

# Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

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## Pastor's Bible Study

# If God Is Good

A Bible Study Series  
Based on the book  
"If God Is Good" by Randy Alcorn

## **Part XX**

April 10, 2012

## **The Two Eternal Solutions to the Problem of Evil: Heaven and Hell**

### **Heaven: Eternal Grace to Unworthy but Grateful Children (part 1)**

#### ☉ **Heaven: Eternal Grace to Unworthy but Grateful Children**

- Jesus said that when his followers hunger, weep, and are hated and insulted, we should rejoice.
  - ☉ Why? "Because great is your reward in heaven" (Luke 6:23)
- In contrast, he added, " But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are fed well now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep" (verses 24-25)

#### ☉ **Heaven: Eternal Grace to Unworthy but Grateful Children**

- His listeners would have immediately understood that he was addressing a fundamental problem of human existence.
- Christ's point? God has an eternal two-part solution to the problem of the righteous presently suffering and the wicked presently prospering: heaven and Hell.

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- The life to come flows out of this one; hence the believer's present sufferings comprise only a tiny part of our total life experience, which will continue forever.

- ⊙ *Romans 8:18 (HCSB)*<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

- ⊙ C. S. Lewis commented on this verse: "If this is so, a book on suffering which says nothing of heaven, is leaving out almost the whole of one side of the account. Scripture and tradition habitually put the joys of heaven into the scale against the sufferings of earth, and no solution of the problem of pain which does not do so can be called a Christian one."

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- Many people believe this life is all there is: "You only go around once on this earth, so grab for whatever you can."
- But if you're a child of God, then you do *not* just "go around once;" you'll inhabit the New Earth forever! It's those in Hell who go around only once on Earth.
- Here, we have bodies and we work, rest, [lay, and relate to one another—we call this *life*. Yet many have mistakenly redefined *eternal life* to mean an off-earth disembodied existence stripped of human life's defining properties.

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- In fact, eternal life will mean enjoying forever, as resurrected (which means embodied) beings, what life on Earth at its finest offered to us.
- We could more accurately call our present existence the *beforelife* rather than calling Heaven the *afterlife*.
- Life doesn't merely continue in Heaven, it emerges at last to its intended fullness.

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- The resurrection means that the best parts about this world will carry over to the next, with none of the bad; hence, what we forgo here will prove no great loss.
  - ⊙ Only the resurrection can solve the gigantic problems of this world—and resurrection cannot come without death.

- ◎ "The physical resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of redemption--both for mankind and for the earth. Indeed, without Christ's resurrection and what it means--an eternal future for fully restored human beings dwelling on a fully restored Earth--there is no Christianity." -- Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, page 109

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- Without this eternal perspective we assume that people who die young, who have handicaps, who suffer poor health, who don't get married or have children, who don't do this or that will miss out on the best life has to offer.
- But the theology underlying those assumptions has a fatal flaw. It presumes that our present Earth, bodies, culture, relationships, and lives are all there is—or that they will somehow overshadow or negate those of the New Earth.
- The stronger our concept of God and heaven, the more we understand how Heaven resolves the problem of evil and suffering.
- The weaker our concept of God and Heaven, the stronger our doubt that Heaven will more than compensate for our present sufferings.

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- If Heaven did not exist, we could never solve the problem of evil and suffering, for we would never receive any lasting compensation for it.
  - ◎ God originally planned that human beings live unswervingly happy, fulfilled, righteous, and God-centered lives on Earth. If our current lives present the only opportunities for that, then God's plan has failed.
  - ◎ But if we know the God revealed in Scripture, we realize his plans do not fail. His promises to resurrect both us and the earth itself guarantee his plan will forever succeed.

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- We want every chapter of our lives to feel good. It doesn't work that way. The current chapter may be terribly hard, but the story hasn't ended.
- God promises a final chapter in which he ties together all the story's loose ends and launches us into an eternal sequel of incredibly grand proportions.

