



“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship

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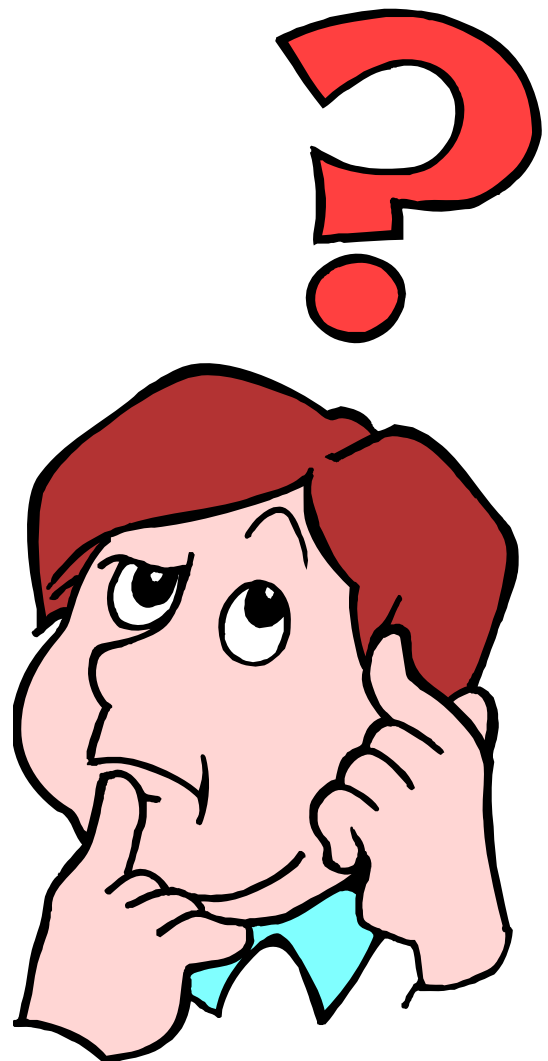
What Your Destiny is Not

A Matter of Choice

Mastering the Bible

A Personal Testimony

***How Would
You
Answer a
Skeptic?***



From Pastor Dennis

What Is Our Destiny?

Some religious cults and new-age philosophies teach that the destiny of humans is to become God. This is heresy and blasphemy; people who believe this have been deceived by false teaching. We are not co-equal with God and never will be. Search for the full article on this subject, "Will Humans Become Gods?" on our denomination's website at www.wcg.org

John writes that we are the children of God, but "what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 2:28 - 3:2) Even though God calls us his children, it doesn't mean we are or ever will be God. We are children by adoption (Romans 8:23). There is one God, who exists in three Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is no other God, and never will be another.

John says we are already "born again" (John 3:3-7). Yet we are still limited human beings. We really don't know what we will be like or what life will be like in the eternal kingdom of God. We do know that we will be free of the trials and suffering of this life (Revelation 21:3-5). We also know that God will give us a new spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44, 52-53) and an imperishable nature. This new existence will be different than our present physical state, but this difference is not something we can explain or understand in this life. In the resurrection we will be like Jesus Christ, and that will be wonderful enough. We will be God's "children" forever.

We must be careful to use accurate biblical terms in describing our destiny. There is a huge difference between 'become God' and 'become like God.' We were created in the 'image and likeness' of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Even though we are like God in some ways, we will never become God; that contradicts the Bible's teaching about the nature of God. Even though Peter wrote that we may 'participate in the divine nature'

through his Spirit living in us (2 Peter 1:4), we are not and never will be divine. The word 'divine' means deity or God; to be God.

God is one being, not many separate beings. God is eternal and uncreated. We are created beings, with a "start date" when we came into existence. We are less than God, and can never be God, for that word implies eternalness, uncreatedness and omnipotence. We do not have life within ourselves, as does God. We cannot give life to others, as God can.

