it clear God is, was, and ever will be a God of perfection, who loves the good, the true, and the beautiful. His goal is a universe where these things are permanent. This means the goal of the Christian in time is to be every striving to add to a world in chaos, order, quality, and beauty. If it disappoints me when I see Christians being sloppy, careless, and indifferent to a life of order and beauty, how much more does it disappoint God?

God's purpose in giving us this revelation of the New Jerusalem is to captivate our imagination. If your imagination is filled with the glorious destiny God has prepared for you, and you visualize yourself as a part of the Bride of the Lamb--beautified with the jewels of heaven--this will be a

powerful tool in making you discontent with what is mediocre and superficial. Christians who have their imagination impacted by this revelation of God, will see themselves and other Christians as jewels and not as junk. This will affect their language, behavior, and attitudes, so that they will have a higher sense of self-esteem, and they will value others as God's jewels.

The practical value of the study of the jewels of heaven is that the more we grasp their beauty, the more we will be gems ourselves in time, adding to the beauty of the Bride of the Lamb, even before she is robed in this eternal necklace. May God help us reflect in time the beauty of the jewels of heaven.

9. OCCUPATIONS IN HEAVEN bases on Rev. 22:1-5

The story is told of a man who died and found himself in a region of fabulous abundance. His slightest wish was instantly granted. At last, however, the novelty wore off and he became bored. He told his host he would love to do something. Was there any work he could perform, or any problem he could help solve? His host said, "I am sorry, but there is no work to be done here." "No work!" cried the man in frustration. "Nothing to do!" he shouted. "I would rather be in hell than have nothing to do forever." His host replied, "Just where do you think you are?"

The hell of hell will be nothing to do. There will be no labor of love, no purpose to being, no goals to achieve, and no expressions of creativity. Hell will be a state of perpetual unemployment. Dorothy Sayers, the great female apologist for Christianity, said, "Damnation is without direction or purpose. It has nothing to do and all eternity to do it in."

In contrast, heaven will be a place, not only of eternal enjoyment, but of eternal employment. When God made Adam, He made him a creature of creativity, with a desire to work. He gave him a job, to keep the garden of Eden, and to study the animal kingdom, so he could give all the animals names. Adam was made a botanist and zoologist the day he was created. God made man to study and to have dominion over his environment. He gave him both physical and mental work, for both are vital to the joy of living.

It is a logical conclusion that God will give even more exciting and satisfying jobs to His children in the eternal paradise. Certainly, his perfected saints will be ready for greater labors than even Adam ever dreamed about. This has been the universal hope of believers down through the centuries. They expect to serve God in a way that satisfies the built in desires God has given them to be creative. Robert J. Burdette, expressed the faith of many when he wrote, " My work is about ended. I think the best of it I have done poorly; any of it I might have done better; but I have done it. And in a fairer land, with finer material and a better working light, I shall so a better work." The poet adds these words,

I cannot think of Paradise a place
Where men go idly to and fro,
With harps of gold and robes that shame the snow;
With great wide wings that brightly interlace
Whenever they sing before the Master's face---

Within a realm where neither pain nor woe,
Nor care is found; where tempests never blow
Where souls with hopes and dreams may run no race.
Such paradise were but a hell to me;
Devoid of all progression, I should rot,
Or shout for revolution, wide and far.
Better some simple task, a spirit free
To act along the line of self forgot--
Or help God make a blossom or a star.

It is intolerable for Christians to believe, that rest from the battle with evil, means an everlasting idleness. Can that be the goal of all God's work, and all the cooperative labors of man? To be saved to spend eternity in idleness, just when we finally gain what we need to be most effective, is inconsistent with the nature of God's wisdom. Better that we be left sinful and imperfect beings, who love serving our Lord, than to be perfected for the sake of inactivity and unproductive idleness. We can understand the hope for rest from life's battles, and that is a legitimate concept of heaven, but in our new bodies we will not need rest. We only need rest for what we endure now, and that is why the poet has written,

There once was a woman who always was tired
She lived in a house where no help was hired.
On her death bed she said, dear friends I am goin
Where washing aint done nor cookin nor sewin,
And everything there will be just to my wishes,
For where they don't eat there's no washin of dishes.
Don't mourn for me now, don't mourn for me ever,
For I'm goin to do nothin, forever and ever.

We can understand her desire to escape from the burdens of life, and that is a part of our heavenly hope. But to do nothing for ever and ever, is certainly not a worthy ambition for a child of God. Our ultimate hope ought to be, to do more for the glory of God in our perfected bodies, than we ever could in the weakness of our earthly bodies.

The question is, what will we do in heaven? What kinds of jobs will be available? What sort of service will be needed? In order to get the best possible answers to these questions, we need to look at heaven from two perspectives. We need to look at Revelation and it's implications. First lets look at-

I. REVELATION.

We need to listen to what God tells us in His Word, about the activities of heaven. Here in Rev. 22:3, the redeemed in heaven are called servants, and in Rev. 7:15, they are also called servants. It says there, "Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night within His temple." These two verses have had a profound impact on Christian thinking about heaven. If the redeemed are called servants, and they worship and serve God, and they reign for ever and ever, as verse 5 says, then we get a picture of heaven as a place of perpetual motion and never ceasing activity.

Billy Graham, commenting on the significance of the title of servant, attached to the saints in heaven, said, "I believe that means we are going to work." We need to see this, not as a threat, but as a promise. It is said that Thomas A'Kempis when a youth, studied the book of Revelation with a group of other young men. At the end of the course the teacher asked each member of the class to quote his favorite promise of no night, no pain, no death, and others. But when A'Kempis came to answer he said that his favorite promise was "His servants shall serve him."

Charles Spurgeon, who gave much thought to being servants in heaven, wrote, "What engagements we may have throughout eternity we are not told, because we have enough to do to fulfill our engagements now; but assuredly we shall be honored with errands of mercy and tasks of love fitted for our heavenly being; and I doubt not it shall be one of our greatest delights while seeing the Lord's face to serve him with all our perfected powers. He will use us in the grand economy of future manifestations of his divine glory. Possibly we may be to other dispensations what the angels have been to this. Be that as it may, we shall find a part of our bliss and joy in constantly serving him who has raised us from the dead."

There shall we see, and hear, and know,
All you desired or wished below,
And every power find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy.

The phrase in the Lord's Prayer, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, is another clear light of revelation that tells us heaven is a place where God's will is being done perfectly. With countless numbers of angels, plus the saints of the ages, there is always plenty to do, for God has a need for infinite service. Moses and Elijah, you recall, were assigned the task of breaking back into history to comfort Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. What they did for many centuries before this, and the many since, we do not know, but the point is, they had a job to do for God, and it is not likely this was the only job God had for them for all the centuries they have been in heaven.

We are not trying to say that the saints in heaven are being driven from one task to another like slaves, but that there is never one moment of boredom in heaven. There is always something to do that is filled with meaning. Heb. 12:1, says we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, as we run the Christian race. It is almost universally agreed upon that this represents the redeemed in heaven who know what is happening here on earth, and are cheering us on as we run the race for the glory of Christ. Wide World Of Saints is on 24 hours a day for those in heaven.

Jesus in the Parable of the Nobleman tells of how he went on a long journey, and left ten servants with ten pounds to trade with while he was gone. When he returned, the one servant had made ten pounds from his one, and Jesus said the nobleman responded, "Well done good servant, you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities." The one who made five pounds was made ruler over five cities, and the one who buried his money, lost it all. The parable is about the gifts Jesus gives to His followers, and the rewards they will receive when He returns. Jesus seems to be saying that those who are faithful will receive jobs of leadership over others in the eternal kingdom.

Here in Revelation 22:5, it says the servants will reign, and how can you reign if you do not have some authority over other beings, or over some territory? Clearly one of the jobs of eternity will be

the job of leadership, involving administration, and decision making.

This is not a lot of revelation, and what there is, is general, and that is why Paul says, "We see through a glass darkly, or in a mirror dimly." But what we see is enough to fill the heart and mind with all kinds of implications. We want to look at heaven, now, from the perspective of-

II. IMPLICATION.

By revelation we know God is not a God of idleness. He is a creator who loves to use His creative energy. He created the universe out of nothing but His own creative thought. He is a working God. He is not a workaholic, however, or even He took a Sabbath rest. He made the angels to labor with Him, and He made man to labor in cooperation with Him. This is a matter of clear revelation. By implication, we can conclude, that unless God's nature changes, He will go on creating new worlds with endless projects, in which He will use both angels and men. God's creative capacity is beyond our wildest imagination, and we can be assured He will never become lazy or indifferent. By implication, therefore, we can see eternity opening up an absolute infinite possibility of new jobs for Jesus.

The question is, just how specific can we get concerning the occupations of heaven. There is always the risk of misunderstanding. Like the little girl who was happily humming a hymn as she dusted the furniture to help her mother. "Mommy", she asked, "Will I be dusting God's chair when I get to heaven the way the hymn says?" The mother looked up surprised, and asked, "Which hymn says that honey?" The girl responded, "and dust around the throne, and dust around the throne." It took the mother a while to figure out she was quoting a line from the hymn, *Marching To Zion*, which says, "and thus surround the throne, and thus surround the throne."

It is not likely that dusting is one of the tasks awaiting the redeemed in heaven. But not all occupations are based on misunderstanding. The Bible says God will grant us the desires of our hearts, and that there will be eternal pleasures at His right hand. This implies that the interest, skills, and gifts that are developed in this life, will continue to be a part of life in heaven. This means that heaven will be filled with infinite variety, even as this life is.

It is always a danger to try to picture heaven in a limited way, that appeals to some, but leaves others disappointed. Frank Gaebel, for many years co-editor of *Christianity Today*, says he can't wait to hear what composers like Beethoven, Bach, and Mozart can do with a chorus of ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands. There is a good basis for his hope to be fulfilled, but there are many who do not find this a great attraction, for they never even listen to the works of these men on earth. We dare not limit our concept heaven to our own interest. God has made man with an infinite variety of interest and gifts, and all of them will be satisfied in heaven.

Several years ago I read two books about Peg and Joy Woodson. Both of these young children died from an incurable disease. This was right at the time when many people were testifying that they had died, and had gotten a glimpse into the next life. Peg was asked what she thought about it, and she said, "People are talking about running around barefoot in heaven, but I don't like to run around barefoot. Have you ever seen one picture of a kid reading in heaven? If you don't read in heaven, I don't think I want to go." "Yeah," echoed her brother Joey, "If you don't read in heaven, I don't wanna go."

