

FOREWORD BY JACK HIBBS

LIFE *after* LIFE



EXPLORING THE BIBLE'S
WONDERFUL PROMISES ABOUT
HEAVEN and ETERNITY

PHILIP DE COURCY

“If we could truly grasp what God has planned for us in the life to come, it would radically reshape our attitudes and behavior in this one. Philip De Courcy has done a masterful job of refocusing our attention and drilling down into the biblical details of what we ought to think in light of Christ’s sure promises about our eternal destination. This book deserves to be read thoughtfully—with a mind prepared to think clearly and a heart ready to be anchored in its future home. Embrace the truth found in the following pages, and let it do its transforming work in you.”

Dr. Mike Fabarez, author of *10 Mistakes People Make About Heaven, Hell, and the Afterlife*

“Scripture says God has set eternity in our hearts. We all have an insatiable curiosity to know what lies beyond the veil of this life. My friend Philip De Courcy has written this engaging, informative, accessible book to answer your questions about life after this life and fill your heart with hope and anticipation. Reading this book is a life-giving, soul-refreshing experience. I highly recommend it.”

Dr. Mark Hitchcock, senior pastor, Faith Bible Church, Edmond, OK; research professor of Bible exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary

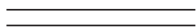
“Books are far from being an endangered species—in fact, as the old adage goes, they’re a dime a dozen. And while it’s true that good books are one in a million, excellent books are rarer than hen’s teeth. *Life After Life* is not only a rarity in temporal excellence, but its heavenly content makes it an elixir for the eternal soul. Philip De Courcy’s literary masterpiece does more than bring heaven down to earth—it helps make earthlings fit for heaven.”

Emeal “E.Z.” Zwayne, president of Living Waters; author of *Fight Like a Man: A Bold, Biblical Battle Plan for Personal Purity*

“This is the most engaging, helpful, and hope-inducing book on heaven that I’ve ever read. *Life After Life* answered my questions on heaven and all the ones I’d never thought to ask! I began the book curious. I ended excited. If you love life here, then you’re going to love life after life there even more. I’ve always wondered what the apostle Paul meant when he said, ‘Life is Christ; death is gain’ (Philippians 1:21). Pastor De Courcy shows us how what’s coming is ‘gain.’”

Dr. Jonathan Murphy, senior pastor, Stonebriar Community Church, Frisco, TX; professor of pastoral ministries, Dallas Theological Seminary

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PHILIP DE COURCY



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To June, my bonnie lass,
loving wife, mother, and grandmother extraordinaire,
friend, cheerleader, and heaven-sent
counterpart in ministry.
Thank you.

Proverbs 31:10

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Life is a team sport. The push and pull of others helps us to reach our goals and achieve our aims. That reality is revealed in the writing of this book, for without the input and inspiration of others, it would never have come to fruition.

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Finally, to the professionals at Harvest House Publishers, thank you for offering me a handrail throughout this project. Your expertise and enthusiasm made it happen. Special thanks to Bob Hawkins for believing in me and the book, and Steve and Becky Miller for improving and fine-tuning the manuscript. I have enjoyed working with you all and have fond memories of my visit to the office in Eugene, Oregon. One last thing—Go Bucks, not Ducks!

To one and all, thank you.

To God be the glory,
Philip

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FOREWORD

JACK HIBBS

Have you ever given any thought to just how much God wants us to be in heaven with Him?

God's plan to make heaven possible for us goes back to "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). That's how long ago He was already thinking about you!

His plan also came at a very high price. Sin condemns every person on Earth to eternity separated from God. This made it necessary for God to send His Son Jesus Christ to Earth to die on the cross on our behalf. Jesus died an excruciating, horrible death so that we could live forever with Him in heaven. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Here's yet another amazing truth: Once we become God's children, we belong to Him *forever*. Nothing can separate us from Christ's love (Romans 8:35). No one can snatch us out of His hand (John 10:28).

When it came to making heaven possible for us, God took care of everything and continues to do so. That's how much He loves us!

For God, opening the door for us to get into heaven has always been His divine purpose.

Can we likewise say that heaven is our purpose and destination too?

