

Will We Know Each Other in Heaven?

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The profoundness of the subject of this paper demands reverence and humility. We approach it with just that spirit and pray that God will illumine our hearts and minds, thus preserving us from wild and fanciful conjectures and reckless assertions that are without foundation. We feel about this subject as Robert G. Lee, a great preacher of the South, must have felt when he said: "I believe in recognition in Heaven as surely as I believe there is a God. If consciousness, character, love, memory, fellowship, are in that life, why should there be any question about it? May God help me for your sakes to take the doctrine of Heavenly Recognition out of the region of surmise and speculation into the region of absolute certainty."

Man is the acme of God's creation, the crown of all that our heavenly Father has brought into existence by His own mighty power. The remarkable strides that men have made in scientific research, in industrial progress, in agricultural development, and in the civilization and evangelization of the peoples of the world are an indication of the treasures of genius which God has put at man's disposal. Is it reasonable to believe "that He might lead it towards one place--a black hole in the ground where it could bury its intellect and memory and imagination and prayer in the depths with the leaf and the worm?" The answer is "No." If death means the utter forgetfulness of God-given gifts and of earthly friends and loved ones in the Lord, then this aching emptiness in our hearts never shall be satisfied, and the undying memory of departed loved ones will never be anything more than just a buried hope.

The Desire of All Nations

From time immemorial men have held to the doctrine of recognition in the future life. Like an unbroken thread in human history, there has been a deep conviction in man's spirit that the purpose of being created could not be fulfilled in his short-lived visit in this life.

The ancient Athenian philosopher Socrates could say that since "death conveys us to those regions which are inhabited by the spirits of departed men, will it not be unspeakably happy to escape from the hands of mere nominal judges? Is it possible for you to look upon this as an unimportant journey? Is it nothing to converse with Orpheus, and Homer, and Hesiod? Believe me, I could cheerfully suffer many a death on condition of realizing such a privilege. With what pleasure could I leave the world, to hold communion with Palamedes, Ajax, and others!"

Cicero wrote: "For my own part, I feel myself transported with the most ardent impatience to join the society of my two departed friends. O, glorious day! when I shall retire from this slow and sordid scene, to assemble with the

divine congregation of departed spirits; and not with those only whom I have just mentioned, but with my dear Cato, that best of sons and most valuable of men! . . . If I seemed to bear his death with fortitude, it was by no means that I did not most sensibly feel the loss I had sustained: It was because I supported myself with the consoling reflection that we could not long be separated."

Untaught savage kings in some part of the world believed that they could send secret messages to departed friends by whispering the message in the ear of one of their subjects and then immediately cutting off his head. It is reported that in some savage tribes, when a king died, hundreds of his subjects willingly submitted to death in order that their king might be better served in the spirit world. Even our American Indians, in some places, believed that when the tribal chief died, it was proper to slay his wife and other close associates in order that he might retain his dignity and be assisted by the same servants in the future life.

The belief in recognition and reunion in the afterlife is a universal one. It prevailed among cultured philosophers and poets, among untutored pagans, and it is voiced by the peoples of the world in our own day. The universal, instinctive belief is that we shall know each other in the future life. Someone has expressed the yearning of his heart in the following verse:

When the holy angels meet us
As we join their happy band,
We shall know the friends that greet us
In that glorious spirit-land.
We shall see the same eyes shining
On us as in days of yore.
We shall feel the dear arms twining
Fondly, round us as before.
Author unknown.

The Hymns of the Church

For many years the Christian Church has been singing hymns that express positively the belief that heavenly recognition is a blessed assurance.

Oh, how sweet it will be in that beautiful land,
So free from all sorrow and pain,
With songs on our lips and with harps in our hands,
To meet one another again,
To meet one another again,
With songs on our lips and with harps in our hands,
To meet one another again.

I'll soon be at home over there,
For the end of my journey I see;
Many dear to my heart, over there,
Are watching and waiting for me.
Over there, over there,
I'll soon be at home over there,
Over there, over there, over there,
I'll soon be at home over there.

There's a land that is fairer than day,
And by faith we can see it afar;
For the Father waits over the way,
To prepare us a dwelling-place there.
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.

Oh, the dear ones in glory, how they beckon me to come,
And our parting at the river I recall;
To the sweet vales of Eden they will sing my welcome home,
But I long to meet my Saviour first of all.

Friends will be there I have loved long ago;
Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet, just a smile from my Saviour, I know,
Will thro' the ages be glory for me.

My loved ones in the Homeland
Are waiting me to come
Where neither death nor sorrow
Invades their holy home.

Heavenly Recognition in the Old Testament

An encouraging oft-repeated refrain in the Old Testament substantiates the doctrine of Heavenly Recognition:

Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people (Genesis 25:8).

And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people (Genesis 25:17).

And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him (Genesis 35:29).

And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people (Genesis 49:33).

