

02.04.2008

Volume 2, Issue 2



The Adopted Life

Judgment Day

As I'm driving down Trinity Lane (the main boulevard near my house) the following conversation emanates from the backseat, the product of a 4-year old and a 9-year old engaging in debate:

"We're going to McDonalds"

"No we're not"

"Yes we are"

"Nuh-uh, you don't know"

"Yes I do, Daddy said so"

"Daddy, are we going to McDonalds?"

And so a little judgment day comes for the children of the Stepp household. One party in the debate will be judged to have been telling the truth and one to have been deceived. Even though this miniature judgment day brings with it the risk of pain—the pain of being proven wrong, the struggle of having to change one's mind to adapt to reality—both parties in the argument long for judgment to be passed and the truth to be revealed at last.

Yet, even if one of the kids has believed a lie; even if there is weeping and gnashing of teeth as some cherished belief must be given over to the flames of judgment; still, they are both children of their father, aren't they? Both are loved, included, and already forgiven for whatever lies they might believe about me or themselves.

I would never say to one "you are wrong, and because you are wrong, you have never been my child and never will be - I cast thee out into hell's dark fury!" God forbid! (Literally. The very nature of the Father, Son and Spirit—that they exist as inseparable communion without loss of distinction—means that we are all connected and can never disconnect ourselves from the Triune Life or one another.)

No, this little judgment day is not bad news for either child. It may be bad news for lies they have believed, and it may be bad news for their wrong thinking, but ultimately it is good news for both of them—the one who believes and the one who doesn't believe.

It is good news because in that moment of judgment, my love for them will be revealed, their secure and forever inclusion in my life will be affirmed, and they will discover the fullness of what the truth really is.

Because we were, indeed, headed for McDonalds. It may not be the wedding supper of the lamb, but to a 4-year old it is a kind of foretaste of heaven.

~ Jonathan Stepp



What Heaven Really Is

Oh, how sure we seem to be about hell, and how unsure we seem to be about heaven! Now, that is an understatement, isn't it? However, since Jesus has come into flesh, permanently, as the Revelation of Heaven (**Rev 1:1**), it is a lot easier to be more sure about what **Heaven REALLY IS!** In this article I am writing to get way more specific about heaven (but maybe not in the ways we typically think about the subject).



First, let me be more biblically accurate about what the New Testament actually says about "heaven". As author Garry Wills points out in his great book, *What Jesus Meant*, in most cases where the N.T. writers or Jesus say "heaven", they really say "the heavens"! Yes, the Lord's Prayer REALLY says, "Our Father, Who is in the Heavens" (**Matt 6:9-10**). That is IMPORTANT, and already begins to add more clarity to the subject, doesn't it?! The Bible clearly records that God the Father, Son and Spirit dwell everywhere, and in all heavens (**Psalm 139!**) Most people who believe in God believe that God is Omnipresent, or everywhere present, right? So.....



...if God lives in the heavens and God is everywhere, then we already have a richer and more accurate view of heaven: **Whatever heaven is, it is something that is literally everywhere since God is everywhere!** Ah-Ha! Consider this question, "Did God live in heaven BEFORE he created the heavens and the earth?" Or, this one, "Can you actually picture the Father, Son and Spirit not living in "heaven"—bliss, joy, paradise, (even before the heavens were created?) I can't!!! Let's tie things together and clarify!

What I am trying to help you see with questions like these is that, fundamentally, we seem to know "in our guts" that heaven is NOT primarily a place! If heaven is a "place," we would honestly and biblically have to say it is "all places" because most of us believe that the Triune God dwells everywhere and that there is not anyplace God is not!! And, well, God is in...errr... Heaven...I mean the heavens!

If you can be open to the idea that the Father, Son and Spirit lived in heaven BEFORE They created "the heavens and the earth" (**Gen 1:1**), AND that **Triune God IS AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN A RELATIONAL BEING (I John 4:16)**, then *there* is our more CONCRETE answer to realizing what Heaven—and "the heavens"—REALLY are:

Heaven—and "THE HEAVENS"—is the Relationship that the Father shares with the Divine/Human Son in the Spirit EVERYWHERE (and of which humanity and creation are NOW a permanent part in Jesus- 2 Cor 5:14, Eph 2:4!!!)