The health of these two had limited their activity, and their whole life revolved around reading. It became their primary interest. With new bodies in heaven they may really enjoy running barefoot, but the point is, if reading is still their primary interest in heaven, you can be assured there will be plenty to read, for God promises to grant us the desires of our hearts.

Peter Marshall, the famous preacher and chaplain of Congress wrote, "I love music and have always wanted to study it. But I've never had the opportunity....In heaven I look forward to the study of music as one of the satisfactions I'm going to have." This is the conviction of the saints through the ages. God has given us more dreams and aspirations than we can fill in one small lifetime. We are made for eternity. Many Bible scholars long for the chance to discover the fullness of truth in God's Word, and they expect to get this chance in heaven. Those with a scientific mind expect to probe deeply into the mysteries of the universe in heaven. Poets, artists, and musicians expect to express truth with a beauty and freedom never known on earth. Every aspiration that God has planted in hearts of men, will motivate them though out eternity. The greatest one's love for anything in this life, the greater is one's anticipation of fulfillment in heaven. Listen to Grace N. Crowell, one of the great Christian poets of our time,

When the curtains of the Blessed Country part
Some evening in the West to let me through,
A keen delight will quicken in my heart,
My faltering, slow tongue will speak with new
Articulation, and the words I seek
And long for now will sparkle up in me
Like clear, cold water, and my lips will speak
A language fraught with strange intensity
I shall have words for April sunsets then,
For the look of autumn sunlight on a wall
For a thousand things the earth-bound tongues of men
Have tried to voice but never said at all.
And in some corner of heaven, mad with delight
I shall sit down and write, and write and write!

G.M. Day, also a Christian writer, had a mother who loved gardening, and she writes in her book, *Joy Beyond*,

Those who loved flowers and trees and gardens here
assuredly have them in their fade less glory in the
better world. I am confident that my garden-engrossed
mother, who spent so much time among her flowers
in her latter years is delighting now in the wonders of
a heavenly garden.

Thy gardens and thy goodly walks
Continuously are green,
Where grow such sweet and pleasant flowers
As nowhere else are seen.

The more you study heaven and how God's people think of it, the more the implication is

strengthened, that your occupation in heaven will be directly related to the interests and aspirations you have developed in this life. In other words, heaven will give you the chance to be and do what you have always wanted to be and do, or to do it on a level beyond what the limits of this life allow.

W.A. Criswell was for many years pastor of the largest Baptist church in the world. He administered this vast organization of world wide influence-the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. He writes of how this influenced his view of heaven.

In our work we shall administer, according to the Word of God, the entire universe and everything that is in it. That includes God's solar system and the infinitude of the world about us. The government of the universe will be given into our hands and the administration of God's creation will be turned over to us.

God has gifted this man with the ability and love for administration, and thus he longs to do it even on a greater scale in heaven.

The Old Testament Temple was a hive of activity. It took a whole tribe of Israel to keep the functions of the temple going. The choir alone was 3,000 trained singers. Imagine what God has awaiting for us who will be servants in His eternal temple. It will be place of endless enterprise. Boredom will not be in the dictionary of heaven, nor will idleness, laziness, or unemployment. Heaven will be filled with glorious tasks of infinite variety.

When asked what we will do in heaven, Harold Lindsell, editor of Christianity Today, replied, "We will work forever and enjoy it." George W. Truett, that great preacher and author of a previous generation, wrote, "Yonder in the immeasurable and infinite immensities of the eternal spaces of God are worlds and worlds and worlds-worlds by the millions...and it may be that one of the services on which God will send us...is to go here and there not limited as we are now and declare the riches and wonders and glories of God as we can never declare them while we are fettered in the flesh." Here was a man who spent his life declaring the glory of God, and he hoped to go on doing it forever.

One of the major purposes of this life is to discover what you would love to do forever. The loves, the interests, the gifts, and the aspirations we develop in this life will greatly affect our service and occupation in heaven. This makes the discovery, development, and dedication of our gifts all the more important, for the more we do this now the more we experience a foretaste of our heavenly occupation.

10. THE LOCATION OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:1-8

The City Bank of Binghamton, New York, sent flowers to the management of their new branch, on the opening of their new facility. Unfortunately, the card accompanying the flowers read, "Deepest Sympathy." The florist who made the mistake, called later to apologize for the mixup. What really worried him, he said, is the message meant for the bank was sent to a funeral, and it read,

"Congratulations on your new location."

This message would really be quite fitting, for the fact is, death does change our location. The question is, where is the new location? Where is heaven and hell? Many feel they are right here on earth, and not somewhere above and below. This conviction is not totally without merit, for the future does begin with the now and the here. Jesus is the door to heaven, but unless we have walked through that door in time, we will not be able to enter it after death. So, it is true, heaven begins now in time, and not after we die. The essence of heaven is the presence of God, and that begins as a present experience. Likewise, those who are without hope and without God in the world are already bearing some of the burdens of hell. Heaven on earth, and hell on earth, are real experiences, but the fact is, when the body dies the soul departs and returns to God. The question is, just where is God and His dwelling place located?

The question gets complicated because of the nature of God. He is omnipresent, and if heaven is where God is, and God is everywhere, then heaven is everywhere, and we are right back where we started. But it is not Biblically accurate to say heaven is everywhere, for the Bible refers to heaven as a distinct place. In the Lord's prayer heaven is used twice. Our Father who art in heaven--that is in distinction from our father on earth. God is everywhere, and everywhere is heaven if you are God, but we are not, and so we need to distinguish between our realm and God's realm. Everywhere can become a heavenly place, for God's presence can fill it, as He did in the Old Testament temple. You can be in a prison, and be in a heavenly place, as you sense the presence of God, like Peter did.

There is no escaping, however, the clear distinction between the earthly and the heavenly. Jesus said, I go to prepare a place for you, and He ascended to the right hand of the Father. And the second reference in the Lord's Prayer says, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Heaven is where God is uniquely present; where His will is done perfectly; where Jesus Christ reigns, and prepares to receive all who die in faith. When we die we can't go everywhere, for that would be to become equal with God. We have to go somewhere, and that somewhere is what we are trying to pinpoint.

The first thing we need to do is recognize that the Bible refers to three heavens, each of which is clearly distinct from the others. Paul was caught up into the third heaven. This implies there are at least two others. First, there is the atmospheric heaven. This is the realm in which the senses reign. You can see this heaven. It is the clouds and sky. It is that heaven in which the birds fly, and where the weather is produced. It is that heaven closest to the earth.

The second is the astronomical heaven. This is the realm in which the stars reign. The eye of man can still penetrate this realm, and with the aid of the telescope, see that it is enormous beyond comprehension. It is a vast heaven, but it is not the dwelling place of God. There is a popular theory that heaven can be located in this sphere of the universe. It is the theory that heaven is in the North. The Bible basis for this is in Is. 14:12-13. "How are you fallen from heaven, O Day Star, Son of Dawn! How are you cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven, above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far North." In Ezekiel chapter one, the vision of the heavenly creatures come out of the North. Job 26:7 says, "He stretches out the North over the empty place and hangs the earth upon nothing."

Jack MacArthur, who promotes this theory points out that North is the same direction from every point on the earth's surface. Up is North from everywhere on the planet. It is also the magnetic pole toward which all compasses point. Why? Many believe it is because the North, of the astronomical heaven, is the actual location of God and His dwelling place. In the empty place in the North, is a huge black hole where the gravity is so great, even the light of stars cannot escape it. Could this be heaven? It is not impossible, but as we move on to the third heaven, we will see why this theory is not likely. The third view will show how this, and all other views, will be encompassed within it.

The third heaven is the ascension heaven. This is the realm in which the Son reigns. This is where the saints go when they leave the body. The other two heavens can be studied by science, but this one can be known only by revelation. Some feel you just keep going past the second heaven millions of light years out, and you run into the third heaven. The theory of heaven in the North is part of this idea. The weakness of this view is that it does not fit the revelation we have in the New Testament. For example, in Acts 7:56 Stephen, as he is about to be stoned, gazes into heaven and says, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." The most powerful telescope cannot see to the furthest galaxy, let alone, beyond the second heaven into the third. If Stephen could, with the naked eye, see the glory of God, and the Son at His side, then we are forced to think of heaven in other than spacial terms. In other words, we need to see heaven as being in a different dimension, and not far out beyond astronomical space.

Jesus said He would never leave us, but be with us always. If heaven is in another dimension, then it is easy to see how this can be, for heaven then, is really no distance away at all, for it is not in space. It is in a dimension that exists right along side our dimension of time and space, and, therefore, always near. If man invented a space ship to go to the stars, those who went would be no nearer heaven than those on earth, but they would be no further, either, for the dimension of God's presence is everywhere.

This is not the same as saying everywhere is heaven. This earth is not heaven, nor is anywhere else in the universe of space, heaven. Yet everywhere one is, he is near heaven, for the dimension of heaven is only a revelation away. That is, God can do for anyone what He did for Stephen. He may be at the North pole, or on the moon, or some far off galaxy, and God could open His eyes to see Jesus standing by His side in heavenly glory. Heaven is everywhere, and yet it is nowhere. It is nowhere, in the sense that you can locate it in space, and draw a map to get to it. Yet, it is everywhere, in that it is in a dimension that encompasses all of space, and, therefore, it is present wherever you are.

When the Bible refers to the third heaven being above all heavens, it is not referring to it as being spatially above them, but rather as being superior to them, and encompassing them. Paul in Eph.4:10 says, "He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things." You would think that rising above all the heavens would take you so far out that you would no longer be in touch with the rest of the universe. Paul says just the opposite is the case. By ascending to the highest heaven, Jesus really came into touch with all of time and space, and is now everywhere present. He is in a dimension where he escapes all the limitations of time and space.

He could not be everywhere in the flesh, even after the resurrection. Only when he ascended to the third heaven could he be an omnipresent Savior. When you call on Christ to forgive, or to guide, your prayers do not have to travel for light years to get to Him. He hears you as you speak, for He is

present at all times, even though He is at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Heaven is never more than a thought away. The distance to heaven is not measured in miles or light years, but in degrees of awareness. Stephen was filled with the Spirit, and granted the ability to be aware of heaven's nearness. Many saints, on their death beds, have this same awareness. They see Jesus, or some loved one who has gone on before them. They hear heavenly music and see light that is unearthly. All of this is easy to understand when we see that heaven is near in another dimension. God can pull the curtain open at any time and let us see that dimension.

This explains how we can be surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses, and how the saints in heaven can know what is happening on earth. If God grants them the awareness, they can see anything in time, just as those in time can see anything in heaven. Jesus said the rich man in hell could see Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham. A great gulf was fixed so there was no crossing, but he could see heaven from hell, because God opened the curtain. Stephen saw heaven from earth, and so no matter where you are in the universe, you can see heaven if God opens up that dimension, which is everywhere.

