

WILL THERE BE PERSONAL RECOGNITION IN HEAVEN? - 3

AFFIRMATIVE EVIDENCE FOR PERSONAL RECOGNITION AFTER DEATH

The Case of Onesimus

Onesimus was a slave who had fled from his master, Philemon, who lived in Colossae. The fugitive found his way to Rome where he came in contact with Paul. The apostle led him to the Lord and presently dispatched him back to his master, bearing the epistle called "Philemon."

Paul commends both master and servant, but he seeks to persuade Philemon to receive Onesimus as a "brother in the Lord." The apostle raises the possibility that "providence" was involved in this situation. "Perhaps" this slave had "been separated" (the passive voice is significant) from his master temporarily so that he might "have him forever" (vs. 15).

This statement clearly implies future recognition and association. It is a thrilling affirmation! Lightfoot described it as an "eternal interchange of friendship" (1892, 340).

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

Some, however, feel that there are objections to the possibility of recognition after death. We will consider a few of these.

No Flesh and Blood in Heaven?

It is occasionally suggested that we recognize one another only on the basis of physical features, and since we will not be flesh and blood in the future state (1 Corinthians 15:50), there could be no future recognition.

This argument is flawed in several particulars. First, it contradicts numerous other passages, such as those presented above.

Second, it would suggested that we would not even be able to know God in the future since he is spirit (John 4:24), and not physical (Luke 24:39) - a conclusion hardly warranted.

Third, it is not true that we only recognize others because of physical traits. A loved one may suffer a horrible tragedy and have their physical features completely reconstructed by means of plastic surgery. He or she may appear totally different, yet we have no difficulty in knowing the person!

No Friends in Heaven?

It is argued that the psalmist asked: "Whom have I in heaven but you [God]?" (Psalm 73:25), thus suggesting no other of his acquaintances was there.

That is a woefully weak objection. This next clause affirms: "And there is none upon earth that I desire but you."

The writer is declaring his **total dependence** upon Jehovah, he is not discussing recognition.

How Can I Be Happy in Heaven, If My Loved Ones Are Not Present?

The most common concern regarding recognition after death is this. If one is able to personally know his loved ones in heaven, will he not also be aware of those **not** there? How could one be truly happy under such circumstances.

We may not be able to fathom everything about this matter from an emotional standpoint. However, we can logically demonstrate that the problem will be resolved.

Surely no one would dare to argue that the affection of our earthly relationship can even begin to rival the benevolent love of our Creator for humanity. Need we be reminded of Romans 5:7-8? Our love pales in contrast to divine affection.

Yet, unquestionably, God is happy! Paul speaks of the "happy" God (1 Timothy 1:11; 6:15).

If the Lord can thus be happy, even though knowing of the many that are eternally

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

lost, we may be confident that our heartaches will be fully remedied. God will wipe away **every** tear (cf. Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

Moreover, no one will be in hell who does not deserve to be there. When we have passed from this life we will have a much sharper view of sin and the hideous nature of rebelling against God. Those of our loved ones who find themselves lost will not appear to us in the same sympathetic light as we saw them through the limitations of fleshly examination.

Yes, we may have perfect confidence that there will be many joyful reunions after we have passed through death's dark valley. May we thus press toward the goal in anticipation of the glories that ultimately be revealed!

-Wayne Jackson

Sources/Footnotes:

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CONSTRUCTION FOR DESTRUCTION

Rutherford County (where I live) is the fastest growing of the 95 counties in Tennessee. It is also one of the fastest growing areas in the entire United States. Construction projects abound, both residential and commercial. The city continues to expand and what used to be the outskirts of the city is now part of the city itself. The side of town I live on is no exception to this incredible growth. Restaurants, gas stations, and retail stores make it convenient for the residents so that they do not have to drive across town to purchase the things that they need or want.

Each time a section of land is designated for commercial use, I wonder what new businesses will be opening. Recently one such building project near our home caught my family's attention. The building that was being constructed was a good-sized facility of several thousand square feet. There was no sign in front indicating what the new business would be. Perhaps it would be a furniture store, or even a mechanic's shop. My family was hoping it would be a restaurant that we liked. The shape of the building appeared conducive to housing any number of worthy businesses. As the construction progressed there was still no sign to identify the type of business. Week by week the finishing touches were applied and finally the big day arrived. A large sign was hoisted to its position on the front of the store that read: **CNG Wine and Spirits**. The project that we had watched with great anticipation was a liquor store packed wall to wall with alcoholic beverages. It is likely not coincidental that his liquor store is located within a few miles of Middle Tennessee State University (with over 20,000 students) and directly across the street from several large apartment complexes where thousands of college-aged people live. What a tremendous letdown! I occasionally glance over at the parking lot of this liquor store while I drive by and it seems that business is booming. There were so many harmless possibilities for this new building, but all along it was being constructed for the destruction of souls. The Bible says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1).

