

The Heavenly Inheritance

Col 1:4-6 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; 5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

Last time I didn't quite finish up. I had some things I was saying about love, and I want to try to finish some of that and then get into the next few verses.

The next few verses are interesting and important, but they often lend themselves to misunderstanding. We were talking last time about the nature of love, about human love versus God's love. Paul was looking at the church in Colossae and was rejoicing about their faith and love, and we talked about how those two things are evidence of a life that is completely foreign to the natural man, that is if we are talking about true faith and true love.

Now man's version of faith and love—man's version of anything—is pretty easily copied and doesn't mean a whole lot, but God's understanding of the reality of faith is a *light*. It's really Him as light shining in your soul. It's the light of God that causes you to see with His perspective, and so it's one hundred percent a spiritual reality that works in you because the author and finisher of faith is Christ.

Love is the same thing. We talked about human love as basically a nature which produces relationships that are according to that nature. That nature is basically to take things to yourself. Self is the center and real heart of adamic love, of natural love. It's not hard to see that just by looking around... by looking at yourself, really.

And so the relationships that natural love produces are relationships that *take*. I'm not saying this is always entirely inappropriate in a natural sense... It's just the way it is. You gather people around you that you can take something from, whether it's something of security or emotional benefit...

whatever it is. Natural love is like a big vacuum that is always sucking towards self. And as soon as person A, B, or C stops providing the thing that you love them for, then your love suddenly dries up. Marriages come to an end. Old relationships stop getting together... “I haven’t talked to Cousin Billy in six years!” or whatever... And that’s just how natural love works.

But the direction of God’s love, the direction of love that works in the human soul by faith, is a love that is away from self. It flows in the opposite direction. And there are relationships and desires that go along with that love. And the reason I’m mentioning the emotion and the desire that go along with the love that faith produces is because usually when people think of love, they just think of the emotions or the desires. But there is something more fundamental than just the emotion and the desire. There’s this need in natural love to *take* things for yourself... and this is what creates the desire.

But in spiritual love there’s a need to give, to share, to pour out, to ‘spend and be spent,’ as Paul says. And since this is the kind of desire involved, the relationships are primarily based upon giving. There is gain for each individual member, but it’s not the fleshy, independent, private, carnal gain of natural love. It’s the gain of the one life being the good of all. And the good of all, the good of the whole, is always far more in view. As this view grows in you, it becomes far greater than any individual or personal desire.

So when Paul is talking about seeing love working in the church, whether he’s talking about love for God or love for the saints, he’s not seeing that natural love has just found a new object. Because if that’s the case—if natural love has just found a new object-- it’s still going to be completely self-serving.

I know this is kind of ugly, but most people love God with a very natural, self-serving kind of love. It’s a love where the most important thing is what I think I’m getting, how I think I’m benefiting. And a lot of times—I would dare to say most of the time—that idea of what we’re getting isn’t even right or real! It might have some right words or concepts attached to it, but we’ve added a whole lot of imaginations and carnal concepts to it. We have this idea that we’re going to get something from God, or that He’s going to do this or that, or that He likes us in this particular way and wants to give us this thing or work that for us, etc. And so we serve and love *that* God. Why do we love Him? Because of what we imagine Him to be doing, and thinking, and protecting, and blessing!

But you have to take a step back and think... “is me loving a God of my own imagination really meaningful? If I loved you because of a bunch of imaginations about who you are and what you are like, would that be meaningful to you? I don’t think so. I hope not.

So there has to be a whole different kind of love... a whole different nature of love working in the human soul for it to be something of spiritual value and reality. What is that love? Well it's the very nature of God. God is love and His nature is to pour out Himself, to give Himself, to share Himself, and to desire the benefit of the objects of His love, but not ever at the expense of truth. God doesn't contradict Himself. He does not love at the expense of righteousness, which is why the cross becomes the *way* that God loves you. **He loves you by removing from you one man and depositing in you and revealing in you and forming in you Another Man**, so you can partake in and experience and know all that He is and has in Christ, by Christ. That's an amazing reality when the light begins to show it to you.