A place in space is either near or far to any other place in space, but a place in non-space is capable of being both near or far, depending upon the state of mind of the one relating to that place. The saved are ever near heaven, but the lost are ever far from it. But, if they repent and trust in Jesus as Savior, they can be near heaven without having traveled an inch. Heaven is as near as our relationship to the King of heaven.

When Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration, they did not have to travel through billions of miles of space to get there. They were watching the life of Jesus as it transpired, from their place in heaven. They knew what was going on in his life, and that he was heading for the cross, because they were in the presence of God, which is the perfect place to see all that is going on in the dimension of time. The disciples did not understand what Jesus was facing, but they did, and they were able to comfort Jesus. Jesus knew he was being watched from another dimension and this was a positive motivation to keep on the track he knew was the will of his Father.

A lot of things make sense when we see heaven is another dimension. For example, the new heaven and the new earth. The new heaven does not mean God is going to scrap His perfect dwelling. This is a reference to the atmospheric and astronomical heaven. The whole material universe is stained by sin and is incompatible with God's perfection. It has to be made new so that it can be incorporated into the third heaven of God's presence.

The ultimate goal of Christ is to redeem the entire creation of God, which means the earth, and the other two heavens. Paul says in Eph. 1:9, "For He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth." Jesus is, Himself, the perfect uniting of the earthly and heavenly. He is flesh and spirit--God and man. Heaven in its final state will literally be everywhere, for everywhere will be incorporated into heaven. The solar system, the milky way, and all the astronomical heaven will be a part of the eternal home of the saints. That black hole in the North, and every other part of God's creation will be a part of the eternal heaven.

It makes a difference how you phrase your question. If you ask, where is heaven? The answer is,

in another dimension. But if you ask, where will heaven be? The answer is everywhere, for all that is will be a part of heaven, with Jesus as the Lord of all. The only part of reality that will be left out will be hell. That will be in another dimension separated from heaven.

The value of seeing that heaven is in another dimension that is even near, is that it helps us set our affections on things above. They are not light years away, but as near as breathing. Heaven is not long distance, but only a prayer away. Flying in a space ship for years will not get you any closer to heaven, but doing God's will on earth as it is in heaven will get you closer by the minute. There is heaven on earth to some degree, as we live in fellowship with the Lord of heaven. One day, this earth will be a part of heaven. Anthony Hoekema, from the reformed tradition writes, "From Rev.21:3 we learn that the dwelling place of God will no longer be away from the earth but on the earth. Since where God dwells, there heaven is, we conclude that in the life to come heaven and earth will no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be merged. Believers will therefore continue to be in heaven as they continue to live on the new earth." Some see the earth as the wedding present of Christ to His Bride, the Church. He won it back from the control of Satan, and He gives it to those who lost it. The meek will inherit the earth, and they will reign on earth with Christ. Heaven will be right here.

Since, however, it is just in another dimension, it is already right here. Imagine a totally deaf person who has been deaf from birth. They do not comprehend sound. It is all around them, but they never experience it. It is foreign to their experience and senses. If everyone they knew was also deaf they would have every reason to doubt that sound existed. It would be real and ever present but in a dimension for which they had no sense to detect it. So, we live with heaven all about us, but we have no sense to detect it, and so we are unaware of its presence. God gives some a peek into that dimension, but most must wait until they receive their new bodies, which will have the senses needed to see the glory of heaven everywhere.

It is considered a self-evident truth that you can't be in two places at the same time. But the Bible says this is not so. The Christian, by being in Christ, is both in time and in the heavenly realm of eternity. Paul in Eph.2:6 says, "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realm in Christ Jesus." We go to heaven when we die, because heaven has come to us before we die, in Christ. Our Head is already in heaven, and so, in one sense so are we. Jesus is the essence of heaven. The poet put it--

Christ is the heart of heaven
It's fullness and it's bliss;
The center of the heavenly throng.
The object of the ransomed's song,
Is Jesus in the midst.

If Christ is in you, and you are in Christ, you have a dual address, and one of them is heaven. Where is heaven? It is everywhere where Christ is, and if He is in your heart, heaven is also there. Thus, there is more than one answer to the question, where is heaven? The primary answer, however, is, it is in another dimension where God dwells, which is right next to the dimension where we live. Heaven is our neighbor, and thus, God is ever near. We need to call on Him more often to sense that we are never far from heaven.

11. THE MUSIC OF HEAVEN based on Rev 15:1-8

Most of us are not gifted in the realm of music. Many of us feel pathetic in our ability to sing, and even more so with our ability to produce music. We can easily envy those to whom it comes easy. Elizabeth Resen, at four could listen to music in a play at school, and then go home and play it on the piano. A classmate asked her how she did it, and she said , "I hear it in my ear then I hum it in my mouth. And then I play it with my fingers." If only it were that easy for all of us.

The good news is, we have every reason to believe that all of God's people will be so gifted in their new bodies in the eternal kingdom. God is a great lover of music, and He will want nothing but the best for all eternity. Everyone is expected to sing His praises, and so we can expect to be given unique abilities to do so. The fact that the Bible reveals there is so much singing in heaven implies that all who are there will be able to sing well. The book of Revelation has a host of happy hymns of harmony as part of the heavenly scene. Poems of praise are part of paradise. Joyful songs of jubilation to Jesus, and songs of salvation to the Savior are a major part of this book. It tells us about the adoration that is always an activity around the presence of the Almighty.

It makes sense that there will be a lot of singing in heaven. If there is plenty on earth, how much greater will be our desire to praise God, when all His promises are fulfilled, and we are enjoying the fullness of our salvation? It is also logical, because song is the best way known to unite a large number of people in a common activity. Hundreds and even thousands can join in one accord, as they sing the praises of the Lord. Singing is something a number of people can do together, and produce what is beautiful sound to the glory of God.

The interesting thing about the particular song in heaven, we are focusing on in Rev.15 is, it is both old and new. It is both the song of Moses, and the song of the Lamb. The song of the Lamb was fairly new, but the song of Moses was well over 1200 years old when John wrote. We see ads all the time for records and tapes of songs that were popular in the 50's and 60's. They bring back memories, and people buy them by the thousands to relive the good old days.

Now we see John is telling us, they do the same thing in heaven. The great victory of the Exodus was the birth of Israel as a nation, and that event produced the first great song of Israel. It became like a national anthem. John said the dead in Christ go on singing that song of Moses, for it is a song of celebration, just like the song of the Lamb, which is the celebration of the ultimate Exodus--the Exodus of Jesus, as the Lamb of God, out of bondage to the flesh, out of bondage to matter, out of bondage to sin, death, and hell--into the liberty of the Kingdom of God. Jesus was our Moses, and He led the way, and was the pioneer of our faith, and enabled us to pass out of the Egypt of our bondage into the promised land of liberty.

What Moses did for the Old Testament people of God, Jesus has done for the New Testament people of God. The result is their songs are the top two on the charts of heaven, and they always will be, for all other songs are based on these two. The Old Testament saints sing the song of the Lamb too, for their exodus out of Egypt would have meant nothing if Jesus had not led the way out of death. On the other hand, the New Testament saints sing the song of Moses, for if he would not have led God's people out of Egypt to become a unique people, the plan for a Savior never could have been fulfilled.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament plan of God are vital parts of the whole, and the songs of heaven prove it. The new will be with us forever. We will sing endless new and enjoyable tunes, and music will be an endless progression of new songs. But the fact is, the old will never be obsolete, for the old will always be the foundation for all the new. The old songs of Moses and the Lamb will be enjoyed one hundred billion years from now, and we will appreciate them all the more, because we will have enjoyed so much more of what their salvation means. Don't waste your time trying to figure out which is best--the old or the new. They are both best, for they are both vital to the whole. The song of Moses and the song of the Lamb--cease to sing either and you rob the other of its fullness of joy.

There is a major lesson for life here on the music of heaven. There is no conflict between the classical and the contemporary. There is wisdom in heaven, for they see the validity and the value of both. Christians should appreciate the heritage of their old hymns, and yet enjoy the endless possibilities of new songs, by which to praise their Lord. God is always the same, and so whatever was valid once, will always be valid. But God is also infinite, and so there is no end to what can be discovered, and so the new is always valid also. The wise Christian will learn from the heavenly singers to preserve the old, and pursue the new.

C. S. Lewis says this is the only way to grow. It is not growth to abandon the old for the new. That is merely change, not growth. Growth is like a tree adding rings. It is not growth for a train to leave one station behind and puff on to the next. That is change but not growth. Growth is when you add the new to the old. He loved fairy tales as a youth, and later in life he learned to love novels. But he still loved fairy tales, and so that was growth. Had he lost his love for fairy tales, that would have been change only, and not growth. Growth is a process of loving the old and the new. Growth is what we see in the music of heaven. They sing the song of Moses, and the song of the Lamb.

A music program that is Biblical, will be just what Paul urges that it be, in Eph.5:19, where he writes, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." Again, he writes in Col.3:16, " Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." The three Greek words Paul uses for singing are salmos, hymnos, and ode. Ode is a word we do not use much, and it is used only 7 times in the New Testament. Two of them we just read by Paul, and the other 5 are in the book of Revelation. Two of these we have right here in our text--the ode of Moses and ode of the Lamb. How an ode differs from a psalm, or a hymn, is not easy to say, but what it seems to mean is this--the ode appears to be more like what we call a chorus. The odes of Revelation are all very short, simple, and not repetitious like a hymn. The ode is newer music, like the hymn, which are in contrast to the age old psalms, but the ode is less formal than the hymn, and thus, more like a chorus. The point is, singing that is Biblically balanced will be a combination of all three. This gives us the old and the new, the formal and informal, the solemn and the joyful. All the emotions are to be touched by songs.

The one area where churches have been weak, is in the area of the ode, or chorus. They have become popular in recent years, and this is more in conformity to the music of heaven. None of the songs in the book of Revelation are called psalms or hymns. They are all called odes. If these short little enthusiastic praises are good enough for heaven, then we are being spiritually snobbish if we feel they are not good enough for our worship. I have to admit, psalms and hymns seem more

dignified for a worship service, but this is because I have been conditioned by tradition. The music of heaven, however, has made me realize worship has other perspectives. It can be worshipful to laugh and clap, and be informal in our praise. Mac Davis sang, I Believe In Music, years ago, and the second stanza says,

Music is love, love is music if
you know what I mean.
People who believe in music are
the happiest people I ever seen.
So clap your hands, stomp your
feet, shake your tambourine,
Lift your voices to the sky. God
loves you when you sing.

