

# Have You Thought About Heaven Today?

By [UpwardCallToHeaven.com](http://UpwardCallToHeaven.com)

Reflecting on the afterlife and what it might be like is often crowded out in our busy society. We are usually more concerned about getting ahead and preparing for... you name it, than things eternal. Only in times of a tragic/untimely death such as from a suicide, illness, accident, or a mass shooting are we forced to ask why. There is often a stark difference between reality and what we might desire. Do we have a hope of Heaven, or could it be that we are trying to create Heaven on earth? If asked, most people would say that they hope to go to Heaven but they have no real idea of how to get there.

This writer will make the bold statement that one can be sure about Heaven and how to get there. The basic premises are as follows:

1. The Bible is (not just contains) the inspired Word of God. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3: 16-17 (ESV) ***All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (17) that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.***
2. God's plan for the salvation of man was through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus says in John 14:6 (ESV) ***'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'*** In Matthew 16:15-18, Jesus was having a conversation with his apostles, ***'(15) (ESV) He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" (16) Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (17) And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. (18) And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'*** Jesus built his church on the fact that He was the Son of God and that he paid for our sins by His sacrifice on the cross. The Lord adds the saved (the ones who have obeyed the gospel) to the church. This is what happened when Peter preached the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost, resulting in three thousand people being baptized. ***Acts 2:47 (ESV) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.***
3. God wants everyone to be saved. ***John 3:16 (ESV) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV) The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.***

I know that we are living in a secular society. This society is 'post-truth' and for the most part disdains Christianity and relegates it to the fringes. Society demands that Christianity is not to be practiced as part of one's actions, life style, or speech on a daily basis. Instead, it elevates things such as separation of church and state, tolerance, inclusivity, etc. Separation of church and state means that religion has no place in governmental affairs, and tolerance means "accepting and promoting the current trends and ideas only". This society is not that much different from the times of the New Testament in which the church of Jesus Christ existed with Judaizing teachers, emperor worship, Greek philosophy, and paganism which included temples of prostitution.

To make matters worse, Christianity has been secularized to such an extent that there is little difference between so-called Christians and everyone else. Some Christians teach things contrary to the Bible by trying to incorporate the current trends, customs, or thinking into practice. There are several thousand religious groups (churches) which teach various doctrines that are at war with each other, yet all the groups claim to be teaching God's Word and many claim "Sola Scriptura", (*doctrine which holds that the Christian Scriptures are the sole infallible rule of faith and practice*). How can this be true? Some televangelists and others are mostly concerned about collecting money for their own pockets. What should one believe? Is one church as good as another? Should one just try to live a good moral life defined by the current philosophies and forget about churches altogether?

There is good news. We do not need to be discouraged or confused because there is a standard on which we can be unified and can have hope. Let's consider religious confusion from our everyday secular experiences. Note that we have standards relating to time, volume, mass, distance and many other things. For example, we all agree there are 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, and we all recognize the octagonal shape of a stop sign and know what it means. There are standardized signs and symbols that involve everything we do, like driving, industry, medicine, etc. By accepting them, we live in harmony and safety. However, when it comes to religion (speaking here to those who believe the Bible to some degree) we can and should do the same thing. This means we must accept that God inspired the Bible (the first premise), created the universe, and has every right to command what He wishes. This fact takes our 'wants' out of the equation. We accept this world's standards to conduct our secular activities, but are we willing to accept God's standard (the Bible) to conduct our spiritual lives so as to be pleasing to Him and to have that assurance of Heaven?

If we accept the divine standard, then the first thing will be to test all the religious denominations by the Word of God. The basis will be "Sola Scriptura". This writer is aware of the Protestant Reformation along with its implications and the many churches spun from it. So what went wrong? We know that Satan (the devil) and his demonic angels know Scripture but

will pervert it. For example, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the temptations of Jesus by the devil. Satan, in those temptations, recorded in Luke 4: 2-13, attempted to pervert the Scriptures to get Jesus to worship him. But in each case, Jesus used the Scriptures correctly to avoid falling into temptation. Satan hates Truth (John 8:44) and will attack it along with the atoning blood of Jesus. Satan, in addition to using Scripture, will present himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11: 13-15). In testing a religion, do not be confused by what others say about it, but test it yourself using Scripture (Acts 17:11). Also, do not be misled and let your guard down when they say that Scripture is their only basis. Their writings might start out this way, but they may not stay within the bounds of the Scripture. **Revelation 22:18-19 (ESV) I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, (19) and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.** Paul, writing in 1 Corinthians 4:1-6, says (among other things) not to go beyond what is written.

