

# An Outstanding New Book About Heaven

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Randy Alcorn's new book that is simply entitled, *Heaven*, is must reading for all Christians. It dispels many long-held myths while underlining some overlooked and misunderstood biblical truths.

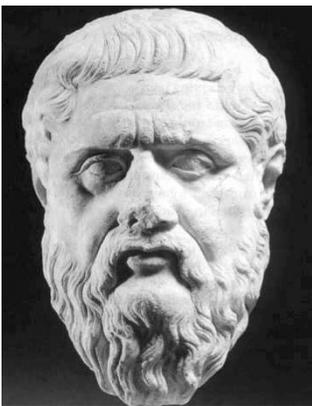
The author starts making his point on the dedication page where he dedicates the book to a long list of departed saints "and countless others who departed 'prematurely' (yet in God's good time) to a world far greater than this one but far less than the one to come, which all of us who know King Jesus will behold together, slack-jawed, on the New Earth's first morning." Now, that's what I call a mouthful of a dedication!

### His Basic Thesis

In this amazing dedicatory sentence, Mr. Alcorn makes one of the major points of his book — namely, that the current Heaven where God resides will not be the Heaven where the Redeemed will live eternally. The current Heaven is located in "the third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2), an undisclosed spot somewhere in our universe or an adjacent universe. But the eternal Heaven, where the Redeemed will live forever with God will be located on a new earth — this earth renovated, refreshed and perfected by fire.

Needless to say, this fundamental biblical truth comes as a shock to most Christians. That's because most of us have grown up under preaching that has been "Christoplatonized," as Mr. Alcorn would put it (page 52). What he means by this term is that Christian theologians from the time of St. Augustine in the 5th Century have interpreted end time prophecies concerning Heaven as if they were written by Greek philosophers instead of Hebrew prophets.

### The Impact of Greek Philosophy



Plato

Plato believed that material things, including the human body and the earth are inherently evil, while immaterial things such as the soul are good. This viewpoint is thoroughly unbiblical. The Bible teaches that the creation was originally perfect, that it was corrupted by the sin of Man, but that it will one day be redeemed to its original perfection. God loves His creation, and He intends to refresh it by "making all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

Being heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, Augustine spiritualized the biblical concept of a new earth to mean a non-literal, spiritual Heaven. Subsequently, the Church came to embrace this "spiritual view" that human spirits are better off without bodies and that Heaven is a disembodied spiritual state.

Mr. Alcorn summarizes the impact of Christoplatonism by

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Mr. Alcorn is the author of 20 theological books and several novels. He is married and is the father of two married daughters. He enjoys spending time with his family, biking, playing tennis, doing research, and reading.

saying it "has had a devastating effect on our ability to understand what Scripture says about Heaven, particularly about the eternal Heaven, the New Earth . . . If we believe, even subconsciously, that bodies and the earth and material things are unspiritual, even evil, then we will inevitably reject or spiritualize any biblical revelation about our bodily resurrection or the physical characteristics of the New Earth" (page 52).

### How to Grasp Heaven

Mr. Alcorn emphasizes over and over again that the eternal Heaven is going to be a tangible, material world located on this earth after it is renovated. He points out that when the Eternal State begins, the Bible says God will "make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). It does not say that He will make new things.

Therefore, if you want to get a feel of what Heaven will be like, the author urges you to look around and observe your environment. He argues that you must understand "that in order to get a picture of Heaven . . . you don't need to look up at the clouds; you simply need to look around you and imagine what all this [world] would be like without sin and death and suffering and corruption" (page 17).

### The Necessity of the Earth's Redemption

In fact, the author argues that God *must* redeem the current earth to keep it from being remembered "as a graveyard of sin and failure" (page 137). The restoration of this earth, producing the New Earth of eternity, will "justify the old earth's disaster," making good out of it, "putting it in perspective" (page 137). In short, "it will preserve and perpetuate earth's original design and heritage" (page 137). These conclusions prompt Mr. Alcorn to declare: "God is the ultimate salvage artist. He loves to restore things to their original condition" (page 89).