God not only loves a cheerful giver, He loves a cheerful singer, and often the chorus helps us be more cheerful in our singing. D. L. Moody said, "Singing could do as much as preaching to proclaim God's Word." Martin Luther said, "Next to theology I give the first and highest honor to music." Luther began to use secular music, for he was convinced the devil should not have all the good tunes. Not everyone agreed with Luther. John Calvin was worried people would just have fun singing, and not really be worshiping, he put the brakes on, and even melted down organ pipes for other uses. John and Charles Wesley agreed with Luther, however, and they promoted Christian singing that would match anything the world had to offer. Listen to their instructions—

Sing lustily and with good courage.
Beware of singing as if you are half
dead or half asleep, but lift up your
voice with strength. Be no more
afraid of your voice now, nor more
ashamed of it's being heard, than
when you sang the songs of Satan.

Music and singing have infinite potential for pleasing God and benefiting man, and it is the obligation of every Christian to work at making music important in their lives, and in their worship. Balance is the key. Robert Shaw, who was America's leading choral director, said years ago, "Ninety per cent of the music written since Beethoven is not worthy of being offered in praise to God." This is too high brow an attitude. Excellence and quality are values to be considered in praising the King of Kings, but we must also remember God is not pleased with quality if the heart is not right. Better a simple chorus of doubtful quality, from a joyful heart that is truly grateful to God, than a Beethoven song, from a cold and thankless spirit.

God made it clear to Israel, through His prophet Amos, that quality of worship is worthless, without a heart that really loves the Lord and His will. God says in Amos 5:21-23, "I hate, I despise your religious feast; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Thou you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps."

God who loves music so much, detested the music that came from a people who did not care

about His will. They had become indifferent to His laws for justice. They trampled on the poor, took bribes, and deprived people of justice. They oppressed the righteous. Then they would come to church, and sing quality songs to excellent music. If was just meaningless noise to God, for songs that are pleasing to Him are songs that come from the hearts of people who want to please Him, not just in church, but in life. Beautiful songs will not whitewash a life of disobedience. But the most simple of songs will please God, when they come from hearts that truly love Him.

Coming back to the ode song in heaven, by those who are victorious over the beast, and all the forces of evil, we see a very simple song. It is not new or unique, or in any way a profound piece of poetry. Yet it is a part of the perfect worship of heaven. It is a radical contrast to much of the music in the Old Testament temple. It was accompanied by just one instrument, whereas, all types of instruments were used in the temple on earth--Azor, Dulcimer, Psaltry, Harp, Pipe, Trumpet, Cornet, Organ, Flute, Shofar, Sackbut, Cymbals, and Drums.

It was not an organized choir, but just a mass of people who had been overcomers, and who did not submit to the antichrist, and get branded by his number of 666. There were many organized groups of people, however, in the Old Testament who were specialists in music. David set apart 4,000 Levites, who would become specialists on various instruments for temple worship. They never had to worry about someone getting sick, for with 4,000 there was always a backup. I.Chron.23:5 says, "four thousand are to praise the Lord with the musical instruments I have provided for that purpose." Imagine, 4,000 ministers of music. Today we would consider this over staffing, even in the largest of churches.

Music was important to the Old Testament worship experience. We have duets in the Old Testament. In Judges 5:1 we read, "On that day Deborah and Barak....sang this song." We have women's choruses in I Sam.18:6-7, "...The women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. As they danced they sang: Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." This was just a little chorus that someone wrote for the occasion. It was an impromptu song for the days events. It was not a song or hymn, but an ode the women picked up on, and sang.

The preaching was often done to music in the temple. In I.Chron. 25:1 we read, "David, together with the commander of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Hemen and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals." You can imagine how the guy with the cymbals could really emphasize a point in the message. It is of interest to note, that the man who sounded the cymbals on a regular basis, was none other than the author of 12 of the Psalms. We read in IChron.16:5, "Asaph was to sound the cymbals."

The point of looking at all the organized singers and musicians of the Old Testament, is to contrast that with the songs of heaven, where there is no specialized group, but all believer's are involved. Everyone gets a harp, and everyone joins in the songs of heaven. The implication is, all the redeemed become singers and musicians in heaven. There will be no non singers, and no non musicians in heaven. There are millions of Christians who are neither in time, but all will be both in eternity.

Anything we do to improve our musical skills will be a long range investment, for we will use these skills forever. Preaching will cease, but praising never will. The idyllic image of the family

around the piano has faded into the past in our culture, but it will return forever in the Father's House, for God has always loved His family to sing in His presence, and He always will. The book of Revelation is loaded with songs to give us this clear impression. Spurgeon saw public worship as preparation for eternal singing. He preached--

".... it seems to me that public worship on earth is a rehearsal for the service of heaven. We shall sing together there, not solos, but grand chorales and choruses. We shall take parts in the divine oratorio of redemption. It will not be some one melodious voice alone that shall lift up the eternal hallelujah. We shall all have to take our parts to make the harmony complete. I may never be able to rise to certain notes unless my voice shall be wondrously changed; but some other sinner, saved by grace, will run up the scale, nobody knows how high; and what a range of melody the music will have in heaven! I believe that our poor scales and modes of singing here are nothing at all compared with what there will be in the upper regions. There, the bass shall be deeper and yet the notes shall be higher than those of earth; even the crash of the loudest thunders shall be only like a whisper in comparison with the celestial music of the new song before the throne of God. John spoke of it as "the voice of many waters." The waves of one ocean can make a deafening, booming noise; but in heaven there shall be, as it were, the sound of sea on sea, Atlantic upon Pacific, one piled upon another, and all dashing and crashing with the everlasting hallelujahs from the gladsome hearts of the multitude that no man can number.

I expect to be there, and I remember that verse in one of our hymns that says:

I would begin the music here, And so my soul should rise;
Oh, for some heavenly notes to bear My passions to the skies!

But you cannot sing that heavenly anthem alone because, however well you can sing by yourself, that is not the way you will have to sing in heaven, there you will have to sing in harmony with all the blood washed hosts. Therefore, let us often come to the Lord's house; and when we are gathered together, let us again take up the words of Dr. Isaac Watts, and say:

I have been there and still would go,
'Tis like a little heaven below.

That little heaven below shall help to prepare us for the great heaven above."

Spurgeon's whole point is, singing in church is to be a foretaste of the songs of heaven, and, therefore, they should be joyful praises most often. For that is the kind of songs that will characterize heaven. We have an obligation to teach our children to sing praises to God, for that is education that will prepare them, not just for time, but for eternity. Music should not be an elective, but a required course for Christians, for that is to be the language of heaven.

Some day or other I shall surely come
Where true hearts wait for me;
Then let me learn the language of that home
While here on earth I be:
Lest my poor lips for want of words be dumb
In that high company.

Music is vital for taking in the Word of God, and for giving out the praises of God. It is by music that we inhale the Word of the Lord, and exhale the praise of the Lord. Some are better at it than others, but all of us need to be ever growing in our use of music and song, for all of us are going to be a part of the singing and music of heaven. All of us, that is, who have let Jesus make our lives a symphony, by asking Him to come into our lives, as Savior and Lord. If you haven't done so, do it now, so you can be assured of being a part of the music of heaven.

12. THE ORDER OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:9-21

In the sixth century B. C. a boy by the name of Pythagorus grew up with his father, who was a gem-engraver. He noticed that gemstones came in regular geometric shapes. The beryl was a hexagon, the garnet was a 12 sided crystal, and each gem had it's own unique order. This observation was the beginning of what we call science. If gems have a special order to their nature, that makes it possible to classify them. This carries over to the study of all reality. He went on to discover that a pitch of a note on the seven string lyre depends on the length of the string. Music is thus, also, a matter of order. The whole universe was a cosmos--a creation of order.

He saw order everywhere, and modern science has confirmed his view. It has discovered that every atom of the universe has a very specific order with a certain number of electrons. The simplest atom has just one electron, and the next two, and the next three, and without skipping a number, on up to 109 electrons. Each is a different element--one of the building blocks of the universe. The last few are created by man, and are not natural. What is fascinating is, it all began with the order seen in gemstones. Jewels led man to the discovery of order in his world, and we will see that jewels also lead us to the discovery of the order of heaven. The task of science is to discover order in God's creation. The task of theology is to discover order in God's revelation.

The vision God gave John of the New Jerusalem is a vision of precise and exquisite order. Pythagours said, everything can be described in numbers. That was a profound insight, for numbers are the ultimate symbol of order. God is the great mathematician, and everything He has made has a

number. 12 is the number of the heavenly city. If we could send mail to those in heaven the address would always be 12 Gold Street. It has 12 gates with 12 angels at them, and the 12 tribes of Israel written on them. It has 12 foundations with the names of the 12 apostles on them. It is 12,000 stadia long, wide, and high. A perfect square of 12ness. It's walls are 144 cubits thick, that is exactly 12 times 12. The foundations are decorated with 12 precious stones, and there are 12 gates which are 12 pearls. In case you haven't guessed, it is no accident that everything about the heavenly city is described by the number 12. This is a significant number all through God's Word.

If we look at the element with 12 electrons in its atom, we will be looking at magnesium. It just so happens that this element is basic to light and life. When you see an old movie with a photographer under a hood, and an explosive flash, that is magnesium powder. Today we have flash bulbs, with a network of magnesium wires, to give the flash. The flares used to light the battlefield at night are burning magnesium. This number 12 element, not only gives light, it is the key to using light to produce life. Chlorophyll traps the energy of the sun that keeps all green plants alive. Every chlorophyll molecule contains one atom of magnesium. Without it chlorophyll will not work, and all plant and animal life will die. There is only about three fourths of an ounce of magnesium in our bodies. Most of it is in the bones, but without it our bodies would not survive. The number 12 is vital to the order of life in both time and eternity.

The point is, God is God of order. The first picture we have of God in the Bible, is that of a Creator, who takes a formless chaotic mass, and turns it into an orderly universe. He does so by a systematic and orderly process. He did not say, let there be animals, and then, when they began to die like flies from starvation, say, I guess I should have started with plant life. God is not haphazard. George Adam Smith, the great scholar, said, "The All-mighty and all-merciful is also the all-methodical too."

Every science is a study of some aspect of God's creation, and in each case it is a study of order. If there was no pattern in the movement of the sun, moon, planets, and stars, there could be no such thing as astronomy. Science depends upon order, and mathematical precision for its existence. You cannot classify chaos. If there was no pattern--no rhyme or reason why anything worked the way it does--there could be no science. It only exists because God is a God of order. We see it in His creation, and also in the laws He gave to Israel.

