

December Questions and Answers

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Worship

Introduction:

Our custom is to devote the lesson on the second Sunday night of each month to questions submitted by members and guests of our congregation. Tonight, all three questions have one thing in common. I do not know the answers to these questions absolutely. However, I hope to provide you with some Biblical passages and thoughts to help provide perspective on these questions.

Discussion:

- I. Will we know each other in heaven as we know each other now?
 - A. Very often we are concerned with what eternity will be like. There are a host of questions that go along with this one. If we know each other, will we know who is not there? If we know they are not there, will we be saddened by that knowledge? But I thought there were “no tears in heaven”? I do not presume to know the answers to all these questions, nor do I think the Bible actually answers all these questions. One of the facts about the Bible that most surprises me is how little God has actually revealed about heaven and what existence there will be like. Further, I do not plan to pursue all the possible questions that can stem from this one in further lessons.
 - B. As I said in the introduction, I do not know the answer to this question absolutely. However, there is one biblical event upon which I base my thoughts regarding this question. I do believe we will retain our identities in heaven and I do believe we will know one another. I base this on the events that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration. In **Mark 9:2-5**, Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John. At the same time, Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus. Both Moses and Elijah were dead and living in the spiritual realm, yet both retained their identities. What most amazes me is even though they had both been dead for hundreds, even thousands of years, Peter knew exactly who they were. Based on this, I believe we will retain our identities in the after life and we will recognize each other.
 - C. Having said that, I know it is not absolute proof. However, here is an absolute truth. We really do not know much about heaven and what it will be like. However, we do know it will be worth whatever we have to endure here to go to heaven. As Paul said in **Romans 8:16-18**, there is nothing we endure here worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed to us in heaven. There is nothing so glorious but that it pales in comparison with the glories of heaven and there is nothing so dreadful that we would trade the glories of heaven to avoid it. Whether we actually know each other in heaven or not, the truth that we want to go there is absolute.
- II. Is hell going to be literal darkness, fire and brimstone or does God use that description as a way of letting us know how bad it is going to be?
 - A. In **Revelation 20:11-15**, John drew a picture of judgment as he described the church's victory over her enemies. Death, hades and everyone whose name was not written in the book of life were cast into the lake of fire. No doubt, this picture presents hell in all of its tormenting reality. **Mark 9:43-48** refers to hell three times, describing it as the unquenchable fire. In **Matthew 3:11-12**, John the Baptist described the baptism of fire pointing out that when the Lord gathers His wheat into the barn, He will thresh out the chaff and burn it in unquenchable fire. Then we have passages in the parables such as **Matthew 25:30**, which picture judgment on the wicked as being cast out into outer darkness, into a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Are these pictures literal, or are they metaphors to simply point out how dreadful hell will be?
 - B. As we pointed out about heaven, God has not revealed a great deal about hell. There are very few things we know about the spiritual realm in which we will exist after this life is over. However, I will share with you my opinion and my basis for believing it. I tend to believe these are metaphors to allow us, in our physical state, to get an inkling of how dreadful the spiritual state of hell will be. In **Matthew 25:41**, Jesus provided a picture of judgment as He told of the goats on the left who did not serve Jesus by serving others. They will hear, “Depart from Me accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.” The first point I would make is the eternal fire of hell was prepared primarily for the devil and his messengers. The devil is a spiritual being, not a being of flesh and blood. To my knowledge, literal fire and darkness would have no affect upon him as a spiritual being. Second, we note the fire is eternal.

That in and of itself demonstrates the spiritual aspect of this punishment. Those enter hell will not be in their earthly forms. In such a case, there would be no eternal nature to this punishment (see also **Mark 9:43-48**). Flesh and blood are destroyed by fire. As spiritual beings, torment in hell will be eternal. But as spiritual beings, physical fire would have little effect. Therefore, I believe the pictures of darkness, fire and brimstone are metaphorical to demonstrate the spiritual torment those who do not submit to Jesus will face.

- C. Having said that, we must not think these metaphorical pictures are intended to water down the reality or torment of hell. Rather, these pictures demonstrate that the closest we can come to understanding what receiving “the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (**II Thessalonians 1:9**) is like is enduring eternal flaming agony without relief. Spiritual torment in hell is as though we are being eternally burned at the stake but never being cut loose and never dying. I may not be absolutely sure what hell will be like. I am absolutely sure I don’t want any part of it.

III. What does it mean in **I Corinthians 6:2-3** when it says we shall judge angels?

- A. As with the other two questions, I freely admit I am not 100% sure of Paul’s meaning in these two verses. Is it possible Christians will have some active role in the judgment of non-Christians and angels? I guess it is possible. However, I find that hard to believe in light of passages like **Romans 2:16**. What then could this passage possibly mean?
- B. I believe **Matthew 12:41-42** provides some insight. Jesus told the generation that saw and heard Him the men of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba would stand up and condemn them at the judgment because the men of Nineveh heeded the preaching of Jonah and the Queen of Sheba listened to the wisdom of Solomon. The Ninevites and Queen of Sheba had the wisdom to heed the two men of God. Yet, the Jews of Jesus’ generation did not have the wisdom to heed the Son of God. Therefore, the actions of the Ninevites and Queen of Sheba were a demonstration that the Jews of Jesus’ day had no excuses. If Gentiles would submit to those less than Jesus, how much more should those Jews have submitted to Jesus?
- C. With that passage in our Biblical context as we examine **I Corinthians 6:2-3**, I think the passage becomes clearer. We judge the world and angels not in the sense of sitting on the jury and hearing the case before them. Rather, our acceptance of the gospel is itself a judgment against those who have access to the same evidence as we do and yet reject it. Further, the angels received even greater evidence of God’s glory but rejected it, how much more do our actions demonstrate judgment against them?
- D. We must consider this point in the context of **I Corinthians 6:1-5**. Paul’s direct point in the passage is if we have issues with one another, we ought to find a wise person in Christ’s church to arbitrate for us instead of going to the world’s court. If I am correct, Paul is in essence saying, “Look Corinthians, these worldly judges are not even wise enough to see the truth of the gospel of Jesus, how on earth can they be wise enough to handle your arbitrations? Find someone within the Lord’s body who can judge between you. Better yet, why not accept the wrong and be defrauded to the benefit of your brother in Christ?”

Conclusion:

As always, I do not have all the answers. I do believe God’s word has all the answers to the important questions regarding serving Him. If you believe I am mistaken in any point of teaching, feel free to talk with me about it. If you have a question you would like dealt with. You may submit it by e-mail or by filling out one of the question forms and dropping it in the box outside my office.