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PERSPECTIVE

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HEAVEN ON MY MIND



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SERMON SCHEDULE

July 7
A King Who Fails
2 Samuel 9:1–12:25

July 14
 Guest Preacher: Mack Stiles

July 21
A King Who Flees
2 Samuel 12:26–20:26

July 28
A King Who Wins
2 Samuel 21:1–23:29

FIGHTER VERSE

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
 2 Timothy 3:16–17

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Use the QR reader on your mobile device to sign up to receive each issue of *Perspective* by email.

Knowing

M V B C

- Knowing Our Commitments: Church Covenant
- Knowing Our Beliefs: Statement of Faith
- Knowing Our Structure: Leadership
- Knowing How to Be Involved: Discipling & Serving

Knowing MVBC is a four-session course that introduces you to life at Mount Vernon, being offered Sunday, July 7. The first session takes place in room 217 during the Sunday School hour (9:15–10:15 am). The remaining sessions take place in room 232 from 12:00–2:30 pm. Lunch is provided. Sign up is available on the edge of the bulletin or by contacting the church office at 404-255-3133 or info@mvbchurch.org.



Chatham

BASKETBALL INSTITUTE

All boys and girls ages 7–14 are invited to attend MVBC's Chatham Basketball Institute. This is a time to learn the fundamentals of the game with biblical devotions.

For boys ages 7–8 and girls ages 7–14, camp will be July 8–12 from 9:00 am–12:00 pm.

For boys ages 9–14, it will be July 22–26 from 9:00 am–12:00 pm. Cost is \$35/camper.

Contact Jacob Hall for more details and to register.

Why Gay Marriage is Good (and Bad) for the Church

by Trevin Wax*



The Supreme Court's decision to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act serves as a boost to ongoing efforts to legalize same-sex marriage across the nation.

Christians believe marriage is defined by God and recognized by government. But many today believe marriage is defined by government and must be recognized by all.

For this reason, I'm not optimistic about the trends concerning marriage and family in the United States. Neither am I sure of what all this means for those who, in good conscience, stand against the tide.

But I am optimistic about the church of Jesus Christ. We've been through societal transformations before, and we're sure to go through them again.

For example, the conversion of Constantine to Christianity in 313 AD was certainly good for the church. (We didn't have to worry about being fed to the lions in the Coliseum anymore.) But many aspects of the church/state marriage turned out to be bad for the church. (True Christianity suffered under the weight of the state's corrupting power.) Some see the positive aspects of that societal transformation as far outweighing the bad (Peter Leithart, for example), while others see the bad far outweighing the good (Stanley Hauerwas). The truth is, Constantine's conversion was both good *and* bad for the church.

Now let's turn to our society's redefinition of marriage. If we truly believe Romans 8:28, that somehow, in some way, God is working all things for the good of those who love Him, then even when the culture swerves in an opposing direction, we ought to expect both benefits and challenges.

Here are some developments we can expect in the days ahead:

1. THE LOSS OF A CULTURE OF MARRIAGE

Riding on a bus last week, I struck up a conversation with the guy sitting next to me. He told me he worked for the government, was in his

early twenties, and his wife was finishing her last year of college. Right away, I thought to myself: *They must be Christians.* Further conversation proved my hunch was right. How did I know? Easy. Few people get married when they're in their early twenties and still in school. Couples either live together or postpone marriage until they've settled into a career. A 22-year-old with a ring on his finger might as well have been carrying a Bible.

Not long ago, a friend who lives in DC told me that whenever he sees a young father and mother pushing a stroller with a couple of kids, he immediately thinks, *They must be Christians.* Why? "There just aren't a lot of intact families in our area. When you see one, you just assume they're religious."

Now, don't misunderstand me. I recognize that traditional family values do not equal biblical Christianity. Plenty of folks from other religions see marriage as the cornerstone of civilization (including Mormons, orthodox Jews and Muslims).

But these two examples give us a window into the future of marriage and family in North America. The picture of a man and woman who wait until their wedding night to consummate their relationship and then remain committed for forty, fifty, even sixty years as they grow in their love for each other and raise their kids and enjoy their grandkids simply isn't the norm anymore. It's likely that churches will be one of the few places you'll find people married more than 60 years.