God declares, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God." (Isaiah 45:5) The angels have greater powers than us, but they are not God. Their powers are limited. They had a "start date" like we did. There is and always will be only one God and only one Lord

Jesus - Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 8:6 - "there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

In our Statement of Beliefs we refer to biblical descriptions of God: "God, by the testimony of Scripture, is one divine Being in See Destiny on Page 3

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The Vine *Growing Together in Christ*



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From Tammy Tkach

A Matter of Choice

It's been said we do what we really want to do and the rest is just excuses. This must be true. I can't seem to find the time to do the ironing, but I make time to go bowling once a week. I also manage to see a movie or two each week (usually rented), but can't seem to find the time to clean out the garage. So when I say, "I didn't have time to do such and such," I really mean I didn't want to do it.

Everything we do or don't do involves making a choice. This includes our spiritual life. We make a choice every day to pray or not to pray, to read scripture and spend time with God or not. We also choose how close we will be to the Lord. Author J. Oswald Sanders said, "We are now, and we will be in the future, only as intimate with God as we really choose to be"

Sanders describes four circles of intimacy with God: the outer circle, the second circle, the third circle & the inner circle. Jesus' outer circle consisted of the 70 he called and sent out two by two to preach the gospel. The 12 disciples made up the third circle. In the second circle were the three who were closest to him: Peter, James and John. But one was especially close; one seemed to have a special place next to the Savior.

John described himself as the one "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). He was the one who reclined next to Jesus at dinner and through whom Simon Peter asked about Jesus' betrayer.

Did Jesus love John so much because Jesus played favorites? Was John teacher's pet because he was special or perfect? Jesus didn't have favorites, but John did. John chose that special place because he loved Jesus so much and wanted to be as close as he could get to the Master. And Jesus loved him back, recognizing John's deep desire to be close. As Sanders says, "Mutual love and confidence are the keys to intimacy."

Have you ever wanted to be closer to Jesus? God puts that desire in our hearts, but we are the ones who choose how close we'll



be. Perhaps we feel more comfortable in the outer circle, choosing to keep a little distance. Or maybe the second circle is as close as we've ever been. It feels so good, moving closer doesn't seem possible.

Being in the outer circle or the inner circle is up to us. Jesus has already invited us to get closer (Matthew 11:28). "The place on Jesus' breast is still vacant, and open to any who are willing to pay the price of deepening intimacy" (Sanders).

If we're willing, we can be close to Jesus in the special place next to his heart. We too can be the ones Jesus loves. It's a matter of choice.



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three eternal, co-essential, yet distinct Persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is the one true God, eternal, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.

He is Creator of heaven and earth, Sustainer of the universe, and Source of human salvation. Though transcendent, God is directly and personally involved with human beings. God is love and infinite goodness." (Mark 12:29; 1 Tim. 1:17; Eph. 4:6; Matt. 28:19; 1 John 4:8; 5:20; Titus 2:11; John 16:27; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Cor. 8:4-6)

– *By Dennis Pelley*

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mighty argument opened out and arose like a great work of art above me till at least it enclosed me within its perfect proportions. It was a revolutionary experience. I saw for the first time that a book of Scripture is a complete discussion of a single subject; I felt the force of the book as a whole, and I understood the different parts in the light of the whole as I had never understood them when reading them by themselves. Thus to master book after book is to fill the mind with the great thoughts of God." - *From the Scriptorium Website: The Scriptorium is the new media daily of the Torrey Honors Institute at Biola University*

<http://scriptoriumdaily.com/index.php?name=james-gray-on-mastering-the-bible&page=&name=james-gray-on-mastering-the-bible&page=>

Apologetics



You Want Proof?

In my mind I've been practicing confronting a materialistic skeptic and proving to him that God exists, just like they do on

TV. After the introductory pleasantries, I press in for the "kill": "The creation requires a *Creator*; its design demands a *Designer*; laws of nature show that there is a *Lawgiver*; and a Big-Bang beginning necessitates a *Beginner*." (Oops, that last one doesn't sound quite right. Let's pretend I didn't say that.) Now I wait in gleeful expectancy for the adversary's capitulation. And he says, "OK, but prove that the universe is a creation." Huh? "And that what we see in it is, in fact, a design." What? "And what you call laws are really no more than *our* feeble attempt to describe how nature sometimes behaves. Or do you really think that a Someone out there is punishing errant electrons that don't obey Coulomb's Law?"