God's laws gave order to society. They enabled people to live with proper patterns of behavior, and with responsibility. Take law out of society, and you lose harmony and beauty. There is no happiness without order, but only anarchy. The perfect picture of order in the New Jerusalem is a symbolic way of telling us heaven is the ultimate in harmony and happiness. Heaven is perfect order, and thus, the ultimate in beauty.

If you study architecture, art, music, language, landscaping, or just about any subject, the key to beauty is order. All beauty is based on some kind of order. Look at anything you consider beautiful, and you will see order. If all the books in a library were thrown together in piles, with no order whatsoever, they would be of little value. If the dictionary or encyclopedia were printed with no order, they would be worthless. It is the alphabetical order that makes them, and the phone book, and many other tools, so valuable. An orderly arrangement of things make them beautiful and useful. When something does not work we say it is out of order. Therefore, when something does work, it is in order.

Music is simply sound in the proper order. Out of order those same sounds are called noise or racket. Get them in proper order, and you can be moved to sing, rather than be annoyed. Order is the characteristic of all that is good, true, and beautiful. The reason we love all the values that order brings in life is because we are made in the image of God, and the very essence of God's nature is order.

The essence of sin, on the other hand, is disorder. It is to be out of harmony with God, man, and nature. I have a misprinted concordance to the Bible, and some pages are missing, and others are in the wrong place. The N does not follow the M, and the P does not follow the O. Any book that does not follow the proper sequence is a nuisance, and a source of irritation. This is what man is to God when he sins. He is out of order. He is not fulfilling his purpose, and therefore, no longer a useful tool.

The goal of God is to restore order where it has been lost. To be saved, is to be restored to harmony with God and man. It is to become a useful tool again to achieve God's purpose. The cross has become a symbol of beauty, because on it, Jesus gained the victory over death, decay, and chaos, and restored fallen man to fellowship with God. Jesus destroyed the work of the devil and restored order. The perfected order of the New Jerusalem is the final result of all that the cross accomplished.

Everything in the New Jerusalem is arranged for beauty and symmetry. There are not two gates on one side and four on the other, but each of the four sides have perfect symmetry with three gates on each side. There are no loose strings or rough edges. All is a work of art pleasing to the eye of both God and man. They will share together in perfect harmony all the aesthetic pleasures God has imparted from His nature to man. God is the architect, artist, and jeweler, who put together this holy city for an eternal environment of order.

Keep in mind, the city represents the Bride of Christ--the people of God--and so, this perfect order has implications for what the redeemed will be in their resurrected bodies. Spurgeon, the great and eloquent preacher, sums it up in this paragraph-

"The body is to be changed. What alteration will it undergo? It will be rendered perfect. The body of a child will be fully developed, and the dwarf will attain to full stature. The blind shall not be sightless in Heaven, neither shall the lame be halt, nor shall the palsied tremble. The deaf shall hear, and the dumb shall sing God's praises. We shall carry none of our deficiencies or infirmities to Heaven. As good Mr. Ready-to-Halt did not carry his crutches there, neither shall any of us need a staff to lean upon there we shall not know an aching brow, a weak knee or a failing eye." The inhabitant shall no more say: 'I am sick.'" And it shall be an impassive body-a body that will be incapable of any kind of suffering. No palpitating heart, no sinking spirit, no aching limbs, no lethargic soul shall worry us there. No, we shall be perfectly delivered from every evil of that

kind. Moreover, it shall be an immortal body. Our risen bodies shall not be capable of decay, much less of death. There are no graves in Glory. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, for their bodies shall rise never to know death and corruption a second time."

Now let me throw in some theological speculation. The question has been asked millions of times. Why did God let man fall, and let the world become so full of disharmony? Why did God allow evil to ever exist? It is a question often asked, but seldom answered to anybody's satisfaction. The best answer is that God could not have free willed beings, like man, and not allow sin as a possibility. Let me add some detail to this that makes it even more likely.

The only way I can ever create anything of beauty and order is to first make a mess. To create a sermon I have to get books, file folders, and papers all over my desk. I create a chaos first in order to assemble the resources for an orderly sermon. Out of chaos comes order. If there was already order there would be nothing to create. You need to start with non order, just as God did. This is part of all creativity. The scene of a beautiful building is first a mess of dirt, ugly holes, and piles of material in disarray. But out of this chaos the beauty of order takes shape, and all the disorder is removed. Artists often make a mess in creating beauty, and so it is with authors, poets, and every other form of creation.

God's goal is the beautiful heavenly city of ultimate order. To achieve this end, He needed to go through the process of overcoming chaos and disorder. It is the paradox of the universe that the good, the true, the beautiful are established by overcoming the bad, the false and the ugly. That is the battle of all human creativity, and it is God's battle as well. The more disorder is overcome and order established, the greater is the beauty. The reason we comb our hair is to restore order out of chaos. We are always seeking order in all aspects of life. Flowers are beautiful in themselves, but man has found a way to make them even more beautiful, by putting them in order. Flower arranging is an art and some people are gifted in putting them in such order that they achieve their highest level of beauty. The greater the order the greater the beauty, and the New Jerusalem is a place of perfected order.

What are the practical implications of the perfect order of heaven? The obvious one is, that if order is our final destiny, then that is to be our goal for this life as well. The great commandments are to love God with all your being, and your neighbor as yourself. What is this, but another way of saying, God's will for us is that we live with order in our lives. Love is the highest order in the spiritual realm. God is love. God has the most beautiful and harmonious emotions with perfect balance. His choices are always loving, and His responses are always just and fair. A loving person is one who has all their emotions in proper order, and balance so that they are beautiful in attitude and action. When we embody God's love, we are appealing, for others can see the balance and harmony in how we relate to people. We are examples of order, and thus of beauty.

When we reveal prejudices, bitterness, and lack of forgiveness, and any other lack of love, people can see the disorder in our lives. None of us are yet part of the perfected beautiful Bride of the Lamb. Christians display every sin, defect, and disharmony in the book. But, our destiny is to be constantly before us to motivate us toward a greater life of order and beauty.

Stanley Shipp travels alot, and one day on plane they were told there was a delay, and they had to get off and wait in the terminal. It was a long wait, and when they got back on they had to wait another half hour. When they were ready to go a man came on and said, "I ask for an aisle seat, and this is a center seat." Stanley jumped up and said, "Here, you can have this one." "No!" he said angrily, "I don't want your seat!" Then he took off his coat in disgust, wadded it up, and threw it in the baggage compartment overhead, slammed the door shut, and sat down. Stanley got up, opened the compartment door, took out his coat, shook it, folded it neatly, put it back smooth and straight, and sat back down. The man said to him, "What do you do for a living?" Stanley said, "I teach people how to live." The man nodded his head and said, "Start teaching." Here was a Christian man seeking to restore order in a chaotic life. That is what Christian living is all about.

Love is the desire to create order, and make things beautiful. Because we love order, we arrange our furniture so as to make it as pleasing as possible. We strive to match our clothes so we are appealing to the eye. We strive to organize our desk, and any other area which tends to get messy. The good life is the ordered life. Plato said the order of the universe makes it clear that God is a creator of order, and that man should be able to order his life and government so as to please God. The heavens are to be a model for life on earth.

If He could see this in creation, how much more are Christians to see it in the revelation of the order of the heaven? This picture of the holy city is to be our model for life. This city is the final work of art of the master artist. It is His own perfection imparted to those He has redeemed. His Bride is just like Him-perfect.

Jesus had to face a fallen world of imperfection and disorder. That is why His ministry began with the temptation in the wilderness. The goal of Satan was to throw Jesus into a state of disorder. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, that prince of expositors, describes this great confrontation. "The king must not only be in perfect harmony with the order and beauty of the heavens, he must fact all the disorder and ugliness of the abyss. Goodness at it's highest He knows, and is; evil at it's lowest he must face and overcome. And so in the wilderness he stands as humanity's representative between the two, responding to the one and refusing the other."

Jesus won that battle for order, and the result is this picture of perfection for His Bride. But until that ultimate order of heaven is a reality, we must fact this challenge daily to choose order over disorder. Dr. Paul Faulkner in, Making Things Right, says the world is a place of "ubiquitous ambivalence," which means, it is messed up everywhere. Life is full of disorder, and it is our job to straighten it out wherever we can. Phil. 2:14 says, "Do all things without grumbling or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure--in a crooked generation in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life." Order is the name of the game, and we will not be finished until we enjoy with our Lord forever, the order of heaven.

13. RECOGNITION IN HEAVEN based on Luke 16:19-31

F. W. Borham tells the story of the English cricket player who lost his sight in his old age. This was a cause for great grief, because he could not watch his own boy play the game in which he excelled. His son became the crack bat on his school team, but the father got small satisfaction from it. One day he suddenly died. The following Saturday and important match was to be played, and the team

took it for granted that their best bat would be absent. But to their surprise, he was not only there, he batted like never before. He played with magnificent judgment, and rattled up a fantastic score that led his team to victory. When it was all over, they asked him what motivated him to play the game of his life. He explained by telling them, "This was the first game where my father could see me at bat." Here was a young man who took literally the picture presented to us in Heb. 12:1. It says there, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses as we run the race of life. Many Christians through the ages have believed that the dead in Christ go on observing those left behind. They know what is happening to us and have a greater understanding of the future than we do.

Some feel this is only wishful thinking and is really too good to be true. Others respond by saying, nothing is too good to be true where God is concerned, and they go on to answer all objections. One of the strongest objections is that if the dead in heaven know what happens on earth, then they cannot be very happy, for they would know of all the sin, war, and sorrow. They would be conscious of the failing even of their own loved ones. This sounds like a powerful argument against it, but John R. Rice, who has a strong conviction on the subject says, this argument proves nothing. Jesus Christ and God the Father know the reality of sin and evil completely, yet they are not unhappy, nor is heaven robbed of its joy because of their knowledge. The bliss of heaven is not the bliss of ignorance, but bliss that comes with the knowledge that victory is certain in Christ.

The saints in heaven with Christ have a far greater knowledge than the saints on earth. This is a matter of clear revelation. Our text, for example, reveals some interesting things about the knowledge of those who have passed into the world beyond. One of the most striking facts about this passage is the knowledge and concern of the rich man in hell. He not only recognized Abraham, a man from the distant past, but Lazarus, the man he neglected in his own lifetime. He also recognized his folly, and he had compassion on those he left behind. Here is a lost sinner, asking that help be sent to his five brothers, lest they end up in the same place with him. Death seems to be very educational, even for the lost. He learned immediately about what really matters in life.