It should be! Heaven isn't simply a wonderful place to live. It is

far more than that! It is impossible for us to fully grasp the wonders and riches of heaven. Even after we've been in heaven for thousands of years, we will continue to discover all that it offers.

If you've wanted to learn more about heaven, *Life After Life* is for you. In it, Philip answers the questions so many of us ask:

- Where is heaven?
- How can we be sure we are going there?
- Do we go to heaven immediately after we die?
- What will we do in heaven?
- What will our new bodies be like?
- Will we remember each other?

If heaven is a big deal to God, it should be a big deal to us. That's why I'm grateful that Philip De Courcy wrote *Life After Life*.

Your understanding of heaven and appreciation for it will grow as you read this book. Within these pages, you'll be enriched and encouraged. I believe you'll be surprised at how much there is to know about heaven!

Colossians 3:2 says, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." We should never tire of thinking or talking about heaven. *Life After Life* is sure to make heaven dearer to you than ever!

Jack Hibbs

Calvary Chapel Chino Hills

CHAPTER 1

HEAVEN CAN'T WAIT

Colossians 3:1-4



It is a tradition in the De Courcy home that, the day after Thanksgiving, I fetch our Christmas tree and decorations from the loft over the garage, and my wife June, along with our daughters, starts making the house look a lot like Christmas. The Christmas tree is erected and decorated with ornaments we have collected from places we have visited around the world. The latest one is from the beautiful Greek island of Santorini. Christmas wreaths are hung, greenery and garlands are twisted around furniture, candles and ornaments are strategically set up throughout the house, and this is all done while Christmas music plays in the background or *Elf* is being watched on TV.

Though we are still almost a month out from Christmas Day and the routines of life will go on as usual—work, rest, and play—the most wonderful time of the year gradually takes up more of our attention.

As Christmas draws nearer, it affects more and more of what we do—our shopping, the shows we watch, the playlists we listen to, the foods and candies we eat, the clothes we wear, and the drinks we

purchase at our favorite coffee shop. For the De Courcys, and perhaps for you as well, from the day after Thanksgiving onward, December 25 looms large. No matter what we do or where we go, the thoughts, trappings, and tunes of Christmas confront us.

After all, 'tis the season to be jolly—it's Christmas!

In a Christmas message given by President Calvin Coolidge in 1927, the president picked up this theme of Christmas being more of a disposition than a date. He stated, "Christmas is not a time or a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and good will, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas. If we think on these things, there will be born in us a Savior and over us will shine a star sending its gleam of hope to the world."¹

For the Christian, heaven is not just a future date with destiny but a season-shaping reality, a perspective that pervades our consciousness on a daily basis. Heaven is not just a time and place that lies in the future; it is a present state of mind. From the time we put our faith in Christ for salvation, everything about us tilts in the direction of heaven. The Christian is a person with heaven on their mind. Heaven is not just a destination but an orientation, an orientation of the heart that leaks into all aspects of life. Whether at work, rest, or play, we live under and live out the realities of heaven. Heaven informs how we spend our money (Matthew 6:19-21), how we pray (Matthew 6:10), how we face our sorrows and suffering (Romans 8:18), how we control our appetites (Philippians 3:17-21), how we bury our dead and mourn their passing (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), how we persevere in the face of persecution (Matthew 5:12), and why we share our faith (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). Heaven is the water in which the Christian swims, the air that we breathe. Heaven is not just the object of our longing but the subject of our living.

Richard Sibbes was a well-respected seventeenth-century pastor, Puritan, and professor at Trinity College in Cambridge, England. He was known for his pastoral warmth, affection for Christ, godliness of

life, and heavenly mindedness. This heavenly mindset, accompanied by his manner of life, prompted a friend to write of Sibbes, “Of this blest man, let this just praise be given, heaven was in him, before he was in heaven.”²

Now there’s a reality to ponder—“heaven was in him before he was in heaven.”

For Richard Sibbes, heaven wasn’t simply a future destination that awaited him but a mindset that shaped his everyday life. He was a man who thought much about the throne of God, the exaltation of the Son of God at God’s right hand, the singing of the angels of God, and the happy state of the saints of God. He considered heaven a means of expectation as well as edification. He understood that being born again meant to be born from above, which meant that heaven experientially and actually had become a reality in him at salvation through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3; Ephesians 1:13-14).