Ummm, well, I . . . ah . . . ah . . . Wait a minute; what happened?

I'm glad you asked. My "proof claims" are flawed! (Even though in days gone by we once used them in a booklet.) *If* someone accepts that the universe we see is a creation, then obviously it was created and has a Creator. It is a tautology, like asking, "Is a bluish sky, blue?" But why should a skeptic accept my premise? Even though many things science discovers would "prove" to us that there is a Creator, an unbeliever can always find an alternative, even if it is only a quasi-scientific hypothesis. Eighty years ago he believed in a universe of infinite age. Today he can retreat to a string theory where colliding 11-dimensional "branes" behind the "quantum foam" create universes.

Now someone might ask, "But, if I drive along a deserted rural road and suddenly see a 10 story building, I know it had a builder." Yes, but we see buildings being built every day: surveys, excavations, foundations, cranes, steel beams, & finally, new buildings. So we know there are builders. But where

can we see newly designed and law-filled universes coming into existence? Or even new designs or new laws within the universe we know? They don't seem to be happening.

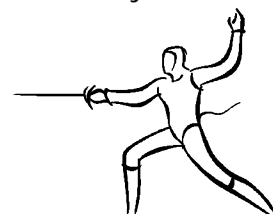
So a skeptic has his faith in a scientific hypothesis and the believer has what? In the first century the Greeks tended more toward the belief that the universe was eternal (and therefore had no need of a Creator). The Jewish tradition was different (and more like present scientific theory!), that the universe had a beginning. Even so, the author of Hebrews wrote: "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible." (1:13) Why then would we want to try to "prove" by other means what that inspired writer says we understand by faith?

So is faith the only thing I have with which to "confront" the unbeliever? What a question. What is meant by "the only thing"? But if I can't prove that the universe is a creation, what sort of answer should I be giving for the hope that is within me?

A skeptic can always find refuge in a new scientific or quasi-scientific theory that may not be provable or disprovable. While we can see buildings being built and therefore know that they have builders, we haven't seen new universes being created that would then prove that there is a Creator. Is that discouraging? It need not be.

Let's ask a different question: "Are there new creations that we can see? Happily the answer is: "Yes." "Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is passed away, the new has come." [2 Co. 5:17 (emphasis added)] So one's own Christian experience should be proof to one's self and maybe even somewhat convincing to others. What experience is that? That once we were fleshly-minded, carnal, sinful human beings going our own way (i.e. Satan's way) in the world, with no realistic expectation of any good thing coming to us at our deaths. And that now we have been changed into

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Personal Testimony

Spirit will conform you into the image of Jesus Christ. - *By Louis Longoria*

An Untold Story

Irma and I thank all of you for your concerns and prayers for her brother, Jose Mendez, who died of lung cancer, on July 12, 2007. At this point in time, it reminds me of the day Mr. Pelley asked us to place names written on paper into an envelope to be sealed. Instead of writing the names of two or three individuals that I would request of the Holy Spirit to draw to Christ for the purpose of salvation, I wrote on the paper placed in the envelope the phrase, "The Whole Family." In so doing I have gotten and received news that my father, my mother and my brother-in-law have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

Of my family and extended family, that's three saved and 37 people to go. The days before Irma's brother's death, he would not allow or listen to anyone who entered to discuss salvation. Two days before Irma's brother died a visiting chaplain called on Jose, who was weak and bedridden and requested permission to sit at his side.

Jose permitted the chaplain to do so, and then proceeded over a period of four hours to pour out all of his bitterness, grievances, dislikes, and differences he had with people. Toward the end of the four hours that the chaplain sat at Jose's side, he asked Jose if he would accept Jesus Christ as his Savior. Jose responded with a yes. The chaplain said to Jose, let's pray together.

They prayed of repentance, of acknowledging that one is a sinner, the accepting of the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ in faith, trust and belief in Him. After the visiting chaplain departed Jose's bedside, but before leaving, he told his son, "Eddie, your father accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior, your father is now a saved person."

Jesus Christ was victoriously resurrected. Jesus Christ was and is victorious over Satan. You too, everyone and me can be a victor over Satan, if we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior & Redeemer. Accept Jesus Christ. Once justified the Holy



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spiritually minded, converted, justified and sanctified human beings seeking to go God's way through the world, with a sure expectation of something very good coming to us sometime after our deaths.