### An Effective Format

One of the most appealing things about this book is its

question and answer format. The author deals in detail with over 200 questions about Heaven that cover every aspect of the topic. Here are some representative samples:

- What is the nature of the intermediate Heaven? (The current Heaven)
- What is life like in the intermediate Heaven?
- Why is earth's redemption essential to God's plan?
- What will it mean to see God?
- What will the New Jerusalem be like?
- Will there be space and time in Heaven?
- Will we be ourselves?
- Will we eat and drink?
- Will we engage in sexual relations?
- Will we be capable of sinning?
- Will we be reunited with our pets?
- Will there be arts, entertainment, and sports?

These down-to-earth questions about the life to come on the New Earth are so fascinating that you will find it hard to put the book down once you start reading it.

The thing that amazed me was how anyone could write 476 pages about Heaven when the Bible says so little about it. I discovered four keys to the author's in-depth coverage.

### Imagination

The first is the author's imagination. He can derive more hints from a verse than anyone I have ever encountered. A good example can be found on pages 65-67 where he derives 21 conclusions from Revelation 6:9-11. That's a total of three verses! Many of these conclusions, though not unbiblical, are nonetheless quite a stretch and need to be recognized as such.

### Misapplications

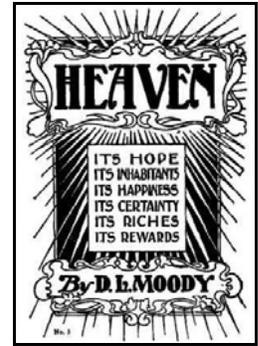
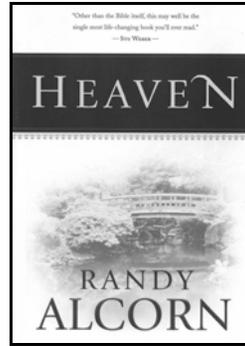
The second key to the author's in-depth writing on a topic so scantily covered by Scripture is that he misapplies many passages about the Millennium to the Eternal State. For example, every time the Scriptures mention "new heavens and a new earth," as in Isaiah 65:17, he immediately jumps to the conclusion that the passage pertains to the Eternal State. But this is not always the case, and it certainly is not in the Isaiah 65 passage where death and child bearing are both mentioned.

The fact the author seems to overlook is that there are two new earths that lie ahead of us. One is the Millennial earth which will be this earth radically changed by earthquakes and supernatural phenomena in the heavens. The second will be the eternal earth which will be the Millennial earth renovated by fire.



## Common Sense

The third factor that has enabled Mr. Alcorn to write in such



depth is what I would characterize as his extraordinary common sense. Many of his conclusions are derived from what I would call common sense reasoning. For example, in dealing with the often asked question, "Will I maintain my identity in Heaven?" Mr. Alcorn writes (page 278):

You will be you in Heaven. Who else would you be? If Bob, a man on earth, is no longer Bob when he goes to Heaven, then, in fact, Bob did not go to Heaven. If when I arrive in Heaven, I'm not the same person with the same identity, history, and memory, then I didn't go to Heaven.

### Continuity

The fourth and most important factor that has produced Mr. Alcorn's in-depth thinking about Heaven is what he calls "the principle of redemptive continuity." By this he means that eternal life will be as life is now — except that it will be perfected. So, if you want to imagine what Heaven will be like, look around you and imagine what this world would be like without disease, suffering, crime, and natural calamities. Here's how Mr. Alcorn puts it (page 112):

Conversion does not mean eliminating the old but transforming it. Despite the radical changes that occur through salvation, death, and resurrection, we remain who we are. We have the same history, appearance, memory, interests, and skills. This is the principle of *redemptive continuity*. God will not scrap His original creation and start over. Instead, He will take His fallen, corrupted children and restore, refresh, and renew us to our original design.

Applying this principle to the Eternal State, Mr. Alcorn titles one of his chapters, "What will our daily lives be like?" (pages 317-324). He asks: "Will we rest? Will we sleep? Will we work? Will we have our own homes? Will we open our homes to guests?"

To all these questions he applies the principle of redemptive continuity and concludes by answering them with a resounding "Yes!"

### Exceptions to Continuity

He does, however, point out that there will be some exceptions to the principle of continuity. One of the most

important being marriage and sex. The only marriage that will exist in Heaven will be that of the Redeemed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus made it clear in Matthew 22:30 that in our glorified, immortal bodies we will not marry.