The point is, if a lost man can be concerned about the state of the living, and offer a prayer on their behalf, who would even think of denying that same concern to the saved? J. Patterson Smyth in, *The Gospel Of The Hereafter*, writes, "Can you imagine your mother, who never went to bed here without earnest prayer for her boy, going into that life with full consciousness and full memory of the dear old home on earth, and never a prayer for her boy rising to the altar of God?" I certainly cannot imagine a Christian mother forgetting her children when a godless man remembered his brothers, who were also apparently godless. Are we to conclude that even though Scripture reveals that the lost are concerned for the lost, that the saved are concerned for neither the saved nor the lost? Angels rejoice over every sinner who repents. Can you imagine a son becoming a Christian after his mother has died, and the angels rejoicing, but never sharing this good news with his mother?

This is a sufficient argument for believing the dead go on in their knowledge of this world. There is more, however. Abraham in verse 31 refers to Moses and the prophets, as if he was familiar with them. But Abraham lived many centuries before Moses and the prophets. We can only conclude, that in the heavenly realm of the redeemed, there is a keeping up of what goes on in history. Abraham was not sleeping, or in some state of oblivion concerning the people he fathered. Abraham kept current on history, and even knew the contemporary state of men's hearts. He said the brothers of the rich man were hardened to Moses and the prophets. He knew they would not listen to one

from the dead. If he was up to date on what was happening in that day, many centuries after his death, it is logical to assume that he knows what is happening in our day. He no doubt, knows about Billy Graham and the New International Version of the Bible and anything he desires to know about contemporary events in the kingdom of God and in the world. Contemporary events are a part of the heavenly experience, if we believe what we see in the revelation God has given us.

Some might be a little leery of taking too strong a stand on what can be inferred from a parable, but there are other clear passages that back up the conviction that the dead go on learning of what happens on earth. In John 8:56 we read, "You father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad." In Luke 9:30-31, we read concerning the event of Christ's transfiguration, "And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem." The impressive thing is not only that they appeared, but that they were fully informed as to what was going to happen. Had they merely appeared it would be of no comfort to Christ, but the fact that they could talk intelligently about His death on the cross was a tremendous release. His own disciples could not understand him when he spoke of dying. But these two, from the realm of the dead, had understanding of God's plan. Their knowledge was superior to that of the living on earth. We see also, that with centuries separating Moses and Elijah, in the realm of the dead they are companions and share a common knowledge of contemporary history. The limitations of time are over. In eternity you can be friends with people from all ages of time. People in eternity know of all ages of time, including the present.

In I. Sam.28, we see Samuel returning from the realm of the dead to inform Saul of what the future held. There is no evidence to deny it, and much to support it, that the dead have knowledge of what happens on earth. The whole doctrine of the communion of saints is involved here. Christ is the head of His body, and His body is one. Whether the saints are in time or eternity they are one in Christ.

Death hides, but it does not divide-
Thou art but on Christ's other side;
Thou art with Christ and Christ with me,
In Him I am still close to thee.

This truth has a great many fascinating implications. The one we want to focus on concerns eternal recognition. It is universally believed, and theologically sound, but there is little in the Bible dealing with this issue. John in his vision of the eternal heavenly city does not tell us much about it's inhabitants. Most of what we know grows out of implications, and logical conclusions. If we heard there was intelligent life on Mars, we would assume that they knew each other. Since we know from Scripture that the dead maintain their personality and memory, it is obvious that they would recognize each other. Spurgeon, preaching on John 14 said, "Some have doubted that there will be recognition in heaven, but there is no room for doubt, for it is called my Father's house, and shall the family be unknown to each other?"

John tells us that the gates of the New Jerusalem have on them the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, and the foundations have the names of the 12 apostles. All of this would be meaningless to the saints of the city, unless there was a conscious recollection of history. The implication is that the saints there know all about the history of God's plan on earth. It would be folly to suppose that in heaven we would forget about the fall of man and all that God did in history to redeem man. The

reason we will be praising the Lamb for all eternity, is because we will remember for all eternity what He did in time.

Dr. Paul Tournier, the great Christian scholar and author of numerous books, says that we will obviously recognize each other in heaven. This is the whole point of our identity. In Christ, our names are written in the Lamb's book of life, and thus, we will be known by name for all eternity. Those whose names are blotted out will, no doubt, be forgotten. If your name is written there on that page white and fair, you will be known by that name forever. Why rejoice that your name is written there if you lose your identity? You just as well have a book filled with x's, if people lose their identity. The implication of the names is clear. We will know each other forever.

We will not only know each other in heaven, but we will not really know each other until heaven. We know each other only in part in this life. In heaven all the problems that prevent complete intimacy will be gone. The communication problems that hinder so many now, will be gone forever then. We could paraphrase Paul and say, now I love in part, but then I shall love even as I am loved. If we do not remember who we are and whom we have loved, then it is not really a resurrection of ourselves that has taken place. A denial of recognition in heaven is a robbery of all that heaven means to us. Lockhart put the feelings of millions into poetry when he wrote-

It is an old belief
That on some solemn shore,
Beyond the sphere of grief,
Dear friends shall meet once more.
That creed I fain would keep
That hope I'll ne'er forgo;
Eternal be the sleep,
If not to waken so.

If we do not recognize our loved ones in heaven, it means our love is not eternal, and heaven will be an empire of strangers. None of the relationships formed in time will have any eternal significance. The 12 names of the apostles around the holy city could just as well be 12 names of unknown people, for they will have no significance if their history is forgotten. But if love is not only good, but the highest good, then it follows, that good will be forever. It is inconceivable that we would not love those we have loved in time.

Robert Browning, after the death of his wife, Elizabeth Barrett, wrote in her Bible, "Thus I believe, thus I affirm, thus I am certain it is, that from this life I shall pass to another better, there, where that lady lives, of whom my soul is enamored." On the tomb of Charles Kingsley and his wife there are three Latin words which say, "We have loved, we love, we shall love."

A foolish objection is that heaven will be too vast to find our friends and loved ones. Let two people loose, even in New York City, and they may never find each other. This can only be a problem, however, for those who have a small concept of the power and wisdom of God. Even men devise systems of communication, like the phone book, so people can find one another. Are we to suppose that the holy city of God is without some systematic means of communication? I expect to be able to contact any person in history with no problem. To think otherwise is to think of God as less than a computer.

Christians have always believed in family reunion in heaven because any alternative robs heaven of its joy, and fails to satisfy the universal longing of the human heart. Heaven may be more than the ideal than we can imagine now, but it will never be less. Men of every nation have anticipated the joys of recognition and reunions in heaven. If it were not so, heaven would fall short of man's ideal. The family life of heaven will be all that we wish it could be now in time. One of the great joys of heaven will be that there is always enough time.

One of the powerful arguments for the belief of loved ones being reunited in eternity is the fact that it is a universal belief. Plato, Socrates, Cicero, and numerous scholars of the ancient world long for the day when they could see again the great friends they knew in this life. Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and others all through history into modern times, have had this hope. The majority can be wrong, but when there is a universal hope, it is usually because God has built the desire into man's very being, and He intends to satisfy it. Our Christian hope is not to be sub-pagan, but it is to rise to a far higher level.

The Christians hope of reunion is what enables them to practice the kind of love toward others that Christ expected. This belief has very practical effects on Christian behavior. Rev. Richard Baxter, back in the 1600's wrote, "I must confess, as the experience of my soul, that the expectation of loving my friends in heaven kindles my love to them on earth. If I thought that I should never know them, and, consequently, never love them, after this life is ended, I should in reason number them as temporal things, and love them as such." The doctrine of reunion is no minor hope, but is a powerful factor in determining how we relate to people. It is the eternity of fellowship that makes them of such infinite importance. Jesus said in Matt. 8:11, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." That is a clear statement concerning the reunion and fellowship of the living and the dead. The Old Testament and New Testament saints will eat together in heaven.

Dr. William Graham Scroggie said, "We cannot possible exaggerate the blessedness of heaven, nor can our imagination stretch to the full measure of it's wonder." The world often has a negative view of heaven. They see it as a perpetual prayer meeting, or a playing of a harp on a cloud, and they conclude it is perpetual boredom. Christians need to convey that it is really the fulfillment of all the joys we only taste in time. Recognition and reunion are aspects of heaven that even the world can appreciate.

When John Evans, the Scotch minister, was asked by his wife, "Do you think we will know each other in heaven?" He responded, "My dear, do you think we shall be bigger fools in heaven than we are here."

Will all loved ones know each other,
Know the same and not another,
In that home of life and love and light?
Yes, forever and forever!
Jesus there! No parting, never,
In that land where there is no more night.

This conviction of the poet is not only the universal hope of men, and the clear implication of Scripture, but it is backed up by the experience of dying saints. When D. L. Moody lay dying, it appeared that his spirit had departed, and so everyone left the room. When they heard a noise they

returned and found him with his eye open. One of them began to pray for him, but Moody asked him to refrain and said, "Do not pray that I may live. I have seen Dwight and Irene {two dead grandchildren}; I have seen the face of Jesus, and I am satisfied. Earth is receding; heaven is opening; God is calling me; this is my coronation day." If this happened only once we could dismiss it, but it has happened to numerous saints on their death beds. Dr. John R. Rice tells of standing around the bed of his mother as she was dying, and she said, "I can see Jesus and my baby now." As one of America's greatest Evangelists, he preached to millions that every little child who dies before conscious sin will be in heaven, and will be recognized. All who lose babies will know that baby in heaven. It will not be unrelated stranger, but it will be a part of the family. This is a great comfort to thousands of women who have lost babies.

Martin Luther lost his darling girl Magdalena, and he wrote, "As Adam, when he awoke from sleep, recognized the newly created Eve at once as flesh of his flesh....Even so and far better shall we, who have been renewed in Christ, recognized one another there,"

Raymond Shaffer in, *After The Rapture*, asks if there will be families in heaven, or will the Rapture be the great divorce, alienating life long marriage partners and splitting happy families? Will the Rapture rupture or restore families? Just to ask the question is to make it clear, love in all of it's aspects will be upgraded and not downgraded in heaven.

The real issue is not, will there be recognition in heaven, but will you be a part of the family of God to be recognized. You can only be assured of this by trusting in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. This alone, can guarantee that you will be involved in the joys of recognition in heaven.

14. THE RIVER OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 22:1-2

Kipling's book, *Kim*, has been called the greatest story of a river that has ever been written. According to Buddhist tradition, Buddha shot an arrow into the air, and where it fell, a river sprang up. The river was sacred, and whoever bathed in it would be cleansed from all sin. Kipling's story is about an old lama who wanders through cities and rice fields, over hills and across plains, always asking the same question. "The River, the River of the Arrow; the River that can cleanse from sin; where is the River?"

