

The Quarterly Journal



THE NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

VOL. 39, NO. 4

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2019

EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

If You Build It, They Will Come The Churchcare Marketplace of the Association of Related Churches

by M. Kurt Goedelman

As Jesus and His disciples came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, the Lord took the opportunity to draw from them a declaration and confirmation of their faith. Peter affirmed that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:16). In response, Jesus proclaimed that upon this confession, Jesus would build His church. As Matthew Henry wrote, “Take away the faith and confession of this truth from any particular church, and it ceases to be a part of Christ’s church.”¹ Henry added, “with the admission or denial of which the church either rises or falls.”²

better.” As one advocate for this model stated, “There are actually studies today that show that the most

successful churches are run by guys who have business degrees instead of seminary degrees.”³ Another pastor, who had just returned from a Willow Creek/seeker-sensitive type conference on church growth, told PFO director G. Richard Fisher, “If you can grow and run a McDonalds, you can grow and run a church.” But, as Fisher responded, the problem with that analogy is that the church isn’t in the “business” of selling fast food and people aren’t hamburgers and fries.

Apologist Steven Kozar outlines this phenomenon that has become the norm within evangelicalism: (continues on page 13)



Yet today, the building of Christ’s church seems to be based not on the faith and commitment of a believer, but more upon marketing models and business techniques to produce quick growth. The drive is for “bigger is

Inside this Issue:

- WAS THE PRODIGAL SON JUST THE GREAT PRETENDER? PAGE 2
- MORE MOORE CONTROVERSY PAGE 3
- HEAVEN AND THE ETERNAL STATE OF BELIEVERS PAGE 4

Editorials

WAS THE PRODIGAL SON JUST THE GREAT PRETENDER?

It is amazing what some people find in the Bible. Perhaps it's better stated that it is amazing what people erroneously read *into* the Bible. The Apostle Peter spoke of the untaught and unstable who twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). So much of what is called *studying the Bible* is simply *muddying the Bible* by untaught leaders — people willing but not able.

Take, for example, the time I attended a church's small-group study about the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

Most any Bible student knows the story of the loving, compassionate, and forgiving father. The father no doubt refers to God and His amazing patience, kindness, and concern. He is always ready to forgive the truly repentant (Psalm 51). The Pharisees were amazed that Jesus welcomed sinners (Luke 15:1). The Father would welcome and clean up even those out of a pig pen.

The son in the parable is described as the "younger" son (vv. 12-13). The Greek word used there can be translated "youthful." Commentators estimate that he was in his late teens, perhaps 19, based on the text. The younger son decided to jump the tracks, reject his upbringing, and take his inheritance. He went on to waste his life and throw away his funds on immoral and

godless living. He went to the dogs and ate with the hogs. Those he spent money on abandoned him once he was broke. With nowhere to go and no one to which to turn, he finally woke up, returned home in a helpless, broken state, hoping at least to be a slave on his father's property. But his father saw him out on the road of return and raced to meet him.

And now back to the Bible study. At this point the group leader suggested that the prodigal son was, yet again, calculating to cheat his father. The son would manipulate the father by pretending to be at the end of himself. He would play on the father's sympathy and trick his father with a faked repentance.

This is the first time I had ever heard this novel approach. This suggestion created a pool of ignorance as the fictional narrative of the con artist son was batted around. Some in the group thought it might have some real merit.

This idea of a scheming son does not at all fit the context of the story in any way. The entire context of Luke 15 is parables about lost things being found: a lost sheep (vv. 3-7), a lost coin (vv. 8-10), and a lost son (vv. 11-32). In each parable the lost item is found and restored!

The idea of a manipulative and deceptive son did not originate from the text of the Bible; it was a figment of this group leader's imagination. It was clear that the "leader" did not have a clue about the Jewish setting,

(continues on page 21)

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

P.O. Box 26062 • Saint Louis, Missouri 63136-0062 • (314) 921-9800

Visit PFO's Website at: <http://www.pfo.org>

BOARD of DIRECTORS:

G. Richard Fisher Dillsburg, PA Gary E. Gilley Springfield, IL
M. Kurt Goedelman Saint Louis, MO Keith A. Morse Cape Girardeau, MO

BOARD of REFERENCE:

Dr. Jay E. Adams Enoree, SC Dr. Ron Rhodes Bullard, TX

© 2019 – PFO. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1083-6853. These articles may not be stored on web pages or Internet sites without permission. *The Quarterly Journal* is the newsletter publication of PFO. Published by Personal Freedom Outreach, P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, MO 63136. PFO's *Journal* may also be obtained on CD-ROM or flash drive in Portable Document Format (.PDF) for use with Adobe® Reader® software.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Because of the fluid nature of the Internet, web addresses or links contained in journal articles may have changed and/or may no longer be accessible.

APOLOGIST NORMAN GEISLER DIES

Norman Geisler, one of the foremost Christian apologists during the past 60 years, died July 1 at age 86. As an author, professor, and seminary president, Geisler's impact in evangelicalism was extensive. He was a respected voice who faithfully defended the Word of God and the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.

Geisler was the author, co-author, or editor of more than 125 books, including his *Systematic Theology*, a four-volume set said to be "a magisterial work by a seasoned evangelical statesman." He taught theology and philosophy at the college or graduate level for more than 50 years. From 1970-1992, he held faculty positions at Dallas Theological Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Seminary, and Liberty University.

Geisler, in 1992, co-founded Southern Evangelical Seminary in North Carolina with Ross Rhoads. Geisler was also the co-founder of Veritas Evangelical Seminary (now known as Veritas International University) in California. VES was founded in 2008 with Joseph Holden.

This past April, Geisler announced that due to health reasons he would be resigning his teaching duties at SES. During the seminary's commencement ceremonies held in May, he was named as its president emeritus.

Christianity Today reported that a few days prior to his death, Geisler had been hospitalized "after suffering a blood clot in his brain." He is survived by his wife of 64 years, Barbara Jean.

—MKG

WATCHTOWER BLOGGERS CAN REMAIN ANONYMOUS

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has a long history of aggressively regulating the lives and actions of its followers. However, with the growing use of the Internet, that control has become harder to manage as Jehovah's Witnesses are able to anonymously search for and post information critical of their organization. In May, a ruling by a federal magistrate in San Francisco allows them to continue under a cloak of secrecy.

The court case involved a person identified as "Darkspilver," a lifelong Jehovah's Witness who had been posting information critical of the Watchtower for several years using the Reddit forum, a website which bills itself

as the "front page of the internet." Darkspilver feared that if his (or her) identity was ever revealed, it would lead to excommunication by the sect and shunning by family and friends.

The Watchtower moved forward in an attempt to uncover Darkspilver's identity when the blogger made posts that included an advertisement and a chart from the organization's magazines. The Watchtower claimed those posts violated copyright law and sought a court order for Darkspilver's name to be revealed.

While the court ruling said Darkspilver could remain anonymous, there was a partial victory for the Watchtower when U.S. Magistrate Sallie Kim allowed for the blogger's name to be revealed to the Watchtower's lawyers. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, attorney Alex Moss of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a privacy rights group that represented Darkspilver, said "neither her organization nor her client was happy with Kim's decision to disclose Darkspilver's name to lawyers for the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, along with an order that they keep the name confidential unless the magistrate approves disclosure to anyone else. That's no guarantee of secrecy, Moss said, and they are considering further actions to shield the client's identity. She contended the copyright suit was merely a pretext for unmasking a critic."

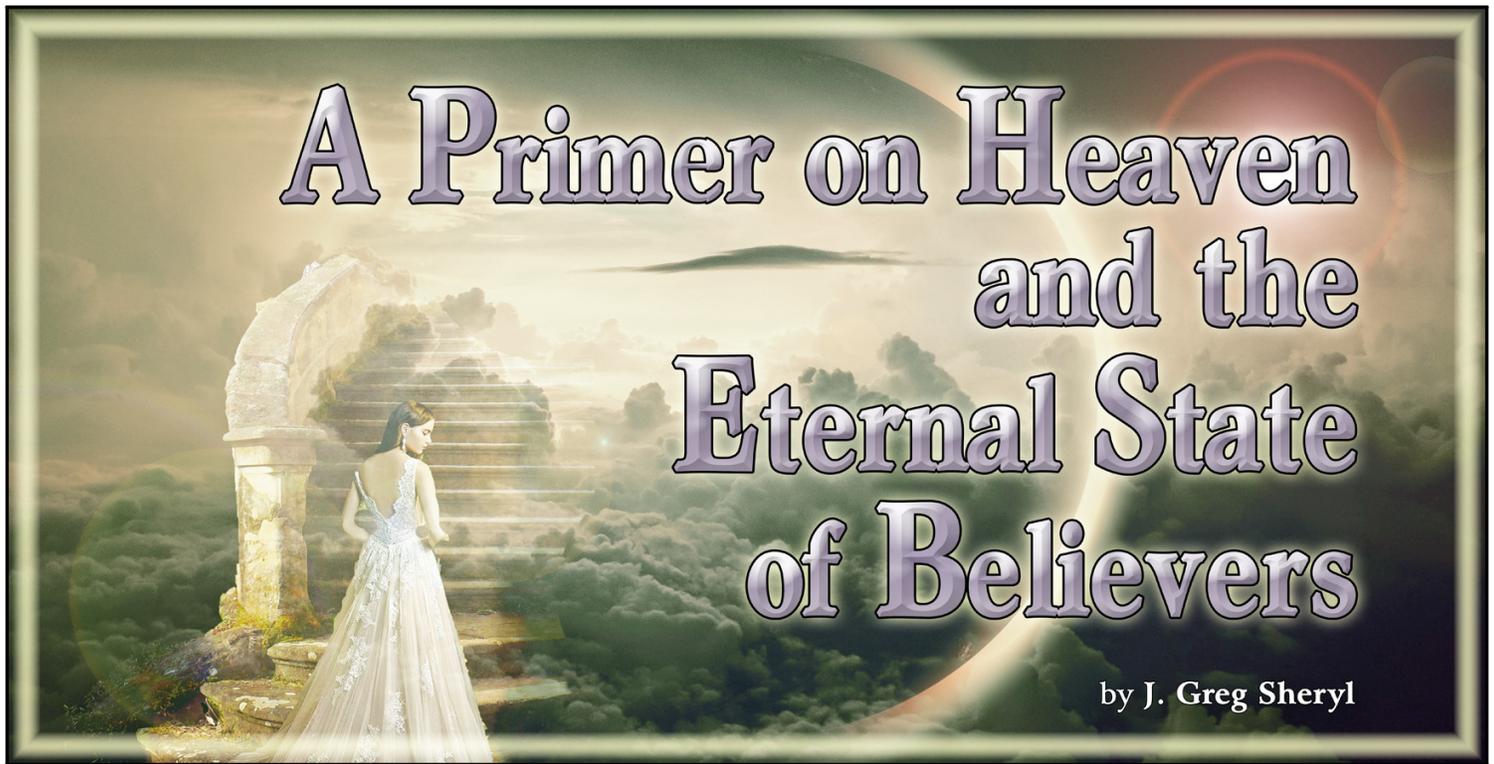
In her ruling, Kim said that the posting of the advertisement and chart "remains subject to 'fair use,' which allows copyrighted materials to be quoted for public purposes such as criticism," but she added that the "Watch Tower's copyright case is not entirely baseless."

—MKG

MORE MOORE CONTROVERSY

Bible teacher and best-selling author Beth Moore continues to be a lightning rod for controversy. For a number of years Moore has attracted the attention of numerous discernment ministries, including Personal Freedom Outreach, for her mysticism and sometimes questionable Bible teaching. Now, due to recent statements she has made on social media, she has increased the number of theologians and Bible teachers who are questioning her opinions, beliefs, and Bible interpretations.

Her latest cause, which has ignited a firestorm, is her
(continues on page 22)



In his book on heaven and hell, longtime Dallas Seminary systematic theology professor Robert P. Lightner wrote:

“A word of warning is in order. I strongly suggest that whenever we write, speak or teach about heaven or hell, we need to be sure not to isolate the one from the other. Both of these realities are taught in Scripture. We must not stress the one without stressing the other one. Remember, both of these are a part of the gospel message we share.”¹

Because the April-June 2019 issue of *The Quarterly Journal* covered the subject of hell, it is fitting to heed this admonition and address the subject of heaven.

Several years ago, Barbara Walters appeared on an ABC News special about heaven,² which featured representatives of various religions — Catholicism, Evangelicalism, Islam, and Tibetan Buddhism — plus an atheist, scientists, and those who had reported near-death experiences. Walters summarized the discussion:

“The vast majority of Americans, almost 90 percent, believe there

is indeed, a heaven. And most think they are headed there. And while they may disagree on what heaven looks like, what they will look like, or what they’ll do there, this seems fairly certain: heaven is a place where you are peaceful and happy.”³

Shortly before this, Walters observed, “But we have learned that there are almost 10,000 distinct and separate religions. And it’s safe to say that most all of them have some theory of life after death.”⁴ This isn’t to say that all religions believe in a heaven, as we’ll see below.