As a man and as a minister, Richard Sibbes viewed his life as a pilgrimage, a sojourn, one that connected his everyday life on Earth to his eternal and fixed citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20-21; Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11). His was a mind set on things above and beyond this present life (Colossians 3:1-2).

But exactly what does such a mindset look like in our lives? What do we need to know about heaven in order to make it real to us in the grind of everyday living? How can heaven be in us before we are in heaven?

A Change of Perspective

When it comes to this subject of heaven, many questions flood our minds. What is it like? What will *we* be like? Who gets to go there? What will we do there? Will we know each other? No doubt you have accumulated a mental list of questions about heaven yourself. As you should. It’s natural for believers to wonder about their future home. Hopefully, as you traverse and turn the pages of this

book, many, if not most, of those questions will be answered for you, inspiring you to dig into God's Word in your own study.

But first, let's consider the premise that *heaven can't wait*. What I mean by this is that in order for us to more fully understand and appreciate heaven, it must, as I have already noted by way of introduction, be more than just some faraway future place for which we long. More than just a "someday" destination, heaven is also meant to be for the here and now, a reality in our daily lives. An ever-present impulse. A contemporary incentive. A perpetual inspiration. Heaven needs to be our North Star during our earthly journey, guiding us along the way. That's because God's planned future is already underway in us. Life in heaven is our present and our future. Christians, in a real sense, are people who live ahead of their time. We are marked not only by the times in which we live, but our identity is also to be formed by our heavenly destiny and the age to come (Luke 17:21; Hebrews 6:5). And one way we experience this reality is by understanding our true citizenship—Paul declared that all believers possess a guaranteed citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

But what does that mean? And what are the practical implications for our lives right now, this side of our heavenly home?

In his book *Called by God*, Derek Tidball notes, "Heaven is not so much a destination, as (it is) our orientation, the axis which determines the path of our present life." He later adds, "Philippi was a colony of Rome. In effect, it was a little bit of Rome planted in Asia Minor. We are a colony of heaven planted on earth. We should not be ashamed about living according to the customs and rules of heaven, the place where God dwells, insofar as we can, while here on earth. In fact, that's our calling!"³

He continues:

Heaven will be a place where righteousness reigns, so we are called to righteous living now. Heaven is the place where

there is no more sin, so we are called to live holy lives now. Heaven is the place where there is no injustice, so we work for justice now. Heaven is the place where there are no tears, so we need to dry the tears of others now. Heaven is the place where there is no pain, so we must do what we can to combat suffering in all its forms now. Heaven is the place where there is no more death, so although we will inescapably face physical death, we must ensure that we will not face “the second death” (Revelation 2:11; 20:6) which is the destiny of those who have not placed their faith in Christ.⁴

God wants us living heaven now. The fact is that Christians are not citizens of Earth trying to get to heaven, but citizens of heaven making their way through this world with one foot in heaven and one toe on Earth. This world is not our home; our hearts lie elsewhere; we are simply passing through, and as we do, we keep that heavenward perspective.

Leaning into the thought of heaven imparts a perspective and ability to understand that we are not yet who we will be (1 John 3:1-3). But what we will be defines and drives what we are becoming. A man was asked if he expected to go to heaven when he died. “Why, of course,” he replied, “I live there now.” A heavenly mindset does not mean that you are dreamy, detached, and distant concerning life on Earth. It means that your present life is governed by your future life. It means that you go above and beyond in all that you do because your heart and mind are fixed on that which is above and beyond.