The arrival of same-sex marriage is just the next train stop on a journey that began with the proliferation of birth control in the 1950s and 1960s. When pleasure and reproduction were divorced from a holistic understanding of sex, the idea that sexual expression and childrearing should be reserved for the committed relationship of a husband and wife began to disappear. Add the abortion culture of the 1970s, the establishment of no-fault divorce, an increase in single moms and deadbeat dads, and the rise of reproductive technologies, and it's no wonder that

people today don't think of marriage as a central institution for bringing new life into the world but instead as an emotional and sexual union of two partners.

The Bad News

When you look at other countries that legalized same-sex marriage decades ago, you notice a dramatic reduction in the number of people getting married. In all likelihood, we will soon resemble our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world: we will stand out for being the very thing that our grandparents would have thought ordinary. One of God's greatest gifts to us in common grace (the institution of marriage) will be disregarded, leading to a number of societal ills and further breakdown of the family.

The Good News

In our churches, we have the opportunity to show the world a better way. To show the world what biblical manhood and womanhood looks like. To show the world the difference between a covenant and a contract. To show the world the difference between commitment based on feeling and a covenant based on faith.

The absence of a marriage culture will make biblical marriage stand out all the more. We'll be ordinary oddballs. So let's not waste the opportunity.

2. THREATS TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

One of the concerns of the religious community about legalizing same-sex marriage is the potential threat to religious liberty.

The Bad News

As the norm of marriage shifts, individual Christians will find themselves in situations where they face penalties for refusing to violate their conscience. We've already seen this take place when Christian caterers, for example, feel conflicted about taking part in a same-sex wedding. Threats to religious liberty are not good news for the church, because they cause us to spend time and energy in preserving "space" for us to live according to our religious convictions without fear of reprisal.

The Good News

These threats may bring about in the church a much-needed change of mindset. It's time we recognized we are no longer the "moral majority" and embrace our identity as the "missional minority."

My friends in Great Britain and Romania tell me it's a noble task to serve Christ when you are clearly in the minority. Though the challenges often seem insurmountable, God's people have the opportunity to learn

how to love those who oppose us, to serve and suffer under governmental or cultural bigotry, and face hatred with respect and kindness. So let's recognize our minority status and learn to serve those who we're called to show God's love.

3. THE COST OF CONVICTION

When it comes to churches and denominations, we will soon see who is truly tethered to the authority of God's Word no matter what way the wind is blowing, and who is conforming to the pattern of this world. Churches that embrace the new definition of marriage will show themselves to be in step with contemporary society and radically out of step with the Christian Church for two thousand years.

The Bad News

Being a convictional Christian (especially in matters related to sexuality, morality, and marriage) will likely mean the loss of cultural clout and respectability. We will pay a personal and social cost for our beliefs, and we need to be prepared.