-Steven E. Yeatts

OF THE PEOPLE

Most of us have heard the famous phrase used by Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address: "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people." Many think that Lincoln invented this expression, but he did not. The phrase has been around for hundreds of years. In John Wycliffe's introduction to his translation of the Bible in 1382, these words are found, "This Bible is for the Government of the People, by the People, and for the People." Civil governments can only do so much. Civil authorities are ordained of God to assist in the governing of the secular and legal affairs of men. But, the best government is self-government guided by God. Each of us must use the Bible as the standard that governs our conduct. This is the finest government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

-Darrell Beard

WHAT IS A “CHURCH OF CHRIST” POSITION?

Sometimes a new or weak Christian, still learning, says, “The church of Christ believes that...” Such a statement is dangerous if the person making the statement has the concept that the beliefs and teaching of the church of Christ are merely of a man-conceived system peculiar to the group of which he now is a part. Proper teaching should change that mind set through the course of time. Perhaps, positively, one who speaks of a “church of Christ position” speaks of the distinctiveness of the Lord’s church on a Bible matter as contrasted to how the world and denominations stand on such.

It is disturbing to think, however, that some within the body of Christ who speak of a “church of Christ position” speak disparagingly of some of the doctrinal stands gospel preachers and godly elders take on issues like modest apparel, mechanical instruments in the singing portion of worship, woman’s role in the worship and leadership of the church, marriage, divorce, and remarriage, along with a host of other moral and doctrinal “positions.” There are several unfortunate implications stemming from a statement like the one under consideration.

Is it implies that one view is as good as another? One viewpoint on a matter of judgment may be as good as another, but the examples given above do not fall within the realm of judgment. For example, it is not scriptural to teach that immodesty is acceptable to God. It is dangerous to limit a biblical matter to a “church of Christ position” as if it were a single stance among several other, equally acceptable positions. The net result of such tolerance is the religious confusion that exists today. No rational person would say, “It is his position that an untreated rattlesnake bite will kill the one bitten.” It probably is “his” position, but what other position would one take? In the same way, when the “church of Christ preacher” preaches “one husband, one wife, for life, except for spousal fornication and death,” that is clearly “his” position as he derives it from Bible study. However, what other position could one hold and still please the Lord? And, it is the same with every matter of faith within the Bible.

Is it implied that the Bible and belief therein is purely subjective? In a cultural climate that is openly tolerant of diverse views and expressions, some religious people may feel the pressure to be as tolerant with every religious view and conclusion. Yet, it is important to see that the Bible is an objective standard rather than a subjective suggestion. Such attempts to dilute the pattern of Scriptures opens the door for any “position” to be valid. If there is no set right or wrong on a matter, is everything right? The Bible teaches that there is a “form of doctrine” to be obeyed (Romans 6:17). “Truth” sanctifies (John 17:17), but if there are a hundred truths, which one should be believed? The Bible commands that one “hold fast the form of sound words” (2 Timothy 1:13). God and Christ expect religious unity (cf. John 17), and one can be confident that they have made it possible for such unity to exist.

Is it implied that erroneous views will not be condemned? If the church of Christ holds the “position” that baptism is essential for salvation, and the Baptists believe that faith apart from baptism saves, will both be saved? Can it be said that those who believe, teach, obey, and thereafter live according to error will be lost? Of course, no one desires to be offensive in teaching the Bible, and one should never be unnecessarily offensive. However, moral courage must cause Christian teachers to identify sin and its wages (Romans 6:23). The Bible teaches that many will be condemned (Matthew 7:13-14). Those who stand condemned are those who are disobedient and who walk contrary to the will of God (cf. Matthew 7:21-24; Hebrews 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17; etc.). Certainly Christ will be the Judge before whom every individual stands (Matthew 25:31-34). But, as certainly, He will judge justly according to the written Word of God and the book of one’s life. If He will save those who lived contrary to His will, who will be lost on that day? Will anyone be lost?

One should never accept anything simply because a “church of Christ” preacher, teacher, elder, or other member says it! The standard of right will always be the Bible. Whatever is done religiously must be according to the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17). May one never dismiss Bible teaching by crediting the stand as only a “church of Christ position.” May our every position, as God’s people, be what God teaches. Let us stand boldly there (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10-12). Then, the position one holds can confidently be shared with the saints and the lost.