

The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded: Chapter Six — *Directions unto the exercise of our thoughts on things above; things future, invisible, and eternal; on God himself, with the difficulties of it, and oppositions unto it, and the way of their removal.*

Right notions of future glory stated.

I. NEGATIVE VIEWS OF HEAVEN

- A. **ABSENCE OF EVIL** “Many esteem only those things that are grievous, troublesome, wasting & destructive unto nature, to be [absent from heaven]; that is, what is penal, in pain, sickness, sorrow, loss, poverty, with all kinds of outward troubles, and death itself, are evil. Wherefore they suppose that the future state of blessedness will free them from all these things, if they can attain unto it. This they will lay in the balance against the troubles of life, and sometimes, it may be, against the pleasures of it, which they must forego; yea, persons profane and profligate will, in words at least, profess that heaven will give them rest from all their troubles: but it is no place of rest for such persons.” (119)
- B. **ABSENCE OF SIN** “Heaven is a state of deliverance from sin, from all sin, in all the causes, concomitants, and effects of it. He is no true believer unto whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow, and trouble. Other things, as the loss of dear relations, or extraordinary pains, may make deeper impressions on the mind, by its natural affections, at some seasons than ever our sins did at any one time in any one instance, — so a man may have a greater trouble in sense of pain by a fit of the toothache, which will be gone in an hour, than in a hectic fever or consumption, which will assuredly take away his life, — but take in the whole course of our lives, and all the actings of our souls, in spiritual judgment as well as in natural affection, and I do not understand how a man can be a sincere believer unto whom sin is not the greatest burden and sorrow.” (120)

II. POSITIVE VIEWS OF HEAVEN

- A. **UNKNOWN PARADISE** “Many are able to entertain no rational conceptions about a future state of blessedness and glory, no notions wherein either faith or reason is concerned. Imagination they have of something that is great and glorious, but what it is they know not. No wonder if such persons have no delight in, no use of, thoughts of heaven... Although no man living can see or find out the infinite riches of eternal glory, yet it is the duty of all to be acquainted with the nature of it in general, so as that they may have fixed thoughts of it, love unto it, earnest desires after it; all under its own true and proper notion.” (122-123)
- B. **CARNAL PARADISE** “So great a part of mankind as the Mohammedans, unto whom God hath given all the principal and most desirable parts of the world to inhabit and possess, do conceive the state of future blessedness to consist in the full satisfaction of their sensual lusts and pleasures. And evidence this is that the religion which they profess hath no power or efficacy on their minds, to change them from the love of sin, or from placing their happiness in fulfilling the desires of the flesh... Wherefore, it is nothing but an artifice of the god of this world to blind the eyes of men, unto their eternal destruction.” (124)
- C. **PHILOSOPHER’S PARADISE** “Some of the philosophers of old did attain an apprehension that the blessedness of men in another world doth consist in the soul’s full satisfaction in the goodness and beauty of the divine nature... It is such an intellectual apprehension of the divine nature and perfections, with ineffable love, as gives the soul the utmost rest and blessedness which its capacities can extend unto. These things are so, and they have been by many both piously and elegantly illustrated; howbeit they are above the capacities of ordinary Christians... They cannot reduce them unto present usefulness, nor make them subservient unto the exercise and increase of grace” (125)
- D. **GOSPEL PARADISE** “The principal notion which the Scripture gives us of the state of heavenly blessedness, and which the meanest believers are capable of improving in daily practice, is, that faith shall be turned into sight, and grace into glory... And if sight come into the place of faith, then the object of that sight must be the same with the present object of our faith... The infinite, incomprehensible excellencies of the divine nature are not proposed in Scripture as the immediate object of our faith; nor shall they be so unto sight in heaven. The manifestation of them in Christ is the immediate object of our faith here, and shall be of our sight hereafter.” (126-127)
1. “The glory of heaven which the gospel prepares us for... is the full, open, perfect manifestation of the glory of the wisdom, goodness, and love of God in Christ, in his person and mediation, with the revelation of all his counsels concerning them, and the communication of their effects unto us. He that likes it not, unto whom it is not desirable, may betake himself unto Mohammed’s paradise or the philosophers’ speculations; in the gospel heaven he hath no interest.” (128)

2. "We can never have an immediate enjoyment of God in the immensity of his nature, nor can any created understanding conceive any such thing. God's communications of himself unto us and our enjoyment of him shall be in and by the manifestation of his glory in Christ." (129)
3. "All the objective glory in heaven would not, in our beholding and enjoyment of it (if it were possible), make us blessed and happy, if our own natures were not made perfect, freed from all disorder, irregular motions, and weak, imperfect operations... by the unalterable adherence of our whole souls unto God, in perfect love and delight. This is that whereby alone the soul reacheth unto the essence of God, and the infinite, incomprehensible perfections of his nature." (131)
4. "It is generally supposed that however men differ in and about religion here, yet they agree well enough about heaven; they would all go to the same heaven. But it is a great mistake; they differ in nothing more; they would not all go to the same heaven." (132)
5. "What is the matter with men that they are so stupid? They all generally desire to go to heaven, at least when they can live here no longer. Some, indeed, have no other regard unto it but only that they would not go to hell... But as for those who are instructed in these things, who profess their chiefest interest to lie in them, not to abound in meditation concerning them, it argues, indeed, that whatever they profess, they are earthly and carnal." (134)
6. "But spiritual thoughts of this heaven, consisting principally in freedom from all sin, in the perfection of all grace, in the vision of the glory of God in Christ, and all the excellencies of the divine nature as manifested in him, are an effectual means for the improvement of spiritual life and the increase of all graces in us; for they cannot but effect an assimilation in the mind and heart unto the things contemplated on, when the principles and seeds of them are already inlaid and begun." (132)

III. COMPARATIVE VIEWS OF HEAVEN "Few men care to think much of hell, and the everlasting torments of the wicked therein. Those do so least who are in the most danger of falling thereinto... The more [that believers] are conversant in their thoughts about the future state of eternal misery, the greater evidence they have of the life and confidence of faith. It is a necessary duty to consider... what we have deserved by our personal sins, as "the wages of sin is death;" what we are delivered from through Jesus the deliverer, who "saves us from the wrath to come;"... that we may be delivered from sin, kept up to an abhorrency of it, walking in humility, self-abasement, and the admiration of divine grace. This, therefore, is required of us, that in our thoughts and meditations we compare the state of blessedness and eternal glory, as a free and absolute effect of the grace of God in and through Christ Jesus, with that state of eternal misery which we had deserved; and if there be any spark of grace or of holy thankfulness in our hearts, it will be stirred up unto its due exercise." (136)

"If you neglect these things for a season, you will quickly find yourselves neglected by them." (136)