The universal search of man has been to find a river that satisfies every thirst of the body and soul. The quest of Ponce de Leon for the fountain of youth is a quest that has gone on all through history. Most of history follows the paths of the great rivers of the world. Babylon is built on the Euphratus; Nineveh was built on the Tigris; Thebes was built on the Nile, and Rome was built on the Tiber. We could go on around the world showing how the great cities are built by great rivers. Rivers have been the streams of life for the cities of the world. Our own great Mississippi has played a major role in the history of our country. The name in Algonquin means, Great River.

One of the strange paradoxes is that Jerusalem was not built by a river. This was a draw back, and the Jews always hoped that one day that their holy city, like the great cities of the world, could have a river. The prophets and psalmists were forever dreaming and singing of the river. Ezekiel, in a vision, saw a board river rushing out of Jerusalem. Isaiah saw a future Jerusalem where he says in 33:21, "There the Lord will be our Mighty One. It will be like a place of broad rivers and streams."

He got so disgusted with the disobedience of the people and God Himself lamented in 48:18, "O that you had harkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river..." Peace like a river, and the prosperity of a river have always been the rewards of a people blessed of God. To the Jewish mind, the ideal city must have a river. They believe that God Himself dwelt by a river in heaven. Psalm 46:4 we read, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High."

In John's vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, he shows us that all the hopes of a sacred city on a sacred river will be fulfilled, and we will have peace like a river forever. It is fascinating to study rivers, but here is the most fascinating river of all. Christianity was, in a sense, born on a river. John the Baptist began the New Testament ministry by baptizing in the Jordan River. Jesus was baptized in this famous river just before He began His public ministry. The Jordan is the most famous river of the Bible. Naaman didn't think it compared to the rivers of Syria, but when he obeyed God, the waters of Jordan became the waters of life for him, and they cleansed his leprosy.

Crossing over Jordan has become a symbolic way of referring to entering heaven. This is because, the entrance of Israel into the promise land began with the miracle of crossing over the Jordan on dry ground. It was the Jordan that made the promised land the nearest thing to the garden of Eden. It gave life to all the rich soil of the Jordan valley, and produced abundance of fruit. In Gen. 13:10 we read, "And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the entire Jordan Valley was irrigated....and it was life a garden of God." Just as the first paradise needed a river to keep it beautiful, and just as the promised land needed a river to keep it beautiful, so the eternal paradise for all God's people needs a river. John, as an eye witness, says it will be there.

All that a river has meant to man in history will be ours in perfection as dwellers in the holy city. What blood is to the body a river is to the city, and that is why it is called the river of the water of life. The blood stream has been called the river of life. When Jesus shed His blood in atonement for our sin, He sacrificed His river of life. Now by trusting in that river of life for forgiveness, we can have the hope of dwelling by that eternal river of life. One day gathered by that river we will sing some such words as this,

O blessed Lord, we little dreamed
Of such a morn as this;
Such rivers of unmingled joy
Such full unbounded bliss!
And Oh! How sweet the happy thought,
That all we taste or see,
We owe it to the dying Lamb,
We owe it all to Thee.

It is understandable why many feel this river of heaven is symbolic. Jesus used the ideal of a river in a symbolic way. In John 7:38 Jesus said, "He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water." He goes on to explain that the river is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Back in John 4:14, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, "...Whoever drinks of the water I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." These are obviously symbolic. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the river of heaven is a real and literal river.

It is the real river and it's values that give meaning to the symbolic use of it. DeHaan is right, I believe, when he says we will need a water supply for all eternity because we will enjoy the pleasures of eating and drinking. I am convinced that water will be part of the new heaven and the new earth. God made water as the basis for life on this earth. The world began with water and the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters. He had to divide the waters before any dry land could appear.

Scientists tell us that 70 per cent of the earth is yet water. From space our planet looks like a big drop of water. The earth is the only place known that is suitable for H₂O in liquid form. Everywhere else is either so cold or so hot that it can exist only as a solid or a gas. On earth alone is this unique source of life able to flow, and bring life to animals and vegetables. This makes the planet earth the most rare and unique place in all of God's creation. Water is the chemical creation that God has chosen to be the foundation of life. We have some hints as to why this is the case.

God so often builds into His creation something of His own nature. Thus, we can learn of Him by what He has made. Water is an expression of the very character of God. In Jer. 2:13, God says to His people, "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water." In Ps. 65:9 we read of the River of God which is full of water and by which the earth is watered and enriched. If you study all that the Bible says about water and compare it with all that science knows about water, you will see why it is such an excellent symbol of the Holy Spirit. Water is a part of the very nature of God.

Water is not a trinity by accident. H₂O is two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. It is a three in one element that can take on a three-fold nature of solid, liquid, and gas. What exciting symbolism is contained in water! The solid representing God the Father who remained on the throne of glory, like the majestic glaciers of the North Pole. Then the liquid representing the Son who flowed from the throne of God, as the River of Life, into the desert of this world to make it bear fruit for the Kingdom of God. Then there is the gas state of water representing the invisible but powerful as gas person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. Steam, or water in a gaseous state, has been a source of great power.

The skeptic may feel this is all a lucky coincidence, but let us look at more amazing parallels between water and the nature of God. God's nature is paradoxical, that is, it is both the source of life and the source of judgment. God is a consuming fire as well as the water of life. God combines in His nature the opposites of fire and water. What is fascinating is that water itself also has this paradoxical nature.

Henry Cavendish, back in 1783, was doing some experiments with the scientific sensation of the day-electricity. He wanted to see what would happen if he sent a current of electricity through a tube of water. He was shocked when the water vanished before his eyes. He repeated it again and again, and he was astounded. He examined the contents of the tube and discovered that water, the quencher of flames could be turned into a gas that was highly combustible and stimulated fire. He published a paper by the Royal Society in 1784, and he called water, "inflammable air."

Other scientists thought he was some kind of a crackpot. Water stimulating fire-it was absurd. The famous French scientist deRazier, was determined to expose this hoax before the world. He duplicated the experiment of Cavendish and attached a valve to the tube so he could inhale the so-called inflammable air. Before a panel of prominent citizens as witnesses he switched on the

current, filled his lungs with the gas left in the tube, and held a lighted paper at his lips as he exhaled. There was a terrific explosion and deRazier thought all his teeth had been blown out. He had proven the hard way that water can produce fire.

What a marvelous coincidence, that the source of life on earth has a nature so similar to the nature of the Creator. To the student of the Bible it is no coincidence, but rather, the design of God. Water is an expression of His very nature and that is why I am convinced that water will be a part of all eternity. The rich man in hell begged for just a drop of water. Hell is pictured as a place with no water. Heaven, on the other hand, is portrayed as a place with an abundance of water.

Rutherford Platt, in his book *Water The Wonder Of Life*, after describing how essential water is to all that physicist do in the laboratory, writes, "It possesses order and creates order. Is not water something on the level of divine creation?" Yes it is! And the Bible reveals it will be a part of the new creation of eternity as well. Our text tells us that the river of heaven flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. There are only two thrones, and so the Holy Spirit does not have a throne in heaven. This may just be a coincidence, but it is of interest to note that water is two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. The two hydrogen atoms are always in pairs. They stick together like the Father and the Son. The oxygen atom is the one that most fits the Holy Spirit, for it stirs up and creates activity. It is the key element in the giant sun flares, for example. The Holy Spirit if the Person of the Godhead who moves and motivates and produces the fire, like oxygen. It could just be coincidence, but it could also be another way God had built something of His nature into water, the basic source of life.

Water, like the Godhead, is also connected with light. Water power is the source of much of our electricity of our nation. Water power is light power. Belle Chapman Morrill, has put it into poetry-

For centuries, This untamed waterfall
Leaped to the gorge below with frightening power,
Dashing to splinters the venturesome canoe,
Cleaving the stubborn rock.
Today, Majestic still,
No loser for it's giving,
It lights a hundred million homes By it's hidden power.
Now....in this very moment....
O Spirit of the living God,
Cut deeper channels in the selfish rock;
Transform your power within me
To light for groping men.

When the Confederate and Union armies fought each other in the Civil War, they had one thing in common, and that was the need for water to quench their thirst. At the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, there is a bricked wall with a tablet telling the story of how both sides drank from that same well to sustain life. Water is something all men have in common as a need. Water is the source of life, and Jesus is the living water, the source of eternal life. The poet offers this toast to water-

Here's to old Adam's crystal ale,
Clear sparkling and divine,

Fair H₂O, long may you flow
And leave us not behind.

We can flow on with the river of life forever, and drink of the water of life, if we realize that in Christ we have found the fountain of youth-that sin cleansing river that all men have longed for. The river of life that flowed from His body on Calvary is the river that cleanses from all sin. Is it just a coincidence that water is the key element for cleanliness? The water and blood that flowed from Christ's side can cleanse us from all sin. When we partake of the communion elements, we drink symbolically from the sacred river of life that cleanses and gives us life. In time and in eternity we will be praising God for the gift of water. One poet conveyed it in these words-

Praise to God in running water,
Gleaming, glancing, and running water.
Crystal clear it's joyous cheer,
Dreaming, dancing, running water;
Amber-bright all slashed with white,
Sweet, romancing, running water;
Give God praise for all fair water!
His sweet grace is running water.
God's sweet grace is running water,
All fair sparkling, running water,
Bubbling spring from rock or sod,
Goodly thing, the gift of God,
Babbling praises as it flows,
Gathering grace as it grows,
Scattering joys wher'er it goes;
Praise to God in running water!

You can use water to communicate your faith in Christ, and your hope in heaven. You can ask people if they have a guaranteed water supply for all eternity. You can share the good news that in Christ you can have access to the fountain of perpetual youth. He is the source of life and the one we must trust, if we would drink forever from the river of heaven.

15. THE SUN OF HEAVEN based on Rev. 21:15-27

Isaac Asimov, the most prolific writer of this age, author of over 500 books, has a delightful essay on gold in his book, *The Sun Shines Bright*. He gives us scientific confirmation of why God would make the New Jerusalem a city of gold. The ancient world considered gold the most noble of metals. Even though gold is heavier than lead, gold has always been a metaphor for lightness.

People talked of walking with leaden feet, and being leaden-hearted. When you could not stay awake, your eyelids were like lead. But gold, which is nearly twice as heavy, is used to describe the opposite. You dance trippingly on golden feet, and golden slippers are not leaden weights, but are like feathers. To be golden-hearted is not to be heavy-hearted, but happy and buoyant.