The Good News

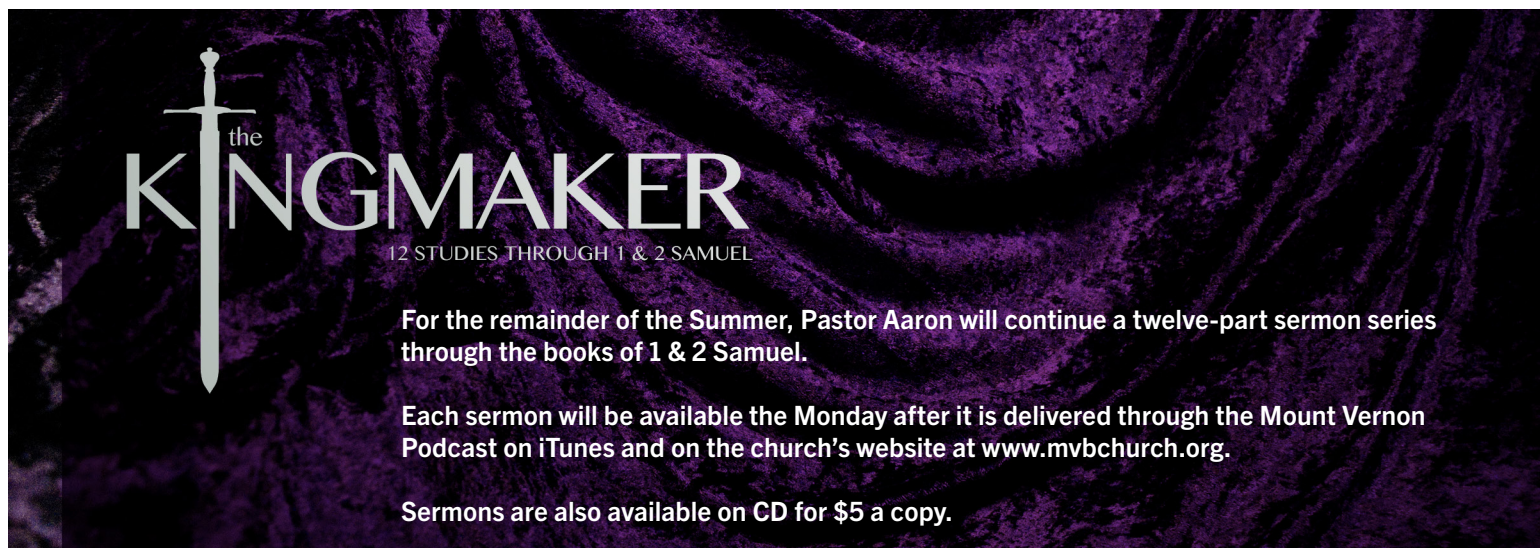
Sociologist Rodney Stark has shown that one of the most powerful engines of early church growth was the fact that membership cost something. Why is this the case? For one, paying a social cost tends to screen out those who would feign religiosity in order to receive respect from society. Also, knowing you are the minority and may be ostracized for your views increases the level of commitment and participation of those who follow Christ.

CONCLUSION

The evangelical witness may be leaner in numbers in coming years, but the upside is that the witness may be even more potent. The gospel of God's love in Christ is no less powerful in 21st century America than in 1st century Rome.

So, let's love God, love our neighbors (even those with whom we respectfully disagree), and remember the good news that in God's lawcourt, all who repent and believe in Christ have the verdict of "justified" pronounced over them. And there's no court on earth that can overturn that. ■

* Trevin Wax is Managing Editor of *The Gospel Project* at LifeWay Christian Resources, husband to Corina, and father to Timothy and Julia. This article was originally published by The Gospel Coalition (www.tgc.org). Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.



the
KINGMAKER
12 STUDIES THROUGH 1 & 2 SAMUEL

For the remainder of the Summer, Pastor Aaron will continue a twelve-part sermon series through the books of 1 & 2 Samuel.

Each sermon will be available the Monday after it is delivered through the Mount Vernon Podcast on iTunes and on the church's website at www.mvbchurch.org.

Sermons are also available on CD for \$5 a copy.



HEAVEN ON MY MIND

DO YOU THINK ENOUGH ABOUT HEAVEN?

It has often been said about Christians that we are so heavenly minded, we're of no earthly good. You've heard this before, right? The complaint is that we are so fixated on high-minded, ivory tower, obscure theological matters that we fail to roll up our sleeves and do the hard but simple work of loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:38).

Are there Christians like this, Christians so concerned with disputing the nuances of God's theology that they fail to serve God's people? Of course! More than one young believer has allowed his interest in debate to eclipse his calling to love. Those who fall into this camp would do well to take a very long soak in the refreshing words of 1 Corinthians 13:1, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." So, if by "heavenly minded" you mean caught up in theological debate to the exclusion of selfless service, then sign me up as the biggest critic.

But if by "heavenly minded" you mean preoccupied with a biblical understanding of the new heavens and earth, then I couldn't disagree more. In that sense, we do not think about heaven enough. This failure to think biblically about the new heavens and earth has weakened our ability to persevere in the present and prepare for the future. Therefore, in this brief article, I want to challenge us to rediscover a biblical doctrine of heaven.

