

HOW DO WE GET TO HEAVEN

Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 18:19; John 14:6; Galatians 2:21; 1 Timothy 2:5-6

Short answer question. My sister, Brenda, died as an infant. Is she in heaven? Many of you have the same question because of the death of a baby or young child or a child with a young child capacity. We know that to go to heaven, a person born of earthly parents also needs to be born of the heavenly parent. But what about infants and children who have died before experiencing a spiritual birth? We must say at the outset that the Bible does not specifically say [Because of that there are those who baptize infants believing that covers the matter—but baptism is not salvific—or knowing it is not salvific baptize them as part of the covenant community]. Having said that, we can glean some things from the scripture.

1. The Bible does not say that babies, young children that die, are lost.
2. In 2 Samuel 12:23, David believed that he would see his son after death.
3. If babies and young children go to heaven when they die, they do not go on their merits or innocence [the sinful nature is manifested early], but on the mercy and grace of God.
4. Jesus held little children up as an example of the type of person who inherits the Kingdom of God.

In addition to these thoughts, we also believe that a baby or young child has not reached an age of spiritual responsibility where they willfully reject truth and Jesus Christ.

Something to ask regarding this question is: “What would we do about infants and young children if it were up to us?” I think I know the answer to that. So, do we think that we can handle this issue better than God? Of course not! We leave the matter to Him. Most Baptists believe that infants and young children that die are “safe.”

Finally, let me say that this question is not about most of us in this room. We are not infants, children with no understanding. We know the truth, and we are responsible. Are we going to heaven?

This question is tied to a book that came out in 2010 entitled *Heaven is For Real*, by Todd Burpo. The book is about 3 year old Colton Burpo’s story of his trip to heaven and back. Interesting reading. Although this account is not biblical revelation, it does not refute what we have just said.

This question leads into our message for today. We have talked about what the Bible is silent on, but what is it very clear on? What does the Bible say about who goes to heaven and how do those who go get there? The intermediate heaven is a place and a dimension that we cannot presently see. The final heaven has not yet been created, so there is no one there—yet. So, how do we get to the intermediate heaven?

If you list some of the answers you hear today, apart from what Scripture teaches, you get some of the following.

1. You just die. That is all you have to do to get to heaven. It is the default setting. People just automatically go to heaven. Isn’t that what you see assumed when people die [they’ve gone to a better place; I bet he’s teeing off right now; they are at peace, etc.]. Ninety percent believe they are going to heaven when they die. I am not sure what the other 10% say. Actually, there are those who say “I am going to hell.” How can anybody believe it just takes death when you don’t know where heaven is and you have to find it dead?
2. You go if you are a spiritual person. “There are many ways to get in touch with the divine.” If you dabble in anything spiritual—inner awareness, new age, the human spirit, etc.
3. You are sincere. If you are sincere in what you believe, regardless of what that is, you go to heaven.
4. You have to be good. All good people go to heaven—and I am just inside the line labeled “good.” The other part of this is that you go to heaven if the good outweighs the bad in your life. So, you just have to come in at 50.1% on the good side. This belief has been swallowed hook, line and sinker and when that happens, it is hard to free the fish. There are a number of problems with

this answer. First, we tend to overrate ourselves and ignore our bad. Secondly, in seeking to determine our good we compare ourselves to someone else we deem less good. Thirdly, who determines what good is or how much good is enough? Obviously, the definition of good varies with the person defining it. Fourthly, the “good” argument is based on works and works don’t count when it comes to getting to heaven. But this is where the majority of people and where all religions but one rest their case. For example, Warren Buffet, at the news conference when he announced that he was giving 85% of his 44 billion to 5 charities said: “There is more than one way to get to heaven but this is a great way.” You can get to heaven by doing a good thing. All religions, save one, say you go to heaven by keeping the rules—whatever the rules are with that particular religion.

5. Within the body of this church you will have some say they are going to heaven because they said a prayer or are a member of a church.

Why do you get such answers when the question is, “How does a person get to Heaven?”

1. We are awash in Therapeutic Moralistic Deism. When researchers did a close look at what American teenagers and adolescents believe, it came down to this: It consists of these beliefs-- A God exists who created the world; God wants people to be good, nice and fair; the main goal of life is to be happy and feel good about yourself; God is not needed in your life unless you have a problem you want him to fix—he usually keeps a safe distance; and, good people go to heaven when they die.
2. The Bible is either not believed—seen as comparable to the Koran or Almanac—or, if believed, people do not know what it teaches. Astonishingly, 56% of all “evangelical” Christians believe many paths lead to salvation, other than faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Tolerance. No one is wrong. All values and beliefs are equal. All religions teach basically the same thing. This is the New Tolerance, which says, “It is okay for you to think you are right. It is not okay for you to think someone is wrong.
4. Arrogance. We set the rules. We tell Him what to do and how things should be done and decided. If I want to go to heaven, I will go.

