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HEAVEN

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RANDY
ALCORN

Chapter 41

Will Heaven Ever Be Boring?

A common misconception about eternity surfaced in an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. A member of the undying “Q continuum” longs for an end to his existence. Why? Because, he complains, everything that could be said and done has *already* been said and done, and now there’s only repetition and utter boredom. He says, “For us, the disease is immortality.” Finally he’s allowed to end his existence.

Science-fiction writer Isaac Asimov writes, “I don’t believe in an afterlife, so I don’t have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse.”

Sadly, even among Christians, it’s a prevalent myth that Heaven will be boring. Sometimes we can’t envision anything beyond strumming a harp and polishing the streets of gold. We’ve succumbed to Satan’s strategies “to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place” (Revelation 13:6).

What Will We Do to Avoid Boredom?

People sometimes say, “I’d rather be having a good time in Hell than be bored in Heaven.” Many people imagine Hell as a place where they’ll hang around, shoot pool, and joke with friends. That could happen on the New Earth, but not in Hell.

Hell is a place of torment and isolation, where friendship and good times don’t exist. Hell will be deadly boring. Everything good, enjoyable, refreshing, fascinating, and interesting is derived from God. Without God there’s nothing interesting to do. King David wrote, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11, NKJV). In the presence of God, there’s nothing but joy.

In his book *Things Unseen*, pastor Mark Buchanan asks,

Why won’t we be bored in heaven? Because it’s the one place where both impulses— to go beyond, to go home—are perfectly joined and totally satisfied. It’s the one place where we’re constantly discovering—where everything is always fresh and the possessing of a thing is as good as the pursuing of it—and yet where we are fully at home—where everything is as it ought to be and where we find, undiminished, that mysterious something we never found down here. . . . And this lifelong melancholy that hangs on us, this wishing we were someone else somewhere else, vanishes too. Our craving to go beyond is always and fully realized. Our yearning for home is once and for all fulfilled. The *ahh!* of deep satisfaction and the *aha!* of delighted surprise meet, and they kiss.³⁰³

Our belief that Heaven will be boring betrays a heresy—that God is boring. There’s no greater nonsense. Our desire for pleasure and the experience of joy come directly from God’s hand. He made our taste buds, adrenaline, sex drives, and the nerve endings that convey pleasure to our brains. Likewise, our imaginations and our capacity for joy and exhilaration were made by the very God we accuse of being boring. Are we so arrogant as to imagine that human beings came up with the idea of having fun?

“Won’t it be boring to be good all the time?” someone asked. Note the assumption: sin is exciting and righteousness is boring. We’ve fallen for the devil’s lie. His most basic strategy, the same one he employed with Adam and Eve, is to make us believe that sin brings fulfillment. However, in reality, sin robs us of fulfillment. Sin doesn’t make life interesting; it makes life empty. Sin doesn’t create adventure; it blunts it. Sin doesn’t expand life; it shrinks it. Sin’s emptiness inevitably leads to boredom. When there’s fulfillment, when there’s beauty, when we see God as he truly is—an endless reservoir of fascination—boredom becomes impossible.

Those who believe that excitement can’t exist without sin are thinking with sin-poisoned minds. Drug addicts are convinced that without their drugs they can’t live happy lives. In fact—as everyone else can see—drugs make them miserable. Freedom from sin will mean freedom to be what God intended, freedom to find far greater joy in everything. In Heaven we’ll be *filled*—as Psalm 16:11 describes it—with joy and eternal pleasures.

Why Would Anyone Think We’d Be Bored?

An elderly gentleman I led to Christ asked a question of a Christian employee in his care center: “Will we have fun in Heaven?”

“Oh, *no*,” the woman replied, appearing dismayed that he’d even asked.

When he told me this story, I shook my head, because I’ve heard it so often. Why did this Christian woman respond as she did? Because, in accordance with the faulty assumptions of Christoplatonism, she instinctively linked fun with sin and boredom with holiness. But she couldn’t be more wrong. God promises that we’ll laugh, rejoice, and experience endless pleasures in Heaven.

Someone told me nobody will enjoy playing golf in Heaven because it would get boring always hitting holes in one. But why assume everyone’s skills will be equal and incapable of further development? Just as our minds will grow in knowledge, our resurrection bodies can develop greater skills.

