

HEAVEN

From: Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Heaven

by Peter Kreeft

Will We All Be Equal in Heaven?

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” (John 14:2-4)

From St. Augustine's Lectures on John
Tractate LXVII. Chapter XIV. 2-3

But the many mansions point to the different grades of merit in that one eternal life. For there is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory; and so also the resurrection of the dead. The saints, like the stars in the sky, obtain in the kingdom different mansions of diverse degrees of brightness.

We modern egalitarians are tempted to the primal sin of pride in the opposite way from the ancients. The old aristocratic form of pride was the desire to be better than others. The new, democratic form is the desire not to have anyone better than yourself. Flat, boring, repetitive sameness is simply not the structure of reality in a theistic universe, either on earth or in heaven. However, in Heaven, as on earth, each one of us will be or do something no one else will be or do as well. No one will be superfluous.

Why is there no jealousy in this hierarchical, aristocratic, nonegalitarian Heaven of authority and obedience? Because all are cells in the same body. The kidney does not rebel because it is not the eye. Jealousy is the principle of Hell. There is no Hell in Heaven.

Will We Feel Sorrow in Heaven for Those in Hell?

We seem to face a dilemma here. On the one hand Scripture assures us that in Heaven “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.” (Rev. 21:4)

If we have someone that we have loved here on earth and that person happens to be in Hell because of their free choice, then won't we feel sorrow when we are in Heaven for the beloved one in Hell?

The answer to this dilemma requires us to distinguish between two ingredients of earthly love and caring, an active and a passive ingredient, that are together in fact but distinguishable in thought.

Say a parent loves a child who has done something harmful to himself. The parent's love speaks two words to the child. The first word of active caring for the other, says, "How could you do this to yourself?" The second word, the word of passivity and vulnerability, says, "How can you do this to me?"

God loves us with the first love only, and the blessed in Heaven will love as God loves. God truly loves and cares, yet He is invulnerable, He is supremely active, not passive. Therefore, we also will love in an active way and feel no sorrow in Heaven for those earthly beloved that have chosen Hell.

Will We Be Free to Sin in Heaven?

The Heavenly question thus lands us squarely into an earthly and present issue concerning the nature of freedom and of morality and may help us to puncture one of modernity's most pervasive and destructive illusions; the association of freedom with rebellion and of obedience with unfreedom.

Are we able to sin in Heaven? If not, it seems we are programmed and determined rather than free. How can we preserve both free will and sinlessness in Heaven? Once again, God is our model and solution: we solve this pseudo problem in the same way God does. He is both free and sinless. How? Let us understand what true freedom is.

We come to understand freedom in various ways; (1) political freedom, freedom from tyranny and oppression (2) physical power, the ability to act (3) spiritual power, the ability to choose (free will). Of course we will have all three in Heaven, but why won't we be able to sin, since we will have free will?

Because we will also have a fourth freedom, the most important one of them all; freedom from sin, from what makes us not ourselves. We will be free to be the true selves God designed us to be, free to be determined by God.

Our free will means that our present is determined by our future rather than by our past. We are true only when we conform to God's knowledge of us. God's artistic plan for our identity. Since our highest freedom means freedom to be ourselves, we are most free when we are most obedient to God's will, which expresses His idea of us. Thus freedom and obedience coincide. To obey God is to be free in the most radical sense: free to be me, free from inauthenticity, free from false being, free from the alien within.

The answer to our question, then, is that "freedom to sin" is a self-contradictory concept. Sin is inauthenticity and freedom is authenticity; sin is our false self and freedom is our true self. Sin is part of Hell and freedom is part of Heaven.

What Will We Do in Heaven?

This is probably the first question most people ask about Heaven. Richard Purtill in his book "Thinking about Religion" postulates three human tasks in Heaven, in this order: (1) understanding our earthly life "by Godlight", (2) sharing all other human lives, and (3) exploration into God.

First we review our past life with divine understanding and appreciation of every single experience, good and evil: we milk all our meeting dry. Then we do the same to others' lives from within. We know them more intimately and completely than we could ever know our most intimate friend on earth because we share God's knowledge of each one. When these two preliminary lessons are complete – when we know, love, understand, and appreciate completely by inner experience everything we and everyone else have ever

experienced – only then we are spiritually mature enough to begin the endless and endlessly fascinating task of exploring, learning, and loving the facets of infinity, the inexhaustible nature of God.

The idea is not new, for it corresponds to three traditional doctrines: Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and the Beatific Vision. But each is given new life by being related to the others in sequence.

The reason we need Heaven in the first place is to complete ourselves and the task we began on earth. No one dies finished. There is never enough time to do and to be all that we can, even all we do our lives are incomplete in all three of their relationships: (1) ourselves, (2) others, and (3) God.

It seems necessary to take them in this order. For we must first know ourselves before we can even know who it is that knows others; and only after purgatorial purification of our attitudes are we mature enough to understand others adequately. And we must learn to love the human images in ourselves and others before we can love their divine Model (God). “For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20)

Will There Be Time in Heaven?

Clock time (*chronos* in Greek) is not the only kind of time. We live in *Kairos*; lived time, or life-time. *Kairos* is time for something, time relative to human purpose. There is never enough time for anything, enough *kairos*, because *kairos* is bounded by *chronos* here on earth. But not in Heaven. After death there will be all the time in the world – more than all the time in the world – to learn, to savor, to sink totally into the meaning of everything.

At the moment of death, according to very widespread testimony, your whole lifetime often flashes before you in vivid detail, in perfect order, and in a single instant. All your *kairos* does not take a single minute of *chronos*, for the boundary, the *chronos*-limit, is removed. An infinitely small unit of *chronos* (the instant in which your lifetime flashes by) is in fact enormous. For it is *kairos* measured not by *chronos* but by eternity. Here is unlimited presence; no waiting, no boredom, no not-yet future or no-longer past.

The Problem of Earthly Injustice Solved in Heaven?

What about the unjust distribution of pleasures and pains, opportunities and rewards on earth? In Heaven, each of us will experience everything through the Communion of Saints. Heaven thus preserves radical equality – kings and slaves enter into each other’s lives -- and individual differences. The sharing of lives in Heaven would also deal with the injustice of premature deaths, especially those of children – an infinitely harder problem than death in general. Those children could receive in Heaven all the earthly experiences of growing in love and learning that they were denied on earth, through the sharing of lives in the Communion of Saints. God is an equal opportunity employer, and he outfoxes the Devil’s invention of death; no one is denied earthly learning, but some postpone it, until Heaven.

Something similar may be true of all individuals, groups, or races who had been unjustly deprived of good things on earth. Not only will they be given compensation in Heaven, but those very earthly goods denied them will be given to them in heaven, perhaps from the very hands of their earthly persecutors.