Mr. Alcorn reasons that since there will be no marriage in Heaven as we know it today, there will also be no sex, since it was designed by God to be a part of the marriage relationship. But he speculates that it may be replaced by something even better (page 338):

There may . . . be some way in which the intimacy and pleasure we now know as sex will be fulfilled in some higher form. I don't know what that would be, but I do know that sex was designed by God, and I don't expect Him to discard it without replacing it with something better.



### Another Disappointing Feature

In addition to his misapplication of some Millennial passages to the Eternal State, there is one other thing I found disappointing about Mr. Alcorn's book. It was his ambivalence about the Millennium. He states point-blank that he believes there will be a literal thousand year reign of Jesus on this present earth, but he hastens to add that he is not "dogmatic" about it because "I also understand and respect the strong interpretive arguments that have been made in support of Amillennialism" (page 140).

It is amazing to me that a man who demands that all scriptures about Heaven be taken literally would turn around and say he can understand why some people might want to spiritualize the passages concerning the Millennium. I suspect that this sentence was due to pressure from the publisher (Tyndale House) in order to give the book a wider appeal.

Nonetheless, I highly recommend the book. It is thorough, carefully reasoned, biblical, thought-provoking, and highly entertaining. Mr. Alcorn is obviously a person who has spent innumerable hours thinking about Heaven. Also, his fundamental thesis about the nature of Heaven is one that Christendom needs to hear because it is directly related to the strength and quality of our hope.

### The Relationship of Prophecy to Hope

Many Christians, because they know so little about the world to come, cling tenaciously to this world, living with little hope. Mr. Alcorn's outstanding book will convince you that "the best is yet to come."

And that, in turn, reminds me of the story of the dying woman who told her pastor she wanted to be buried with a fork in her right hand. When he asked why, she said: "Every time we have a pot-luck meal at church, we are told to keep our forks

when the plates are picked up, because, referring to the desserts, we are told, 'The best is yet to come!'"

Yes, the best is yet to come, and because of that Randy Alcorn ends his book with an interesting thought (page 415):

We have redefined eternal life to mean an off-Earth existence stripped of the defining properties of what we know life to be. Eternal life will be enjoying forever what life on Earth is at its finest moments, what it was intended to be. Since in Heaven we'll finally experience life at its best, it would be more accurate to call our present experience the *beforelife* rather than what follows the *afterlife*.

And all I can add to that is *Maranatha!* ✚

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### Quotes from Randy Alcorn's book:

"The predominant belief that the ultimate Heaven God prepares for us will be unearthly could not be more unbiblical. Earth was made for people to live on, and people were made to live on Earth" (page 91).

"The idea of Earth and Heaven becoming one is explicitly biblical. Christ will make Earth into Heaven and Heaven into Earth. Just as the wall that separates God and Mankind is torn down in Jesus, so too the wall that separates Heaven and Earth will be forever demolished" (page 101).

"We must distinguish the biblical promise of seeing God from the beliefs of Buddhism, Hinduism, or New Age mysticism, in which individuality is obliterated or assimilated into Nirvana. Though God will be absorbing, we will not be absorbed by Him. Though we may feel lost in God's immensity, we will not lose our identity when we see Him. Instead, we will find it" (p. 192).

"If Heaven is truly our home, we should expect it to have the qualities we associate with home. *Home* as a term for Heaven isn't simply a metaphor. It describes an actual, physical place . . . a place we'll share with loved ones; a place of fond familiarity and comfort and refuge; a place of marvelous smells and tastes, fine food, and great conversation; a place of contemplation and interaction and expressing the gifts and passions that God has given us. It will be a place of unprecedented freedom and adventure" (pages 440-441).

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### How to get a copy of the book.

To secure a copy of Randy Alcorn's book, *Heaven*, call **1-800-705-8316**. Call between 8:00am and 5:00pm (Central time) Monday through Friday.

The book is available only in a hard cover edition. It runs 476 pages in length, and it contains an extensive scripture index that makes it easy to find the author's thoughts about any particular verse. The cost of the book is \$25, including the cost of shipping. Consider purchasing two copies, one for yourself and one for your church's library.