To help us cultivate that kind of heavenly mindset, I want to turn our attention to the text of Colossians 3:1-4. This is one of several seminal scriptures that invite and incite us to turn our thoughts toward heaven (2 Corinthians 4:17-18; Ephesians 1:18-19; 1 Peter 1:13). Here, Paul, having talked in the preceding verses about the failed policy of

trying to fight our sin nature with asceticism and prohibition, now moves on to something more positive and powerful—namely, the entranced vision of the risen, regal, and returning Lord Jesus Christ. As Sam Storms notes,

The only way to defeat the power of sin's promise of pleasure is by faith in God's promise of a superior pleasure... Yielding to fleshly urges is overcome by seeking the things above. Fixing our minds on things above leaves little time or mental energy for earthly fantasies. The heart that is entranced by the risen Christ is not easily seduced by the "things that are on earth."⁵

It is Christ's and our permanent glory that will keep us from the hollow and passing pleasure of sin. To set our affection on things above makes for a better life here below.

In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul outlines four aspects to a heavenly mindset, namely the believer's position, priority, predicament, and prospect.

THE BELIEVER'S POSITION

Paul begins with the amazing reality that through our union with Christ, where He is and what He has done redounds to our benefit (Colossians 2:12-13; 3:1). Our identification with Christ allows us to enter into His exaltation and enthronement. What was done to Christ has been done in the believer. What God did historically in Christ for us has been replicated in us spiritually and personally. When Jesus died, we died with Him (Galatians 2:20). When He was buried, so were we (Roman 6:4). We also share in His resurrection and enthronement on high (Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:1). The benefits of Christ's redemptive work, through His death, burial, and resurrection, have accrued to us. While we await a future bodily

resurrection, we have already experienced a spiritual resurrection in that we who were once dead in sin have been made alive in Christ and now share in His exalted position (Romans 6:5-9; Ephesians 2:1-3, 4-7). Raised with Christ—that is our status and our permanent position before God. So then, it follows that the Lord Jesus' victory through His resurrection and ascension is also our victory as well. That's why the Christian life truly is an *elevated* life. It is the high life!

Think about it: When someone ascends to the throne of a country, those connected to him or her, whether family or friends, are also elevated alongside that person. The singular person's ascendancy benefits more than just himself. Those who know and are close to that person will benefit within the kingdom alongside the king. The same is true for us as Christians.

Our ascended Lord Jesus Christ is now deservedly at the right hand of God, the majesty on high (Acts 2:33; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3). His enthronement—by implication and image—speaks of inherited power and kingly authority (1 Corinthians 15:24-26; Ephesians 1:19-22). He who was crowned with thorns is now crowned with glory and honor (Revelation 4:9-11). And that power and that authority is shared with us (working in us) both now and in the future (Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:19). Therefore, you and I can raise our game and live more powerfully and productively because Christ is risen and enthroned, and His ascendancy benefits more than just Himself.

Raising our game involves looking up and fixing our gaze upon the risen Christ and remembering our exalted position (John 17:22; Romans 8:16-18; Colossians 3:1-2). Seated with Christ in the heavenly realm, we belong to the company of the redeemed who have been chosen, adopted, accepted, forgiven, informed, enriched, sealed, and assured (Ephesians 1:3-4, 5, 6, 7, 8-10, 11-12, 13, 14). His enthronement is our enrichment (Ephesians 1:7; 2:7; 3:8). And as we set our attention and affection on the things of heaven, particularly on Christ Himself, exalted and enthroned, we are able to rise above our

circumstances, fears, and opponents. It is hard to get down in the dumps when you are thinking about things above and all that Christ is to us and for us. As followers of Christ, we can stand up to life knowing we are seated with Christ!

For many years, Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse occupied the prominent pulpit of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. On one particular Sunday morning, a boy sitting in the gallery was all ears as the great preacher spoke about God's treatment of our sin. As Barnhouse closed out the sermon, he did so in his familiar manner by collecting many of the great promises of God's Word into one impressive sentence. As he nailed home God's treatment of our sin, he said, "Our sins are forgiven, forgotten, cleansed, pardoned, atoned for, remitted, covered, they have been cast into the depths of the sea, blotted out as a thick cloud, removed as far as the east is from the west, cast behind God's back."

Finishing his sermon, Barnhouse proceeded to the front door of the church building to greet those attending. As he stood there talking to several congregants, a 12-year-old boy who had listened intently from the balcony tugged on his sleeve and said, "Good sermon, Doc! Gee, we're sure sitting pretty, aren't we?"⁶

Indeed, no one has a brighter future than those who are "in Christ." Yes, we really are "sitting pretty"!