Another reason people assume Heaven is boring is that their Christian lives are boring. That’s not God’s fault; it’s their own. God calls us to follow him in an adventure that should put us on life’s edge. He’s infinite in creativity, goodness, beauty, and power. If we’re experiencing the invigorating stirrings of God’s Spirit, trusting him to fill our lives with divine appointments, experiencing the childlike delights of his gracious daily kindnesses, then we’ll know that God is exciting and Heaven is exhilarating. People who love God crave his companionship. To be in his presence will be the very opposite of boredom.

We think of ourselves as fun-loving, and of God as a humorless killjoy. But we’ve got it backward. It’s not God who’s boring; it’s us. Did we invent wit, humor, and laughter? No. God did. We’ll never begin to exhaust God’s sense of humor and his love for adventure. The real question is this: How could God not be bored with *us*?

Most of us can envision ourselves being happy for a few days or a week, if that. But a year of complete and sustained happiness? Impossible, we think, because we’ve never experienced it. We think of life under the Curse as normal because that’s all we’ve ever known. A hundred or a million years of happiness is inconceivable to us. Just as creatures who live in a flat land can’t conceive of three-dimensional space, we can’t conceive of unending happiness. Because that level of happiness is not possible here on the fallen

Earth, we assume it won't be possible on the New Earth. But we're wrong. To properly envision Heaven, we must remove from our eyes the distorted lenses of death and the Curse.

Will Our Work Be Engaging?

On the New Earth, God will give us renewed minds and marvelously constructed bodies. We'll be whole people, full of energy and vision. James Campbell says, "The work on the other side, whatever be its character, will be adapted to each one's special aptitude and powers. It will be the work he can do best; the work that will give the fullest play to all that is within him."³⁰⁴

Even under the Curse, we catch glimpses of how work can be enriching, how it can build relationships, and how it can help us to improve. Work stretches us in ways that make us smarter, wiser, and more fulfilled. The God who created us to do good works (Ephesians 2:10) will not cancel this purpose when he resurrects us to inhabit the new universe. The Bible's picture of resurrected people at work in a vibrant society on a resurrected Earth couldn't be more compelling: We're going to help God run the universe (Luke 19:11-27).

We're told that we will serve God in Heaven (Revelation 7:15; 22:3). Service is active, not passive. It involves fulfilling responsibilities in which we expend energy. Work in Heaven won't be frustrating or fruitless; instead, it will involve lasting accomplishment, unhindered by decay and fatigue, enhanced by unlimited resources. We'll approach our work with the enthusiasm we bring to our favorite sport or hobby.

In Heaven, we'll reign with Christ, exercise leadership and authority, and make important decisions. This implies we'll be given specific responsibilities by our leaders and we'll delegate specific responsibilities to those under our leadership (Luke 19:17-19). We'll set goals, devise plans, and share ideas. Our best work days on the present Earth—those days when everything turns out better than we planned, when we get everything done on time, and when everyone on the team pulls together and enjoys each other—are just a small foretaste of the joy our work will bring us on the New Earth.

A disembodied existence would be boring, but the reality of our bodily resurrection puts boredom to death. Imagine the animals that zoologists will research and play with or the flowers that botanists will study. Gifted astronomers and explorers may go from star system to star system, galaxy to galaxy, studying the wonders of God's creation. If we think life on the New Earth will be boring, we just aren't getting it. Take a closer look at God and his Word, and all thoughts that we'll be bored in his presence will vanish.

Will Our Life's Work Continue?

Because there will be continuity from the old Earth to the new, it's possible we'll continue some of the work we started on the old Earth. I believe we'll pursue some of the same things we were doing, or dreamed of doing, before our death. Of course, people whose jobs depend on aspects of our fallen world that will no longer exist on the New Earth—such as dentists (decay), police officers (crime), funeral directors (death), insurance salespeople (disability), and many others—will change their work in Heaven, but that doesn't mean they'll be unemployed. What's now an interest or hobby may become their main vocation. Others, however, may continue with work similar to what they do now, whether as gardeners, engineers, builders, artists, animal trainers, musicians, scientists, craftspeople, or hundreds of

other vocations. A significant difference will be that they'll work without the hindrances of toil, pain, corruption, and sin.