However, religions other than Christianity have their own ideas about heaven. Walters explained, “If you were a Viking who died in battle, fierce goddess warriors known as Valkyries, riding mystical steeds, would carry you to Viking heaven, Valhalla, where you would join an eternal feast.”⁵

Hinduism teaches a perpetual cycle of reincarnation, eventually culminating in “Ultimate salvation of the soul [which] is total absorption into Brahman.”⁶ For a Hindu, “A person is truly saved when he or she becomes one with Brahman.”⁷ A segment of

Buddhism, called Amida Buddhism — also known as Pure Land Buddhism — teaches that “faithful followers of Amida Buddha are reborn in this Western Paradise [Pure Land].”⁸ However, regardless of its length, even if it be for thousands of years, this stay in the Western Paradise is only temporary. They teach that the eventual destination of Pure Land Buddhists is extinction.⁹

Orthodox Judaism teaches, “There will be a physical resurrection. The righteous will exist forever with God in the ‘World to Come.’”¹⁰

And then in Islam, Muslims are told:

“The Quran says, ‘For those who reject Allah, there is a terrible penalty: but for those who believe and work righteous deeds, there is forgiveness and a magnificent reward’ (Surah 35:7).¹¹ This great reward is *janna*, a garden paradise, an eternal place of sensual and spiritual pleasures.”¹²

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

Many individuals claim to have had a near-death experience (NDE). In the

television special mentioned above, Walters reported, "Several surveys have shown that as many as 18 million Americans may have had a near-death experience, making this phenomenon very hard to ignore."¹³

In the last 45 years, beginning with Raymond Moody's book, *Life After Life*,¹⁴ a number of books have been published about this phenomenon, many of them written by or about people who claim to have had a near-death experience.¹⁵ And some of the people who wrote about their experience have even gone on to write sequels.

Pastor Douglas Connelly says, "Lazarus never tells us what it was like to be dead four days and then called forth by the Lord Jesus."¹⁶ Neither does anyone else in the Bible who was raised from the dead, such as Jairus' daughter whom Jesus raised from the dead (Mark 5:22-43); the dead son of the widow of Nain, whom Jesus also raised (Luke 7:11-17); Dorcas, whom Peter raised (Acts 9:36-42); or Eutychus, whom Paul raised (Acts 20:9-12). Connelly well says:

"I certainly do not have a complete explanation for every near-death experience, nor am I questioning the integrity of those who tell their stories. I do believe, however, that we need to be gently skeptical of the accounts we hear [or read about]. Such individual experiences do not prove anything about the after-life."¹⁷

In his book, *The Wonder of Heaven*, Christian author and researcher Ron Rhodes observed:

"[M]any accounts of near-death experiences have clear connections with occultism and must be outright rejected. As well, many of the accounts portray a 'Jesus' saying things that go against the biblical Jesus. These too must be outright rejected."¹⁸

We must always measure NDEs against the plumb line of God's Word. Mark Hitchcock's book, *Visits to Heaven and Back — Are They Real?*¹⁹ does just this.

NUMEROUS CHRISTIAN BOOKS ON HEAVEN

In 1968, Wilbur M. Smith authored a 317-page monograph on heaven.²⁰ In the mid-1970s, an entry by him on "Heaven" in a well-known Bible encyclopedia observed:

"The Biblical doctrine of heaven has never received, from a theological standpoint, the consideration that theologians have given to the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment."²¹

However, since that time, there has been no shortage of Christian books on the subject. For instance, Joni Eareckson Tada wrote the book *Heaven: Your Real Home*.²² Probably the best-known and lengthiest recent treatment of the subject is Randy Alcorn's 530-page comprehensive study titled *Heaven*.²³

Many other Christian authors and teachers have written books on heaven in recent years, including David Jeremiah, Robert Jeffress, John MacArthur, Ron Rhodes, Mark Hitchcock, Erwin Lutzer, Tony Evans, Paul Enns, Douglas Connelly, Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., and Derek Thomas.

These books can clarify the Bible's teaching on this topic. Of course, no book except the Bible is completely authoritative on the subject. Therefore, no book is more important regarding this topic, because the Bible alone gives us the information that God desired to reveal to us about heaven.

HEAVEN IN THE BIBLE: LESS INFORMATION THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

In the New King James Version of the Bible, the words "heaven" or "heaven's" occur 533 times,²⁴ the word "heavens" occurs 171 times,²⁵ and the word "heavenly" occurs 24 times.²⁶ In the New American Standard Bible, the word "heaven" occurs 457 times²⁷ (the word "heaven's" never occurs in the NASB), the word "heavens" occurs 184 times,²⁸ and the word "heavenly" occurs 30 times.²⁹ John MacArthur notes that "The En-

glish Standard Version of the Bible employs the word *heaven* 493 times."³⁰

The statistics above can mislead the reader into thinking that these abundant uses of the words "heaven," "heavens," and "heavenly" in the Bible indicate that the Bible provides comprehensive information about heaven. However, this isn't the case. Those seeking thorough and exhaustive information about heaven from the Bible will be frustrated.³¹ There are several reasons as to how and why so many references to heaven can yield such partial information.

For one thing, not all the Scriptures about heaven yield *new* information that isn't also stated elsewhere in the Bible. For instance, that God created the heavens and the earth or that God's dwelling is in heaven.

The *Baker Illustrated Study Bible* calls heaven:

"The present abode of God ... The ancient Jews distinguished three different heavens. The first heaven was the atmospheric heavens of the clouds and where the birds fly — the sky (Gn 1:8, 20). The second heaven was the celestial heavens of the sun, the moon, and the stars. The third heaven was the present home of God and the angels. Paul builds on this understanding of a third heaven in 2 Co 12:2-4. This idea of multiple heavens also shows itself in how the Jews normally spoke of 'heavens' in the plural (Gn 1:1), while most other ancient cultures spoke of 'heaven' in the singular."³²

One writer noted, "Before the Christian era, the Jews divided the heavens into seven different strata, a notion which has no basis in the Scriptures."³³ Perhaps this was the origin of the term, "seventh heaven," to describe a state of supreme happiness.

What the note above tells us about there being three different uses of the word "heaven" in the Bible is a second reason why all those hundreds of references in the Bible to heaven don't give us as much information as we would wish about the third heaven — God's dwelling place, be-

cause not all of the references to heaven in the Bible are about that heaven that is God's dwelling place. It is sometimes difficult to tell if God's heaven is included in some of the Bible's references to heaven or heavens. For instance, the Bible clearly tells us that, "But the heavens and the earth ... are reserved for fire" (2 Peter 3:7). And:

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved" (2 Peter 3:10-11a).

"... the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat" (2 Peter 3:12b).

And Jesus Himself said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

The Bible also says, "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13; cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22-24).

And in Revelation, John tells us, "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Revelation 21:1a).

So, we see that the present heavens and earth are going to be destroyed and that there will be new heavens and a new earth. Whether God's heaven will be destroyed is another matter. Ron Rhodes, for example, believes that the heavens that will be destroyed do not include God's abode:

"Scripture reveals that the only heavens that have been negatively affected by humankind's fall are the first and second heavens. The entire physical universe is running down and decaying. The third heaven — God's perfect and glorious dwelling place — remains untouched

by human sin. It needs no renewal. This heaven subsists in moral and physical perfection and undergoes no change."³⁴

As Rhodes also points out, Christians also differ on whether God's fire will *annihilate* the present heavens and earth or whether it will merely *cleanse* them.³⁵

One biblical scholar states:

"Of the hundreds of occurrences of the word *heaven* in the [English] Bible, practically all are [translations] of just two words — the [Hebrew] word *shamayim* and the [Greek] word *ouranos*.³⁶ The [Hebrew] word means literally, 'the heights,' and the [Greek] word has a similar meaning, 'that which is raised up,' and as an [English] word its primary meaning is generally 'that which is above,' that is, above earth and above man."³⁷

Another source states that in the New Testament the Greek word for heaven, "*ouranos* occurs most frequently in Matthew (82x) and Revelation (52x)."³⁸ However, at times, Jews used the word "heaven" instead of saying "God." Thus, of the 32 times that the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is used in Matthew's Gospel — the only book in the Bible that uses this phrase — it appears to mean "the kingdom of God,"³⁹ a term which is used elsewhere in the New Testament. If this is correct, it reduces the number of significant uses of the word "heaven" in Matthew's Gospel. There are also other places in the Bible where the word "heaven" is used in place of the word "God." So, this is a third reason why the hundreds of references to heaven in the Bible do not equal as much information about it as the number of references might suggest.

A fourth reason that the many biblical references to heaven may fail to quench our thirst for knowledge is that a number of those that do speak of God's heaven do not say what believers will be doing there.

Although the many references to heaven don't tell us about it as might be supposed from that fact, a counter-

balancing truth is that there are other words and passages in the Bible that refer to heaven without using the word. For instance, some passages simply speak of God's habitation (e.g., Psalm 68:5; Jeremiah 25:30; Zechariah 2:13) and there are some throne room scenes in the Bible that are set in heaven, but don't use the word "heaven" (e.g., Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Isaiah 6:1-13).

The book of Psalms is one source of information about heaven. Exodus 24:9-11, 1 Kings 22:19-23, Daniel 7, Revelation 4-5, and other throne room scenes add to the picture.

Perhaps the most complete description of what many people think of as heaven — the new heaven and the new earth — is contained in its last two chapters of John's Revelation.

Everyone seems to know that, in our eternal dwelling place, the streets will be made of gold (see Revelation 21:21). However, the city itself will also be pure gold (see v. 18). Although John gives a physical description of the city, some believe that at least certain aspects of the description are symbolic, not literal. And questions also have been raised as to whether the city there described is a literal city.

Nevertheless, some of the most important and precious verses concerning the place where Christians will be for eternity are these:

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away'" (Revelation 21:3-4, NASB).

"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:3-4).

We know that there won't be marriage in heaven, because Jesus said, "in the resurrection [people] neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). It appears that faith, hope, and love will endure for eternity because the Bible says, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Although the material quoted below refers to the eternal dwelling place of believers as "heaven," rather than referring to it more accurately as "the new earth," it succinctly notes some things, most of which are evidently derived from the description of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21-22:

"What is most notable about heaven is what is absent from it as well as what is present in it. Things that will be absent include: (1) tears, (2) sorrow, (3) death, (4) pain, (5) darkness, (6) ungodly people, (7) sin, (8) temples, (9) the sun or moon, and (10) the curse from Adam's sin (see Genesis 3:14-19). What will be present in heaven includes: (1) the saints, (2) the river of the water of life, (3) healing fruit, (4) the Lamb of God, (5) worship, (6) the wedding feast of the Lamb and His bride, (7) the unveiled face of God, and (8) the Sun of Righteousness. Heaven is where Christ is. It is the eternal bliss of communion with the God-man."⁴⁰

The Bible doesn't speak directly to many of the questions that people have about the eternal state, such as: Will we recognize one another there? Where will infants and small children go when they die? Will our pets be there? What age will we be or appear as there? Will the eternal state be boring? How will we be able to rejoice in eternity if we know that some people that we love are in hell? What will our daily lives in eternity look like?

Although the Bible doesn't seem to give direct answers to some of these things, answers to at least some of these questions can be deduced from

things the Bible *does* tell us. Some other things can be reasonably supposed, yet still other things are simply not known to us on this side of eternity.

WHY BIBLICAL INFORMATION ABOUT HEAVEN IS SO PARTIAL

We can suggest some reasons why God didn't give us more information than He did about heaven. First, if He had given us more detail about what awaits us there, it's possible that some would commit suicide to get there as soon as possible, rather than enduring the conditions we daily experience here on our fallen earth. In line with this, we're reminded of certain Muslim suicide bombers, who believe that by becoming a martyr because of their acts of terrorism, they will be rewarded in the afterlife with many virgins and other sensual pleasures.

Second, the Bible doesn't tell us everything we might wish to know about everything. It does tell us what God wished to reveal to us, and, while we are called to be heavenly minded (Colossians 3:1-3) — there are also things that God wants us to do during our present lives. And, had He revealed to us more about heaven than He has, we might become so preoccupied with heaven that we wouldn't accomplish what He intends for us to fulfill while we are living this life.

What God has revealed to us may seem frustratingly incomplete. However, we can trust that He has revealed — or enabled us to reasonably deduce from what He *has* revealed to us — what we need to know about it for this present life. We must trust Him for what we don't yet know about it (see Deuteronomy 29:29).

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BELIEVER AFTER THEY DIE?

