

# All About Heaven (and a little about hell)

Week 1: Sheol and Beyond • Week 2: Rewards & Punishments • Week 3: Mansions in the Sky •

Week 4: **Waiting Time** • Week 5: *The Great Divorce*

## 1. Video

*Elinor is Improving*

## 2. Opening Question

- Do we continue to grow spiritually in the afterlife?

## 3. Resurrection: Now or Later?

*John 11:20-27*

[As Jesus is arriving in Bethany after the death of his friend Lazarus]

When Martha heard Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her: “**Your brother will rise again.**” Martha said to him, “**I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.**” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? She said to him: “Yes, Lord, I believe you are the messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

[Jesus then goes and raises Lazarus from the dead.]

### Luke: Immediate Resurrection

*Luke 23:42-43*

[Conversation between Jesus and the criminal crucified next to him]

The criminal said: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied: “**Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.**”

*Acts 7:55-59*

[As Stephen is dying from being stoned]

Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him ... While they were stoning Stephen he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

### Paul: Delayed Resurrection

*1 Thessalonians 4:13-17*

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who

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have died. **For the Lord himself, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.** Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

*1 Corinthians 15:35-52*

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. You do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed. But God gives it a body as he has chosen.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.

Flesh and blood does not inherit the kingdom of God, no does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but **we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.**

### Paul: Immediate Resurrection

*Philippians 1:23*

I am hard pressed between the two [dying and being with Christ or living and ministering to his people]: **my desire is to depart, and to be with Christ**, for that is far better.

*2 Corinthians 5:1-6*

For we know that **if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God**, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling – if indeed when we have taken it off we will not be found naked.

We are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.

### Official Doctrine: The State of Man After Death and the Resurrection of the Dead

*Westminster Confession PCUS: XXXIV; UPCUSA: XXXII*

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust and see corruption; but their souls, (which neither die nor sleep) having an immortal substance, immediately return to God who gave them.

At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed; and all the dead shall be raised up with the self same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again with their souls forever.

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*Review: Letter to Rheginus (The Treatise on the Resurrection)*

[This is a Christian document found in a buried jar outside of the village of Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945. Dated 100-200 AD. HERESY ALERT]

Although once you did not exist in flesh, you took on flesh when you entered this world.

Leaving this behind will profit you, for you will not give up the better part when you leave.

Some inquire further and want to know whether one will be saved immediately, if the body is left behind. Let there be no doubt about this. Surely the visible parts of the body are dead and will not be saved. Only the living parts that are within will rise.

### 4. Between Then and Now: Spiritual Growth After Death

#### Prayers for the Dead

*2 Maccabees 12:39-45*

[After a battle against the Greeks in which some of the Jewish soldiers died]

Judas (Maccabees, the Jewish revolutionary leader) and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and bring them back to lie with their kindred. Under the tunic of each one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen. So they turned to supplication, praying that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out. Judas also took up a collection and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. **For if he were not expecting those who had fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead.** But he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.

#### Purgatory

*Review: Where We Go from Plato's Phaedo*

Socrates goes into detail about various postmortem fates reserved for different kinds of persons. People who have lived a 'neutral' life go to a place of purification, the Acherusian Lake, where they are both punished for sin and rewarded for good deeds. Others who are great sinners, such as murderers, are sent off to Tartarus, never to be released. **Moderate sinners spend some time in Tartarus before being sent to the Acherusian lake, where they have to seek forgiveness from their victims.** Finally, those who have lived lives of surpassing holiness are released at death and pass up to the pure realm above.

Ehrman, Heaven & Hell – p. 61

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*Definition of Purgatory – from YouCat (A Catholic catechism for youth)*

Purgatory, often imagined as a place, is actually a condition. **Someone who dies in God's grace (and therefore at peace with God and men) but who still needs purification before he can see God is in purgatory.** When Peter had betrayed Jesus, the Lord turned around and looked at Peter: "and Peter went out wept bitterly" - a feeling like being in purgatory. Just such a purgatory probably awaits most of us at the moment of our death: the Lord looks at us full of love- and we experience burning shame and painful remorse over our wicked or merely unloving behavior. Only after this purifying pain will we be capable of meeting his loving gaze in untroubled heavenly joy.

*From the Official Catholic Catechism 1030-1032*

All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned.

"As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.<sup>608</sup>"

This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture. From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God.<sup>610</sup> The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead.

### Continuing Spiritual Growth: Rob Bell

*Origen: First Principles*

[Origen was a theologian who lived in Egypt around 200 AD]

The goal of human life is to return to the original intention of existence, the contemplation of God. For that to happen people need to be purged of their sin, which interferes with their adoration of the One above all things. **Those who do not learn to do so in this life – the vast majority of humanity – must do so after death,** and that is why there is postmortem suffering. Suffering is meant to purge souls of their sin so they can return to their eternal destiny of contemplative adoration of the one who made them. After many, many ages, all will eventually return to God of their own free will, purged completely of their sins.

Summarized in Ehrman, 242

*Heaven as a Restart*

Heaven has the potential to be a kind of starting over. Learning how to be human all over again. Jesus called disciples – students of life – to learn from him how to live in God's world God's way. **Constantly learning and growing and evolving and absorbing.** Tomorrow is never simply a repeat of today.

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Much of the speculation about heaven- and more importantly the confusion – comes from the idea that in the blink of an eye we will automatically become totally different people who “know” everything. But our heart, our character, our desires, our longings – **these things take time.**

Bell, *Love Wins*, 51

### *Gates Always Open*

[Rhetorical question]

Can God bring proper, lasting justice, banishing certain actions – and the people who do them – from the new creation while at the same time allowing and waiting and hoping for the possibility of the reconciliation of those very same people? **Keeping the gates, in essence, open?** Will everyone eventually be reconciled to God?

Bell, *Love Wins*, 115

### *Endless Invitation*

[Bell compares heaven to the party thrown by the Father for his prodigal younger son. Some are the younger son, embraced by the father, enjoying the party. Others are the older son who refuses to go in. (Luke 15:11-32)]

I believe the indestructible love of God is an unfolding, dynamic reality and every single one of us is **endlessly being invited** to trust, accept, believe, embrace and experience it.

Bell, *Love Wins*, 194