Be on your guard when religious leaders say things like the following:

1. *You need us to interpret the Bible for you.* Philippians 2:12 tells us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. I Thessalonians 5:21 says to test everything and hold fast to what is good.
2. *I am a lesser light to bring you to the greater light and then claim inspiration just like the apostles.* Galatians 1:7-9 (ESV) **not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (9) As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.**
3. *Only the personal teachings of Jesus are to be followed.* For example, the religious leaders who teach this, reason that the writings of the Apostle Paul, in particular, are not binding because he was just a student of Jesus just like we are today. However, in John 16:13 (ESV) Jesus plainly says **‘When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.’** And in John 14:26 (ESV) Jesus says **‘But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring remembrance all that I have said to you.’** In both cases, Jesus was speaking to His Apostles—not to us, and Paul was an Apostle (I Corinthians 15:7, 8).
4. *The Bible should be interpreted based on the wants or traditions of our society.* However this may not be consistent with what it meant to the original hearers. The

Bible is not a document to be reinterpreted as we see fit; no prophecy of Scripture comes from our own interpretation (2 Peter 1: 20, 21).

5. *Just accept the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.* Some use certain Scriptures but leave out others claiming that they are not necessary. That is most evident when talking about salvation. Many times, faith is mentioned as the only requirement for salvation. Others mention God's grace as being the only thing necessary. If one reads carefully the book of Acts and the other books of the New Testament, that argument can be shown to be false. If someone says 'only' or 'alone' be on your guard. **James 2:24 (ESV) *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*** Obtaining salvation requires more than faith only. In some of the last words Jesus spoke to his Apostles just before his ascension into heaven he commanded them to preach the gospel, so that others would believe and be baptized, as recorded in Mark 16:15-16 (ESV) **(15) *And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. (16) *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.**** The New Testament church taught all that Jesus commanded.

Read the book of Acts to see when the church was established and how to become a member of it. Note that it began on the day of Pentecost AD 33 after the ascension of Jesus. Jesus had prophesied that some of his listeners would still be alive when the kingdom of God came with power. **Mark 9:1 (ESV) *And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."*** Jesus had told his apostles to wait in Jerusalem for power from on high. **Luke 24:47-49 (ESV) *and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (48) *You are witnesses of these things. (49) *And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.***** This happened on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the ascension, in Jerusalem where the apostles were gathered. **Acts 2:1-4 (ESV) *When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. (2) *And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. (3) *And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. (4) *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.****** After Peter had preached the first gospel sermon, many people were convicted of their sins and wanted to know what to do. **Acts 2:36-38 (ESV) *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (37) *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (38) *And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.***** Verse 41 tells us what the people who believed did that day. **Acts 2:41 (ESV) *So those who received his word were***

**baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.** It is apparent from Acts 2:47 that God does the adding of the people who were being saved to the church, as we mentioned in the beginning with the second premise. There are many cases of conversion mentioned in the book of Acts. In every case the conversions involved hearing the Gospel, believing that Jesus is the son of God, repenting of all sins, confessing the name of Jesus, and being immediately baptized (immersed in water). In these cases some of these steps are implied but baptism is always mentioned. So when was 'your' church established and what does it practice? Let's look at the chart from World Video Bible School that shows when various churches were established. A high resolution chart can be found at the following website:

<http://whyaretheresomanychurches.com/timeline.pdf>

This chart was compiled by Michael Shank and copyrighted by the World Video Bible School in 2009. This material is presented with the intention of providing a historical perspective of various churches. If 'your' church was not established in AD 33 with the head and founder being Jesus Christ, how can it be right? This question is very important because in Matthew 7: 21-23 (ESV) Jesus says, "**Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' (23) And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'**" God loves us and gave his Son to die for our sins, but if we reject his plan the alternative is justice and vengeance.