Notice that I said a *biblical* doctrine of heaven. If you go to Amazon.com and search for books on "heaven," you'll quickly find that most of the works that appear are eyewitness accounts of near-death or return-from-death experiences. The list seems endless: *Proof of Heaven*, *Heaven is for Real*, *To Heaven and Back*, *Waking Up in Heaven*, and *Heaven is Beyond Your Wildest Expectations*, to name just a few.

Is it possible that Christians are buying these books from the web pages of Amazon because the church has failed to adequately teach on heaven from the inspired pages of Scripture? It is.

Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3). This does not mean we are to be unconcerned with this world, our place in this world, or our responsibility to make this world better. It does mean that our primary concern and driving thought is a proper understanding of heaven.

Paul goes on in verse 5 to say, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you." He is making a direct connection between a mind set on things above (v. 2) and a body intent on living a righteous life (v. 5).

So, if we think more about heaven or, better yet, if we think more biblically about heaven, we will be better equipped to live the life *today* that God would have us live. Do you think enough about heaven?

TEN HEAVENLY FACTS

1. Heaven is where God most perfectly dwells.

Ask a kid who grew up in the 1970s what heaven is like, and they will probably daydream about Willy Wonka's fantastic tour through the chocolate factory. Ask a Christian what heaven is like, and he will reflect upon the glorious presence of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In Isaiah 66, the prophet speaks of the new heaven and earth (more on that later). The climax of this account is not the perfect health of man, but

the perfect presence of God. The Lord said, “Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear” (Isa. 66:24). This is communion with God the way it should be. In Revelation 21, when John is given a vision of this new heaven and earth, once again it is the perfect presence of God that draws the Christian’s attention: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God’” (Rev. 21:3).

The most wonderful part of traveling is returning home. Nothing beats seeing your wife and kids waiting for you at the airport with outstretched hands, eager to welcome with smiles and hugs and kisses. Multiply that experience by a billion and you’re still not close to the joy that will course through our veins when God receives us into his perfect and holy presence.

2. Heaven is not for everyone.

Writing back in 1962, J. A. Motyer introduced his essay on heaven and hell with this chilling sentiment, “No one could wish to think of the bitter pains of eternal death, consciously and eternally endured by sinners.” Jonathan Edwards minced no words when describing these “bitter pains”: “The Scriptures are very express and abundant in this matter: that the eternal punishment of the wicked will consist in sensible misery and torment, and not in annihilation. What is said of Judas is worthy to be observed here, ‘It had been good for that man if he had not been born.’ (Mat. 26:24). This seems plainly to teach us, that the punishment of the wicked is such that their existence, upon the whole, is worse than non-existence.”

When Jesus said, in John 14:3, “I go to prepare a place for you,” he was not speaking to every man who ever lived, but to those willing to follow him. Revelation is replete with scenes of individuals “standing before the throne and the Lamb” because heaven is only home to those whose sins have been atoned for by the shed blood of the Lamb of God (Rev. 7:9–10; John 2:29–30). At the heart of heaven is a crucified and risen Savior who will forever remind the forgiven of his great love for them.

It is a joy to ponder the satisfaction of worshiping in the very presence of Christ, and it is a necessity to write of the end facing all those who refuse to come under the authority of Christ, the sovereign king. I agree with Motyer’s conclusion. He wrote that the reality of hell should “urge us on in the task of proclaiming the saving Word, and all the more when we appreciate afresh the glories which God has reserved for those who love Him.”

3. Heaven is where Christians go when they die.

In the Westminster Shorter Catechism, we read, “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory.” This “glory” is what we commonly refer to as heaven.

It is the clear teaching of Scripture that the believer, upon death, does not pass into purgatory but into the perfect presence of God. Paul knew that when he died, he’d be with Christ (Phil. 1:23). And to be “away from the body,” as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:8, is to be “with the Lord.” At death, the believer is with God in heaven. And who is included in the “assembly...enrolled in heaven” to which the author of Hebrews refers (Heb. 12:23), if not believers who have died and are presently with Christ in heaven, awaiting the arrival of the new heaven and earth? And consider Jesus’ words to the thief on the cross, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). That very day, the thief who put his faith in the crucified Messiah would know Christ’s perfect presence.