Yes!! We, humanity and creation, are ALREADY in Heaven! We are already where Triune God IS! We are even already in "the Heavens", in Jesus, and we always will be (**Col 3:3!!**) We have a permanent and abiding relationship with God in Jesus,

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and the Triune God will NEVER be God without us! He won't be God without you, no matter where He is at (which is literally everywhere, remember?!) Ha-Ha!!!

Wherever JESUS is, WE (YOU) ARE! Never let go of our Good News, which is that **Jesus is the God/Man IN WHOM ALL THINGS DWELL, ARE SUSTAINED, AND LIVE, MOVE AND HAVE THEIR BEING - PERMANENTLY (JN 1:1-3; COL 1:16-17; ACTS 17:28; 1COR 8:6-7; HEB 1:1-3!)** Notice that these are all **PRESENT TENSE TRUTHS** (and **MUST** be because Jesus IS GOD and alive forevermore - **Romans 6:5-11!!**)

In the broken parts of me, I too feel your pain! This view of “Heaven” appears to be too human, doesn't it?! For some it may even appear to be less exciting than, let's say, the “American Dream.” *You can begin to see what has happened, can't you?* We've been taught to dismiss our present Main Streets for “Streets of Gold!” We are waiting to eat more “godly” fish, instead of taking seriously that Jesus AFTER HIS RESURRECTION validated the eating of our “just human” fish in His Divine/Human belly, on one of our “just human” beaches (**John 21:9-14, Luke 24:42!**) We've been taught that we have to DO something to get to God in heaven, instead of believing the Truth that God has gotten to us and brought heaven here (**Matt 1:18-23!**)

We have been taught to dismiss our humanity instead of respecting and dignifying it, like God does. After all, God the Son thought our sinful human flesh good enough and worth enough to enter into. And it is our “just human” nature that the One and Only Triune God has embraced forever (**Col 1:19 - dwell = “to house permanently”!!!**)

Yes, we have fundamentally missed Heaven—and “the heavens”—that are right in front of our faces! It's alright to admit it! By admitting it, we can repent (have a radical mind change, and start enjoying it!) Yes, we have missed the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit in which we were born already INCLUDED!!

We are waiting to see God at the “pearly gates” and are missing His “pearly whites” in the distinct features of our sons' and daughters' toothy smiles! We think people are dredging up their own human good instead of realizing that all good things come from God (**James 1:17!**) We walk all over “God's good earth,” “in front of God and everybody,” trying to earn a place in heaven while ignoring the fact that this same Triune God reconciled, created and renewed everything, everywhere, in Jesus' Human Body (**2 Cor 5:16-19!**)

We desire a land “full of milk and honey,” but we fail to taste and see how milk and honey flows to us through the hands of farmers and grocers around the



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world. This is God's PRESENT Kingdom of grace in action. Open your eyes and SEE!

We ARE adopted into the family of God; we are in the heavenly places in Jesus!

Oh, that we would "wake up and smell the coffee" and drink it right here in the heavens! Oh that we might even see our coffee (and/or tea) for what it really is **AND LOVE EACH OTHER AROUND THE COFFEE TABLE RIGHT HERE ON EARTH IN THE RELATIONSHIP WE WILL ALWAYS HAVE WITH THE FATHER, SON AND SPIRIT, IN JESUS!!**

We ARE adopted into the family of God; we are in the heavenly places in Jesus, AND,

- 1.) Our Father, Who is in the heavens (**Matt 6:9-10**)...
- 2.) Has sent His Kingdom Reign And Fulfilled His will (**Luke 20:21, John 19:30**)...
- 3.) **On Earth** as it is in the heavens (**2 Tim 1:8-10**)

YES! Heaven is HERE and NOW and we ARE IN IT!!!

So, the Triune God lives in Heaven and is present EVERYWHERE, including here on earth; therefore, we are in a dimension of Heaven already. **This cannot be overstated and is NOT hyperbole or exaggeration (even though to our fallen minds it always sounds like Gospel—"Good News that sounds 'too good to be true!'")**

We must learn to allow our understanding of Who God Really IS to dominate our understanding of His Creation and Humanity that became fallen due to Evil! Even our 5 senses and consciences are defiled (**I Cor 8:7, Col 2:20-23, Titus 1:15!!**) The Triune God is not subject to evil and its illusions! Evil is subject to Him and His Truth (**Job 2:6!**)



Because Jesus is the one who sustains all things in himself, there is NO such thing as a FALLENNESS OUTSIDE of HEAVEN (which is the relationship of the Father, Son and Heaven shared with all things in the Son!) Nothing is outside the domain of God's creation sustained in the Son (Acts 17:28).