**2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 (ESV) and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels (8) in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,**

In addition to the time of establishment of a church, another important criterion is name. In the New Testament, the church is called by several descriptive names [all references are from the ESV]: In Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Corinthians 10:32, 1 Corinthians 11:22, 1 Corinthians 15:9, 2 Corinthians 1:1, and Galatians 1:13 it is called **the church of God**. In Hebrews 12:23 it is called **the assembly of the firstborn**. In Acts 9:2, Acts 19:9, Acts 19:23, Acts 24:14 and Acts 24:22 it is called **the Way** [several translations do not capitalize way]. In Acts 22:4 it is called **this Way**. (As mentioned previously in John 14:6, Jesus describes himself as the way, the truth, and the life.) A group of churches in Galatians 1:22 were called **the churches of Judea**. In about 60 verses, including Christ's sayings in Matthew 18:17, **the church** is used alone or with some modifier as to place or people with such words as *in* or *at*. The references that use **the church** can be found in Acts 8:3, Acts 9:31, Acts 11:22, Acts 12:1, Acts 12:5, Acts 14:27,

Acts 15:3, Acts 15:4, Acts 18:22, Acts 20:17, I Corinthians 5:12, I Corinthians 6:4, I Corinthians 12:28, I Corinthians 14:4, I Corinthians 14:5, 1 Corinthians 14:12, Ephesians 1:22, Ephesians 3:10, Ephesians 3:21, Ephesians 5:23, Ephesians 5:25, Ephesians 5:27, Ephesians 5:29, Ephesians 5:32, Philippians 3:6, Colossians 1:18, Colossians 1:24, 1 Timothy 3:15, 1 Timothy 5:16, James 5:14, 3 John 1:9, and 3 John 1:10. In Romans 16:16, the plural term, **churches of Christ**, is used.

The Greek word ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia) is usually translated 'church' but assembly or congregation could also be used. Strong's Concordance gives its meaning as 'called out'. Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible gives the meaning as 'that which is called out'. However, depending on the context, it may or may not be a religious assembly. ekklēsia, which is translated 'assembly' in Acts 19:32, refers to a mob.

At that time, denominations did not exist. That means the early church was non-denominational and needed no name because it was the only one. Any of the above-mentioned names would be scriptural, but for a church to be the one that Jesus built, its practices must conform to the teachings of the apostles given in the New Testament. Today, the **church of Christ** generally tries to follow those commands. As will be discussed later, congregations are autonomous or independent. As such, they may not all have the same practices. This means that the name above the door does not guarantee that they are following all of God's commands. A good explanation and some highly recommended articles can be found at the following websites:

<http://radicallychristian.com/what-is-the-church>

<http://bible.ca/index-ntx.htm>

In the following passage, Paul explains the importance of the church and why Christ should have the preeminence. This is a very important passage that ties several truths together. **Colossians 1:13-23 (ESV) He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. (17) And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (18) And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (19) For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (20) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (21) And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing**

*evil deeds, (22) he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, (23) if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.* Paul in his writings to the Ephesians had this to say when comparing the marriage relationship to the church. (The idea of the church being the bride of Christ can also be found in the book of Revelation.) ***Ephesians 5:23-27 (ESV) For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. (24) Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (25) Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, (26) that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (27) so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*** So why would you want to be called by any other name other than Christian (Acts 11:26), belong to any assembly (church, etc.) that does not carry his name, or submit to any man-made authority that is not ordained in Scripture?

There are some other things that characterized the New Testament Church.

1. The New Testament churches were autonomous and were ruled over by elders. ***1 Peter 5:1-4 (ESV) So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: (2) shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; (3) not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (4) And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.***
2. The church is in the world, but not of the world (John 18:36). The New Testament church struggled with many of the same problems facing us today. Some of them were division in the church in Corinth along with problems with sexual sins, partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, understanding Christian love, etc. Paul urged the Corinthians not to be divided. ***1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (ESV) (10) I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (11) For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. (12) What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." (13) Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?***
3. A church may not be pleasing to Christ. Some churches were not in good standing with Christ even to the point of potentially having their candlestick removed. Of the seven

churches of Asia written about in Revelation only two of them received no condemnation. (Revelation 2-3)

4. The work of the early church consisted of evangelism, benevolence, and edification (Ephesians 4:11-12).

The Christian life in James 1:27 (ESV) is summed up this way: ***Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.***

Thanks for reading until the end. This writer wants you to think about Heaven and realize that, just like anything else worthwhile, preparation and sacrifices must be made to get there. My prayer is that everyone will search for the truth and find it. By doing so, you will experience joy in this life and the hope of heaven in the afterlife. It is decision time, what will you do with Jesus?

For further study, click on the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLYqM4HaWdw>

The above link from World Video Bible School has some well-prepared material that presents the Gospel in a short video. You can also find links to other resources for additional study. Live humbly and glorify God. You can also email this writer from *the UpWardCallToHeaven.com* website.