4. The redeemed life on earth is a precursor to heaven.

Depending on what your life is like, this truth may be harder or easier to believe. Perhaps it is easy for the Christian who owns a nice home, drives a

safe car, vacations in tropical climates, and regularly eats delicious food is to see how this life could be a precursor to the next. Meanwhile, the Christian who is fired from his job and abandoned by his spouse for coming to faith in Christ may wonder what this world has to do with the next.

And yet we must remember that it is not the presence of comfort in this life that points us to heaven. Rather, it is the peace in suffering that only God can give which gives us a taste of the bliss to come.

Princeton professor J. Gresham Machen, explained that peace comes from recognizing that God alone is our satisfaction. Commenting upon Romans 8:31, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Machen noted that believers experience victory in this life:

That does not mean that faith in God will bring us everything we desire. What it does mean is that if *we possess God*, then we can meet with equanimity the loss of all besides. Has it never dawned upon us that God is valuable for His own sake, that just as personal communion is the highest thing that we know on earth, so personal *communion with God* is the sublimest height of all? If we value God for His own sake, then the loss of other things will draw us all the closer to Him; we shall then have recourse to Him in time of trouble as to the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. I do not mean that the Christian need expect always to be poor and sick and lonely and to seek his comfort only in a mystic experience with his God. This universe is God’s world; its *blessings* are showered upon His creatures even now; and in His own good time, when the period of groaning and travailing is over, He will fashion it as a habitation of glory. But what I do mean is that if here and now we have the one estimable gift of *God’s presence* and favour, then all the rest can wait till God’s good time.

Notice the italicized words (italics added) in the paragraph above. What does Machen observe that we have now, in this world, as conquerors? First, we possess God. Not the way a child possesses a toy, but the way a son possesses a father. Second, we have communion with God. We have real and genuine fellowship with the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Third, we experience God’s blessings. We don’t merely enjoy the blessings of common grace: rain and sunshine, but the blessings that are only poured out into the life of a Christian: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). Fourth, we enjoy God’s presence as we live in Christ.

Heaven is a reward that should be treasured.

This is why Paul could teach that God has “seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). It is not that we are in heaven, but having been redeemed by Christ, the eternal life which we have (John 6:54) is not just a down payment of what is to come, it is a taste of it. Thus, in a very real sense, heaven begins on earth.

5. Heaven is the precursor to the new heavens and earth.

The Bible teaches that, upon death, the believer goes to be with Christ. But the Bible teaches more than this. Upon Jesus’ return, the dead shall be raised and every believer will receive a glorious resurrection body, and the entirety of God’s creation — heaven and earth — will be wonderfully and perfectly renewed.

- 2 Peter 3:13, “But according to this promise we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”
- Romans 8:20–21, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”
- Revelation 21:1–2, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”
- Genesis 1:31, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”

It appears from these verses that the goodness of God’s creation, described in Genesis 1:31 but corrupted by the entrance of sin into the world, will one day be restored and, more than that, surpassed. There is not complete agreement over whether God will *replace* his first creation or *renew* it, though I think it is best to argue that he will renew what he made. After all, it seems likely that the believer’s glorified body will bear some resemblance to the body God first gave him or her — though I trust far, far better!

The coming of a new heavens and earth with the return of Christ means that upon death the believer is, in a sense, in an intermediate state. Make no mistake; the condition of the believer upon death is wonderful. He is immediately freed from the agonies of life and experiences an intimacy with God more pure and satisfying than he has ever known. And yet, there’s more for believers than this. As Anthony Hoekema put it, “their happiness [upon death] will be provisional and incomplete. For the completion of their happiness they await the resurrection of the body and the new earth which God will create as the culmination of his redemptive work.”