I ended last week talking about the fact that you can't even really know love or experience love towards your brethren in Christ or towards God without the cross, because the reality of love can't work in you in the presence of the wrong seed, the wrong nature. Again, the cross comes into the center of this picture. It's only by the inward work of the cross, the putting away of the old man, and the crucifying of the man who cannot love in this way. Only then can you begin to know and experience and share the nature of God that is love.

This is what Moses says in Deuteronomy 30:6

"And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants to love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul that you may live."

I just love this verse because what's the problem? What's the reason why man cannot love the Lord our God? Well, it's an uncircumcised, flesh heart. It's the wrong heart. **In order to love the Lord your God, you need to have your heart circumcised. In other words, you need to have your soul stripped of the wrong man through the work of the cross.** That's the only way that you're going to love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind.

The issue is that naturally speaking, you don't have the resources for this kind of love. It's not what you thought it was. It's not what they show you in the movies. It's something very different, and only the nature of God working in the soul of man can produce the love that the Lord desires in the body of Christ.

Now starting in Colossians 1:3,

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you since we heard of your faith and love for all the saints because of the hope [and that word is really expectation] which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of truth, of the gospel which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bearing fruit even among you [And that word "among" is also the Greek word "in." I think

it's meaning should be translated as "in" here, although you can translate it as "among," but I think "in" is probably what Paul had in mind.], *even in you since the day you heard and fully knew the grace of God in truth, even as you heard from Epaphrus our beloved fellow servant who is a faithful minister of Christ for you.*"

This scripture, and another one I'm going to mention in 1 Peter, are probably the verses that are used more than any others to maintain a really wrong view of what heaven is, and of what our experience of heaven is. And that's really unfortunate because when you look a litter closer at what this verse is actually saying, it's just the opposite of what a cursory, quick reading would imagine!

Let's start with this question: What is heaven? The first thing that comes to the natural mind is a geographical location, a place. And the other thing we think of when we think of "heaven" is the word "future." You grab any Christian off the street – it doesn't matter if they've been a Christian for fifty years or five minutes—and you ask them what heaven is, they'll probably say it's the place I'm going to go when I die.

This is quite unfortunate. But before we even read the word "heaven" in scripture, we have all already heard and thought and imagined and seen in movies or in Looney Tunes, so many different things and ideas about heaven. We bring our imaginations to this word, and we don't allow the scriptures to testify of something real. We don't bring our idea of heaven to the Lord and say, "Lord is this even right?" What we do is bring our preconceived ideas to scriptures and make the scriptures fit our ideas.

And worse than that, even before a person decides to accept God's gift of salvation, their decision is often based upon someone's presentation of heaven, or some preconceived idea or promise about what heaven will be like! Do you see what I'm saying? First we hear a presentation or have an idea about what heaven is like, and it sounds really appealing, and therefore we accept God's offer of Jesus Christ as a kind of stepping stone to get to that idea about heaven; to get to that place, to have that kind of security, to not be as afraid to die, to go and see your loved ones, to be able to fly with a harp, to have your body fixed, etc. We hear this list of things that sound great to us, and then someone says, "All you have to do is accept Jesus and you'll go to that place one day!" so we say, "Sure I want to go to that place! I'll accept Jesus."

My point is that, before you've even cracked open the bible the first time, you're already totally entrenched in a concept. Before you read the word heaven in Scripture, you already are totally attached to an idea. And if you never humble your heart and lay it down before the Lord and say, "What is heaven, anyway?" then you will live your whole life with that same concept. You'll die at ninety three with the same concept you formed at age fourteen. And that's really unfortunate because true spiritual learning and knowledge is always killing the ideas that were

already in our heart—the ones we imagined in the darkness—and replacing them with true perspective in the light... if we allow it, that is.