So, verses like this - Luke 10:18-20 - must be seen within the objective context of Heaven! Even our ability to tread "over all the power of the enemy" and our interaction with Satan and evil creatures AFTER Satan's fallenness "from heaven" can ONLY occur because all of creation is being sustained in union with Jesus and not apart from Him!

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There is no reality but the reality of our inclusion in Triune God's relationship. Whatever Hell is, it is an experience within our union with God in Jesus. You cannot flee the Father, Son and Spirit no matter where you go, and Humanity and Creation are in permanent UNION with God in Jesus Christ (Psalm 139, John 8:12!)

When we fail to understand that we are already in heaven NOW, we miss out on the full experience of reality. Hence, the continual cry to repent and be transformed in the renewing of our minds and the way we think (**Rom 12:1-2!**) I challenge you to give it a try in God's grace! The N.T. writers, and present believers are a great witness to this truth!

Let's face it! If everyone believed that we were in heaven RIGHT NOW, and that the Father, Son and Spirit were with us and have blessed us with everything in Jesus (and they have - **Eph 2:4-6**), everything would be positively transformed and be more like the heaven on earth Christ shares with us!! We would no longer try to find life in anything else because we will have embraced our "adoption as sons" and provided liberation and rest to all of creation in Jesus, the Life (**Romans 8:12-21!**) This is what the Father is wanting, has fulfilled in Jesus, and we are watching unfold in the Spirit!

Still not completely satisfied with this view of Heaven? Me either!

Okay, so here is my dissatisfaction with this all "too human" view of Heaven Jesus shares with us.

My dissatisfaction is in the evil creatures, in me, and in you, and in the sinful part of us that has yet to embrace our real death in Jesus, which was put to death - forever! My dissatisfaction is in the amazing lies we can tell ourselves and believe!

It is the corrupt nature we inherited from Satan and Adam that hinders us from receiving and believing the Truth about Who we REALLY are! Yes, in our distinction, we often stumble blindly in the real union we have with Jesus, in heaven, in our day-to-day lives (**I Peter 2:7-8!**)

My dissatisfaction—and I presume yours—is in this fallen and corrupt nature, where we have real and abundant milk and honey in our countries and cities, only to see it snatched by the powers and a few people in control before it can get to anyone else, especially the poor! It is in the fallen part of us that we often have strong faith in something else besides the Truth and cause great harm to ourselves and others (**Romans 9:3-18!**)



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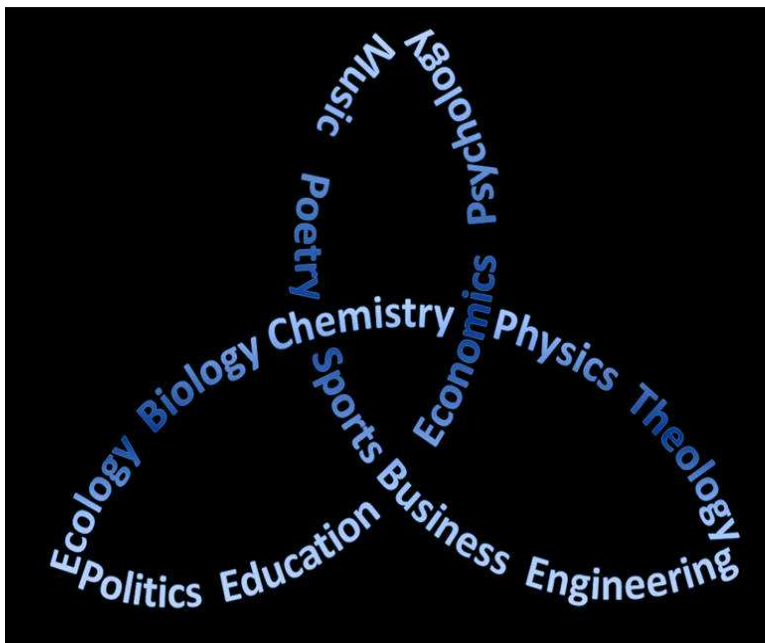