Author Victor Hugo, in reflecting on his life's work, spoke profoundly of anticipating his work in Heaven:

I feel within me that future life. I am like a forest that has been razed; the new shoots are stronger and brighter. I shall most certainly rise toward the heavens the nearer my approach to the end, the plainer is the sound of immortal symphonies of worlds which invite me. For half a century I have been translating my thoughts into prose and verse: history, drama, philosophy, romance, tradition, satire, ode, and song; all of these I have tried. But I feel I haven't given utterance to the thousandth part of what lies within me. When I go to the grave I can say, as others have said, "My day's work is done." But I cannot say, "My life is done." My work will recommence the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes upon the twilight, but opens upon the dawn.³⁰⁵

I'm convinced that Hugo was right in saying that every Christian's life's work, though not always his or her vocation, will continue on the New Earth. After all, our calling to glorify God will never end. It applies as much here and now as it will then and there, and it will likely be fulfilled in many old ways as well as new ones.

In *The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven*, Wilbur Smith suggests, "In heaven we will be permitted to finish many of those worthy tasks which we had dreamed to do while on earth but which neither time nor strength nor ability allowed us to achieve."³⁰⁶ This is an encouraging thought. It saves us from frantically thinking that we have to do it all now, or from giving up in despair because of the limits of time, money, and strength, and the duties that keep us from certain things we'd love to do.

James Campbell took comfort in this same idea:

This throws some measure of relieving light upon the painful mystery of a life brought to a sudden close in the fullness of its power. In the presence of such a tragedy we instinctively ask, Why this waste? Is all the training, discipline, and culture of this choice spirit to be lost? It cannot be; for in God's universe nothing is ever lost. No preparation is ever in vain. There is need up there for clear heads, warm hearts, and skilled hands. . . . If some kinds of work are over, others will begin; if some duties are laid down, others will be taken up. And any regret for labour missed down here, will be swallowed up in the joyful anticipation of the higher service that awaits every prepared and willing worker in the upper kingdom of the Father. . . . He will allow no heaven-born hope to be put to shame, but will bring to realization life's brightest visions.³⁰⁷

What will it be like to perform a task, to build and create, knowing that what we're doing will last? What will it be like to be always gaining skill, so that our best work will always be ahead of us? Because our minds and bodies will never fade and because we will never lack resources or opportunity, our work won't degenerate. Buildings won't last for only fifty years, and books won't be in print for only twenty years. They'll last forever.

Will There Be Cultural Developments?

Anthony Hoekema says, “In the beginning man was given the so-called cultural mandate—the command to rule over the earth and to develop a God-glorifying culture. Because of man’s fall into sin, that cultural mandate has never been carried out in the way God intended. Only on the new earth will it be perfectly and sinlessly fulfilled. Only then shall we be able to rule the earth properly.”³⁰⁸

Would there have been human culture without the Fall? Of course. Culture is the natural, God-intended product of his gifting, equipping, and calling for mankind to rule over creation. Scripture describes developments in farming, metallurgy, and the crafting of musical instruments (Genesis 4:20-22) shortly after the Fall. If God had no interest in those cultural improvements, he wouldn’t make note of them. God created his image-bearers to glorify him in creative accomplishments, and he’s pleased by them.

Only two people in human history, Adam and Eve, even began to taste what it was like to fulfill God’s command to subdue the earth, and they didn’t get far. Was God shortsighted, not anticipating the Fall? Did he give up on Adam and Eve after they sinned? No. He had a plan that would fulfill his original design in greater ways. Resurrected culture will reach ever-expanding heights that no society has yet seen.

In *The Promise of the Future*, theologian Cornelius Venema writes, “Every legitimate and excellent fruit of human culture will be carried into and contribute to the splendour of life in the new creation. Rather than the new creation being a radically new beginning, in which the excellent and noble fruits of humankind’s fulfillment of the cultural mandate are wholly discarded—the new creation will benefit from, and be immensely enriched by, its receiving of these fruits.”³⁰⁹

Bruce Milne shares a similar perspective: “The one who is Lord of the whole of life was never going to bring us at the end into an eternal existence of mental constriction, or of emotional and creative impoverishment. Creativity will surely be valued, for such an anticipation must be in keeping with the nature of him who set the morning stars a-singing when he created them at the beginning, and whose joyful, uninhibited cry echoes across the battlements of the new creation. ‘See, I am making everything new!’ . . . What creative possibilities await us in the unfolding of the eternal ages no present imagination can begin to unravel.”³¹⁰

We should stretch our vision of what’s in store for us. God’s redemptive work is far greater than we imagine because God himself is far greater than we imagine.