THE BELIEVER'S PRIORITY

Now, in light of our position before God, Paul goes on to highlight a particular responsibility we have before Him. Because our lives are vitally linked to the risen and enthroned Savior, the Christian is to actively seek those things above: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:1-2). We are to live with heaven on our mind.

We are to choose a sustained and singular focus on heaven's eternal priorities, realities, personalities, and values.

Let's break down Paul's language:

First, we are to "seek those things that are above" (verse 1). Paul here employs a verb tense (present imperative) that means to "keep seeking" as a way of life. This is something we *choose* to do. It's a volitional search and quest. This word "seek" is used in the Gospels to describe a shepherd looking for sheep, a woman looking for a coin, and a merchant looking for a costly pearl (Luke 15:1-10; Matthew 13:45-46). It signifies an earnest search, an intentional striving toward and after something or someone (Matthew 6:33; 1 Corinthians 7:27; Revelation 9:6). The idea is that our goal is to actually obtain that which we seek. It is more than a mere discovery, but rather, a relentless *pursuit* motivated by the reward of finding that which we seek for and after (Philippians 3:12-14). Such a pursuit puts a gleam in our eye, a spring in our step, and a compass in our heart.

Second, you are to "set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (verse 2). Paul's add-on admonition has to do with our thinking. To "set your mind" refers to that which is fixed, firm, and focused. It is the discipline of directed thinking. We set our minds to lose ten pounds in weight. We set our minds to finish a degree. We set our minds on reading the Bible in a year. And once again, Paul uses the present imperative (that is, "continually set your mind"). This speaks of a determined inner disposition. An ever-present mindset. A constant mental orientation. It means to be unwaveringly mindful. When it comes to heaven and Christ's return, we are to get our minds in gear; we are to bend our thoughts in that direction.

Most musicians (especially guitarists) have heard the name Les Paul. Paul is well known for being the architect of rock 'n' roll, having invented the solid-body electric guitar that famously bears his name.

However, what most people don't know is that in 1948, Paul's passion for music nearly came to a tragic end. While driving on a bridge

in Oklahoma, his car skidded off into a river, and due to the ensuing impact, his arm was shattered. Doctors told Paul they could save his arm, but he would never play the guitar again. Paul then gave the surgeons a suggestion. Could they set his arm at a slightly less than 90-degree angle so he could still cradle his guitar?

And that's exactly what they did.

So, for the rest of his life, Les Paul was unable to throw, reach outward, or raise his right arm. However, none of that ultimately mattered to him, for he could still do what he loved the most. He could play the guitar.⁷

Wouldn't it be great if our minds could similarly be fixed in a permanent position so that everything we do is shaped and salted by the thought of Christ in heaven, Christ in us the hope of glory, and us in heaven?

These are heavenly habits of the heart and mind! Seeking and thinking are like two sides of the same coin. They go hand in hand. Spirit-fueled effort and mental concentration are a potent combination and force in the life of the athlete, teacher, soldier, and entrepreneur. And even more so for the Christian.

But lest we misinterpret and misapply what Paul is saying, let's clarify a few important principles.

To not set our minds on earthly things is different from denying the material world. That would be drifting into a form of asceticism, which Paul had already condemned in his letter to the Colossians (Colossians 2:20-23). God doesn't want us to detach from everyday life and earthly obligations and responsibilities. He has chosen to keep us here for now, and that means giving our attention to the necessary, normal things of life (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). In God's book, it is an extraordinary thing to do the ordinary thing well and for His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). As Paul underscores in the rest of his letter to the Colossians, we are not to retreat from the world or walk about with our head in the clouds, or to run from family or

civic responsibilities (Colossians 3–4). The chapter begins in heaven but ends at the marriage altar and the workshop.