Beauty is the key factor that is seen in gold, and, therefore, gold is the metal of aesthetics. God certainly knew that man would discover other metals in the future that would have nobler characteristics than gold, yet he still revealed the New Jerusalem to be a city of pure gold. Why not platinum? It is used in science because laboratory equipment made of platinum is untouched by air or water, or by chemicals that contact it. It can stand temperatures that would melt gold. It can be heated white hot and not be damaged. It is as rare as gold, and superior in so many ways. So then, why not a holy city of platinum? Was God being old fashioned, and behind the times, to reveal the eternal city as one of pure gold? Listen to the conclusion of the most read scientific author of our day.

Neither Platinum nor any other metal ever discovered has the warm yellowness of gold, and none is anywhere near as beautiful. Platinum can have all the nobility and density and high-meltingness and rareness you can give it, and can even be more expensive than gold, but it will never have gold's beauty, or be as cherished and desired as gold is.

If God's purpose was to describe the eternal city as a place of unmatched beauty, then He could not have chosen a better substance than gold. Gold is so beautiful because it is the color of the sun. All through history the sun and gold were related. Gold coins were made round as symbols of the sun. On the hieroglyphics of Egypt the gold circle was called, "Child of the sun." Gold has always been the metal most connected with worship, because of its connection with the sun--the source of all life on our planet.

The chemical symbol of gold is AU, from Aurora, the goddess of the dawn. In temples all over the world the highest point is covered with gold. You see it today, not only on churches and cathedrals, but on capital buildings. Gold is the highest metal in man's estimation, and God's, as well, for it so beautifully reflects the sun. It is like congealed sunlight on the earth.

All of this is relevant to our study of God's revelation of what heaven is going to be like. John tells us in verse 23, the city does not need the sun anymore, for the glory of God lights the city, and the Lamb is its light. Jesus is not only the light of the world, but the light of the universe. Notice in verse 24, the nations will walk by its light. The light of the holy city of gold will be replacing the sun. It will be the sun of the earth for eternity. Since Jesus is the Lamp--the source of that light, He will be forever the sun of the earth, as well as the sun of heaven.

The sun of our solar system has been, all along, just a symbol of the Son of God. It is the center around which all revolves. It is the source of all life, and all warmth, and all beauty. It is the physical symbol of what Jesus is, and of what He will be forever in God's eternal kingdom. He is light, life, and love. All that is beautiful and precious has its source in Him. The awesome beauty of a city of pure gold, like glass, with Jesus as the sun shining everywhere, answers for me the question a little child recently asked--"will there be shadows in heaven?" Since the positive value of shadows, which is their coolness, and escape from the heat of the sun, is no longer needed, and because the negative aspect of shadows, the evil lurking in them, is eliminated, the answer is no! It is a city with no shadows, for the light of Jesus is everywhere. He is a Sun that casts no shadow. There is no need to hide from the golden rays of His light. We will bask in its beauty with no

concern for sun block. Satan is the sun block in time, but he will have no influence in that golden city.

Jesus is the Light, Jesus shines so bright.
Jesus is the Light, for all the world to see.
Jesus is the One. Jesus is the Sun.
Jesus is the Sun, the one who lights eternity.

In that golden city's brightness,
We will never have a care.
There is universal lightness,
And there are no shadows there.

The brightness of a transparent golden city, with pure light from the very creator of all light, is beyond our comprehension. The golden sun itself is the nearest thing in our experience. Its brightness is more than we can endure with our present eyes. We will need new bodies to endure, and enjoy the golden city with the even brighter sun-the Lamp of the Lamb.

Notice that the gold and the sun come together as the key ingredients in the beauty of heaven. The gold is more glorious than earthly gold, for it is transparent. The sun is more glorious than our solar sun, for it is the sovereign Son of God. The idea of Jesus being the Sun of both earth and heaven motivated me to search the Bible on the subject of the sun.

We all learned in school that the sun is the source of all life as we know it. It provides the light, heat, and energy that makes life possible. Every second, four million tons of hydrogen are destroyed in explosions which start near the core of the sun, where it is 13 million degrees centigrade. More energy than man has used since the dawn of civilization is produced by the sun every second--not every millennium, not every century, not every year, hour, or minute--but every second. The heat from a pin head of the core of the sun would be so intense it would kill a man even if he stood a hundred miles away from it.

To give you another image, imagine a cake of solid ice one and a half mile square, and 93 million miles high. This would make man's biggest ice palace the size of a freckle in comparison. Scientists tell us this gigantic cake of ice would be completely melted in 30 seconds if the full power of the sun was focused on it. Yet in spite of this enormous power, it is considered a mere temporary candle, until God installs His permanent light-the Lamp of the Lamb. The enormous power we see in time is a mere night light. The real power in this universe will not be experienced until we get to the golden city of light, and see the full power of the Son of God. In that golden crystal city everything will be run, not by solar power, but by Savior power. The tree His light shines upon produces 12 different fruits a year, a crop for every month. That gives you just a hint of the kind of power there will be in His light.

If you go back into the Old Testament, you discover that God was considered the sun to the Old Testament saints. The sun has always been the greatest physical symbol of God. The ancients worshipped the sun, and made many alters to it. But their folly did not prevent God's people from seeing, you do not reject the truth just because others pervert it. People will idolize every value, but the people of God are to still treasure them. We read in Psalm 84:11, "for the Lord God is a sun."

God was a sun to His people. That is why the blessing God gave to the priests to say to the people was equivalent to-may your days be sunny and bright, and may you walk ever in the light. In Numbers 6:24-26, we read the actual blessing-"The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you; The Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace."

When God's face shines on you, you bask in the sunlight of divine love. When Moses saw the face of God, his own face was made to shine. To have God turn His face toward you was the same thing as being saved from the dark night of oppression. Psalm 31:16, says, "Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love." The context makes it clear he needed to be saved from enemies. Psalm 80:3 says, "Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved." Salvation is always in the sun, and God is that sun of life in the Old Testament.

The solar system is a symbol of the plan of salvation. The sun is what gives life, maintains life, and saves the world from a dark and cold death. Earth would quickly become a dark and barren hell without the sun. That same picture is what we see on the spiritual level. Cut yourself off from the light of God, and cease to seek His face, and you are soon lost in a kingdom of darkness. We need God's light for salvation and for guidance. He is our sun. Psalm 67:1-2 says, "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face shine upon us. May your ways be known on earth, your salvation among the nations." These texts show God's glory rising in the East, like the rising sun, to flood the land with life giving light.

When we go to the New Testament, we see there is only one Person, who can be to the New Testament saints, what God the Father was to the Old Testament saints, and that is Jesus. God was the sun of His people, and Jesus is the sun of His people. He will be the source of light, life, and love, forever. Just as there is no life without the sun in our physical world, so there is no abundant life in the spiritual world, without a sun. The question every human being has to ask themselves, is, who is qualified to be the sun of my spiritual life? People, all too often, pick the moon--that is, some other body that reflects the light of the sun, but is not the sun. It may be religion, church, doctrine, or some charismatic leader, but at best, these are only moons, and not the sun.

It was revealed on the Mt. of Transfiguration that Jesus is the sun. Matt. 17:2 says, "His face shown like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light." His deity was breaking through His humanity. The apostle Paul made it clear that Jesus was the face of God, who would be the sun of God's people, and give them light and all blessings. Listen to II Cor. 4:6, "For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." When John first saw the risen Christ in Rev. 1:16 he wrote, "His face was like the sun shining in all it's brilliance."

In darkest shades if He appear
My dawning is begun.
He is my soul's bright morning star,
And He my rising Sun.

Jesus is the sun, the eternal sun--the source of all light, and life, for all eternity. J. Danson Smith wrote,

No need of the sun in that glory-filled land,

The sun would itself there be dim.
That land where the shadows or twilight ne'er come,
Where the light and the glory are "Him."

To worship the sun is folly, for that is to worship the creation rather than the Creator. Those ancient people who worshipped the sun, did however, have a nobler religion than others. They fell short of the glory of God, but they came closer by seeing the glory of the sun, as His glory. In His Hibberit Lectures on the Religion of the Babylonians, professor Sayce quotes a hymn to Samas the Sun-god, beginning: "O Sun-god, king of heaven and earth, director of things above and below, O Sun-god, thou that clothest the dead with life, delivered by thy hands, Judge unbribed, director of mankind, supreme is the mercy of Him who is the Lord over difficulty, bidding the child an offspring come forth, light of the world, Creator of all thy universe, the Sun-god art thou."

Many such prayers as this in the ancient world confirm the words of Paul in Rom. 1:20, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--His eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." If this be so, you would expect the highest religions of the world to say some marvelous things about God that are true, and so it is. These ancient people could see the impact on life from the sun. Every leaf, every blade of grass, every rose bud, was given life by it. They had no problem believing in a God who was far away, and yet everywhere present to make a difference in life.

They saw the sun, year after year, decade after decade, century after century, rise and set with no variableness, neither shadow of turning, and thus, they saw in the sun, a god of unchanging faithfulness. Those religions that focused on the sun became the most noble of the religions of man. They fell short of the ideal, but they were heading in the right direction, for ultimately, all God's people will worship the Sun. Jesus will be that Sun of heaven. Some of you will remember the old chorus--

Sunlight, sunlight in my soul today.
Sunlight, sunlight all along the way.
Since the Savior found me, took away my sin,
I have had the sunlight of His love with-in.

Jesus will be the sun of eternity, but He is already our Sun now. We set aside the day called, Sunday, to worship Him in a special way. That is the day on which our eternal Sun first rose, and this Sun of Righteousness will never set, but shine forever. The goal of life is to walk in His light, and let His face shine upon us.

At the North and South Poles, the sun only sets once a year. There are six months of life in the light, but in the golden city the sun never sets. There we will walk in it's light with never a night. Heaven is a beautiful sunny day forever and ever, with Jesus as the Sun. Shakespeare wrote,

The glorious sun,
Stays in his course and plays the alchemist;
Turning with splendor of his precious eye
The meager cloddy earth to glittering gold.

This which is only poetry now will be literal reality in that city of gold where the Sun never sets.

The sun is not our God, but God is our Sun, and the sun is symbolic of all He will be to us in the eternal city.

Throughout the universe of bliss,
The center Thou and Sun.
The eternal theme of praise is this,
To Heaven's Beloved One.
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou
That every knee to Thee should bow.

Everything you can learn about the sun--its power, light, and fire, will increase your love for, and awe of Jesus. Study the sun, and you are studying theology, for it is a symbol of what Jesus will be to us forever. The Gospel is the good news that every person is invited to step out of the darkness and shadow of death, and walk in the light, by receiving Jesus Christ as Savior. The first step is as easy as opening a door, and walking out into the sunlight. Just trust in Jesus, and begin to follow Him, and you are on your way to the golden city where you will live, love, and laugh forever in the light of the Sun of Heaven.