The Bible is clear that after the believer dies, the soul or spirit⁴¹ immediately goes to be with the Lord. The believer's body remains separated from the spirit until the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-58), at which time the believer's resurrected and glori-

fied body and their spirit — or soul — will be reunited.

For instance, we recall the Lord's response to the thief on the cross, "And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:43).

There are only two other references to Paradise in the Bible: 2 Corinthians 12:4 (where the word "Paradise" is used as a parallel for "the third heaven" in verse 2), and Revelation 2:7, where we are told that, "the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

Paul told the Philippian:

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ... [I have] a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Philippians 1:21, 23b).

In this passage, Paul clearly delineates two alternatives: Either he lives on in the flesh, or he dies. He describes the alternative as, "to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."

Elsewhere, Paul tells the Corinthians:

"So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ... We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6, 8).

Thus, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Because Jesus is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father (Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12), it is reasonable to believe that, at death, Christians go to heaven. Recall that, just prior to being stoned, Stephen saw Jesus *in heaven*, standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56) and that, as he was dying, Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (v. 59).

A VOICE OF DISSENT

One contemporary biblical scholar who does not agree with the view that believers go straight to heaven is Douglas Jacoby. Jacoby's views on

heaven and hell differ at various points with much contemporary Christian teaching on heaven, hell, and the intermediate state between death and the resurrection.⁴² Although Jacoby claims that only the Bible is authoritative,⁴³ he seems to have interpreted Scripture through the grid of early church thought rather than judging early church thought by what Scripture says.

Elsewhere in his book, Jacoby appears to teach salvation by works — and even defends doing so. Again, he appeals to the early church to buttress his alarming view (see Galatians 1:6-9). He says, “The early church saw no contradiction between justification by faith and justification by works, for they are two sides of the same coin. We should strive for the same maturity, the same heart.”⁴⁴

Jacoby may be thinking of James 2, where it says that there is a need for works corresponding to one’s professed faith and where James says, “faith without works is dead” (vv. 20, 26). If that is what Jacoby is saying — and the larger context surrounding the above quotation raises questions about that — he should have qualified his remarks to indicate that while works will be present where there is true faith, it is faith *alone* that saves, *not* faith plus works.

THE AFTERLIFE BODY OF BELIEVERS

At the resurrection, believers will receive their eternal, glorified body. However, some have advanced the notion that believers will have some sort of intermediate body between death and the resurrection. Whether or not believers will have an intermediate body between their death and the resurrection is up for debate. However, it need not concern us here.

The permanent body that believers will receive at the resurrection will be imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42, NASB), glorious (v. 43), powerful (v. 43), spiritual (v. 44),⁴⁵ heavenly (vv. 48-49), and immortal (vv. 53-54).

Those who have not trusted Christ as Savior will go to Hades after death and before the resurrection (Luke

16:19-31). At the time of Christ’s death, it appears from some Scriptures that Christ *may* have translated to heaven the souls/spirits of the righteous dead who were in Hades prior to His death (Luke 23:43; Ephesians 4:8-10). However, with such slender scriptural support, Bible scholars disagree on whether or not these passages refer to Christ leading to heaven the souls of the righteous who were in Hades prior to His death.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, what Scripture does seem clear about is that since the time of Christ’s death and resurrection, at death believers go immediately to be with Christ and unbelievers still suffer torment in Hades until the resurrection of the dead.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT AND THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

Throughout the Bible, God is revealed as a righteous judge (Genesis 18:25; Psalm 7:11; 9:8; 50:6; 96:13; Acts 17:31).

After they are resurrected, both believers and unbelievers will be judged (Hebrew 9:27). Those who have not accepted Christ as Savior will be judged according to their works and consigned to hell (Matthew 25:41-46; Revelation 20:11-15). Those who have trusted Christ as Savior will not partake of this judgment of condemnation (John 5:24; Romans 8:1-2, NASB; 1 Corinthians 11:32). Nevertheless, believers will also be judged according to their works, not to decide their eternal destiny, but to determine what, if any, rewards they will receive from the Lord (Psalm 62:12; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Jeremiah 17:10; Acts 24:15-16; Romans 14:10-13; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Revelation 22:12).

In addition to the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment, there will be the marriage of the Lamb (Matthew 22:1-14; Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7, 9).

WHERE DOES THE BELIEVER SPEND ETERNITY AFTER THE RESURRECTION?

The Bible teaches that Christians go to be with Christ — likely in heaven — as soon as their life on earth ends.

However, after the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15), when the glorified, resurrected bodies and the souls of the dead are again united, and after the destruction or replacement of the current heaven and earth occurs (Revelation 21:1), where do the believers reside?

From Revelation 21-22, it appears that believers forever reside on the new earth in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12; Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-24). While agreeing that believers will reside for eternity on the new earth, Kenneth Boa and Robert Bowman disagree that the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21-22 is a literal city.⁴⁷ They point out:

“John says that he saw the New Jerusalem ‘coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’ (Rev. 21:2). In verse 9 an angel tells John, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ ... the Lamb is Jesus Christ ([Rev.] 5:6) ... [and] the church ... is the bride or wife of the Lamb ([Rev.] 19:7-8; cf. 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27). *Therefore, the New Jerusalem is a symbol for the redeemed in their future glory, not a description of a literal location.*”⁴⁸

So, while they rightly point out that the church is the bride of Christ and that Revelation seems to identify the wife of the Lamb with the city Jerusalem described in Revelation 21-22, they appear to see no alternative other than to see the city Jerusalem, as “a symbol for the redeemed in their future glory,” rather than as “a description of a literal location.”

However, in this same section, the word “city” is used to describe New Jerusalem 12 times. Additionally, the book of Hebrews speaks four times of a city that God has prepared for the redeemed: Hebrews 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14. And in one of these references it says, “you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22).

Boa and Bowman may be right. Or, perhaps in some way both things are

true: Jerusalem is *both* the wife of the Lamb *and* a city which the saints inhabit.

The following two quotations from Randy Alcorn's book, *Heaven*, give a fitting summary:

"[T]he Heaven we will go to when we die, the present Heaven, is a temporary dwelling place, a stop along the way to our final destination: the New Earth."⁴⁹

"The answer to the question, Will we live in Heaven forever? depends on what we mean by Heaven. Will we be with the Lord forever? Absolutely. Will we always be with him in exactly the same place that Heaven is now? No. In the present Heaven, we'll be in Christ's presence, and we'll be joyful, but we'll be looking forward to our bodily resurrection and permanent relocation to the New Earth."⁵⁰

As the Bible says, "we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

So, after the new heavens and earth are revealed, we will live on the new earth and (perhaps) live in a city called the New Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12; 21:2; cf. Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT HEAVEN

Space only allows us to briefly consider a few questions. Those wishing more information are advised to search the Bible. Other resources include Appendix 1 of Mark Hitchcock's book, *Visits to Heaven and Back — Are They Real?*⁵¹ Hitchcock's earlier work, *55 Answers to Questions About Life After Death*,⁵² Ron Rhodes' book, *What Happens After Life?*,⁵³ or the larger work, *Heaven*,⁵⁴ by Randy Alcorn.

Will we be bored in eternity? This seems to be a common fear. Voice to this fear was given by Mark Twain in a passage from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where Huckleberry is describing the views of the spinster,

Miss Watson, and his reaction to them:

"She said ... *she* was going to live so as to go to the good place. Well, I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it. But I never said so. ... Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together."⁵⁵

Eternity and the eternal state will not be boring. The God Who created many marvelous wonders on this earth is the same God who is Creator of the new heaven and the new earth. Does anyone imagine that the new earth will somehow be *less than* the earth we currently live on, which is beautiful, even though marred by the effects of the Fall?

The Bible says, "In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). And we know that, both immediately after this life, and in eternity, we will be in the Lord's presence.

In the revised and expanded edition of her book on heaven, Joni Eareckson Tada says:

"In the original book, I make the point that heaven isn't so much a Place as it is a Person. But I didn't say nearly enough. Yes, Jesus said, 'I am going there to prepare a place for you' (John 14:2). But it isn't the mansion or celestial condo or quarter acre of heavenly real estate that really matters to me. It's Him. Truly. If He's there — wherever there is — it's heaven. If He's not, then it's not."⁵⁶

And it is likely that one reason that the Bible doesn't tell us more about heaven and life on the new earth, is that words cannot describe it.⁵⁷

Will we recognize one another in heaven? Scripture does not answer this question directly. However, we do know that when Jesus was transfigured before three of His disciples on the mountain (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36), they recognized Moses and Elijah. Also, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31, the rich man saw and recognized both Abraham and Lazarus (Luke 16:23-24). (Although some, who believe that account to be a parable, rather than an actual historical event, might discount this detail.) And when Stephen was being stoned, he recognized Jesus in heaven (Acts 7:55-56).

What age will we appear to be in eternity? This question is somewhat related to the previous one about whether or not we will recognize each other in eternity. It is a question that people have that the Bible doesn't seem to address. Mark Hitchcock, who poses this question, in order to respond to it, admits as much, "The subject of age or appearance of age in heaven is never directly addressed in the Bible, so the answer to this question requires us to speculate based on other information."⁵⁸

In answering this question, he concludes that he believes, "our Lord will give us a body that reflects how we looked in the prime and peak of our earthly life. For those who leave this earth before reaching the optimal age and condition, we can trust that our Lord, who knows everything, will fit them with a perfect body that reflects how they would have appeared at the optimal stage of human life on earth."⁵⁹

Do infants and small children go to heaven? Although Scripture does not directly address this, there are indications in Scripture that infants and small children go to heaven. Ron Rhodes and Randy Alcorn both address this topic in the books referred to by them at the beginning of this section.⁶⁰ Additionally, a short book that Robert Lightner wrote on this topic is very helpful.⁶¹

Both Rhodes and Lightner agree that children are sinners. However,

there are two main issues: moral culpability and the ability to meet the condition for salvation, which is putting one's faith in Jesus as one's Savior. Concerning the first issue, Rhodes states, "On the one hand, infants are born into the world in a state of sin. On the other hand, young infants are *not* portrayed in Scripture as morally culpable beings — not until they reach the age of accountability. But what is the age of accountability? It's not the same for every child. Some children mature faster than others. Some come into an awareness of personal evil and righteousness earlier than others do."⁶² Concerning the second matter, that of putting faith in Christ as one's Savior, Rhodes states:

"It would be a cruel mockery for God to call upon infants to do what they could not do — and to hold them responsible for that. At such a young age, children simply do not have the capacity to exercise saving faith in Christ."⁶³

Later, he states:

"My conclusion is simple and straightforward. Heaven receives those who can't believe. If a child should die before reaching the age of accountability, the benefits of Christ's death are applied to that child at the moment of death, and the child is issued immediately into the presence of God in heaven. This includes preborn babies — that is, babies who die in the womb due to a miscarriage or an abortion."⁶⁴

What will we do in eternity? In their book, *What the Bible Says About Heaven and Eternity?*, authors Thomas Ice and Timothy J. Demy state, "The Bible speaks of at least six activities in heaven: worship, service, authority and administration, fellowship, learning, and rest."⁶⁵ Concerning the last activity listed, there is little scriptural support for this and the main Scripture that Ice and Demy cite as support is Revelation 14:10-13.⁶⁶ In verse 13, we read, "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: "Blessed

are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'"⁶⁷ As for the other five activities:

1. One cannot read the book of Revelation and miss the presence of worship in heaven. It seems only reasonable to believe that, as we are in the presence of our Savior, the Lord Jesus, and as we behold Him (see Revelation 22:4), that we too will join with the heavenly host in worshipping God.

2. As for service, we read that in the holy city "His servants shall serve Him" (Revelation 22:3c).

3. Concerning authority and administration, in Jesus' parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), those servants who were faithful over a few things were made ruler over many things (vv. 21, 23). Likewise, in His similar parable of the minas (Luke 19:11-27), those servants who were faithful were given authority over cities (vv. 17, 19). If these parables refer to rewards in the afterlife — as it seems — then those who were faithful with what the Lord entrusted to them in this life will be rewarded in the afterlife with increased responsibility and administration.

The Bible also says that believers will judge the world (1 Corinthians 6:2) and angels (v. 3). And we also read, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12). In Revelation, concerning the redeemed, we read, "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Revelation 5:10, NASB). Note here, that they will reign *upon the earth*, not in heaven. And, regarding the Lamb's servants, we are told, "And they shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:5c). It also appears that the 12 apostles will sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

4. We will have fellowship with the Lord and with fellow believers from all the ages. The scriptural support for fellowship with others in God's kingdom would include verses such as Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:28-29.

5. As for learning, the Bible says, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12, NASB).

GETTING TO HEAVEN

From a human viewpoint, this is the most important part of the subject of heaven. For, unless a person goes to heaven, everything else is just head knowledge!