This verse is saying that Paul has heard of their faith and love, and therefore he's praying. Verse five has to do with why he is praying. **He's praying for them because there is an inexhaustible expectation laid up for them in heaven, of which they've heard, and out from which there is already fruit. There is heavenly fruit already manifesting itself in the earth, in them, in the whole world.** And that's the always the order of the kingdom, but I'll get to that in a second.

I think you could say that Paul is saying something like this. This is my summary, and I'm making it a little stronger than he's saying it to try to make it more clear and to help us dump some of our thoughts about it...

He's saying, **"Look, everything that the gospel offers you is purely heavenly. It's laid up in the heavens, it's not in the earth.** It's not in a bank. It's not at a car dealership. It's not a brand new car. **The inheritance the gospel promises you is heavenly.** It's incorruptible, it's not able to be defiled. It's something that cannot be ruined or stolen- thieves cannot break in and take it... Moths cannot destroy it, it's heavenly. That is to say it's spiritual. That's the nature of it... the realm of it.

And the gospel that is come to you is this incredible reality of our expectation. Any Greek lexicon will tell you that that word "hope" is really "expectation." It shouldn't be translated "hope." Unfortunately the word "hope" makes this inheritance seem even further away than our concepts of heaven do by themselves! Saying "heaven" already makes it feel like another place and time for us, but then you add the word "hope" and suddenly you don't even know if you're going to get to that place! The word is "expectation." **And it's an expectation to know and experience this heavenly fruit growing in the soul.** That's what Paul is praying about.

Going back to my question, "What is heaven?" Heaven isn't really a place, at least not in the sense that we think of the word "place" or a geographical location. I suppose you can call it a place as long as you understand that place to also be a Person.... the realm of life and reality in Him, in Christ. The bible uses a lot of words to describe purely spiritual realities. For example, Exodus 15:17 says, "I will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of my inheritance, the place that I have chosen for myself to dwell," says the Lord."

Now what is that mountain? Why did He use the word mountain? It's a word that has to do with something that is raised up out of the earth, but God's not really going to stick you into a mountain! You're not going to walk around inside of that mountain saying, "Hey look! This is the place You've chosen for us to dwell in!"

It's obviously language that describes a coming together or union of the heavens and the earth in this one dwelling place. It's Christ. It's the place, the Person, the life the realm, the salvation where God and man live together in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the temple of God.

The temple of God, again, isn't a physical temple. Christ says, "You will raise up my body in three days," and He's talking about the temple. You can talk about the temple as Christ and we are living in Him. You can talk about the temple as the Church, and He is the glory filling up the temple. Either way you look at it, it's not a natural temple; it's a reality that a natural temple speaks of.

There is some truth to calling heaven a place, but its not a location where God lives. I mean, it's not bigger than God. It's not like God made this really big place so that He fits inside of it. No, it's not that. **Just as easily as you can say that God lives in heaven, you can say that heaven lives in God. You see? Heaven is in God.**

You can call it the Father's house, but the house is the Father. Jesus says in one verse, "My Father's house has many dwelling places", but then He says "I'm taking you with Me into my Father." "I am in the Father, you are in Me, and I am in you" The house isn't a separate thing than the Father. It's not just something He made that He owns. It's HIM! "You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God!"

Natural words describe spiritual realities, not natural realities. You can call it a house or a place, as long as you don't separate that place from the Person who is its substance, reality, and definition. God lives in heaven, yes, but then there are many scriptures saying that God lives in you! Heaven can't be defined by a location. It's defined by a Person, who has opened Himself up as a dwelling place, as a relationship.

I think the purpose for using the word "heaven" as opposed to just saying "in God" is generally as kind of a contrast word with the word "earth" or "earthly." There are things that are earthly and there are things that are heavenly. There is the earth and there is the heavens.