We blindly pursue the heaven that is already our INHERITANCE (free gift) in Jesus, and experience it in very perverted and discouraging ways (**Ephesians 5:3-9!**) We pursue it even though there is nothing else but the Reality of the Triune God, and even though **NO OTHER GOD OR IDOL REALLY EXISTS (I Cor 8:4!)**

BUT, this is what the Son has addressed and overcome in His Incarnation (**Matt 28:10, 16-20**), and this Truth has been spreading throughout all of creation ever since He ascended with us back to the Father in the Spirit (**Col 1:3-6, 1 John 5:4-5!**) It is only a matter of time before we ALL SEE, because the Father, Son and Spirit pursue us, personally, **UNTIL** we are found, and we **KNOW** we are found and were never really lost to Him – (**Luke 15!** Notice that word “UNTIL” in this ONE Parable, **v.3**, and take it seriously, as Peter Gray has pointed out in his little book *Until They Are Found*). **NO!** We will not always live in a darkened and dim view of heaven (**Hebrews 8:11!**), but, in fact, will **ALWAYS** be learning about the Life and Love of the Triune God in the heavens (**Luke 1:31-33!**)

Yes, **Heaven is HERE and NOW**, and **Heaven will ALWAYS be HERE and NOW** because **Triune God ALWAYS lives in the HERE and NOW**, and we are united with Him in Jesus, forever (**Eph 4:6!**) Ask Him to help you (and me!) to see it more clearly, more quickly (**Eph 3:14-21!**) Ha-Ha!!!

~ *Tim Brassell*



For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

1 Corinthians 8:6, NIV

Artwork by John Stonecypher

Christian Living

Colossians 3, along with Ephesians 4 and Romans 12, are three chapters of scripture called ‘Christian Living Chapters.’ These chapters were never meant to be requirements for one to live up to in order to become a Christian, or to gain the love and approval of Jesus Christ.

Some would say that individuals are ‘separated’ from God and ‘unsaved,’ and that these ‘requirements’—if lived out by the person—would place that person in a position for Christ to accept, love, and save them. Do we hear “WORKS” screaming out of that position?

What these chapters ARE dealing with is the description of behavior that reflects the life of Jesus Christ living in the person. This is how we are to live our life knowing WHO we are in Christ. These are descriptions of how Jesus lives. How He thinks. How He acts. They are reflections of the mind of Christ Paul mentions in Phil.2:5. “Let this mind be in you which was/is in Christ Jesus.”

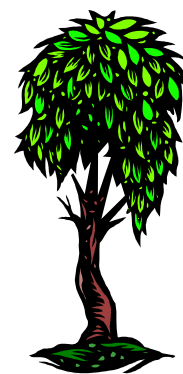
A person who walks in the flesh—who is motivated by selfish interests, vanity and by their carnal mind—finds it impossible to employ these godly characteristics in their life. (Romans 8).

BUT, when people see WHO they are in Jesus Christ and that Jesus lives His life in them and THROUGH them, then these elements of behavior will be manifested in their life. It really is not them doing these things and living in these ways, but it is Christ living in them who is the motivation for their life. He IS living this way and it is observed in the person through their actions.

Jesus is not some metaphysical mysterious magician who says the magic words “hocus pocus” over an individual and that person is now changed into the person described in the Christian living chapters of the Bible. No, Jesus along with the Father and the Holy Spirit INVADE the person’s mind, heart, soul, being and life. The person lives and reflects this New Life empowered by the Triune God. The person grows in the Grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (2 Pet.3:18).

All of this is a description of the Union between God and man, which Jesus came to complete. This Union produces relationship. It is promoted by love. First God’s love for us and then in response to God’s love our love for God.

It is a way of life which God our Father desires for ALL of His children. He has secured it in Jesus Christ. It is available to and for all of mankind. This is the GOSPEL. This is Life.



~ Paul Kurts

A Mess of God's Greens

He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' " Mark 7:20-23



Into William P. Young's truth serum fiction dances the winsome and translucent Sarayu, a personification of the Holy Spirit. As she gives Mack, the main character in Young's novel, *The Shack*, a guided tour of her garden, he discovers it is actually a living metaphor of his soul.