6. Heaven is a place of great rest.

When we start thinking about what our experience in heaven will actually be like, heaven as a place of rest immediately comes to mind. Jesus described heaven as a house with many rooms, and in that house is refuge from the storms of this world (John 14:2). When Paul wrote of believers who died, he described them as those “who have fallen asleep in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:18). The point isn’t that in this heavenly, intermediate state between earth and the new earth, the believer is in what some have called “soul-sleep,” unaware of what’s going on. Instead, Paul is describing the unusual peace that crawls into the believer’s bones upon death. Rest. Perhaps more obviously, John recorded how those who die in Christ may in heaven fully “rest from their labors.” And in a passage that can never be quoted often enough, one day the Lord “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

Perhaps you know what it’s like to put in a day of backbreaking work. The work may be physically draining; laying down sod, moving boxes, scraping off paint. The work could be intellectually draining; preparing a report, crunching numbers, strategizing a plan. The work can even be emotionally draining; counseling a patient, being yelled at by a customer, disciplining a child. More often than not, our labor is a combination of all three. It’s physically, intellectually, and emotionally hard!

The difficulty of work is the curse of the Fall, it’s the “thorns and thistles” that God promised would spring up in Adam’s gardens, and they’ve sprung up in the gardens of our work ever since. But in heaven, God promises to reverse the effect of the Fall. There will be work to do in heaven because work is good. But there will be rest from the thorns. In heaven, no one will ever labor in vain again (Isa. 65:19, 23).

But it’s not just rest from the difficulty of work that we will experience, it is rest from the scourge of sin. Nothing sinful, impure, or unclean can enter the gates of heaven. All those who find themselves a home in heaven will not only be washed clean by the blood of Christ, but they will be freed from the possibility of ever sinning again (Rev. 21:27). This, of course, makes perfect sense if heaven is the perfect dwelling place of a God who will not look upon sin.

An eternity without sin should be of great comfort to us for a few of reasons. First, because it means we will never suffer due to the sinful actions of another person. Second, because it means we will never be the source of suffering for another person. Third, because it means we will never again experience the internal battle of the flesh and the spirit (Gal. 5:17). In short, heaven is rest not just from toil, but from temptation.

7. Heaven is a place of worthy activities.

One of the most common criticisms of heaven is rooted in the understandable question, “Won’t I get bored?” We can’t imagine singing, smiling, floating on clouds, and playing harps for eternity and not getting restless to do something else. But what if our default understanding of heaven merely as rest from fruitless toil and corrupting temptation is not enough? Is there more to heaven than a lack of difficulty and an absence of sin? What if heaven is a place where we will work eternally and every day is a doorway into a job of inestimable worth and interest? This, I believe, is a far better description of heaven. Paul Helm put it well, “There will be no prospect of boredom in heaven because of the ever-new powers of creativity

**It is the peace in suffering that
only God can give which gives us
a taste of the bliss to come.**

that man and women will be able to exercise there.” What does this mean?

First, we will work in heaven. Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). The new earth is our inheritance and, thus, our responsibility to steward for God’s glory. Just as Adam and Eve had work to do in the garden before sin entered the world, so we will have work to do in heaven. Our work will include managing a perfect world. With the Lord God himself as our light, we “will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5). Whatever this means, exactly, it certainly implies that in heaven we will exercise authority under God, and that will not be boring.

Second, we will mature in heaven. Paul prayed that believers would increase in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:10). We have no reason to think that the process of increasing in the knowledge of God will stop in heaven. Jesus is perfect and yet he grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52) and he learned obedience (Heb. 5:8) certainly we will grow and learn in heaven, too. Combine the knowledge of history’s finest theologians and it is not even a drop in the bucket compared to all there is to know about God. As Machen put it, “God’s revelation of Himself to man embraces, indeed, only a small part of His being; the area of what we know is infinitesimal compared with the area of what we do not know.”

Much more could be said. But consider for a moment just these two facts: we will work and we will mature in heaven. Every moment in heaven will be an opportunity to dive deeper into the mysteries of God and his creation. Perhaps in heaven we will swim with dolphins, training them to jump for the glory of God. Perhaps we will roam galaxies, charting the

movements of stars and planets. Perhaps we will exert our glorified bodies in athletic competitions that are never marred by envy or disappointment. Perhaps we will exert our minds as the Lord schools us in the mysteries of his divine nature.

I say “perhaps” only because the Bible does not give us details regarding what an eternity of working and maturing looks like. I take God’s silence to be a warning against undue speculation. I appreciate the caution of Helm who noted that the Bible’s teaching on heaven is not to satisfy our curiosity but to deepen our faith in a God willing and able to make all things right. There are limits to what we can and need to know about the activities of the life to come.

