

Fire-Escape Religion

How many Mandarins have wanted to be saved so that they will go to heaven rather than hell when they die, and that literally is the extent of their perception of the value of their salvation?
By Ben Graydon

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Surely, to them, to go to church on Sunday is probably necessary in order for them to maintain any sense of ongoing connectivity with the whole Christianity idea.

But the faith of followers of Christ is – or ought to be – about a lot more.

When one confesses Jesus with his mouth and believes in his heart that God has raised Him from the dead, one enters the Kingdom of God as a citizen. It is not something out there, far ahead of us, for which we must wait to die to enter into. No, indeed; Jesus said (Luke 17:21) that the Kingdom of God is already within us (in the Person of Himself).

So what do we do with this Jesus, if His intent for us was not simply for us to snatch from Him a “free ticket to heaven” to cash in on our way out of this earthly life?

What did He mean when He said, “Greater works than these shall he (who believes on me) do”? How on earth is that to be true if the thing we are looking for is just to leave this earth someday in the future and go then to that better place (heaven) somewhere “beyond the blue”?

We have allowed the metaphor of “crossing over” to a better place to come to mean only our departure through physical death to our “eternal reward” when what we might better be doing is remembering that the children of Israel “crossed over” into an earthly promised land (not a heavenly) to conquer enemies and to fulfill their Genesis 1:28 “take dominion” mandate. It was in THAT doing that they found their fulfillment as God’s people, not simply in the “afterlife.”

Many who are looking for heaven after their earthly life mainly as the better alternative to eternity in hell should bear in mind that the worst part – if not the very definition – of that hell is the total absence of God and His restraint of the natural forces and effects of sin. And people who ask how a loving God could allow bad things to happen aren’t thinking right: they’re blaming God for causing the bad thing rather than recognizing that bad things are the natural result of man’s free choices of what they think they want rather than of God’s best. So, in hell, man will experience what happens in a place without God ... and NONE of it will be good or pleasant. And if we keep heaven “out there” – if we aren’t living daily in the knowledge of the presence of God – how are we choosing heaven over hell anyway?

So why do we think about eternal life with God, in His Kingdom, as something necessarily “out there,” in front of us, to be enjoyed only after death? We can have it NOW! We DO have it now; we just don’t have the eyes and the faith to see it. It is our shortsightedness.

A husband wants the relationship tonight that is short and to the point. It’s out there, some distance away, but he imagines it. A wife wants a relationship that is deeper, that goes on all day long. It’s here now. God wants the latter kind of ongoing, all-the-time relationship. It is present, it is

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future and it has no gap between now and then. He did not save us just to give us the hope of a better future in eternity; He saved us to give us that better hope RIGHT NOW! In the same way, salvation is not a one-time thing; it is an ongoing thing, being realized every day.

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If going to church helps you to draw closer to God, great. But if that is the zenith of your spiritual experience, the place where you best (think that you) hear the voice of God, perhaps you should ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you if it's really His voice you're hearing there ... or some spirit of man.

Hebrews 10:25 tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves (episynag?g?n) together, yes, but that "assembling" is in the context of our future gathering together with the Lord. (See 2 Thess. 2:1, the only other place in the NT where that Greek word is used, thus indicating that Hebrews 10:25 is not referencing Sunday "church" meetings, which never occurred in the NT, but the gathering together with the Lord in the air at His return that 2 Thess. references.). It could actually be true that practicing what is commonly taught as the meaning of that verse – assembling together with others in church – could prevent one from the assembly with the Lord that it is ACTUALLY referencing by substituting some earthly experience, some man-made religious practice, for the real thing.

But I could be wrong. Holy Spirit, please guide us. Give us that TRUE RELIGION, undefiled, that scripture talks about, not the man-made, fire escape variety.