Sam Storms offers a helpful clarification:

Don't think for a moment that Paul is endorsing the view that the world "above" is the truly spiritual and pure one whereas nothing in this world is worth working to redeem or preserve. Salvation is not the release of the spirit from the prison of our physical bodies so that we can live unsullied and unsoiled, soaring in some ethereal realm of a distant eternity. He means that the power and principles of the age to come are to energize us now so that we can influence the earth with the truths and values of heaven.⁸

Minding the things above is not a denial of the material, but rather, a focusing on Christ as our chief pursuit and highest priority. It is living as if heaven is a real place, which it is. It means we anticipate the rapture and the judgment seat of Christ to follow. It means we fight the flesh while cultivating the spiritual. It means we reject the passing fads and fashions of this present age. It involves resisting the urge to give in and make peace with the world. It is contemplating your life after death (or post-rapture)! It is living for the things that will outlast this life. It means finding happiness in the anticipation of your nonstop joy in heaven. It is wishing for a new body and being fully convinced you are getting one! It is being dominated by the reality and beauty of heaven. Minding the things above connects you to all these glorious things, and much, much more!

This principle is illustrated in the ancient Jewish perspective on Jerusalem. The Israelite, though perhaps many miles removed from his capital, would nonetheless pray toward Jerusalem, allowing that far-away city to come to his mind (Jeremiah 51:50; cf. 1 Kings 8:48; Daniel 6:10). We might say he was temple-minded, and thus, God-minded.

Conversely, Christians must let the New Jerusalem and the things of the coming age come into their minds and capture their longing and give direction to their living (Revelation 21–22).

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used to tell the story of how he would ride the city bus across town every day to attend high school. During those days, black people were required to sit at the backs of buses, while white people were able to sit in the front. Even if a bus was half empty, black passengers were still not permitted to sit in the front. King said, “Every time I got on the bus, even though I found myself having to take my body back to the back of the bus, I always left my mind on the front seat. And I said to myself one of these days, I’m going to put my body up there where my mind is.”⁹

What a great parallel to the way we should view our lives! We are forced to be on this earth in our bodies, but our minds should focus on the things of heaven, where one day our bodies will also be!

And why does all this matter? Because having this mindset literally shapes the way we live. Think about it. Had Dr. King been content to stay at the back of the bus—body *and* mind—we may never have witnessed the Civil Rights Movement in America. But his mindset shaped his lifestyle and actions. The same should be true for us. Thinking of heaven ought to change our behavior, deepen our love, inspire our worship, repurpose our parenting, mold our marriages, affect our employment, impact our speech, and trigger our evangelism.

These practical applications are a far cry from being “so heavenly minded you’re no earthly good!” In fact, being heavenly minded is what makes us any good here on Earth. History bears out the truth that those who impacted this life the most were those who thought most about the next life. It was the thought of heaven that drove evangelism, made people socially responsible, caused people to be generous in helping the poor and illiterate, and brought about the end of such injustices as the slave trade. Ask the apostles, ask Mary

Slessor, ask Amy Carmichael, ask Lord Shaftesbury, ask C.H. Spurgeon, ask William Wilberforce.

My friend Mark Hitchcock puts it this way:

1. Focusing on heaven restores our hope in times of suffering (Romans 8:18)
2. Focusing on heaven assures us that God is on the throne (Revelation 4:1-3)
3. Focusing on heaven reminds us that this world is not our home (Philippians 3:20)
4. Focusing on heaven points to our true treasure (Matthew 6:19-21)
5. Focusing on heaven reignites our fervor to serve the Lord (Isaiah 6:1-8)¹⁰

He then adds, "I once heard someone wisely say, 'Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither.'"¹¹

THE BELIEVER'S PREDICAMENT

You're probably already anticipating the tension this heavenly mindset produces. It puts us at odds with the surrounding culture. Keeping in step with the Spirit puts us out of step with the world (Galatians 5:16-26). We are in this world in terms of location, but we are not of this world in terms of lifestyle (John 17:14-18). Physically, we look no different than our neighbors, but morally and spiritually, we live a life alien to them (1 Peter 2:11-12; 4:1-4). We march to a heavenly drumbeat. The secret to our life, according to Paul in Colossians, lies beyond this world. Our life is sourced and secure in Christ (Colossians 3:3).

