



The
CLARITY
Series

Herb Paynter

Semantics vs
Hermeneutics

The Necessity of Interpretation Within Context

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents3
Introduction4
 Heaven4
 The Kingdom of Heaven5
 Eternal vs Everlasting6
Semantics vs Hermeneutics9
 God’s Prisoner Exchange Program11
The Danger of Assumption Theology12
Ruling and Reigning17
 Mansions in the Sky17
 Crowns18
Christ’s Millennial Kingdom22
 Location, Location, Location24
Talents and Callings26
 God’s Latent Imaging27
Eternal Rewards29
 An Issue of Degrees29
Salvation33
 Calling Audibles34
Inheritance37
 Inheriting Eternal Life37
 Investment-based Inheritance39
Sanctification41
 Instant vs Progressive41
Body, Soul and Spirit43
Children of God vs Sons of God48
Revealing the Sons of God52

Introduction

We're going to take some time to examine the terms and phrases that we routinely use in our Christian conversation—simply because we need to. You might be surprised to see how Satan has allowed these terms to be totally misconstrued, and how he is keeping some of God's most critical truths from being known. I'll start with something simple, like "heaven."

Heaven

People tend to think that heaven is a place; a specific location somewhere deep in the cosmos. We make this presumption because Scripture speaks of heaven as the abode of God.

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

However, heaven is never referred to as the believers' afterlife port of call in the manner in which we use the term *going to heaven*. I believe and actively participate in personal evangelism. I believe that this personal witness of my faith is both a calling and a command given to all believers.

1 Peter 3:15

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear

Even though the actual phrase “going to heaven” is not mentioned in the Bible, I still use it when relating my faith. However, it is more important to clarify the *intent* of God’s plan of salvation, more than the destination. When “going to heaven” becomes the total reason for accepting Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior, the bigger picture for Christ’s death can get shortchanged.

Truth be known, according to Scripture, man’s actual *eternal* destination will be the re-created Earth. Believers may only reside in “heaven” for a maximum of seven years while the Great Tribulation is unleashed on the unbelieving world system. While the Earth is being judged by God, believers will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ to review what we’ve done with our lives. Believers of all ages will then return to Earth with Christ as He establishes His millennial kingdom.

After the one thousand year reign of Christ on Earth and the final battle of Gog and Magog, God will destroy this planet with fire and create a brand new one. In the end, God Himself will abide on Earth, and we will be eternally with Him.

The Kingdom of Heaven

There needs to be a distinction made between *Heaven* and *The Kingdom of Heaven*. Eternally speaking, the *where* is not nearly as important as the *with Whom!*

Heaven as it relates to man’s eternal destination is not a definitive place, it is an eternal state and position. Eternal life is neither a duration of time, nor an extension of life as we know it. Eternity doesn’t relate to time and it doesn’t

have a calendar. Heaven, like eternal life, refers to the unending and unbreakable relationship that exists between believers and their God.

1 Thessalonians 4:17

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with at shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

This is why Scripture states unequivocally that believers in Christ have (currently possess) eternal life. Eternal life is the unending state of spiritual life (communion) that exists between Christ and His Church. Eternal life is a *relationship* that begins upon belief and never ends. Man is not eternal, as God is, but man is definitely everlasting. Man's existence is everlasting, though not eternal.

The Kingdom of Heaven is a clear reference to Christ's earthly millennial kingdom; His thousand year reign on Earth. This must be clearly distinguished from Heaven, the abode of God.

What is commonly referred to as Heaven (the believers' final destination) as alluded to in Revelations 21, is actually a description of the New Jerusalem- which is part of the new heavens and Earth which appears *after* the Millennial Kingdom.

As you can see, there are Scriptural terms that are being confused, and as a result, there are a considerable number of passages currently being misinterpreted. This study will attempt to shine a light on these issues.

Eternal vs Everlasting

There is a definitive difference between eternal and everlasting. Our existence, as living souls, began at the moment of our conception. At that moment, our mortal body was combined with an immortal soul, and we became a living (everlasting) being. God, on the other hand, was never born. He had no beginning, and He will have no end! Therefore He is eternal.

When we are born again (into God's family), we receive the gift of everlasting life. Since Jesus is life (John 14:6) and everlasting means forever, we possess the very life force of the Universe and it is resident in each of us both now and forever.

Note: even those who do not accept Christ as Savior will exist eternally, though they will not enjoy eternal life (communion with God). Instead, they will exist in a state of eternal death (total *separation* from God).

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Many times Scriptures that presumedly describe heaven are actually addressing life during the earthly Millennial Kingdom of Christ (the Kingdom of Heaven). Our citizenship is in heaven, indelibly written in the book of life, but our dwelling will ultimately be on Earth. We will attend the Judgment Seat of Christ in heaven, but Christ's Kingdom will take place on Earth.

Philippians 3:20-21

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

We are told to store up treasures “in heaven,” and to pray to our Father “in heaven,” but we are not told that we will “go” to heaven. We are told quite plainly that we will be in the presence of our Savior forever, anywhere He is.

When questioning where believers spend eternity, the Bible tells us quite plainly...

2 Peter 3:12-13

...because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The fact is that we will spend eternity with God on the newly created Earth. The New Jerusalem (the city of God) will descend down to the new Earth. This, in effect will literally become “heaven on earth.”

Revelation 21:1-3

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle (dwelling) of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

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