As Paul wrote: "Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers - none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." [I Co, 6:9b-11]

Looking at the changes in our nature, outlook, direction, and behavior that have been created in us, one might ask a skeptic, "Is there any realistic way in the world that you could see *me* bringing about these changes on my own?" Fortunately, up to this point, because of your belief, he has probably thought that you are rather "weak-minded." So how indeed would such a "mental midget" be capable of such a transformation? While the obvious negative response to that question may still not be a proof to a skeptic, it may give him some good food for thought amid the carnal thoughts his mind is usually filled with.

As Peter wrote: "You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme." [I Pet. 4:3-4 (emphasis added)] And happily most of us can speak of this transformative experience much more authoritatively than to the subtleties and ramifications of string theory or protein synthesis.

Still want more? Let Paul, in a different context, settle the matter: "For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; *but a new creation is everything!*" [Gal. 6:15] (emphasis added) Case closed!

- *By Allen Andrews*

Bible Study

So Basic It's Easy To Ignore



James M. Gray (1851-1935) was one of the most famous Bible teachers of the early 20th century. He was a key player in the generation that established the Bible institute movement, serving as dean/president of Moody Bible Institute for more than two decades. He had worked alongside Dwight L. Moody, and was academically qualified to lead an educational institution into the 20th century, institutionalizing his signature "Synthetic Bible Study" method.

So when he wrote a little book in 1904 called How To Master the English Bible, you can imagine how eager people were to read it. Here was a "How To" book from a man who knew his Bible and could make it come alive in the church or classroom. What tips, tricks, and techniques would he share?

In fact he offered almost no tricks at all, and certainly nothing that seems like advanced or specialized knowledge. His program is so basic that it's easy to ignore, and most people go right on ignoring it. But it really can take you deeper into the Bible than you've ever been, if you'll just try it.

– Fred Sanders, *The Scriptorium Website*

Excerpts: How to Master the English Bible

The first practical help I ever received in the mastery of the English Bible was from a layman. We were fellow-attendants at a certain Christian conference or convention and thrown together a good deal for several days, and I saw something in his Christian life to which I was a comparative stranger – a peace, a rest, a joy, a kind of spiritual poise I knew little about. One day I ventured to ask him how he had become possessed of the experience, when he replied, "By reading the epistle to the Ephesians." I was surprised, for I had read it without such results, and therefore asked him to explain the manner of his reading, when he related the following: He had gone into the country to spend the Sabbath with his family on one occasion,

taking with him a pocket copy of Ephesians, and in the afternoon, going out into the woods and lying down under a tree, he began to read it; he read it through at a single reading, and finding his interest aroused, read it through again in the same way, and, his interest increasing, again and again. I think he added that he read it some twelve or fifteen times, "and when I arose to go into the house," said he, "I was in possession of Ephesians, or better yet, it was in possession of me, and I had been 'lifted up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' in an experimental sense in which that had not been true in me before, and will never cease to be true in me again."

I confess that as I listened to this simple recital my heart was going up in thanksgiving to God for answered prayer, the prayer really of months, if not years, that I might come to know how to master His Word. And yet, side by side with the thanksgiving was humiliation that I had not discovered so simple a principle before, which a boy of ten or twelve might have known. And to think that an "ordained" minister must sit at the feet of a layman to learn the most important secret of his trade!

Since that day, however, the writer has found some comfort in the thought that other ministers have had a not unlike experience. In an address before the National Bible Society of Scotland, the Rev. Dr. Stalker speaks of the first time he ever "read a whole book of the Bible straight through at a sitting." It was while as a student he was spending a winter in France, and there being no Protestant church in the town where he was passing a Sunday, he was thrown on his own resources. Leaving the hotel where he was staying, he lay down on a green knoll and began reading here and there as it chanced, till, coming to the epistle to the Romans, he read on and on through to the end. "As I proceeded," he said, "I began to catch the drift of Paul's thought; or rather, I was caught by it and drawn on. The See Bible on Page 3

