

## A Redeemed Soul

Scripture: Hebrews 12:23

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In heaven we will finally lose all traces of human fallenness. In fact, no one will ever enter heaven or dwell there who isn't absolutely perfect.

That point is often symbolized in Scripture by the imagery of white robes that are worn by the redeemed in heaven. Revelation 6:11 says this about the martyrs of the apocalypse: "They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been." The white robes symbolize holiness, purity, and absolute perfection. In Revelation 7:14 one of the elders says, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Repeatedly, the Bible emphasizes the perfection of those who enter heaven.

Scripture tells us that apart from holiness, "no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). As we've already seen, God doesn't merely justify us, clothing us with imputed righteousness, then leave us bound in the grave clothes of the flesh. He lovingly, graciously conforms us—heart, soul, mind, and flesh—to a standard befitting the lofty position He has elevated us to.

But don't misunderstand. This is not to say our own personal holiness is the ground on which we are granted entrance into heaven or acceptance with God. If that were the case, none of us could ever gain enough merit to deserve heaven. We are graciously granted entry into heaven solely and exclusively because of Christ's perfect righteousness, which is imputed to us in our justification. The holiness gained in our sanctification is by no means meritorious.

Moreover, the holiness our sanctification produces could never be sufficient to fit us for heaven by itself. In heaven we will be *perfectly* Christlike. Sanctification is the earthly process of growth by which we press toward that goal; *glorification* is the instantaneous completion of it. God graciously, summarily glorifies us and admits us into His presence. There is no waiting period, no soul sleep, and no purgatory.

Misunderstanding on this point runs deep. No less a scholar than C. S. Lewis wrote:

Our souls *demand* purgatory, don't they? Would it not break the heart if God said to us, "It is true, my son, that your breath smells and your rags drip with mud and slime, but we are charitable here and no one will upbraid you with these things, nor draw away from you. Enter into the joy"? Should we not reply, "With submission, sir, and if there is no objection, I'd *rather* be cleaned first." "It may hurt, you know."—"Even so, sir." (C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* [New York: Harcourt, 1964], 108–109.)

Lewis was no theologian. He was prone—like too many Anglicans—to water down the clarity of biblical truth with Roman Catholic tradition. But this is surely one of his most glaring and baffling errors. It is as if he were totally oblivious to the biblical promise of glorification.

Nothing in Scripture even hints at the notion of purgatory, and nothing indicates that our glorification will in any way be drawn out or painful. On the contrary, the moment a believer dies, his soul is instantly glorified and he enters God's presence. To depart this world is to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23). And upon seeing Christ, we become like Him. It is a graceful, peaceful, painless, instantaneous transition. Paul says that to be absent from the body is to be "at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Notice Paul also indicates that Christians in heaven now are "away from the body" (2 Corinthians 5:8). The body goes to the grave; the soul is admitted immediately to heaven. Hebrews 12:23 also suggests that all the saints who have died and are now in heaven are there without their bodies; it describes heaven as the dwelling place of "*the spirits of the righteous made perfect*" (emphasis added). But we do not remain mere spirits throughout eternity. Our glorified spirits will be united with glorified bodies at the final resurrection.

What will the perfected soul be like? The most obvious characteristic is that it will finally be perfectly free from evil forever. We will never again have a selfish desire or utter useless words. We will never perform another unkind deed or think a sinful thought. We will be perfectly liberated from our captivity to sin and finally able to think and act in a way that is perfectly righteous, holy, and honorable in God's sight. Can you imagine yourself in consummate perfection forever? I frankly have a hard time envisioning myself as utterly impeccable. But there will be no imperfection in heaven!

Revelation 21:27 says, "Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false." No one who has any stain of sin will ever enter the heavenly city; therefore, sin will never again pose any threat whatsoever.

What about the stain of *our* past sins? Revelation 22:14–15 says:

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

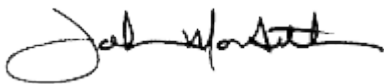
Sin may define who we once were, but no longer. We are now new creatures in Christ, completely forgiven, thoroughly washed, and forever made perfect. As Paul wrote the Corinthians:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. *But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; emphasis added)

All believers can rest in this confidence: God has already justified us in order to free us from the guilt of sin. He is now sanctifying us in order to deliver us from the corruption of sin. And one day He will glorify us in order to liberate us from the very presence of sin—forever!

If you are not a Christian, you need to lay hold of this truth by faith: *the sin that will keep you out of heaven has no cure but the blood of Christ*. If you are weary of your sin and exhausted from the load of your guilt, He tenderly holds forth the offer of life and forgiveness and eternal rest to you: “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). No one will be turned away. Jesus said, “Whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37). All are invited: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Revelation 22:17).

Any discussion of the glories of the eternal kingdom is ultimately irrelevant to anyone who will be excluded from heaven. Scripture makes it clear that those dressed in the rags of their sin will be forever shut out, but those clothed with the righteousness of Christ will be welcomed with open arms for all eternity. Longing for heaven is not enough; we must meet the spiritual dress code. And that requirement can only be fulfilled by God’s perfect substitute—only the Lord can clothe us in the righteousness of Christ. God treated Him as if He committed believers’ sins, and treats believers as if they did only the righteous deeds of the sinless Son of God.



(Adapted from [\*The Glory of Heaven\*](#); all Scripture references are taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted.)

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