Earlier in the day Mack over did it on a meal of greens. While this garden is a place of beauty and design by its Creator, it, along with Mack's churning stomach, is in a 'mess' at the moment. As they walk, talk, and pull weeds Mack begins to sense the unavoidable result of what he has previously 'taken in' working its way through his system. Sarayu offers him another kind of green—hand picked healing herbs:

"You'd better chew on these greens for a minute. It will counteract the natural movement of the ones you overindulged in earlier, if you know what I mean." ... "The flavor of the herb was not distasteful: a hint of mint and some other spices he had probably smelled before but couldn't identify. As they walked, the growling in his stomach slowly began to subside, and he relaxed what he hadn't realized he had been clenching." (The Shack, William P. Young, p. 129)

Like you and I, Mack's life reflects a personal value system lived out in the day to day. From birth we absorb information, stimuli, data, and experience like a sponge. We process these all—the true and the false, the good and the bad, the painful and the pleasant—and out of this process comes our own self-oriented and self-guided tour of life. But even the keenest among us discovers that trailing behind this self-guided tour is a wake of pain where cherished relationships were meant to be grown and nurtured.

Author and theologian C. Baxter Kruger writes that our hearts have been 'shredded', and both we and the cosmos are in a world of hurt. Instead of a living legacy we have passed along a death trap. When we catch glimpses of the mess we're in we seek to clean it up using Religion and other worn out methods and means with renewed vigor!

We aren't really sure how we got here, but we don't mind dabbling with religion in the attempt to find a cure. Religion inspires a forced mold and a crude clenching of the undisciplined facets of our nature into the façade of calm and control.

Though once repulsed by the thought, I find myself in tacit agreement with Karl Marx' statement that religion often serves as an opiate of the people. But this is our own doing. It won't be this way forever and God has never been about religion. We strive to hide the natural consequence of making our own way in life with-

But even the keenest among us discovers that trailing behind this self-guided tour is a wake of pain where cherished relationships were meant to be.

A Mess of God's Greens . . . (cont.)

out the relational God who created us for His love.

“Having chosen the ravaged path of independence you don’t even comprehend that you are dragging the entire Creation along with you. . . . So very sad, but it won’t be this way forever.” (The Shack, William P. Young, p. 132)

God’s desire is to work from our insides out to help, heal, and bring harmony to our soul’s personal chaos until the curse is gone. He wants us to see Him, believe Him, and enjoy Him as the source of life—today, tomorrow, and for eternity! The Triune God is the only one who can open our clenched fists so we may grasp anew His little finger like the newborn clasps that of his parent.

The Human of Human-ity has come and dwelt among us and the creation groans for the fruits of our life in Him to be realized! The living water which began to flow 2000 years ago is still available and the healing herbs are still growing. So help yourself to seconds. A mess of God’s greens is really what we need!

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. (Revelation 22:1-3, NIV)



~ Steve Schantz

Check this Out: The Shack

We highly recommend the novel that Steve talks about in his article above, “A Mess of God’s Greens.” It’s called *The Shack* and the author is William P. Young.

In this emotionally profound and beautiful story Young gives us a vision of the Triune Life that is unparalleled in Christian literature. The main character meets God in his Triune nature and he is able to witness perichoresis first hand as he watches the Father, Son and Spirit interact with each other and with him.

There are few other literary encounters with God that reflect the Triune Life so well. At the end of “Paradiso” in the *Divine Comedy* Dante has a vision of the Trinity but it is sterile and unmoving in comparison to what Young achieves in *The Shack*.

The only reservation we have is that we wish Young would have more fully explored the Trinitarian context of the cross and reconciliation.

Even so, it is an excellent book and well worth reading.



~ The Editors

Pope John Paul II on Humanity's Salvation

We're sometimes asked "are you sure that all of humanity is included in Christ's redemptive work? I've never heard that before."



Over the last few months we've quoted from a number of the ancient Fathers of the Church affirming the inclusion of humanity in Christ's redemptive work. This month we quote from a modern father, Pope John Paul II. In his *Message for the World Day of Peace* in 1990 our catholic brother wrote:

Christians believe that the Death and Resurrection of Christ accomplished the work of reconciling humanity to the Father, who "was pleased ... through (Christ) to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (*Col 1:19-20*). Creation was thus made new (cf. *Rev 21:5*). Once subjected to the bondage of sin and decay (cf. *Rom 8:21*), it has now received new life while "we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (*2 Pt 3:13*). Thus, the Father "has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery . . . which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite *all things* in him, all things in heaven and things on earth" (*Eph 1:9-10*). [All emphases are his]

You can find the full text of his comments at www.vatican.va. Simply search for "Message for the World Day of Peace 1990".



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