- Make no mistake—the promise of God is that all his children, each of us who know Jesus, will live happily ever after.
- ☉ **Heaven: Eternal Grace to Unworthy but Grateful Children**
- In order to share Christ’s glory forever on the New Earth, we must share his sufferings temporarily on the fallen Earth.
    - ☉ When the New Testament discusses suffering, it repeatedly puts Heaven before the eyes of believers.
    - ☉ Sadly, many churches fail to follow this example. When we say nothing, or put our hope in a health and wealth gospel, or hope only in medical advances, we rob God’s people of an eternal perspective.
- ☉ **Heaven: Eternal Grace to Unworthy but Grateful Children**
- “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” ([Romans 8:17](#)).
    - ☉ Paul says we will become Christ’s heirs and share in his glory if we share in his sufferings. No suffering, no glory.
  - F. F. Bruce writes, “It is not merely that the glory is a compensation for the suffering; it actually grows out of the suffering. There is an organic relation between the two for the believer as surely as there was for his Lord.”
- ☉ **Heaven: Eternal Grace to Unworthy but Grateful Children**
- As [Romans 8:18](#) emphasizes, our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the future glory that God and we and others will see in us.
    - ☉ Paul offers a one-word answer to the question, “Why suffering?” He replies, “Glory.” Glory is a state of high honor, involving a brilliant, radiant beauty.
    - ☉ Our glory is secondary, not primary. We are not its source, God is. He is the sun who shines upon us, bestowing an eternal glory rooted in himself, purchased for us by his suffering on the cross.
    - ☉ God will be glorified by imparting his honor to us and sharing it with us.
- ☉ **Heaven: Eternal Grace to Unworthy but Grateful Children**

- God’s promise of glory doesn’t minimize our suffering, of course; Paul affirms we will experience great sufferings (see Romans 8). Only an immeasurably greater glory can eclipse our present suffering—and that is exactly what will happen. [Romans 8:18](#) says God will not create that glory, but will reveal it. It’s already there—just not yet manifested.
- The treasures we’ll enjoy won’t lie only outside us, but, Paul says, “in us.” God uses suffering to achieve the glorious transformation of our characters to prepare us for service and joy in the next life.
- *2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (HCSB)* <sup>17</sup> For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. <sup>18</sup> So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

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- God will not simply wait for our deaths, then snap his fingers to make us what he wants us to be.
- He begins that process here and now, using our suffering to help us grow in Christlikeness.
- Phillips renders [Romans 8:19](#), “The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.”
- As a master artist’s magnum opus awaits unveiling at an exhibit, so our Christlikeness, forged in suffering, awaits revealing at the Master’s perfect time.

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- We can rejoice now because Christ promised that in Heaven he will replace our weeping with laughter; our poverty with wealth; our hunger with satisfaction; and hatred, insults, and rejection with eternal reward.
  - ⊙ Luke the physician tells of a great number of people who came to Jesus “to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all” (Luke 6:18-19).
  - ⊙ Consider what was going through Christ’s mind as he dealt with these image-bearers plagued by sickness, poverty, and spiritual oppression. He knew the world was full of people whom he wouldn’t heal in this life. He also knew that the same

people he healed would one day grow weak again and die, leaving their families wailing over their graves.

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- What could Jesus say to such people? Luke tells us:
- “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven” (Luke 6:20-23).
- Jesus tells the hungry they’ll be satisfied. Those whose eyes are swollen with tears will laugh. Those persecuted should leap for joy now. Why? Because of their great reward in Heaven later.
- On that New earth God will reverse life’s injustices and tragedies—and all the blessings Jesus promised will become ours.

