

Death, Immortality, and Heaven. No. 1

October 8 is a hallowed date on my calendar. Sixty years ago on that date Elma Lea Holladay and I happily joined our lives as one. To me she was adorable both for her character and her physical beauty. If God had offered free miraculous cosmetic surgery for her, I would have had no suggestion for improvement of her beauty. Through the following 57 years we were blessed to eat three meals together most every day and few were the nights we were apart.

By that closeness, it would seem that we would know each other fully; however, my eyes never saw her real self any more than I was able to see gravity or the countless radio waves about me constantly. I saw and loved the manifestations of her spirit, her real invisible self. As I stood by her bedside and held her hand over two years ago while the trumpet of God summoned her into the unseen assembly, my invisible companion left her earthly body. I could only see the visible effects of her departure.

In the old heaven and earth of OT times, it was written that in such a transition, “.. *the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it*” (Ecc. 12:7). Because death had not been conquered and heaven had not been opened by the atonement of Christ, God let souls sleep in death in the hadean world while their bodies disintegrated. But Lea lived in the new heaven and earth which came down out of heaven from God, a people in whose persons God himself dwelled. She was reconciled to God and he lived in her. She did not return to God for that relationship was not broken by her spirit leaving her body. Heaven is not a place but an unending relationship with God. She did not have to go somewhere in the universe to meet with God for she lived in him; neither did she have to wait for some future development for it to transpire.

In cremating that which was earthly and visible, those combustible physical elements were diffused back into this universe. Those elements not disintegrated by fire were lovingly deposited in the earth near the remains of others of my family. There they will remain until time or some disturbance will disintegrate them and they are diffused back into the dust from which they came. Those lovely physical elements housed her but were not her. They were returned to the earth and air as the seed from which the new plant rises. The seed does not rise but a new plant with a different nature continues in life.

Because Jesus had already met her appointment with death and judgment substituting for her (Heb. 9:23-28) and death and hades had been destroyed (Rev. 20:14), she was endowed with immortality when she left the earthly nature with our Spirit God. The hope of Israel was for resurrection, but she needed no resurrection from the hadean world. Since God alone has immortality (2 Tim. 6:16), we are not born immortal, but immortality is given to those in God through Christ. Freed from her lifeless body, immortality was given. Immortality, for all practical purposes then, is what heaven is, and that is not restricted to a locality. Her citizenship was already in heaven; now she is only free of physical limitations of time and space.

Paul and the Philippian disciples were awaiting a Savior from heaven who “*who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body*” (Phil. 3:20-21). That was written before Jesus’ victorious presence at the consummation of the age around AD 70. Are they still waiting? Were they expecting Christ to make calcium, carbon, salt, hydrogen, oxygen, iron, zinc – all those elements (dust) of which their bodies were composed – immortal and spiritual? Spiritual elements! Immortal flesh! Those are fanciful oxymorons! The seed remains in the ground while a plant with no resemblance to the seed rises from it with more glorious features.

I do not know how Lea will “look” when I soon shall “see” her, for I will not have these physical eyes which detect physical light and images. If I am given physical sight, I still will not be able to see her in her spiritual state – no more than when I held her loving form in my arms. Since she is in God and he is everywhere, if I were able to see (detect) a spirit, I might discover that she is with and about me even as is God and his Spirit. And as God is perfect and beautiful, I think she would be also.

Some of you may be reading this with a “what’s new?” attitude. I have touched on these points in various essays already. Others of you may be aghast, having never heard anything so outlandish and evidently wrong. You have heard so many of the eloquent descriptions of heaven that my expressions above might make heaven unappealing to you. I can certainly understand that for I have long believed and taught the traditional physical concepts relating to eternal life. I thought that somehow reconciliation with God was severed in death and needed restoration after formal judgment.

Although I do not have my material organized, I intend to write a series of lessons giving many more details and their scriptural basis. If you are disquieted by questions about our traditional teachings, just delete them. I do not want to upset you over such matters that are not essential to our salvation. But inquiring minds want to know! I do not have time and energy to enter into lengthy correspondences with you but your brief, pertinent questions may offer help in my reaching more accurate conclusions. []

(Cecil Hook; October 2005)

Talkin’ Texas: Maybe you have learned more about Texas than you wanted to know. So I will begin to add other post scripts, addenda, trailers, tailings, lagniappe, notes, quotes, and/or appendices – providing they do not detract from Texas!

Tailings: Except for the two readers who disagreed, your increased number of responses to my FR 283, “Learning From A Setting Hen,” have been supportive and refreshing. I am convinced that part of our controversy has been over a “loaded” word. All informed people understand that there have been, and still are, constant “changes” in the world about us. We can agree that God works and uses “change” -- as long as we do not call it “evolution.” That is an ugly, prejudicial word for too many of us. Let’s get over it.