Lifeboat or Ark Theology?

Paul Marshall speaks of the prevalent but misguided notion that we’ve permanently wrecked the world. He says that many assume, “What’s important now is simply that we rescue people from the wreckage.”³¹¹ He calls this *lifeboat theology*: “It is as if the creation were the *Titanic*, and now that we’ve hit the iceberg of sin, there’s nothing left for us to do but get ourselves into lifeboats. The ship is sinking rapidly, God has given up on it and is concerned only with the survival of his people. Any effort we make to salvage God’s creation amounts to rearranging the deck chairs. Instead, some say, our sole task is to get into the lifeboats, to keep them afloat, to pluck drowning victims out of the water, and to sail on until we get to heaven where all will be well.”³¹²

Marshall says that this is the assumption and perspective that drives many evangelical Christians. He proposes an alternative to lifeboat theology, which he calls *ark*

theology: “Noah’s ark saved not only people, but it preserved God’s other creatures as well. The ark looked not to flee but to return to the land and begin again. Once the flood subsided, *everyone and everything was intended to return again to restore the earth.*”³¹³ God’s preservation of man and animals and the earth itself demonstrates he hasn’t given up on his creation. In fact, he commanded Noah after the Fall to do exactly what he commanded Adam and Eve before the Fall: Fill the earth and rule it. Noah went out to plant a vineyard (Genesis 9:20), and mankind was back to work again on the earth.

Our gifts and special interests—the way we’re wired—aren’t accidents. *God* made us this way. He intricately designed each of us to uniquely express his glory. Speaking of God’s sovereign distribution of a variety of spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul says, “To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). We’ll be a great community on the New Earth. The gifts, skills, passions, and tasks God grants each of us will not only be for his glory and our good but also for the good of our larger family. God will rejoice as we thrive together, interdependently, in the New Earth’s continuously creative culture.

How Will We Express Our Creativity?

In this world, even under the Curse, human imagination and skill have produced some remarkable works. The statues of Easter Island. Stonehenge. Shakespeare’s plays. Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. The Golden Gate Bridge. Baseball. Heart transplants. Prenatal surgery. Microwave ovens. DVDs. The space shuttle. Chocolate ice cream. Pecan pie. Sports cars. It’s a list that never ends.

With the resources God will lavishly give us on the New Earth, what will we be able to accomplish together? When we think about this, we should be like children anticipating Christmas—sneaking out of bed to see what’s under the Christmas tree.

Without creativity, music would be a dull succession of sounds. Without creativity, books would be colorless and superficial. They wouldn’t engage our minds and hearts. Paintings would be lifeless or nonexistent. Our homes would be barracks, our buildings boxes. God’s preparing a place for us, and he’ll equip us to develop it to his glory.

I agree with Anthony Hoekema when he says, “The possibilities that now rise before us boggle the mind. Will there be ‘better Beethovens’ on the new earth? . . . better Rembrandts, better Raphaels? Shall we read better poetry, better drama, and better prose? Will scientists continue to advance in technological achievement, will geologists continue to dig out the treasures of the earth, and will architects continue to build imposing and attractive structures? Will there be exciting new adventures in space travel? . . . Our culture will glorify God in ways that surpass our most fantastic dreams.”³¹⁴

I imagine that people will express creativity in designing clothes. The precious stones of the New Jerusalem suggest jewelry may have a place on the New Earth. Some people wear jewelry now for status, but on the New Earth, God-made jewels worn by people made in the image of God will reflect the Creator’s beauty. Isaiah 65:21 suggests that we’ll build houses and live in them on the New Earth. If so, we’ll no doubt decorate them beautifully.