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- In order to appreciate our eternal future, we will remember the sufferings of the present.
  - ☉ When Christ sets up his eternal kingdom, he will banish evil and suffering—yet we will remember both in a way that won’t cause us pain, but will prompt our gratitude and worship.
  - ☉ God told the Israelites to remember their bondage in Egypt, long after he had freed them, as they celebrated Passover each year.
  - ☉ Likewise, in Heaven we’ll remember evil and suffering in order to provide the backdrop to better see God’s holiness and grace.

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- Personality requires memory. “For the sins which so often made us tremble, are washed away in the blood of Jesus, and are, therefore, no longer a source of trouble. The remembrance of them rather intensifies our love for the God of mercy, and therefore increases our happiness.”
- Isaiah 65:17 is often cited as proof that in eternity we won’t remember our present life: <sup>17</sup> “For I will create a new heaven and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind. Isaiah 65:17 (HCSB)

- ⊙ We should, however, view this in context.
- ⊙ In the previous verse God says: *Isaiah 65:16 (HCSB) ... For the former troubles will be forgotten and hidden from My sight.*
- ⊙ *Jeremiah 31:34 (HCSB) ... “For I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sin.”*

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- *Remember* is a covenant word that includes acting upon what comes to mind. To not remember doesn't mean to forget. It means that though God could recall our past sins, he will never hold them against us because he sees that we are covered by Christ's blood and made righteous in him.
- God doesn't have a mental lapse; he *chooses* not to bring up our sins.
- Likewise, *Isaiah 65:17* suggests that our former sins and sorrows will not preoccupy or distract us in eternity.
- Even though God will wipe away the tears attached to this world, he will *not* erase from our minds human history and Christ's intervention.
- We'll never forget that *our* sins nailed Jesus to the cross, for Christ's resurrection body has nail-scarred hands and feet. But rather than causing us eternal grief, this will prompt us to eternal joy and worship of God for his grace.

⊙ **Heaven: Eternal Grace to Unworthy but Grateful Children**

- God promises he will destroy death and forever remove the Curse upon us and upon Earth.
  - ⊙ Christ guaranteed his final defeat of evil spirits (see *Matthew 12:28*; *Luke 10:18-19*; *John 12:31*; *Colossians 1:13*; *2:15*).
  - ⊙ John said :<sup>8</sup> ...The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the Devil's works. *1 John 3:8 (HCSB)*
  - ⊙ On the New Earth, “No longer will there be any curse” (*revelation 22:3*).
  - ⊙ Christ's victory over the Curse will be total, not partial. Death won't limp away wounded. The King will annihilate it:
    - ⊙ <sup>7</sup> On this mountain [He] will destroy the [burial] shroud, the shroud over all the peoples, the sheet covering all the nations; <sup>8</sup> He will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from every face and remove His people's disgrace from the whole earth, for

the LORD has spoken. *Isaiah 25:7-8 (HCSB)* ( see also *Revelation 20:14; 21:4*).

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- The magnificent hymn “Joy to the World” by Isaac Watts contains great theology:
  - ☉ No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found.
- If redemption failed to reach the farthest boundaries of the Curse, it would remain incomplete. The God who rules the world with truth and grace won’t feel satisfied until he removes every sin, sorrow, and thorn.
- N. T. Wright says , “the evil that humans do is integrated with the enslavement of creation. This is seldom a matter of one-on-one cause and effect, but there is a nexus, a web of rippling events that spreads out from human rebellion against the creator to the out-of-jointness of creation itself. In the same way, when humans are put back to rights the world will be put back to rights.

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- The Curse is real, but *temporary*. Jesus will reverse the Curse. Earth won’t merely be put out of its misery; Christ will infuse it with a far greater life. Then, at last, it will become all God intended it to be.
- If the present Earth under the Curse can seem so beautiful and wonderful; if our bodies, so weakened by the Curse, at times feel overcome with a sense of the Earth’s majesty and splendor—then *how magnificent will the New Earth be?* And what will it feel like to enjoy it in perfect bodies?
- God promises that every one of his children will one day experience the answers to those questions.