

God's Presence OR Disney Heaven

Sometimes, as I'm having spiritual conversations with folks, we talk and talk and talk, then we argue and argue and argue, then we fuss and fuss and fuss, then we get exasperated, frustrated, and downright angry. Then I realize, "Wait a minute, we are talking in two different languages." Imagine for a moment that you are seeing two different people who are obviously agitated with each other. They are red-faced, gesticulating, and yelling, but one is doing so in Chinese and the other in Italian. What are these two going to accomplish? Pretty much nothing. Why? Because they can't even understand each other.

This happened to me again recently. I shared something and someone got upset about it. We were going back and forth about it, and I was totally flummoxed as to why what I was saying was so upsetting. My point made perfect sense to me. Then I realized the language he was hearing in was not the language I was speaking in. Suddenly, a few things fell in place not only for this discussion but also for numerous discussions I've had in the past.

I believe I've noticed two perspectives from Christians.

One views heaven as this place we hope to go, like Disney World. To get there, we have to measure up to a set of rules. Thus, every rule that is part of this requirement means it is harder to get to heaven. That means if someone or even the Bible says, "Don't do this" or "You need to do this," it gets translated as a bigger burden and a harder road to get to Disney Heaven.

The second perspective views heaven as being with God (**Philippians 1:23**; cf. **II Thessalonians 1:9**). Thus, heaven is about God's presence and not a geographical location. I've heard one person express it this way: God is where we find heaven, not the other way around. Thus, to be in heaven, we must draw close to God and we want to avoid anything that is going to lead us away from God (cf. **Isaiah 59:2**). From this perspective, when someone or even the Bible says, "Don't do this" or "You need to do this," it gets translated as a blessing showing how to more easily have a relationship with God.

For instance, from the first mindset, someone reads **II Timothy 3:16-17** and sees a huge burden. "Great, if I want to go to Disney Heaven, I have to read the Bible. That is so hard. Why does God put such a burden on us?" Then they start to barter over how much. "Do I really have to read it every day? How much do I have to read it every day? Does it have to be a set amount of Scripture or for a set period of time?" But from the second mindset, the passage looks completely different. "Awesome, I can draw closer to God by being in His Word? Well, that's easy. I'm all over that."

But then these two start talking to each other. The person with the "God's presence" mindset starts talking about how Christians need to be in the Word way more than on Sundays, and the person with the "Disney Heaven" mindset gets upset.

DH (Disney Heaven): "You can't make rules about how often I have to read the Bible."

GP (God's Presence): "But you have to read your Bible."

DH: "But you can't prove I have to do it every day."

GP: "But why wouldn't you read it every day?"

And the discussion goes on, getting nowhere. Why? Because they are speaking two different languages. DH wants to know the exact rules that will get him into Disney Heaven. GP isn't trying to create rules; he's trying to help people get closer to God.

Consider another example. How do these two approach **Ephesians 5:18**? The DH perspective wants to know the rule. Some will claim this rule says "no drinking alcohol, period;" others will argue against that rule and barter it down to "only social drinking is allowed." But both of them view this passage as a rule that makes getting to Disney Heaven harder. It would be a lot easier to get to Disney Heaven if God didn't make up these rules that limit us from what we want to do. The GP perspective sees this differently. This Christian recognizes that Paul's point is to the degree you have intoxicants in your system, you can't be filled with the Holy Spirit. This statement is not a burdensome rule that makes getting to heaven harder; it is a blessed truth that shows the easier way to be in a relationship with God and in His presence. Intoxicants make it harder to be led by the Spirit (cf. **Galatians 5:19-24**). The person concerned about a relationship with God doesn't see the discussion about alcohol as a debate over rules and simply can't understand the argument from that perspective. This person just doesn't understand why anyone would remotely do anything that makes walking with God harder, so he doesn't drink alcohol. It's not about rules for him; it's about relationship. But the person concerned with getting to Disney Heaven can only think in terms of rules and usually wants to get away with as much as he possibly can while still abiding by the technical rules.

We could go on and on with examples of these contrasts in thinking. So, the question we each have to ask ourselves is how do we view the instructions in the Bible? How do we view the discussions you have with other

Christians about how a Christian should live? Do we see them as increased burdens making it harder and harder for us to get to heaven? Or do we see them as blessings that make having a relationship with God easier?

How do you view it?

—**Edwin L. Crozier**