

13. Heaven, Education, and Eternal Learning (4Q 2020—Education)

Biblical Material: John 3:16, 1 John 5:13, 1 Tim. 1:16, 1 Cor. 13:12, 2:9, Zech. 13:6.

Quotes

- An educator should think of a child as a gardener thinks of a plant, as something to be made to grow by having the right soil and the right kind amount of water. If your roses fail to bloom, it does not occur to you to whip them, but you should try to find out what has been amiss in your treatment of them... The important thing is what the children do, and not what they do not do. And what they do, if it is to have value, must be a spontaneous expression of their own vital energy. *Bertrand Russell*
- We must view young people not as empty bottles to be filled, but as candles to be lit. *Robert H. Shaffer*
- What we want is to see the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child. *George Bernard Shaw*
- When teaching, light a fire, don't fill a bucket. *Dan Snow*
- The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. *Martin Luther King Jr.*
- A dull mind gets bored easily. A curious mind expands forever. *Maxime Lagacé*

Questions

How do we “educate for eternity”? Do we look forward to “ever learning”—and what does this imply? If God was indeed the kind of person some people have described him—like a strict schoolmaster—what would heaven be like? How is possible to be “always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7 NIV)?

Bible summary

John 3:16 speaks of God's gift of himself to us so we could have eternal life. John continues that theme by saying that those who believe in Jesus can know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). Paul writes that though he was the worst of sinners he too could have eternal life (1 Tim. 1:16). Then we shall see and know fully (1 Cor. 13:12). We cannot even conceive of what God has prepared for us (1 Cor. 2:9). Jesus was wounded in the house of his friends (Zech. 13:6).

Comment

The phrase “Heaven Can Wait” has been used as the title for books, movies, and songs. It expresses something of a dismissive attitude towards heaven and an eternity with God, suggesting that the protagonist “isn't ready” for it yet. The thought is that life here is more important than some pie-in-the sky by-and-by.

But while we may be prepared to make heaven wait, can heaven wait? Can God himself wait? What about the attitude from the “other side”? God expresses his desire for us to respond to him with great urgency. Heaven's strong desire is that we relate to eternity now. Added to that is the joy in heaven over one sinner that repents etc.

But this is just from the perspective of our own salvation. What about the wider view of God's vindication before the whole universe, the demonstration of the absolute nature of goodness and truth and right in the context of the great controversy?

If there's any subject we should be studying, it should be that! In fact this is what is going to preoccupy us for eternity. The nature and character of God as goodness personified may be settled in our minds, but exactly how did/does God work it out? What exactly will our education in eternity consist of? How will this be our "science and our song" throughout the "ceaseless ages of eternity"? Can we even imagine what the curriculum will be?

"No one has ever seen, and no one has ever heard, and no one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Cor. 2:9 FBV, referencing Isaiah 64 and 65).

This is no boring scenario! We get to share in understanding the workings of the divine mind. Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6 that says "you are gods" (John 10:34). Peter states that we can "share in the divine nature" 2 Peter 1: FBV. What this exactly means we can't explain, but it certainly describes experiences and learning way beyond what we currently have.

The challenge is of course that we must want to be there. The depictions of God and heaven shared by some have been very off-putting. Would you want to be in heaven and be with God if it's as some have said? As John Milton observed, "The mind is its own place and in itself, can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven." Could it be true that some have made a Hell of Heaven?

Mark Twain stated categorically that "There's no humor in heaven." How did he know? Isaac Asimov wrote, "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." Tragic. Stephen Hawking commented, "I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark." True?

Add to that so many more ideas about God and heaven and perhaps it's no wonder that John Lennon sang, "Imagine there's no heaven; It's easy if you try."

So how do we share the amazing delight and opportunity to increase in knowledge and experience and creativity with our self-giving God? His education will be truly out of this world!

Ellen White comments

Teachers, if you will open your hearts to the indwelling of the Spirit of God, if you will welcome the heavenly Guest, God will make you laborers together with Him. In co-operation with the Master Teacher, the spirit of selfishness will be expelled, and wonderful transformations will take place. {FE 526.4}

There are many who have but an imperfect understanding of the character of God. They think of Him as stern and arbitrary, and when the fact is presented that God is love, it is a difficult matter for these souls to lay aside their false conceptions of God. But if they do not let the word of truth in, rooting out the thorns, the briars will start up afresh, and choke out the good word of God; their religious experience will be dwarfed, for the evil of their hearts will overtop the tender plant of truth, and shut away the spiritual atmosphere. {RH June 21 1892}

Christ's mission on the earth was to reveal to men that God was not a despot, but a heavenly Father, full of love and mercy for His children. {18MR 112.4}

The highest class of education is that which will give such knowledge and discipline as will lead to the best development of character, and will fit the soul for that life which measures with the life of God. Eternity is not to be lost out of our reckoning. The highest education is that which will teach our children and youth the science of Christianity, which will give them an experimental knowledge of God's ways, and will impart to them the lessons that Christ gave to His disciples of the paternal character of God. {CG 296.4}