We see a similar contrast in the words "natural" versus "spiritual." The words earthly or natural don't really speak primarily of location either; they speak of a kind, a realm, a nature, a character. If we say, "That thing is earthly," are we primarily talking about a place or location? No, we're talking about a kind, a realm. What makes it earthly is the nature of it; the character of it.

And it's the same thing with the word heavenly. What makes something heavenly is that it's spiritual, it's in God, or it's participating in something that God is. Heavenly love or heavenly truth is the love and truth as it is in Him, according to God's nature, life, character, being. The heavenly Jerusalem isn't a natural city in the clouds. It's the spiritual fulfillment of all that earthly Jerusalem was meant to testify of.

If you look through the whole book of Hebrews, in so many places, the author uses the word “heavenly” as a synonym for the word “spiritual.” There are a few obvious examples like Hebrews 12:22, “But you have come to Mount Zion...” He’s speaking to people who have physical bodies yet he says, ‘You have come to Mount Zion.’

And there’s that mountain again, the mountain mentioned in Exodus 15:17— *‘You’ve come to the city of the living God; you’ve come to the heavenly Jerusalem...’*

I don’t think their physical bodies had left one place and gone to another, but I do believe one hundred percent that they had gone to heavenly Jerusalem. They had come into this spiritual city that has a King like David, but one who is greater than David—Christ—that reigns over that city. He’s the glory within it. He’s the wall of fire around it, as Zechariah says. The city they came to is a spiritual reality... it’s heavenly.

Hebrews 11:16, *“But they desired a better country, that is a heavenly one, therefore God was not ashamed to be called their God.”* Again, he’s talking about a people who walked by faith, seeing a heavenly country. Again, the obvious implication is that they were seeing a spiritual reality as opposed to a natural one. They weren’t seeing really, really far away, with a telescope, unto a natural location in the sky. No, they were seeing a spiritual reality.

My purpose in mentioning these verses is that when the bible speaks of heaven, **you shouldn’t automatically think of a future place.** Heavenly doesn't speak of a different geographic location as much as a different nature, substance, character. Heaven doesn't speak of a different time... way off in the future. It speaks of a different life, realm, kind, light, etc. When Scripture uses the word heaven or heavenly, it is often trying to make a contrast, saying that such-and-such is not carnal, not earthly; your inheritance that you’ve come to in Christ is not in the earth or of the earth, it’s a heavenly inheritance. It’s kept in the heavens. It’s laid up in the heavens; it’s spiritual and eternal.

1Peter 1:3 is a similar passage to Colossians 1:5

1 Pet 1:3 *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; He according to His great mercy, having regenerated us unto a living expectation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading, being kept in heaven for you.”*

The point here is that first of all, we’ve been born again, as Paul says in so many places, made alive with Him, seated with Him in the heavens, our souls are partakers of that realm, that reality, that substance. We are citizens of heaven. We have come to the heavenly Jerusalem. **And what these two verses (Col 1:5, 1 Pet 1:3) are saying is that the inheritance is a heavenly experience, not an earthly experience... not a financial experience....not a carnal experience. It’s a heavenly**

experience so that the moment you're born again, the moment you're joined to Christ in the resurrection—the moment Christ becomes your resurrection and your life—you have a living expectation. He has regenerated you to a living expectation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

What does that expectation have to do with? It has to do with an on-going possessing, experiencing, abiding in an inheritance that is purely heavenly. Do you see what he's saying here? The world can't corrupt it. Man can't defile it. It's never going to fade away. That's why he's saying it's heavenly! It's heavenly because moth can't eat it and thieves can't steal it, but your expectation is the present and eternal on-going experiencing, knowing, abiding in, living, loving of this eternal inheritance.