Professor Donald Whitney, of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, observed that the prevailing thought is that all it takes to go to heaven is to die:

"Today, the more common belief is justification by death. The way you go to heaven is simply die. If you die, you will go there. The people in the Twin Towers in New York, they're all in heaven now. Why do we believe that? Well, they died. ... And if you don't think that is so, watch the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* or *Time* or *Newsweek* when a famous person dies and on the op-ed page, where they have those little political cartoons ... and they will indicate that almost universal belief that that person is now in heaven because that's where everyone goes when they die because they are all basically good people."⁶⁸

However, contrary to this popular belief, the Bible states that, "There is none righteous, no not one" (Romans 3:10) and "There is none who does good, no, not one" (v. 12c) and "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23). Furthermore, it says, "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Sin results in death — spiritual death — which is separation from God both in this life, and in the hereafter.

Dr. Erwin Lutzer has written:

"One minute after you slip behind the parted curtain, you will either be enjoying a personal welcome from Christ or catching your first glimpse of gloom as

you have never known it. Either way, your future will be irrevocably fixed and eternally unchangeable.”⁶⁹

The Bible is clear: Jesus told Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). And, a few verses later, Jesus repeated, “You must be born again” (v. 7). We must be spiritually reborn to enter heaven.

The Gospel is God’s good news about Jesus. Being born again involves two things: Knowledge of the Gospel message and personally appropriating that message for ourselves. Regarding the content of the Gospel, Paul says:

“Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also” (1 Corinthians 15:1-8, NASB).

It has been stated that these verses are some of the most important in all of Scripture, as they embody the very content of the saving message of the Gospel.

As for personally appropriating the Gospel, John writes, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

Elsewhere, John tells us:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

The Greek word for “believe,” simply means “trust.” We must put our trust in Jesus as our sin-bearer — and in nothing and no one else — for our salvation.

More succinctly, the Bible says:

“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

Jesus stated:

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:37-40).

As the Bible says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31, NASB).

Trust in Jesus as your Savior and you will have an eternal address with the Lord on the new earth!

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23, NASB).

One of the last verses in the Bible gives this gracious invitation:

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

If you have never done so, come to Jesus today and receive His gift of eternal life!

Endnotes:

1. Robert P. Lightner, *Heaven and Hell: A Biblical Guide*. Taos, N.M.: Dispensational Publishing House, Inc., 2017, pg. 57.
2. Barbara Walters, “A Barbara Walters Special: Heaven: Where is it? How do we get there?,” ABC News, 2005.
3. *Ibid.*, timemark: 1:19:14. Walters had made a similar observation near the beginning of the program: “In a recent survey by ABC News, nearly 9 out of 10 Americans said they believe heaven exists. And most assume they’re going there at the end of their lives,” timemark: 2:46.
4. *Ibid.*, timemark: 1:17:00, emphasis in the original.
5. *Ibid.*, timemark: 10:52.
6. J. Isamu Yamamoto, *Hinduism, TM and Hare Krishna*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998, pg. 42. Elsewhere, Yamamoto defines Brahman as “the Universal Soul in pure spirit form” (*ibid.*, pg. 40) and “the ultimate reality; the chief god in the Hindu pantheon” (*ibid.*, pg. 87, s.v., “Brahman”).
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 42.
8. J. Isamu Yamamoto, *Buddhism, Taoism and Other Far Eastern Religions*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998, pg. 50.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 51.
10. Dean C. Halverson, General Editor, *The Compact Guide to World Religions*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996, pg. 126, from the chapter on Judaism, by Richard Robinson, of Jews for Jesus.
11. A “surah” in the Quran is like a chapter in the Bible.
12. Bruce Green in *Christianity, Cults and Religions*. Torrance, Calif.: Rose Publishing, 2008, pg. 63, italic in original.
13. “A Barbara Walters Special: Heaven,” op. cit., timemark: 1:08:38.
14. Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D., *Life After Life*, 25th Anniversary edition. New York: HarperOne, 2001. In this anniversary edition, Melvin Morse, who wrote its Preface, credits Moody with coining the term “near-death experience” to describe the phenomenon (*ibid.*, pg. x; for Moody’s use of the term, see, e.g., pg. 6).
15. In the book by Mark Hitchcock, *Visits to Heaven and Back — Are They Real?* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers,

Inc., 2015, pp. 5-8), he lists 40 books related to NDEs, and calls it, "a brief list" (pg. 5).

16. Douglas Connelly, *After Life: What the Bible Really Says*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995, pg. 36.

17. *Ibid.*, pg. 35.

18. Ron Rhodes, *The Wonder of Heaven*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2009, pg. 242.

19. *Visits to Heaven and Back — Are They Real?*, op. cit. See the back page of this issue of *The Quarterly Journal* for a review of this book. Also regarding NDEs, see J. Greg Sheryl, "Are Near-Death Experiences 'Proof of Heaven'?" *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2014, pp. 4-14.

20. Wilbur M. Smith, *The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1968.

21. W.M. Smith in Merrill C. Tenney and Steven Barabas, editors, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976, vol. 3, pg. 60, s.v., "Heaven."

22. Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven: Your Real Home*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan-PublishingHouse, 1995. Tada has recently expanded and updated this book: Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven: Your Real Home ... From A Higher Perspective*, expanded edition. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2018.

23. Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*. Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004.

24. *The New King James Version Concordance*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992, pg. 472-474.

25. *Ibid.*, pg. 474.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Zondervan NASB Exhaustive Concordance*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan-PublishingHouse, 2000, pp. 511-513.

28. *Ibid.*, pg. 513.

29. *Ibid.*

30. John MacArthur, *The Glory of Heaven: The Truth about Heaven, Angels, and Eternal Life*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2013, pg. 73, italic in original.

31. Bible scholar and theologian Ron Rhodes, who has written three books on the subject of heaven (*Heaven: The Undiscovered Country* [1996], *The Wonder of Heaven* [2009], and *What Happens After Life?* [2014]), disagrees that the Bible has little information about heaven. He writes, "Some people claim we can know little or nothing about what heaven is like. They say Scripture says very little about the topic ... I have a much different view. As a longtime student of the Bible, I think Scripture tells us a great deal about heaven and the afterlife" (Ron Rhodes, *What Happens After Life?* Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2014, pg. 66).

32. *Baker Illustrated Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2018, pg. 10, sidebar on Heaven.

33. Robert G. Rayburn in Charles F.

Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, John Rea, Editors, *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998, pg. 768, s.v., "Heaven."

34. *What Happens After Life?*, op. cit., pg. 59.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-62. Rhodes states, "Theologians call the first view the *replacement view*" (pg. 60, italics in original). He says, "Other theologians counter that such [biblical] phrases could easily apply to the *renewal view*" (pg. 61, italics in original).

36. The name of the planet Uranus comes from this Greek word *ouranos*. (See *The Glory of Heaven*, op. cit., pg. 73.)

37. Smith in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, op. cit., pg. 60, italics in original.

38. William D. Mounce, D. Matthew Smith, Miles V. Van Pelt, Editors, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006, pg. 329, italic in original, s.v. "Heaven(s)."

39. Matthew's Gospel does use the phrase "kingdom of God" a handful of times.

40. R.C. Sproul, General Editor, *The Reformation Study Bible*. Sanford, Fla.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2015, pg. 2330, sidebar on "Heaven."

41. I will use the words "spirit" and "soul" interchangeably in this article to refer to the immaterial part of the person that survives death.

42. See Douglas A. Jacoby, *What's the Truth About Heaven and Hell?* Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2013. For Jacoby's differing views regarding some of the Scripture verses cited above, see pp. 123-130.

43. *Ibid.*, pg. 129, where he states, "The evidence is clear. There was an early Christian consensus [i.e., that believers don't go straight to heaven at death]. The patristic quotations [which I have cited] have no intrinsic authority — for authority we rely only on the word of God — but they illustrate the scriptures, with which they are in harmony." I agree with Jacoby that the patristic quotations he cited have no intrinsic authority. However, in the chapter where he says this, Jacoby uses those early church citations to argue for the way he interprets some of the Scriptures we have cited above rather than evaluating the citations he gave by Scripture.

44. *Ibid.*, pg. 148.

45. The fact that something is called both spiritual *and* physical is biblical. For example, in a Scripture concerning the Israelites in the wilderness under Moses, it says that they, "all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:3-4). The Israelites ate manna from heaven (Exodus 16:4, 31) and they twice

drank water from a rock (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:7-12). Both the manna and the rock were physical, yet spiritual.

46. For more discussion of this point, see J. Greg Sheryl, "The Grave and Beyond: A Biblical Look at What Happens After Death," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2006, pp. 15-16, the section entitled, "There Goes the Neighborhood!"

47. Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Sense and Nonsense About Heaven and Hell*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007, pp. 165-166.

48. *Ibid.*, pg. 165, emphasis added.

49. *Heaven*, op. cit., pg. 43.

50. *Ibid.*, pg. 42.

51. *Visits to Heaven and Back — Are They Real?*, op. cit., Appendix 1: "Answers to Common Questions about Death and Heaven," pp. 171-197.

52. Mark Hitchcock, *55 Answers to Questions About Life After Death*. Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2005.

53. *What Happens After Life?*, op. cit.

54. *Heaven*, op. cit.

55. Samuel L. Clemens, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: The Heritage Press, 1940, pg. 15, italic in original.

56. *Heaven: Your Real Home ... From A Higher Perspective*, expanded edition, op. cit., pg. 16.

57. It's tempting here to cite 1 Corinthians 2:9, "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'" However, the next verse says, "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit" (v. 10a). So, the context seems to indicate that the Spirit has *already* revealed things that belong to believers; although some of those things He *has* revealed may relate to the afterlife.

58. *Visits to Heaven and Back — Are They Real?*, op. cit., pg. 183.

59. *Ibid.*, pg. 184.

60. *What Happens After Life?*, op. cit., pp. 121-128; *Heaven*, op. cit., pp. 354-356.

61. Robert P. Lightner, *Safe in the Arms of Jesus: God's Provision for the Death of Those Who Cannot Believe*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 2000.

62. *What Happens After Life?*, op. cit., pg. 123, italic in original.

63. *Ibid.*, pg. 124.

64. *Ibid.*, pg. 128.

65. Thomas Ice and Timothy J. Demy, *What the Bible Says About Heaven and Eternity*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 2000, pg. 23.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

67. Cf. *ibid.*, pg. 25.

68. Donald Whitney, "Hell Is Real," sermon at Parker Road Baptist Church, Florissant, Mo., April 13, 2008.

69. Erwin W. Lutzer, *One Minute After You Die*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1997, pg. 9.

“The ‘attractional’ church model is so common that it’s practically the norm; most Christians have assumed that it is the only valid way to ‘do church’ nowadays, or they don’t even know that other legitimate options exist. What is it? Simply put, this model of church starts with the idea that ‘normal’ church is unattractive and can’t bring in new people, so exciting new ideas must be implemented in order to get people in the door. Once people show up for the attractive and entertaining aspects, they’ll eventually hear a gospel message and they’ll ‘accept Jesus in their hearts’ (or something to that effect).”⁴

Kozar further says that “leadership” is a preoccupation within this church model. He explains:

“One of the most striking characteristics of the Attractive, Seeker-Friendly church is the constant emphasis on LEADERSHIP. This is not surprising, since much of the philosophy behind this church model is *not* based on the Bible — it’s based on business principles.”⁵

Along this line, one of the major players in the church planting business is an organization called the Association of Related Churches (ARC). According to recent statistics provided by the group, ARC has launched 843 churches.⁶ They also claim that in 2018 the association invested \$8 million in church planting and that the largest average attendance on a launch day for a new church was 315 people.⁷

THE HISTORY OF ARC

ARC was launched at a meeting of six pastors in 2000. One pastor, Greg Surratt, had told his church that “he felt they were supposed to plant 2000 churches.”⁸ Surratt became president of ARC in 2012 following the death of the organization’s first president, Billy Hornsby, in 2011. A driving force in

organizing ARC was Hornsby’s fascination of Surratt’s “‘live-giving’ weekend services that were attracting large numbers of un-churched people,” and which were described as “Spirit filled, non-spooky service[s].”⁹ Hornsby saw this as “a model to be emulated” and “felt he could put ‘feet’ to Greg’s vision of planting 2000 churches.”¹⁰

In that first meeting two pastors, Rick Bezet and Chris Hodges, wanted to establish churches, one in Little Rock, the other in Birmingham. The trouble was that they needed money and “a workable model.” So, according to ARC:

“Greg offered both guys \$25,000 to fund their plants and any monthly support needed to meet budget for their first year — a safety net that bolstered their confidence in planting. Going forward, Greg asked Rick and Chris to invest that same amount back into other church planters. Rick and Chris went on to plant their churches on the same day — February 4, 2001. Their successful launches and subsequent growth became the model for future ARC church plants.”¹¹

In the very early years, ARC planted only a few churches annually, but in “2006, ARC planted 9 churches, in 2007 there were 16 more, 2008 saw 25, and by 2009, ARC was averaging around 50 new plants a year. With a more developed structure, ARC is now training and coaching hundreds of church planters each year.”¹²

In March 2011, following a two-year battle with cancer, Hornsby died at age 61. In addition to his role as pastor and church-plant facilitator, he wrote such books as *The Cell-Driven Church*, *Success for the Second in Command*, and *The Attractional Church*. In April 2012, a year following his death, the ARC board selected Surratt to serve as its second president.