8. Heaven is a reward.

I do not mean that if you live a good life God will reward you with eternal life. That would be nothing more than salvation by works. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking, “If I’m good enough, because I’m good enough, God will bless me with a heavenly reward.” Nothing could be further from the truth! After all, the Bible is clear from cover to cover that our salvation is not based upon our work, but upon the work of Christ. As Peter taught, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live for righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). Our lives of righteousness are never credited to the quality of our character but the power of Christ’s work on the cross.

And yet, the Lord is also clear that we should view heaven as a reward, and we should press ahead, straining against ungodliness, because we want heaven. Paul exhorted us to work hard for the Lord in this life, mindful that a future reward awaits:

Now if anyone builds on a foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward (1 Cor. 3:12-14).

A similar idea is found in the words of our Savior in Matthew 5:11-12, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Jesus urges his disciples to be mindful of their heavenly reward so that they would have the self-discipline to joyfully endure earthly suffering. Jesus was not holding out heaven as a bribe, but as a reminder that only those who endure the agonies of this world will enjoy the blessings of the next. John Piper put it this way, “Loving your enemy doesn’t earn you the reward of heaven. Treasuring the reward of heaven empowers you to love your enemy.”

Heaven is a reward that should be treasured. And we shouldn’t think that we can live life however we want and still receive the reward of heaven. All those who are known by Christ, will follow him. We will not do it perfectly, but we will follow nonetheless. So when my eyes are tempted to go where they shouldn’t go, I need to tell myself, “Aaron, heaven is the reward for those who, by God’s grace, put lust to death.” And when my pride is tempted to well up in my heart, I need to tell myself, “Aaron, heaven is the reward for those who, by God’s grace, put pride to death.” And for all those who do persevere, heaven is the crown jewel of God’s amazing grace.

9. Heaven is a place of worship.

A few weeks ago, the congregation at Mount Vernon sang Reginald Heber’s famous hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” For a stanza, the instruments

stopped playing, and the auditorium was filled with the sound of God’s people singing with one voice:

*Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in power, in love and purity.*

And as I heard the voices behind me singing, I stopped for a moment, and I let these words wash over me, and I thought to myself, “This must be what heaven is like.” Worship is more than singing songs before the Lord, but it is not less than that. In heaven, we will worship God with a depth, sincerity, boldness, and a confidence unmatched by our present existence.

I’m not a huge baseball fan. I enjoy going to games mainly for the camaraderie and the hot dogs. A few years ago, I went to a game with a friend who kept score. I could tell he understood the game, and he loved it. As I looked over his shoulder I saw how he kept track of the each pitch and each run. I could tell that his appreciation for the game of baseball was inextricably linked to his understanding of the game of baseball.

So it is with our appreciation for God. The better we know him, the more we love him.

In heaven our understanding of God will not only be without sin, but it will grow. Heaven will be a place of worship where the worship gets sweeter and deeper as our love for the Lord grows. If worshipping God like that sounds boring to you now, could it be because you don’t know God as well as you should?

10. Heaven is a place with no regret.

The Lord told John that in heaven, “neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). Every Christian knows the pain of regret. We regret a word spoken or a word withheld. We regret a relationship severed or, perhaps, a relationship begun. We regret decisions we made, mistakes we allowed, sins we committed.

In heaven the past will not be forgotten. We will know who we were and what we did. But we will see and experience the mercy and grace of God with an acuity heretofore unknown. We will look back on a life of sin and hate it with more holiness than we ever knew here on earth. But, at the same time, will we revel in the atoning work of Christ on our behalf with an intensity we can now only dream of. We will remember our weaknesses that led to so much pain and grief, but finally understand how the Lord used them to make his power perfect (2 Cor. 12:8). How different, and how glorious heaven will be.

“SET YOUR MINDS ON THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE.”

What must our response be to these heavenly facts? “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2). There is nothing more important to your daily living than your contemplation of the future life. Sam Storms is absolutely correct: “we will never be of much use in this life until we’ve developed a healthy obsession with the next.”