Here is something that we need to realize: JESUS DOES NOT AGREE WITH THE NUMBERS GOING TO HEAVEN NOR WITH THESE WAYS OF GETTING THERE.

First of all the number of people who are going to heaven:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it [Matthew 7:13-14].

The majority of people are on the broad road. The narrow road is referring to being a part of the Kingdom of God, having salvation and eternal life [which includes heaven]. Salvation is not by accident. The path is chosen.

Jesus also disagrees about the ways to get to heaven, and He made that way possible by giving up His life.

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” [John 14:6].

Why does Jesus disagree?

1. Because He knows the Father. He came from the Father and returned to the Father, Who is in heaven. He knows the character of the Father. He knows the holiness of the Father. He knows the love of the Father for us, His desire to have a relationship with us and what that relationship costs.
2. Because He knows us. He knows how sinful we are.

“No one is good—except God alone” [Luke 18:19].

How can people go to heaven because they are good, when God knows no one is? God is the absolute standard for goodness and we all come short of that standard.

3. Because He Knows Who He is. He is the Son of God. He is truth, and He knows the way to the Father—to heaven. So He said:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” [John 14:6].

He is the way—the truth—the life—the only way.

Jesus is either wrong, deranged and as a result of that, very inferior to any other way. Or He is right and, and therefore, the superior way. If we believe that He is God and the resurrected Savior, then we have to believe He is the only way.

Let's look carefully at what He said.

1. Come to the Father. This refers to approaching God. How can He be approached? In Leviticus 10:2, Aaron's sons approached God the wrong way and were consumed. They approached the right God, but they approached Him the wrong way. Approaching God is not according to how we determine, but how He determines. If we think we can approach Him directly, we do not understand Him or ourselves. The very fact that we think we can approach Him any way we want shows both ignorance and arrogance. We can't even board an airplane without the proper credentials. How do we think we can approach God any way we want? We are told how to approach Him through the revelation He has given us. Approaching God has always required mediation. Jesus became for us the Mediator.
2. Except through Me.
For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself as a ransom for all men [1 Timothy 2:5-6].
Jesus is the Mediator because He is the God-man. In the Old Testament priests were used as mediators. But they were sinners and had to offer sacrifice for themselves. They pointed to the real priest who was coming. As a man Jesus was sinless. Therefore, He could pay the penalty for our sin, which is death, turn the wrath of God from us and give us His own righteousness. No one else is so qualified and has done what He did.
3. No one.
No one comes to the Father except through the Mediator. Is that exclusivity? Yes. All religions claim exclusivity. The question is: which one is true. Islam claims that the Koran is exclusive. Buddhism was born when Buddha rejected 2 fundamental assertions of Hinduism. Hinduism is uncompromising on the authority of the Vedas.
Is this claim offensive? Yes. The Gospel is offensive—to have to believe that you are a hopeless sinner and Jesus is the only way to the Father—is offensive to many.
Is it arrogant? No—the claim of truth is not arrogance. This is good news.
When we understand Who God is, what we are, how God must be approached and Who Jesus is and what He did, then we will understand that Jesus is the only Mediator and way to God.
We have to choose what is true. And, let me warn you, your eternal destination is at stake in the choice. Here is what I want you to realize. All religions, save one, are “Do” religions. You have to do certain things to get to heaven. You have to follow the rules. With Christianity you have a “Done” religion. God did everything for you. It cannot be both ways with the same God. God did not whisper to one part of the world “Do” and to another part “Done.”

How can a person who is alienated from God, spiritually dead and under the wrath of God get to heaven on his own? He can't. It is impossible. We cannot get to heaven unless God takes the initiative and does what is needed for us. We are helpless.

God's way is the way of grace. It takes the guess work out of it. It rests salvation on what God said and did rather than what you or someone else thinks. He rests salvation on what Jesus did rather than on what you do. Amazing grace is so freeing.

If this is not true, then:

- Jesus died for nothing.

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing" [Galatians 2:21]!

- The character of God does not matter.
- Heaven is man-centered. We call the shots and make heaven what we want.

Accept the gift of salvation and eternal life that God offers us in His Son. Trust Him rather than yourself—trust His way rather than your way. Your way won't work. His way can't fail.