The term “hidden with Christ” speaks to the fact that our new life in and with Christ awaits its full expression upon the return of the Savior (Colossians 3:3-4). As the apostle John puts it, “It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). Another thing the “life hidden with Christ in God” speaks to is the fact that our new life in Christ is not understood by others. What has been gloriously and graciously disclosed to us by God in the gospel has been hidden from them (Colossians 1:26-27). Our friends and family think us to be strange (1 Peter 4:4).

That is our predicament, but this dilemma of being unknown to the world but well known to God drives a portion of our purpose (2 Corinthians 6:9). Although our life is “hidden with Christ in God,” we mustn’t hide or shade the light of Christ’s gospel, but rather, be a city set on a hill for all to see it (Matthew 5:14-16). If we hide the gospel, we hide it from those who are perishing and in most need of it (2 Corinthians 4:4). That light is a transformed life marked by godly character and good works (Matthew 5:1-12, 16).

Did you know that the word *photograph* means “to be written in light”? Christians whose lives are sourced and secure in the risen and exalted Christ are called to live as children of the light in this dark world—as photographs of Jesus, who is the light of the world. May we make visible what is hidden to the world through a life unmistakably changed by Christ!

As the martyred missionary Jim Elliot once prayed, may we also pray: “Father, make of me a crisis man. Bring those I contact to decision. Let me not be a milepost on a single road; make me a fork, that men must turn one way or another on facing Christ in me.”¹²

THE BELIEVER’S PROSPECT

Thankfully, Scripture lets us know that this tension of being strangers in a foreign land won’t last forever. In reality, our time here is but a

brief moment (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). This life is a day that flies by compared to the long tomorrow of eternity. Jesus will be here soon and very soon (Revelation 1:3; 22:20). We hope and wait for that which we presently cannot see—the completion of our salvation, or glorification (Romans 8:25; Colossians 3:4). Christ, who has saved us from the penalty of sin through justification and is saving us from the power of sin through sanctification, will someday save us from the presence of sin through glorification. Then when Jesus, who is our life, appears, our bodies will finally and fully be where our minds have already lived. We will be with Christ in a new and glorious state of being (Romans 8:17-18; 1 Corinthians 15:43).

Heaven will be many things: First, it will be the absence of all that is bad—experiences like dying, suffering, and temptation will be gone. Second, it will be the presence of all that is good—experiences like joy, peace, endless life, and righteousness will never end. It is all that the mind of God can conceive and all that the power of God can perform. Granted, it is hard for us to anticipate and imagine the perfect. But fundamentally, heaven and the eternal state are expressed in two simple phrases: *like Him* and *with Him* (1 John 3:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Philippians 3:20-21).

Upon Jesus' return, the rule of Satan will come to an end and the reign of Christ will, at last, begin. At this time, our denial of self and our diligence and dedication for gospel ends will be greatly rewarded (Revelation 2:23, 26-27; 22:12). And all our suffering will have been worth it when compared to the glory that will be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). Having endured tribulations while on Earth, we will be triumphant in that day. Our faith will give way to sight. And we will know fully just as we have been known by Him (1 Corinthians 13:12). Our subjective experience will perfectly match our objective status. What we were saved to be, we *will* be.

Our glorification will be a wonderful moment of victory and vindication (2 Thessalonians 1:10). Scorned by the world, we'll be

accepted into God's kingdom. Mocked by men, we'll hear our heavenly Father's, "Well done." Bodies weak and worn from a life of toil and Christian service will be made new and invigorated by immortality. When Christ appears, we will appear with Him in glory. That will be the church's Cinderella moment!

The story is told that Andrew Bonar sent C.H. Spurgeon a copy of his commentary on Leviticus. Spurgeon was so blessed by the exposition that he returned the book with a request for Dr. Bonar's autograph and photograph.

Soon the book was returned with this message from the saintly Bonar: "Dear Brother, I cannot refuse what you are so kind as to ask. But if you had only waited a little while, it [the photograph] would have been really worth having—for 'we shall be like Him' (1 John 3:2)."¹³

Some glad day, we will be what God saved us to be (Romans 8:28-30). We will be with Christ and like Christ in heaven. God will put the final touches to His masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10). But until that moment arrives, the real question for you as a believer is not whether you'll be in heaven one day. Rather, it is, How much of heaven is in *you* today?