Do you have a “healthy obsession” with the biblical doctrine of heaven? This world is not what it ought to be. Let’s face it, *you* are not who you ought to be! Sin continues to cloud our judgment, diminish our capacity for joy, weaken our friendships, and stunt our growth. But the gospel teaches us not only that Jesus died for sinners so that we could have eternal life today, but to purchase for us a heavenly inheritance that we will possess tomorrow (Eph. 1:14). ■

~ Aaron Menikoff

July 2013

1	2	3	4	5	6
7 9:15 am Knowing MVBC: 1 12:00 pm Knowing MVBC: 2-4 5:45 pm Specially-Called Church in Conference 6:00 pm Lord's Supper 7:00 pm LS Fellowship Meal	8 Chatham Basketball Institute (Boys ages 7-8, Girls ages 7-14) 9:00 am - 12:00 pm daily	9 6:30 pm New Equipping Matters Class Begins	10 Independence Day Church Office Closed	11 12	13
14 Camp Arrowwood	15 16	17	18	19	20
21	22 Chatham Basketball Institute (Boys ages 9-14) 9:00 am - 12:00 pm daily	23 24	25 26	27	
28 4:30 pm Church in Conference	29 30	31			

EVENTS

CHURCHWIDE

July 7 5:45 pm *Specially-Called Church in Conference*
Church family, we will have a brief Church in Conference for the purpose of voting on the origination of new line of credit with a new lending institution. For more information, contact Brad Thayer, Larry Norwood, or David Dorsett.

July 7 6:00 pm *Lord's Supper*
We encourage members to examine their hearts and relationship with one another in preparation for this celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.

July 7 7:00 pm *Lord's Supper Fellowship Meal*
(See ad below.)

ADULT

July 3 6:30 pm *New Equipping Matters Class Begins*
All are welcome to attend as pastor Aaron leads us through an inductive study of 1 Corinthians 13 on the superiority of love. Please note that this study will be meeting in the youth room.

RECREATION

July 8–12 9:00 am *Chatham Basketball Institute*
Boys ages 7–8 and girls ages 7–14 are invited to come and learn the fundamentals of basketball and receive daily biblical devotions. The cost for the basketball camp is \$35 per camper.

July 22–26 9:00 am *Chatham Basketball Institute*
Boys ages 9–14 are invited to come and learn the fundamentals of basketball and receive daily biblical devotions. The cost for the basketball camp is \$35 per camper.

CHILDREN

July 14–19 *Camp Arrowwood*
The children's ministry will be going to Camp Arrowwood in Sevierville, TN.

BIRTHDAYS

- | | | | |
|----|------------------|----|-------------------|
| 2 | Gay Cooper | 17 | Cam Cherbonnier |
| | Carolyn Davis | 19 | Montine Alexander |
| 4 | Ruth Edwards | | Hazel Kath |
| 6 | Elsie Howard | 21 | David Carnes |
| | Bill Luck | | Paige Pattillo |
| | Rob Meadows | 22 | Rhonwyn Ryan |
| 7 | Lisa Kubes | 23 | Tom Howard |
| | Ann McCallum | 24 | Andres Rivera |
| 8 | Joel Roberts | 25 | Jonathan Thurman |
| 9 | Tricia Carnes | | Kevin Vaughter |
| | Aaron Henderson | 27 | Rita Caldwell |
| 12 | Marvin Dorsey | | Dee Linker |
| 13 | Joe Drexler | 28 | Anthony Blalock |
| 14 | Suzanne Millen | | Lena Hocker |
| 15 | Mel Wakefield | | John McCoy |
| 16 | Cory Blackburn | | Bradley Thomas |
| | Jim Fleming | 30 | Steve Arnold |
| | Yvonne Holtzclaw | 31 | Margot Dawkins |



Lord's Supper Fellowship Meal

Everyone is invited to our next Lord's Supper fellowship meal on Sunday, July 7. Immediately after the evening service, we will gather for a meal and fellowship in the fellowship hall. Sign-up sheets are available at Connections Corner and in Sunday School.



Mount Vernon

BAPTIST CHURCH

850 Mount Vernon Highway NW
Sandy Springs, GA 30327