Like the previous models of Bill Hybels (Willow Creek Community Church) and Rick Warren (Saddleback Church), ARC sees the church as an evangelistic center with a focus on

attracting non-believers. To keep the numbers high and on the increase in a postmodern culture, the target audience — nonbelievers — must be kept happy and satisfied. And this often comes at the expense of sound doctrine and preaching. Forgiveness of sin through repentance is minimized or eliminated and the message is one that is “relevant” and addresses the needs of people by helping them navigate through the issues of life to be successful and in accomplishing the visions and dreams that drive them forward.

As one newspaper report stated, “Bars aren’t the only venue downtown where patrons can find dim lights, loud music and 20-somethings swaying rhythmically;” visit this new brand of churches “on any given Sunday morning and you likely will see a similar scene.”¹³ Jay Henderson, former pastor of a United Methodist Church in Kansas that was in decline and which sits in the shadow of several market-driven churches, said he wanted “to learn about the style these churches are using to attract young adults.”¹⁴ Henderson indicated that “a more progressive theology is necessary to keep young adults in the church for the long haul.”¹⁵ He added:

“Young adults are going to say, ‘I have gay friends and gay family. It doesn’t seem relevant to me, or possible for me, to be a part of a group that says they are going to hell,’ ... Ultimately, they are not really being relevant to where young people are today.”¹⁶

A LOW VIEW OF SOUND MINISTERIAL CHARACTER

As doctrine often takes a back seat to numbers, so, too, the standards for personal integrity and character of the leaders of ARC are likewise diminished. This was demonstrated in the life of ARC’s executive director Dino Rizzo. Rizzo was one of the six pastors who founded the organization. According to *Charisma* magazine:

“As a 23-year-old Dino worked under Baton Rouge icon Jimmy

Swaggart as a youth pastor and ran the televangelist's \$300,000-a-month, 30-vehicle bus ministry. He'd been saved in a Word-Faith church in Myrtle Beach, S.C., and at Swaggart's Bible college."¹⁷

Neither *Charisma* nor (apparently) Rizzo offered an explanation for the claim of two conversion experiences. Nevertheless, it was at the Bible college where Rizzo met his wife, DeLynn. They were married in 1988 and began serving as student pastors. Five years later, and after declining several opportunities to serve as youth pastors at "some of the nation's largest churches," the couple agreed to help revive a dying church in Baton Rouge. At his inaugural service as pastor, Rizzo said there were only 12 people present. But within four months, the church, then known as Trinity Christian Center, grew to over 70 people. The church received support from some prominent sources. *Charisma* reported:

"Their first offering was a \$400 check written in the living room of Lakewood Church founding pastor John Osteen, who wanted to be the first to sow into their ministry after listening to Dino's plans to reach the poor and hurting. ... Other ministries, such as Joyce Meyer Ministries, came alongside the church with additional resources to reach the poor."¹⁸

From those humble beginnings, Trinity Christian Center, which was later renamed Healing Place Church, grew into what is seen as nothing less than a modern church success story, expanding to over 10,000 attendees at numerous campuses in Louisiana, Texas, and outside the United States. In 2012, its Baton Rouge facility boasted "a stunning \$44 million main campus with a state-of-the-art media center and a community sports complex open year-round to the public."¹⁹

The social gospel was Rizzo's ticket to prominence. He coined the term "Servolution" and developed a multimedia curriculum to enable other churches "to create and spur on a

culture of serving for the cause of Christ!" The curriculum was advertised as:

"A Servolution is not an event, it's a culture. Infusing it into the DNA of your church will change the way you think about outreach and revolutionize the way your church reaches people. The Servolution culture actively pursues the lost, forgotten and poor to show them the love of God. In Servolution, Pastor Dino Rizzo shares the story of serving and how it has become an integral factor in the life of Healing Place Church and each of it's [sic] people."²⁰

And *Charisma* makes clear, "That 'Servolution' lifestyle goes beyond one-time outreaches and trendy 'social justice' efforts."²¹ While it is presented as providing information on growing a church, the underlying premise of Servolution never fully addresses the true mission of the church. There is no Gospel, no repentance, no sin, and/or no depravity of man. Its focus is about meeting needs and giving away free merchandise so those in the community will feel obligated to attend church. While Rizzo would dispute that charge by claiming, "The goal of our servolution has always been to demonstrate the love of Jesus, not to make people feel like they now owed it to us to come to a service."²² Nevertheless, that's what the end result will often be. In one example he cites, Rizzo says that one summer his church "gave away two hundred and fifty thousand bottles of Snapple and over forty tons of bananas."²³ Rizzo also suggests:

"We were learning that whenever you find something that meets a need *and* makes people excited about coming to church, it is probably worth doing."²⁴

His book comes with the endorsements of Promise Keeper founder Bill McCartney, Hillsong Church pastor Brian Houston, and mystic author Priscilla Shirer.

In 2011, the social gospel aspect of Rizzo's ministry advanced further as he co-founded and served as presi-

dent of Compassion Coalition, an "international organization that brings together more than 50 churches and ministries, including Joyce Meyer Ministries, Assemblies of God, Convoy of Hope, and other ministries."²⁵ Rizzo asserts:

"Social justice is a hot topic right now in our culture; it's becoming a cool thing to talk about in Hollywood and in the music world, and that's fine with me. But I'd really like to see the church lead the way in social-justice efforts."²⁶

Yet in the midst of Rizzo's star rising — with all his fame and accomplishments — sin was crouching at his door. At the very same time he was being enthusiastically praised, including being featured on the July 2012 cover of *Charisma* magazine, he began a sabbatical and then two months later he resigned as pastor of Healing Place Church. In a subsequent story a year later, the magazine reported:

"Rizzo stepped away from the pulpit at Healing Place Church in Baton Rouge, La., last summer, saying he had not felt like himself spiritually, physically or emotionally for several months. At that time, he also said that his physically exhausted, spiritually depleted state had affected his decision-making, his family life and his ability to lead effectively. Although it was unclear why Rizzo chose to resign at that time, he did ask for forgiveness from those he disappointed as a pastor. He told the congregation that his wife and three kids were on the path to 'healing and hope.'"²⁷

When Rizzo announced that he and his wife were resigning, his comments were vague, saying, "We feel it is best that we step down as pastors today" and that they felt that God was moving them into "a new season" of their lives.²⁸ Rizzo's congregation was simply told to "accept" and "trust":

"Acknowledging the lack of clarity provided by the Rizzos as to why they were stepping down,

Chris Hodges, an overseer of Healing Place and pastor of Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Ala., asked the congregation to just accept that the seven overseers of the church know the whole situation. 'We're going to take care of them and we're going to take care of you. Trust me,' said Hodges during Sunday's service."²⁹

One church member stated, "There will be tons of rumors circulating, but it's none of anybody's business."³⁰ While much of what was reported about Rizzo's departure was ambiguous at best, a website that featured the testimonials of former cult members provided some of the details that were being sidestepped:

"However, rumors have [been] circulating since late July [2012] on Louisiana message boards that Rizzo was having an affair with a 25 year old church intern. What's worse is, the church board allegedly paid the young woman to move back to her home state to cover the incident up, which was not originally Louisiana, according to sources."³¹

From those who supported Rizzo, his moral failure was sanitized with descriptions such as he was "involved in the early stages of a brief but inappropriate friendship with another woman."³² And it seems as though before the dust had even settled, Rizzo was back being labeled by a fellow ARC board member as "amazing inspiration to me and to people all over the world."³³ *Charisma* magazine added the following details:

"In July [2013], the ARC board of directors met for our annual board meeting and — based on the recommendation of the overseers — formally installed Dino back into this season of ministry,' Surratt says. 'We laid hands on him and released him to fulfill the call of God on his life again. We are looking forward to the value he will bring to ARC, providing care and relationship to fellow pastors as we move forward together in our goal of

seeing life-giving churches planted and nourished in every community."³⁴

And it appears that Rizzo's affair did little in the way of suppressing his ministry. His biographical description on the ARC website states:

"Dino also serves on the Executive Team and is Outreach and Missions Pastor for Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Alabama, one of the largest and most influential churches in the United States, led by planter and Senior Pastor Chris Hodges. In these roles, Dino teaches in weekend worship services throughout the year and leads the church to recognize the needs and serve the community."³⁵

Upon his reinstatement in 2013, Rizzo received cheering and clapping from the congregation of the Highlands church.

The issue of Rizzo's moral lapse is troubling on at least two accounts. First was the way it was downplayed, along with an "it's none of anybody's business" rationalization. Second was his fast-track return to the pulpit, after only a year exile. Moreover, Rizzo's ARC and Healing Place Church colleagues set standards for his return and evidently thought the time was right:

"Hodges explained that Rizzo went through a 31-point restoration plan devised by him and the overseers of the Healing Place Church. The plan required counseling for both Rizzo and his wife, Delynn."³⁶

Following his return, Rizzo also served for a year under Hodges' supervision as a part of that plan. In addition to his outreach and missions pastoral ministry, his role at ARC in a sense places him in a position where he is a pastor to pastors, developing church-growth strategies and teaching at the organization's conferences.

There is a great debate among Christians about the restoration of a morally fallen pastor. From immediate reinstatement to permanent disqualification, the evangelical approach

has varied greatly. Yet in the church today, restoration to a pastoral office has become the prevalent pattern. John Armstrong, citing a *Leadership* magazine article in which four ministers responded to the issue of restoration, noted that "three of the four participants believed men fundamentally can and should be restored to pastoral ministry if at all possible."³⁷ However, Armstrong's view is more in line with the minority on this one.

The past voices from the church — that is men such as the Church Fathers, along with the Reformers and Puritans — say "No" to the restoration of a pastor who sinned sexually. Armstrong tells us:

"What emerges plainly is this: They would tolerate no deviation from moral purity and certainly would not allow a pastor to continue in office who had fallen sexually. Indeed, some churches and fathers would not even allow such a man to ever be a member of the church again, much less re-enter the pastoral office."³⁸

Armstrong aligns himself with these men and argues effectively the case for pastoral removal. In biblically presenting his view and responding to the arguments of those who favor restoring a sexually fallen pastor, he summarizes by saying:

"All sin is deceitful and potentially destructive of pastoral ministry. What I am arguing for is this: sexual sin is especially able to deceive, to harden the heart and to bring untold harm and destruction to those touched by it (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20); thus it destroys pastoral leadership whenever it occurs. It is a fire of destruction that burns scores of people when it occurs in the life of one chosen to shepherd the flock of Christ. It nurtures the cynicism of the world, since the fallen pastor can no longer have a 'good reputation with those outside,' and it destroys trust within the church by making the man no longer 'above reproach' or 'blameless.'"³⁹

Beyond addressing the matter of Rizzo's return to the pulpit, Armstrong's comments also speak firmly to the concern about how Rizzo's sin, while glossed over to his congregation and others, has strong consequences. Armstrong further observes that "the church would be much stronger without its fallen leaders back in position of authority. Indeed, the church suffers precisely because she has compromised her moral integrity. This invites the discipline of God upon the church. When leadership breaks down, all pastors are affected in one sense."⁴⁰

Another prominent pastor who is involved with ARC is the Rev. Casey Treat. According to the organization, Treat is a member of its "Lead Team."⁴¹ Treat has been on the radar of numerous discernment ministries for decades. Michael G. Moriarty, in *The New Charismatics*, discloses:

"Charismatic Casey Treat, pastor of the Christian Faith Center (Seattle, Washington) and an avid promoter of restorationism, positive confession, and the health and wealth gospel, has also 'been accused of fostering the heresy of Satan's lie in Genesis 3:5, teaching his followers that they are gods and exact duplicates of God.'"⁴²

While not excusing Treat's connection to the hyper-charismatic theology of positive confession and the health doctrine, Moriarty does however explain that Treat's teaching that believers are little gods may be the result of "poor word choices or careless doctrinal articulation" and has cited one source who claims that Treat has "admitted that men are not literally gods and [has] promised not to use this terminology again."⁴³

But Treat's ministerial difficulties extend beyond the theological. According to Wikipedia, "In 2017 Caleb Treat, Casey's son and executive pastor of Christian Faith Center, was sued over claims of sexual harassment. The case settled for an undisclosed sum of money. In December 2018, a second lawsuit was filed against the Treats and the church,

alleged sexual exploitation, abuse, and financial improprieties."⁴⁴

In regard to the 2018 allegations, a news source in Seattle reported that the "Lawsuit calls for removal of Casey and Wendy Treat, and CFO, from church leadership roles" and stated:

"Three former Christian Faith Center congregants have brought a lawsuit against Federal Way megachurch Christian Faith Center and the family who owns it, alleging family members utilize church resources as their own and sexually exploit and abuse church members."⁴⁵

The article further revealed that:

"The suit lists several causes of action in the plaintiff's complaint for damages, including the church's alleged breach of contract. This includes regular and routine cash distributions and lending of credit to Casey and Wendy Treat and their children 'upon demand.' Some examples include an approximate \$31,000 cash expenditure allegedly taken by Caleb Treat from the church's Chief Financial Officer Theresa Fazeka that was used to purchase a Harley Davidson motorcycle for his father. At any given time, Casey Treat had approximately 10 Harley Davidson motorcycles valued at approximately \$50,000 each, according to the suit. The church's alleged breach also includes the Treat family member's acquisition of personal real estate using church resources."⁴⁶

A LOW VIEW OF SOUND BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

Churches and ministers who are a part of the ARC network embrace a wide spectrum of beliefs, including traditional Pentecostalism, Word-Faith, emergent churches, and those preaching a "Christianity-Lite." As one blogger observed:

"A lot of the ARC Churches do not have solid doctrine but I know of a few who do preach about sin, heaven, hell, etc. but

even in those churches it is a lot like Christian Kindergarten and even those churches' affiliations are sketchy at best and scary at worst. A lot of the ARC churches take out the saving portion of the gospel out of the Gospel but some keep it in. If they do, it is likely watered down. ... The ARC is a seeker sensitive purpose-driven organization from what I have noticed. It is preferable to avoid due to the false teachers they promote."⁴⁷

The ARC website is all about "launching, equipping and connecting the local church." It has all the resources and information necessary, including "how-to series," conferences, and training events. All of this is just a "click" away. One thing, however, that is missing — or at least very difficult to get to — is a doctrinal statement for the organization. Apparently, your practice (what you do) is more crucial than your doctrine (what you believe). Yes, their website does have a "Statement of Faith," but it's like the New England idiom, "You can't get there from here." Nowhere on the home page, including the navigation bar at the top or the footer navigation panel at the bottom, is there a link to ARC's beliefs. One has to know and manually type the URL into the web browser's address bar in order to open the webpage containing the organization's beliefs.⁴⁸ (One can also locate it by typing "Statement of Faith" into the website's search engine and then sorting through the list of results.)

While ARC provides easy-access, quick links to its resources and training, it makes examination of its beliefs nearly impossible. This is only one of several aspects which clearly demonstrates how doctrine lacks in importance or significance with this organization.

Moreover, the emphasis is directed toward one's "dreams," "visions" and in "creating a healthy culture for your church staff, your marriage, [and] how to carry a consistent culture from one campus to another."⁴⁹ In listing the various ways in which

ARC members express their culture as “being Jesus-centered,” the paragraph under the title “We Believe” does not encompass a single theological essential, but rather says:

“WE BELIEVE. One of the greatest things about our founder Billy Hornsby was that he believed in couples who no longer believed in themselves. There are so many pastors I have heard tell their story and the turning point for them was when they realized someone believed in them. What I love about that now is that it’s not just Billy Hornsby, but it’s all of ARC believing in you. All of this ARC family is pulling for you, whether you’re a future planter or a recent planter, or you pastor a church you didn’t plant, or if you’ve pastored the church you’re at for 50 years, this ARC Family believes in you and is pulling for you.”⁵⁰

ARC’s interests encompass many elements, but doctrine does not appear to be one. Doctrine is of little concern to this organization and its leaders. It is imperative, however, that spiritually disciplined believers, and especially those who are pastors and teachers, devote themselves to doctrine. Scripture commands such:

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16).

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Christians must pay careful attention to doctrine — to know what we believe and why we believe it. The early believers in Jerusalem “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42). We should do the same. Knowing the Scriptures and what they teach is the only way to

truly develop a Christian worldview. Doctrine shapes our lives and impacts how we live.

The “we believe” focus of ARC, therefore, is not about believing sound doctrine, but about believing in oneself and one another. It seems relational issues are more important than doctrine. And the Rizzos are unapologetic in holding to this view. Years earlier, they told *Charisma* magazine that, “We love diversity. We like crossing over into a lot of flows.”⁵¹ They also acknowledge their propensity toward Pentecostalism and how the social aspect of their message takes precedence over doctrine:

“We value the gifts of the Spirit, praying in the Holy Ghost, all those things ... but we always felt like it could be expressed in a new way to reach a new people. We’ve never made it a dividing point; we’ve always felt like being Spirit-filled is just who we are — we just express it a lot of different ways. It’s never really been a big tension or this big discussion on ‘What are we and how do we express it?’ We don’t get into a debate about all that. When you’re ministering to the poor and have people stopping by who just lost their job, and you’re getting emails from someone who just got diagnosed with cancer, you just don’t have time for all that. *We don’t have time to argue or split theological hairs.*”⁵²

And a low view of doctrine appears to be prevalent throughout many of the ARC churches. The pastor of an ARC plant church in St. Louis recently tweeted, “Nothing drives me crazier more than ‘DISCERNMENT’ being used for ‘Suspicion’ instead for the observation of the needs of others! I hate the impact that religion has had on our definitions.”⁵³ This pastor’s church, Equation Church, says it is “named by many as the ‘Out the Box Church’ due to their untraditional methods and his unconventional preaching style” and that the pastor “is known for his creativity from catchy sermon titles to props to illustrate his messages.”⁵⁴ Their propen-

sity to the social gospel is evident as they state, “Our mission is simple: Love God + Help People = Change the World!”

A doctrinal statement is absent from this church’s website. If one searches enough webpages, however, they may discover a statement or two such as, “What is the Christ Centered Focus? The Holy Spirit will give you the mental, spiritual and physical strength to do what he has called you to do.”⁵⁵ But an articulation of the Gospel is absent. The idea of a “Christ Centered Focus” concludes with:

“As we press toward the mark, it’s good to remember that God is a BIG God and loves to display his wonders through His children, particularly the things that seem to be impossible in the natural. Just like Elijah, the hand of the Lord can give us the supernatural strength to outrun chariots of fear, doubt, debt, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, laziness, ignorance and any other affliction that causes us to miss the mark. He will give the spiritual, mental and physical strength to those who are running into their destiny, to outrun their chariots with purpose, on purpose.”⁵⁶

In the end, the message is all about us and our well-being, not about Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice.

A HIGH VIEW OF PARTNERS IN MINISTRY

A large section of ARC’s website is devoted to what they call “Partners in Ministry.” This is a significant block of “resources” which is mainly businesses that cater to the church planting/church building business. It includes financial investors, loan providers, legal counsel, and much more.

Suppose, as a start-up church, you need a location to meet on Sunday mornings. ARC’s “Partners in Ministry” can help you with that. Don’t be thinking school cafeteria or gymnasium; ARC has a better resource from which to draw. Along this line, AMC theatres are a “partner” and there is a contact to rent an AMC theatre for

your worship services. They promote it as:

“Movie theatres, unlike many traditional church buildings or other rented venues, are a familiar environment that are relevant and welcoming. The non-traditional, comfortable and casual environment of a theatre church is ideal for inviting the people you’re attempting to reach. Be honest: Would you rather revisit your middle school cafeteria or the place you saw your favorite movie? In addition, it’s a space designed for easily gathering and sharing a message: prominently located, great visuals and acoustics, with plenty of parking, restrooms, and seating. AMC is the largest movie exhibition company in the U.S., in Europe and throughout the world with more than 1,000 theatres.”⁵⁷

Or maybe you need help in marketing your church or for a fundraising effort. ARC can steer you in the right direction there, too. BMC Ferrell is one of several advertising and marketing firms who are ministry partners with ARC. The company describes how it can help grow a church:

“God has used BMC Ferrell to help churches and ministries grow to their greatest potential through the strategic use of traditional and digital media and advertising. Through wise planning, production, placement and promotion, BMC Ferrell is passionate to see our ministry partners fulfill their calling from our Lord Jesus Christ. For over 30 years, we have been dedicated to the success of ministries like Joyce Meyer, John Siebeling/The Life Church Memphis, Bayless Conley/Cottonwood Church, The Healing Place Church, Stovall Weems/Celebration Church, Kenneth Hagin Ministries/Rhema, and many others.”⁵⁸

Besides the obvious Word-Faith connection of some of its “ministry partners,” what is even more disconcerting is the constant appeals to human effort and marketing tech-

niques, rather than to the power and blessing of God, in building a church. Phrases like you can grow to your “greatest potential through the strategic use of traditional and digital media and advertising” and “Through wise planning, production, placement and promotion ... our ministry partners [can] fulfill their calling from our Lord Jesus Christ” remove the Holy Spirit and His work from the endeavor. But, perhaps, that should be expected. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). To cultivate a large number of church goers in a short time, preaching about sin, the depravity of man, and the need for repentance is not the best approach to use. If we want people to show up — and continue to do so — then it’s better to use a “strategy” that avoids all the heavy doctrinal issues and in its place give free resources to the community and in its worship provide entertainment and promises of success, keep everything relevant, and don’t demand too much from those who attend.

Rizzo, however, does offer a token gesture that God is responsible for building the church. He recounts a time when “God spoke quietly” inside his heart, claiming, “He said, ‘Dino, if you will take care of people outside the walls of this church, I’ll take care of filling it.’”⁵⁹ Ultimately, then, while God builds His church it is the result of our service and strategies and, as Rizzo clearly maintains, “Servolution makes churches grow.”⁶⁰

Beyond advertising and direct mail, “coaching” is another feature that ARC pitches. One entry states:

“We’re excited to bring back Make Room in 2019 and we’re starting something new this year called ‘Whiteboard Sessions’! These will be four unique and focused intensives throughout 2019 designed for Lead Pastors and senior-level leaders of medium to larger-sized churches. We’ll dive into specific topics that we get a lot of questions about from friend churches.”⁶¹

Those who enlist this service will have the curtain pulled back “on the successes and failures of each specific topic of the session” and will be able to strategize “how each topic can be applied to bring success to your church.”⁶²

And then let’s not forget about serving coffee at your church services. ARC has a resource for that as well. Another of the “Partners in Ministry” can provide you with coffee from around the world:

“Non-Fiction Coffee is committed to making a real impact both locally and globally through reliably sourced commerce and giving back to local causes. We believe each cup of coffee provides real people with both a delicious beverage and opportunity.”⁶³

Yes, from design and architecture to securing loans and investments to risk management and legal advice to advertising and marketing to event production and staging to coffee, ARC has you covered on all fronts. Walmart claims, “Save Money. Live Better.” Target says, “Expect More. Pay Less.” And Amazon boasts of being, “The Everything Store.” ARC just needs a catchy tagline, like “Your One Stop Church Shop.”

IT’S ALL ABOUT CULTURE

One ARC church plant in the St. Louis area (different from the one previously mentioned) says it is “a life giving church ... that reflects the culture of the communities that surround us.”⁶⁴ “Culture” is a reoccurring buzzword in ARC materials and sources. In its spring 2019 magazine, readers are reminded of the importance of culture. In his “First Word” column, ARC president Greg Surratt writes:

“When people ask me what I would do differently as a church planter today, I tell them that *culture* — *how we accomplish the vision* — is just as important as the *dreams that drive you forward.*”⁶⁵

Surratt then explains, “Culture making is our responsibility. If we

produce a culture with God at the center, there is no way the world can stay the same!"⁶⁶ Elsewhere, the Rizzos state, "Our culture really all gets down to being Jesus-centered, and we express that in a lot of ways."⁶⁷ A few pages further, Josh and Amy Roberie, members of ARC's "Launch Team," outline how to "Create a Compelling Culture in 4 Steps" informing readers that, "A healthy culture is not easy to create or maintain."⁶⁸ Still further, church growth teacher Phil Klein tackles the subject in great detail and answers the question, "What is culture and why is it so important?" He stresses:

"Culture is the glue that holds everything together in an organization. It connects and engulfs people, systems, and structures. It is the protective net that catches and corrects any failures or shortcomings of people or systems. It's where individuals take responsibility for end results, not merely process execution. Process is critical, and it needs to be defined, documented, and taught, but culture is the self-healing ring that encircles systems and processes when they fail us. It's what keeps people and churches healthy. In other words, culture assures that your values and your behavior are in alignment. It steers the vision God has given you throughout every level of your church."⁶⁹

Here again, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God are diminished and human effort, rather than the power and blessing of God, is at the core of building a church. This time, however, instead of *marketing techniques* it is creating a *culture* that "keeps people and churches healthy" and "the glue that holds everything together in an organization." In their passion to attract the masses, ARC and its leaders establish an out-of-balance theology of culture. While their desire to reach the lost for Jesus Christ is biblical and honorable, they have disintegrated into an "ends justifies the means" approach that ultimately compromises the Gospel.