Paul says in Colossians chapter one that this inheritance is already bearing fruit in you! It's already there. And how is it there? Well because you have been joined to Christ through the resurrection of the dead. **It's not kept from you, it's kept for you.**

Imagine that you've saved up some money for a few years and you go to a bank and you're telling the banker that you live in a bad neighborhood and you're a little afraid that someone's going to break in and take your money, so you're going to keep it in the bank just to be safe.

And he gives you a debit card and a check book, and a few days later you go to the ATM machine but it doesn't seem to work. Then you try to write some checks but they bounce...

So you go back to the bank and say to the banker, "Hey, I put my money here in the bank because I thought it would be safe and incorruptible, defiled and unfading..." And the fellow says, "Oh no... Your money is totally safe here, but it's kept FROM you." And you say, "I thought I had access to it!" but he replies, "Well maybe one day—when you come and live in the vault where your money is kept—you can have access to it..." And you say "But I put it here so that it would be safe and I could actually spend it!" You thought your money could actually bear fruit in your life, could actually pay your bills, that you could actually invest it!" And he says, "No, no, that's not how it works... It's yours, but you can't have it."

Now that's a silly example, but that's what people are saying about our heavenly inheritance. There are so many scriptures that talk about a present, heavenly reality for the soul of believers, but we don't pay much attention to those scriptures, for some reason.

Yet Paul would say, "You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. You've been raised up in the heavens." Somehow we glance over those verses and explain them as some sort of strange theological thing that we'll experience some day when we go to heaven. But this begins to change

with the eye of faith starts to open up and we see all that is now in Christ... all that is present and real and alive in Christ.

And when faith begins to be real in your soul... And I mean real faith, not human belief, but the faith of the Son of God, the faith that sees Him who is unseen... The faith that has to do with substance... the faith that is substance of things that are hoped for, the evidence of things that are not seen-- when that's the faith that begins to work in your soul, then something happens. This great expectation is born!

What's the expectation? The expectation is to possess everything that faith is looking at! You see in Christ that these three remain: Faith, Expectation, and Love. Faith, hope, and love, but really it should be faith, expectation, and love. And the greatest of these is love— the actual substance, person and nature coming to be the reality of your soul.

Faith sees it. And expectation is an ever-present knowing that all that you see to be true in Him is going to be a progressive experience of your soul; a reality that you walk in. **Faith is the seeing of it, expectation is always reeling it in, and love is the very substance of it made real in you.**

And so the spiritual order is death, heaven, and then earth. What do I mean by that? I mean that the first thing that God brings you to in His Son is death. You've been crucified with Christ, baptized into His death, you have died with Him. The very next thing that your soul is brought to is a purely heavenly reality and relationship, and as you come to know that heavenly reality and relationship, it begins to bear fruit in you in the earth. It begins to have manifestation and increase in you in the earth.

That's the order. It's very different from the order that works in the natural mind. The natural mind says, "First it's earth, then it's death, then it's heaven." And God says, "No... Look at the order in Exodus. First I baptized them all into the death of the lamb. I first put them into the blood of the lamb, made them eat the dead lamb... They were all crucified with Christ."

"Then what was the next thing we dealt with? It was the priesthood. It was this heavenly relationship. It was showing you that you were on the High Priest's breastplate, going into the tabernacle of God. You were a heavenly people, you were a kingdom of priests."

"Exodus 19:4 'I brought you out of Egypt, raised you up on eagle's wings, and brought you into Myself.' That what was the product of this death..."

And then, only after God establishes the reality of the relationship through the priesthood, do you see that people going into a land and having increase in the land, having increase in the earth.

There's an increase, an expression, that begins to spread through the land of Israel. Of what? Of a heavenly reality, a heavenly relationship.

That's the order: Death, heaven, and earth. And that's what Peter's dealing with in 1 Peter 3. That's what Paul's dealing with in Colossians chapter one. They're both dealing with the reality that a people has died with Christ, been raised up and seated with Christ in the heavens, and their inheritance and their experience of the gospel is this spiritual, heavenly fruit that is growing and increasing in them.