Aaron *shall* be gathered unto his people; for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the waters of Meribah (Numbers 20:24).

And the Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also *shalt* be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered (Numbers 27:12, 13).

When Abraham died, he was buried in a cave at Machpelah in the land of his sojourn. He purchased the field himself for a possession to be certain of a burying place at death, but it was not the sepulchre of his ancestors. Therefore, the language of the Scripture does not mean that his body was gathered to the place of his forefathers, for some of them had died and were buried back in Ur of the Chaldees. Notice also that Abraham was gathered to his people before his body was buried, for it was after he was gathered to his people (verse 8) that his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah (verse 29). The same is true also of Moses who was gathered to his people, but whose body was buried in a valley in Moab, and "no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day" (Deuteronomy 34:6). As we study the lives of other Old Testament characters of whom it was said that they were gathered unto their people, we will find that it meant more than merely being buried with them. They were gathered to their loved ones in the abode of departed spirits with not one moment's solitude between their memories on earth and their joining them in Heaven. A blessed recognition! A hallowed reunion!

The attitude of David at the death of his child shows that Israel's King believed in Heavenly Recognition. He had fasted and wept in the hope that God would be gracious to him and allow the child to live. But when final word was received that he was dead, David ate food, wiped the tears away from his eyes, and found comfort in a hope that he expressed in the words: "I shall go to him" (2 Samuel 12:23). Would there be any comfort for David if he had to go to his child whom he would not know? What would the blind get out of going to behold a sunset? What would the deaf get out of going to hear music?

May we say here that we do not believe there will be infants in Heaven as such. There will be no deformed, deficient, nor decrepit bodies in Heaven. There will be no old age or infancy in the home of the blessed. We have

stated in the previous chapter that no infant who dies will be lost and sent to Hell. However they will not appear in their resurrected bodies as infants, for, as Dr. West has said: "Infancy is an immature stage and an imperfect state of existence. Adam and Eve were not infants when made, but adults." What a tragedy if weak and helpless infants are doomed to an eternal state of weakness and infirmity! We encounter no problem here in a parent recognizing its child in Heaven. When we think of Christian mothers who have died giving birth to a child, and the child growing to full maturity and becoming a Christian, we still believe that the mother shall recognize her son or daughter even though her last view of the child was in its infancy.

Heavenly Recognition in the New Testament

The scene on the Mount of Transfiguration is generally accepted as strong evidence of Heavenly Recognition. After death the spirit is clothed with a spirit body that is recognizable. This fact was in evidence when Jesus took Peter, James, and John up into the Holy Mount. As Heaven shone forth in celestial effulgence, there appeared before Christ and His disciples Moses and Elijah. These two Old Testament saints did not appear as angels or ghosts, but, Luke says: "There talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias" (Luke 9:30). Not only were Moses and Elijah recognizable by our Lord, but they were known to the disciples also. Peter certainly knew them, for he said: "Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles: one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (verse 33). When we recall how the disciples with earthly, limited vision could recognize the two saints from Heaven, certainly when we arrive there in our glorified bodies and with heavenly vision, we will be able to recognize those with whom we associated on earth.

When the rich man died and went to Hell, "he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (Luke 16:23). Here is a case that proves both recognition and remembrance in the future life. If, in the abode of the lost with its limitations of spiritual wisdom and perception, there is feeling for and recognition of loved ones, how much greater will be the affinity and knowledge of our loved ones in the eternal Home of the redeemed where cognizance is not limited!

Heaven is revealed as a social place, where enjoyment and fellowship are set forth under the figure of a feast. Jesus said: "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). Assuredly, the patriarchs and prophets knew each other at this holy festival, and so will the saved from every quarter of the earth.

The Apostle Paul believed and taught that Heaven was a place of mutual recognition for the children of God. In his first Epistle to the Thessalonians,

Paul wrote: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20). There is no mistaking what Paul had in mind. He fully expected to meet the converts from Thessalonica in Heaven, and furthermore, he looked forward to being able to distinguish them from others who had found Christ during the years of his ministry. By the Holy Spirit, Paul taught also that those who were saved under his teaching and preaching would know him. He says, "As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus" (2 Corinthians 1:14). Elsewhere Paul speaks of "the whole family in heaven and earth" (Ephesians 3:15). Heaven is our home, and all who go there are one family with God as their Father. How sad if we had to live throughout eternity as strangers! It would not be home.

But we take courage and press on hopefully, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Today our knowledge is confined to the revelation that God has given us, and how we do praise Him for that marvelous revelation in His Word! But in that day--"face to face!" O blessed hope! Face to face with family and friends whom we have loved and long since lost awhile. But more wonderful still we shall see Him as He is, "face to face."

Face to face! O blissful moment!
Face to face--to see and know;
Face to face with my Redeemer
Jesus Christ Who loves me so.