Growth and success becomes the focus and driving force, and when those things occur it is seen as evidence that God is blessing their efforts. The result, however, is not just an inadequate message of salvation, but apostasy.

Syndicated columnist Cal Thomas is spot on when he says, "Too many in Christ's family are preoccupied with 'reforming' culture instead of being transformed by the renewing of their minds."⁷⁰

In his analysis of seeker friendly churches, writer Steve Shirley maintains:

"I even see nothing wrong with a church adapting itself to some degree to the culture it is in. Paul talks about the fact that he adapted to the culture he was in to reach more people with the Gospel (1 Cor 9:19-23). But, the KEY is that while he may have adapted himself personally, he NEVER changed or adapted the message he was preaching, no matter where he was. This is a BIG problem with the 'seeker friendly' movement. They are not only adapting the church, but they are adapting the MESSAGE! This is wrong! The early church preached no messages on positive thinking, self-improvement, psychology, or how to have a better life. But, there were lots of messages on the need to repent (mentioned 65 times in the New Testament), Christ crucified for sin, blood being shed, hell (used 23 times in the NT), dying to oneself, rejoicing when persecuted, Jesus is the ONLY way to the ONLY God, and many other 'hard' messages."⁷¹

Tom McMahon, who co-founded with Dave Hunt the discernment ministry The Berean Call, expresses these two concerns:

"First of all, the gospel and, more significantly, the person of Jesus Christ do not fit into any marketing strategy. They are not 'products' to be 'sold.' They cannot be refashioned or image-adjusted to appeal to the felt needs of our

consumer-happy culture. Any attempt to do so compromises to some degree the truth of *who Christ is and what He has done for us*. For example, if the lost are considered consumers and a basic marketing 'commandment' says that the customer must reign supreme, then whatever may be offensive to the lost must be discarded, revamped, or downplayed."⁷²

And:

"Secondly, if you want to attract the lost on the basis of what might interest them, for the most part you will be appealing to and accommodating their flesh. Wittingly or unwittingly, that seems to be the standard operating procedure of seeker-friendly churches. They mimic what's popular in our culture: top-forty and performance-style music, theatrical productions, stimulating multimedia presentations, and thirty-minutes-or-less positive messages. The latter, more often than not, are topical, therapeutic, and centered in self-fulfillment — how the Lord can meet one's needs and help solve one's problems."⁷³

David F. Wells, professor of systematic theology, in his penetrating book *Losing Our Virtue*, writes:

"The wisdom common to many of our marketers is that, if it wants to attract customers, the Church should stick to a positive and uplifting message. It should avoid speaking of negative matters like sin. Not only so, but what has distinguished the Church in its appearance and functions should now be abandoned. In order to be attractive to people today, church buildings should not look different from corporate headquarters, malls, or country clubs. Crosses and robes should go; dress should be casual; hymns should be contemporary and empty of the theological substance by which previous generations lived, because this is incompre-

hensible today; pews should be replaced by cinema-grade seats, organs by synthesizers and drums, solemnity by levity, reflection by humor, and sermons by light dialogues or catchy readings. The theory is that people will buy Christianity if they don't have to deal with what the Church has traditionally been."⁷⁴

Simply put: when a church or ministry has as its main focus someone or something other than the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is an organization that needs to be avoided. ARC is more devoted to successful statistics than a sovereign Savior. The Apostle Paul was single-minded in preaching Christ and Him crucified. In addressing the church at Corinth, his Christ-centered message was that if any of us boast, we do so only in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:31). We are never to boast in ourselves or in what we have accomplished through earthly wisdom and physical endeavors. The LORD, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, warned:

"Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD'" (Jeremiah 9:23-24, ESV).

As Wells instructs:

"The Church ... must care more about truth than its success, more about faithfulness than being culturally at home. It must find the strength to believe that modernity poses no problems that are insurmountable to the grace and power of God."⁷⁵

These are all matters to which the leaders and members of ARC need to pause and ponder. While not each and every aspect of ARC is bad or even heretical, the legitimate concerns are far too numerous. God establishes

the directives for building His church and we are to follow. When we start trying to develop ministry on our own, based upon our abilities — human ability and human study, it becomes a business and not a church.

In Acts we are told that it is the Lord who builds the church: "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). We must not overlook the fact that it comes by the faithful preaching of the Word (see vv. 14-42), not by marketing methods or meeting the needs of the populace by means of a social gospel. Until the goal-driven and social strategies to market Christianity and build churches are abandoned and Jesus Christ and His message of salvation become central, ARC is an organization to be avoided. ARC may be building "successful" churches, but it is lacking in the biblical sense of building Christ's church which is the making of disciples who will live, not for themselves, but for the Lord and His glory.

Endnotes:

1. Leslie F. Church, editor, *Commentary on the Whole Bible by Matthew Henry*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961, pg. 1287.
2. Ibid.
3. Guy Walker in Arley Hoskin, "Turning the tide: As traditional churches see interest wane, upstarts draw in young people," *Lawrence Journal-World* (Lawrence, Kansas), March 18, 2013. Article accessed at: www2.ljworld.com/news/2013/mar/18/turning-tide-traditional-churches-see-interest-wan/.
4. Steven Kozar, "The Seeker-Friendly, Purpose-Driven Cornucopia of False Doctrine" from *The Messed Up Church* website, March 8, 2017. Document accessed at: www.themessedupchurch.com/blog/why-the-attractional-church-model-fails-to-deliver-the-true-gospel.
5. Ibid., capitalization and italic in original.
6. *ARC Magazine*, April 2019, pg. 7.
7. Ibid., pg. 6.
8. "Our History" from the ARC Churches website. Document accessed at: www.arcchurches.com/about/history.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. "Turning the tide: As traditional churches see interest wane, upstarts draw

- in young people," op. cit.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Marcus Yoars, "The Servolutionary," *Charisma*, July 2012, pg. 30.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., pp. 30-31.
20. Servolution advertisement, *Charisma*, July 2012, pg. 13.
21. "The Servolutionary," op. cit., pg. 32.
22. Dino Rizzo, *Servolution: Starting a Church Revolution Through Serving*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009, pp. 32-33.
23. Ibid., pg. 33.
24. Ibid., pg. 25, italic in original.
25. "Dino Rizzo, ARC Executive Director," from the ARC Churches website. Document accessed at: www.arcchurches.com/dino-rizzo-arc-executive-director.
26. *Servolution: Starting a Church Revolution Through Serving*, op. cit., pg. 74.
27. Jennifer LeClaire, "After 'Inappropriate Relationship,' Megachurch Pastor Dino Rizzo Restored to Ministry," *Charisma* online article, Aug. 9, 2013. Document accessed at: www.charismanews.com/us/40578-after-inappropriate-relationship-megachurch-pastor-dino-rizzo-restored-to-ministry.
28. Jeff Schapiro, "Megachurch Pastor Dino Rizzo Resigns From Healing Place Church" from the Christian Post website, Sept. 18, 2012. Document accessed at: www.christianpost.com/news/megachurch-pastor-dino-rizzo-resigns-from-healing-place-church.html.
29. Ibid.
30. Long-standing HPC member Brian McCollister cited in "Rizzo resigns as Healing Place pastor; Rumors of Affair Surface" from the MyCultLife website, posted Sept. 16, 2012. While the original post of this webpage is no longer available, a copy of it is available on the archival website, WayBack Machine. Document accessed at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20120921055325/http://www.mycultlife.com/rizzo-resigns-as-healing-place-pastor-rumors-of-affair-surface>.
31. Ibid.
32. Greg Surratt in "After 'Inappropriate Relationship,' Megachurch Pastor Dino Rizzo Restored to Ministry," op. cit.
33. Chris Hodges in Leonard Blair, "Former Megachurch Pastor Dino Rizzo Returns to Pulpit After 14-Month Exile Over 'Inappropriate' Affair" from the Christian Post website, Aug. 12, 2013. Document accessed at: www.christianpost.com/news/former-megachurch-pastor-dino-rizzo-returns-to-pulpit-after-14-month-exile-over-inappropriate-affair.html.
34. "After 'Inappropriate Relationship,' Megachurch Pastor Dino Rizzo Restored to Ministry," op. cit.

35. "Dino Rizzo, ARC Executive Director," op. cit.
36. "Former Megachurch Pastor Dino Rizzo Returns to Pulpit After 14-Month Exile Over 'Inappropriate' Affair," op. cit.
37. John H. Armstrong, *Can Fallen Pastors Be Restored?* Chicago: Moody Press, 1995, pg. 130.
38. Ibid., pg. 125.
39. Ibid., pg. 136.
40. Ibid., pg. 134.
41. "The ARC Lead Team" on ARC Churches website. Document accessed at: www.arcchurches.com/about/team.
42. Michael G. Moriarty, *The New Charismatics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, pg. 107.
43. Ibid., pp. 334, 335.
44. "Casey Treat" on Wikipedia. Document accessed at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casey_Treat.
45. Carrie Rodriguez, "Federal Way Megachurch Slapped With Another Sexual Exploitation Lawsuit," *Seattle Weekly*, Dec. 3, 2018. Document accessed at: www.seattleweekly.com/news/federal-way-mega-church-slapped-with-another-sexual-exploitation-lawsuit/.
46. Ibid.
47. "Questions on Association of Related Churches (ARC)" from Rapture Forums website, posted Feb. 11, 2014. Blog accessed at: www.raptureforums.com/forums/threads/questions-on-association-of-related-churches-arc.77687/.
48. The URL to ARC's Statement of Faith is: www.arcchurches.com/about/statement-of-faith.
49. Greg Surratt, "Vision & Values Drive Culture," *ARC Magazine*, April 2019, pg. 5.
50. Dino and DeLynn Rizzo, "Family Vibes," *ARC Magazine*, April 2019, pg. 9, capitalization in original.
51. "Who — Or What — Are They?," *Charisma*, July 2012, pg. 30.
52. Ibid., ellipsis in original, emphasis added.
53. Antwain Jackson tweet, Equation Church, May 8, 2019, capitalization in original.
54. "The Dream Team" webpage on Equation Church website. Document accessed at: <http://equationchurch.tv/team-page/>.
55. Michelle Sturdivant, "Outrunning the Chariots - 1 Kings 18:48," on Equation Church website, blog posted Jan. 1, 2019. Document accessed at: <http://equationchurch.tv/uncategorized/outrunning-the-chariots/>.
56. Ibid, capitalization in original.
57. AMC resource webpage on ARC Churches website. Document accessed at: www.arcchurches.com/resource/amc-theaters.
58. BMC Ferrell resource webpage on ARC Churches website. Document accessed at: www.arcchurches.com/resource/bmcferrrell.
59. *Servolution: Starting a Church Revolution Through Serving*, op. cit., pg. 49.
60. Ibid., pg. 48.
61. Make Room Whiteboard Sessions resource webpage on ARC Churches website. Document accessed at: www.arcchurches.com/resource/make-room.
62. Ibid.
63. Non-Fiction Coffee Co. resource webpage on ARC Churches website. Document accessed at: www.arcchurches.com/resource/non-fiction-coffee.
64. "Who We Are" from Middle Tree Church website. Document accessed at: <https://middletreechurch.com/who-we-are/>.
65. "Vision & Values Drive Culture," op. cit., pg. 5, italics in original.
66. Ibid.
67. "Family Vibes," op. cit., pg. 8.
68. Josh and Amy Roberie, "Create a Compelling Culture in 4 Steps," *ARC Magazine*, April 2019, pg. 12.
69. Phil Klein, "Scaling Culture in a Multi-Site Environment," *ARC Magazine*, April 2019, pg. 31.
70. Endorsement by Cal Thomas for David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998, back cover.
71. Steve Shirley, "Q: #277. What is a 'seeker friendly' church?" from Jesus Alive website, capitalization in original. Document accessed at: <https://jesusalive.cc/ques277.htm>.
72. T.A. McMahon, "The Seeker-Friendly Way of Doing Church" from The Berean Call website, posted March 1, 2004, italics in original. Document accessed at: www.thebereancall.org/content/seeker-friendly-way-doing-church.
73. Ibid.
74. *Losing Our Virtue*, op. cit., pg. 201.
75. Ibid., pg. 207.



EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

Jewish idioms, or the clear teaching and thrust of Jesus' message as recorded in Luke's Gospel.