Buildings on the scale of the New Jerusalem reflect extensive cultural advancement. Human builders will learn from God’s design, just as Leonardo da Vinci learned by studying the form and flight of birds while working on his flying machine. What will clear-thinking human beings—unhindered by sin and the barriers that separate us—be

able to design and build? What would Galileo, da Vinci, Edison, or Einstein achieve if they could live even a thousand years unhindered by the Curse? What will we achieve when we have resurrected bodies with resurrected minds, working together forever?

Some researchers suggest that we now use only 10 percent of our brainpower. Adam and Eve could likely use 100 percent of theirs—and their brainpower was probably far greater than ours. (Contrary to evolutionary assumptions, according to Scripture, mankind’s greatest capacity was in the past.) On the New Earth, God’s gifts to us will never be lost to age, death, pettiness, insecurity, or laziness. Undistracted and undiminished by sin and the demands of survival, mankind will create and innovate at unprecedented levels, to God’s eternal glory.

Will We Shape Culture into New Forms?

In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam to name all the animals. And “whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name” (Genesis 2:19). Remarkably, from that point forward, God called animals by the names that Adam chose. This demonstrates the lofty and meaningful role that God grants us in molding and governing culture.

Adam wasn’t just preserving creation; he was shaping it. Paul Marshall writes, “We have a creative task in the world. We must shape things in ways for which there is sometimes no clear direction. This is why imagination is not just a feature of the arts; it is a feature of human life itself. Without imagination, without experimentation, without openness to new questions and new possibilities, there can be no science and no technology. We are not challenging God when we do this, at least not when we do it in humility and faith. We are not stealing fire from the gods. We are taking up our responsibility before God to shape what he has placed in our hands.”³¹⁵

Angels could have maintained the world as God created it. But it takes God’s image-bearers to develop, expand, and enrich the earth. That is culture. It includes art, science, and technology. The question of whether these creative disciplines will continue in eternity is settled if we believe the Bible when it says that both mankind and the earth will continue in physical form. If so, then culture *must* continue.

If this sounds like an overemphasis on the New Earth rather than a proper emphasis on God, consider Christ’s words: “I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name” (Revelation 3:12). Jesus says he will put on us his name and *also* the name of the New Jerusalem—a *place* with people, buildings, and culture. God chooses to mark us not only with his person but also with his place.

God is a creator, and he created us to be creators. Hence, what we create is an extension of God’s creation. He accepts, embraces, and delights in our creation—even as he did the names that Adam gave the animals. He delights in us just as we delight in our own children’s creativity. In *Exploring Heaven*, Arthur Roberts reflects on how life will be after the curse of sin has been removed:

The city of man has had intimations of a coming splendor. Civilization has brought health and safety. It has brought freedom from toil and provided creative enjoyment to millions of persons. How much more, freed from the curse of sin, will civilization flourish! Heaven will provide for urban as well as pastoral living. . . . Already the city of man is probing the galaxies. Already it has catalogued the human genome. . . . With the curse of sin gone, apocalypses past, surely human beings in heaven will

become active stewards of the Lord in completing or extending the universe of things and ideas. The whole creation groans, said Paul, awaiting human redemption. Civilization is not old; it has barely begun!³¹⁶



eternal perspective ministries
with author Randy Alcorn

Learn more about *Heaven*

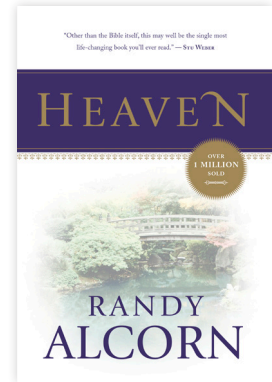
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About Randy Alcorn

Randy is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries and the best-selling author of over 50 books (over nine million in print) including *Heaven*, *The Treasure Principle*, and the Gold Medallion winner *Safely Home*.

Randy resides in Gresham, Oregon with his wife, Nanci. They have two married daughters and five grandsons. He enjoys hanging out with his family, biking, tennis, research, and reading.



About Eternal Perspective Ministries

Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a nonprofit ministry dedicated to teaching principles of God’s Word and assisting the church in ministering to the unreached, unfed, unborn, uneducated, unreconciled, and unsupported people around the world. The common element in all of our writing and teaching ministry is an emphasis on seeing life through the eyes of eternity, and thereby learning to live now to the glory of God.

You can order all of Randy’s books and products through EPM’s online store at www.epm.org.