The parable is obviously not a story of an unrepentant, scheming son, but rather the polar opposite. It shows a loving father and a heartbroken, repentant son. Gerhard Maier summarizes:

"Revelation knows 'autonomous' man only as 'lost' man. Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32) conveys this way of viewing things in a concentrated form. The younger son gains a certain — not full — measure of autonomy from the father, suggestive of a cutting loose from God. This autonomy 'suffers' under two limitations. #1) It cannot thwart the reign and love of the father. #2) It cannot assure that forces other than the father will not exert their power over the son during his sojourn in a strange land. His life becomes debt-ridden; he falls into dependence. The once free son becomes a slave (cf. *pepramenos*, 'sold' in Ro 7:14). From the very start his

autonomy was a utopian illusion, a path into slavery, indeed very nearly a course leading to total destruction" (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 278-279, italics in original).

We know that the wayward son went so low that he ended up feeding and tending pigs (v. 15). This would have been the vilest of all jobs. The prodigal son was exposed to his own uncleanness. A Jew was forbidden by God's law to even touch a pig (Leviticus 11:7-8), much less care for one.

The KJV translates the pig's food in verse 16 as "husks." It is the Greek word *keration*, meaning carob pods. The rebellious son would have starved to death had he not had carob pods to eat, but he could not bring himself to that ultimate act of desperation. Carob pods were used as fodder for cattle and swine and eaten only by the poorest of the poor.

There is an old Jewish saying that when Israel is reduced to the carob tree they become repentant. (See, for instance, Herbert Lockyer, *All the Parables of the Bible*, pg. 287 and Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. 2, pg. 261.) So, this is not a story of a son

spinning a tale to con his oblivious father, but rather the story of a young man who is beaten down by sin, totally broken and repentant. He then vowed to confess to his father that he had sinned against heaven (God) and his dad. This can be nothing but true repentance. Nothing in the text suggests that the son was lying, manipulating, or playing games. We will see more of that true repentance as we examine the subject in greater detail.

Biblical repentance (Greek: *metanoia*) is a change of mind that leads to a change of direction and behavior. It is the abandonment of sin and the old ways. True repentance lasts. The prodigal son is an excellent illustration of true repentance in many different ways. "Turning toward home" has been a metaphor for repentance for years.

Verse 17 says "he came to himself" (ESV, KJV, NKJV). Other translations say, "he came to his senses" (NASB, NIV). The New Living Translation says, "he finally came to his senses." The phrase, *came to his senses* or *came to himself* is a Jewish and Semitic way of expressing genuine repentance. Sin is loss of all sense. It was a form of insanity in the Jewish way of thinking. Linguist and commentator Adam Clarke concurs: "A state of sin is represented in the sacred writings as a course of folly and madness, and repentance is represented as a restoration to sound sense" (*Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, pg. 879). Too often we are trying to read an oriental book through our western mind-set and we lose the nuances of the Hebrew world in which it was written.

And again: "He came back to himself" or "he came into himself" are, in Hebrew and Aramaic, both an expression of repentance (see Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, pg. 130).

Remember the story opens in Luke 15:10 by talking about a sinner who repents. So it is not about an oblivious father.

In verse 24 the father says that the son was dead but is now alive. The father repeats it and adds "he was lost and is found." It is clear that there was genuine sorrow and genuine repentance by the son and not a deceptive ploy in the works. The lost is found and the spiritually dead is now spiritually alive. The father has not been misled. The father represents God. How can God, who knows all things, be fooled?

Using God's Word in a cavalier way is not a light matter. When we read the Gospels we stand before Jesus. It is a serious business to put words in Christ's mouth. To say what He did not say is also serious and to not say what He did say is misrepresentation. It misrepresents Him in a very serious way. Jesus had much to say about hypocrites, but Luke 15 is not among any of His warnings concerning hypocrisy.

Not all small-group leaders are equal. It really is the job of church leadership to equip its small-group leaders

in hermeneutics and Bible training. Teaching is urgent business with eternal significance as James reminds us: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1).

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

contention against complementarians. Complementarians teach that males and females are created for distinct and complementary roles in the home and church. In her challenge of that position, Moore says that women should be permitted to preach during worship services to the corporate church body. Owen Strachan, associate professor of Christian theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, says that "Southern Baptists have never embraced such a view." It is the position set forth in *The Baptist Faith & Message*, the official statement of doctrinal beliefs held by Southern Baptists. Moore identifies herself as Southern Baptist.

According to *Charisma* magazine, "The controversy began when Moore admitted on Twitter that she was preaching the Mother's Day sermon at an unidentified Southern Baptist Church. Several theologians issued rebukes of any SBC church that would allow a woman to preach to men."

Moore argues that those who hold to a complementarian position are not doing so because of Scripture, but for other reasons. In her Twitter post of May 11, she wrote: "I had the eye opening experience of my life in 2016. A fog cleared for me that was the most disturbing, terrifying thing I'd ever seen. All these years I'd given the benefit of the doubt that these men were the way they were because they were trying to be obedient to Scripture ... Then I realized it was not over Scripture at all. It was over sin. It was over power. It was over misogyny. Sexism. It was about arrogance. About protecting systems. It involved covering abuses & misuses of power. Shepherds guarding other shepherds instead of guarding the sheep."

However, despite all her protests, according to a Religion News Service article, "Moore has called herself a 'soft complementarian.' She has pointed out that the Baptist Faith & Message says 'the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture,' a view she said she agrees with."

As she has done in the past, Moore claims divine involvement in setting forth her views. "I am compelled to my bones by the Holy Spirit — I don't want to be but I am — to draw attention to the sexism & misogyny that is rampant in segments of the SBC, cloaked by piety & bearing the stench of hypocrisy," she also tweeted.

The following month Moore received even more criticism. In June, several prominent women Bible teachers challenged Moore on her views on homosexuality. "In an open letter ... the women ask Moore why she has not spoken out on the issue of homosexuality, despite being a loud voice against misogyny and racism," the online media outlet, Christian Headlines, reported. The letter asked Moore a series of questions regarding her position on homosexuality and why she has been "so silent" on the subject.

The women writing the letter expressed concern that Moore, regarding the matter of homosexuality, has been tight-lipped. But in other issues she has been quick-to-the-draw. For instance, last January, Moore was swift to condemn the Covington Catholic School boys who were falsely portrayed by the media as racists and bigots. The open letter noted, "The actions of the Covington kids, for example, you said 'is so utterly antichrist it reeks of the vomit of hell' in a January 19, 2019 tweet; a tweet you deleted, without apology to the kids, once the full video was shown that portrayed a very different reality than what initial reporting suggested. It is this *Johnny-on-the-spot* readiness to engage issues related to misogyny and racism that makes your virtual silence on the issue of homosexuality so puzzling."

—MKG

WHITE-CAIN INSTALLS SON AS PASTOR

Pastor and prosperity gospel preacher Paula White-Cain is on the move again. In May, she installed her son,

Brad Knight, and his wife, Rachel, as the new senior pastors of New Destiny Christian Center in Apopka, Fla., which she also renamed City of Destiny. White-Cain will assume the role of "apostolic overseer" at the church.

White-Cain alleges this mother-to-son pastoral transition came by way of a "prophetic word" given to her in 2005 by the church's then pastor Zachery Tims. However, she claims that it "didn't make sense until 2019." In 2005, White-Cain was co-pastoring with her second husband, Randy White, the Without Walls International Church in Tampa. Following her divorce from Randy in 2007, Paula became senior pastor of the Tampa church, a role that was later returned to Randy in 2011 and Paula's association with Without Walls International Church came to an end. In April 2015, she married her third and current husband, rock musician Jonathan Cain of Journey fame.

White-Cain became the senior pastor for New Destiny Christian Center on Jan. 1, 2012. She succeeded Tims who was the church's founder and senior pastor, and who died in August 2011 from a cocaine-heroin mixture.

An online article on the *HuffPost* said that White-Cain's announcement comes with "big plans for the future." The report also revealed that White-Cain "said the shift will allow her to focus on her other goals — which include starting 3,000 churches, acting as a mentor to pastors, opening a university, and even creating a performing arts center."

In 2016, White-Cain gained even more notability when she was named as chairwoman of the Evangelical Advisory Board to President Donald J. Trump.

—MKG

Personal Freedom Outreach — Statement of Belief

- I. The Bible as the divinely inspired, inerrant Word of God: It is in its entirety the sole authority for all matters of Christian belief and practice.
- II. The one true God. In the one true God there exist three persons, being: The Father, The Son Jesus Christ, and The Holy Spirit.
- III. Jesus Christ: His deity, humanity, virgin birth, sinlessness, death and bodily resurrection; who will personally and visibly return again to earth.
- IV. The personality and deity of the Holy Spirit.
- V. The existence and personality of Satan, his total opposition to God, and his power over the unregenerate.
- VI. The complete and total depravity of all men which makes them hopelessly lost without the new birth obtainable through faith in Jesus Christ.
- VII. The final estate of man: for the saved, everlasting life in the presence of God and for the unsaved, everlasting punishment because of their unbelief.
- VIII. The Gospel by which we are saved being summed in the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- IX. The Church being the Body of Christ, united in the Holy Spirit, consisting of those who have received Jesus Christ as Savior. A local church is an organized assembly of believers united for the purpose of carrying out the Great Commission of Christ.
- X. The Great Commission of Christ being to preach the Gospel to all men, baptizing and discipling those who have believed.



Books in Review

VISITS TO HEAVEN AND BACK — ARE THEY REAL?

by Mark Hitchcock

Tyndale House Publishers, 221 pages, \$15.99

Mark Hitchcock wears several hats. He has a doctorate from Dallas Theological Seminary, where he also is associate professor of Bible exposition. He is pastor of Faith Bible Church in Edmond, Okla., a Bible prophecy expert, and author of more than two dozen books, including several on eschatology.

Visits to Heaven and Back — Are They Real? is the second of three books that Hitchcock has written on the afterlife. His first was *55 Answers to Questions About Life After Death*. His newest book is *Heavenly Rewards*. Sandwiched in between is *Visits to Heaven and Back* which deals with those who claim to have gone to heaven and returned. In the book's 10 chapters, Hitchcock shows the discrepancies and contradictions in the stories of several authors who say they personally experienced heaven.

Hitchcock shows great familiarity with the literature about near-death experiences (NDEs) and those who say they had one. He writes, "I've read at least twenty of these books, and scanned many, many more" (pg. 131).

Hitchcock covers the subject of "heavenly tourism" in general in the first two chapters of the book. In chapters 3-6, he evaluates by Scripture eight experiences of those who say they died (or nearly died), visited heaven, and came back to tell about it. (Although at least one of those — that of Mary K. Baxter — was not an NDE.)

Near the beginning of chapter 7, he states, "In my estimation, five simple arguments against the heaven-and-back books will suffice to show why they should be avoided and even rejected by those who claim to be followers of Christ" (pg. 117). He spends the rest of the chapter elaborating on this statement.

In chapter 8, he evaluates from Scripture two books about people who say they went to hell. In chapter 9, he discusses what heaven will be like. And the final chapter is an invitation to those who haven't believed in Jesus, to trust in the only Savior Who can take them to heaven.

Visits to Heaven and Back has three appendices: The first deals with 10 common questions about life after death. Nine of the 10 questions appeared almost verbatim in Hitchcock's first book on the afterlife, *55 Answers to Questions About Life After Death* — although the answers may have some differences in this book. The second appendix is a list of 13 recommended books on heaven and the hereafter. The third consists of four Scripture passages about heaven: Isaiah 6:1-8; Ezekiel 1; Revelation 4-5; and Revelation 21-22.

The only caution to issue about this book is that, while many of the people Hitchcock cites are solid Christians, at least two men whom he approvingly quotes from are problematic. He cites one of them in "Appendix 2: Recommended Books on Heaven and the Afterlife" (pg. 199).

One of these men is Peter Kreeft who converted from Protestantism to Catholicism and who also reportedly believes Christians and Muslims serve the same God. And several times Hitchcock approvingly cites Douglas Jacoby's book, *What's the Truth About Heaven and Hell?*, which is the questionable volume he lists in Appendix 2.

The choice of these writers is baffling and warrants regretful and strenuous disapproval. There are also favorable citations from David Platt and John Piper — which some readers might also consider problematic. However, the individual citations themselves from these men are not objectionable and do not detract from the great value of this book. And lest one think the book is overly littered with questionable sources, it's not. Hitchcock enlists the work of many fine theologians including A.W. Tozer, Larry Dixon, Charles Swindoll, Dwight Pentecost, Tim Challies, and J.C. Ryle.

In 1996, cult researcher and author William Alnor wrote *Heaven Can't Wait*. In it he surveyed many twentieth-century claims of visits to heaven or hell and back. This genre's popularity increased in the new millennium. Hitchcock helps bring the discerning Christian up to date with this latest wave of "heavenly tourists" and their books.

Those who are interested in "heavenly tourism," NDEs, purported visits to hell, the subject of heaven, and answers to some common questions about heaven will find this book of interest. Therefore, to the discerning reader PFO can recommend this book.

—JGS

Editor's Note: The publications featured in PFO's *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$3.00 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.