

# OUR HEAVENLY CALLING



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

*Our Heavenly Calling*

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T. M. Moore  
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

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*Our Heavenly Calling*

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*Our Heavenly Calling*

Welcome to *Our Heavenly Calling*

God, spiritual realities, heaven – such ideas our increasingly secular generation refuses to acknowledge.

But the Christian knows these are real, and that believers have a calling from God which comes to them from that spiritual realm and is meant to bear witness to God in the here and now.

What is our heavenly calling? How can we receive it? How do we live it? What should we expect as we do?

These are some of the questions addressed in this brief study.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Really Real

*Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus... Hebrews 3.1*

*Heaven?*

In our secular age, the idea that there might be something like a “heavenly calling” is not received as anything like real truth. The only *heavenly* matters most people today take seriously are those that relate to the weather, space exploration, star gazing, or coronal mass ejections. In other words, all that’s considered *heavenly* by most people is just some form of matter located up in the sky at one level or another.

The notion of *heaven* as a spiritual region, where spiritual beings reside, and with which we may have converse, is for increasing numbers of people today merely a quaint bit of lore, leftover from our religious past, and clung to by people who have difficulty coping with the real world.

The unseen realm of spiritual beings and purposes is no longer regarded by many people as of any relevance to our lives. It’s not really real, even though large numbers of people claim to have some acquaintance with it.

Even Christians aren’t exactly sure how to think about the spiritual realm, which is mentioned so frequently in the Bible. For most Christians, heaven is a real place, but it’s not so real right *now*. It will only be *really* real when we get there and, hopefully, that won’t be for a while yet.

Most unbelievers don’t acknowledge a heavenly realm or spiritual beings, including God, at all. Many – perhaps too many – Christians regard such matters as true, but only somewhat relevant to our lives here and now. Heaven is not so much something we *know* as something we *believe*; it is not to be experienced in the present but awaits us, so to speak, in the sweet by-and-by.

Whatever *heavenly calling* we may have relates to when our lives in this world are over, and we go to be with the Lord.

*A calling we can share*

The writer of Hebrews, on the other hand, mentions “a heavenly calling” and indicates that some people – “holy brethren,” such as those to whom he was writing – actually *partake of* that heavenly calling, and that they were partakers of it at the time he was writing them. The entirety of Hebrews 3 is devoted to warning, urging, exhorting, and teaching *holy brethren* how to partake of that heavenly calling, and how to keep from forfeiting it.

In other words, the writer of Hebrews indicates that heaven – from which this *heavenly calling* derives, and for which, and to which it pertains – is a *real* place, a place within our grasp, and one so important that we must not allow anything in this life to get in the way of our partaking of, holding fast to, pursuing, and knowing that heavenly calling at all times.

What does the writer mean by “a heavenly calling”?

*From, for, and to heaven*

First, a heavenly calling is a summons to a way of life that comes to us *from* heaven – from God, the Creator of all things (v. 4), the One Who sent His Son to inaugurate the day of salvation (vv. 1, 13-15). God issues a call to human beings, a call which, as the writer explains in Hebrews 1, comes through the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ and those who knew Him first-hand (Heb. 2.1-4). From His place of eternal

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presence and power, God issues a call to all human beings, summoning them to know Him and His ways, and to enter His rest (vv. 9-11).

This heavenly calling is a call *for* heaven as well. It comes to summon people to peer into heaven's realities and to embrace heaven's priorities – which are the ways of God (v. 10). The ways of human beings on earth are naturally unbelieving, sinful, and deceitful (vv. 12, 13). As Solomon argued in Ecclesiastes, those who live only “under the sun,” as opposed to “under the heavens,” live empty, disappointing, vain lives, because they are out of touch with the eternal realities for which their souls long.

Such a way of life does not please God, Who is the Author of life (v. 17). This is not why He created us. His desires and plans for us are higher, brighter, and more eternally significant than what we typically pursue “under the sun.” But rather than just exercise sovereign wrath against humankind, because of the moral and spiritual affront such a way of life is to Him, He calls us *from* heaven to embrace a life *for* heaven and its purposes and ways.

Finally, that heavenly calling is *to* heaven as well. God is gathering people into His eternal rest in heaven (vv. 11, 18). In that place, there will be no unbelief, no sin, no deceit, and no wickedness. Instead, resting in the Lord and *partaking* of Him (v. 14), human beings will find full and complete satisfaction and joy, forever (Ps. 16.11).

There is a heavenly calling, and it's really real. It comes to *holy brethren*, who are partakers of this altogether true and complete domain of reality and life.

### *For reflection*

1. If you were asked to define the “heavenly calling” which Christians pursue, what would you say?
2. What do you think are the primary obstacles keeping people – including many who call themselves Christians – from partaking of this heavenly calling here and now?
3. What is the place of *considering Jesus* in this heavenly calling? What does it mean to *consider* Jesus?

*Next steps – Conversation: Ask some of your Christian friends about this “heavenly calling.” What is it? What does it mean to partake of it? How can one be certain that he is following this heavenly calling? Encourage them to read this and the remaining installments in this series, and invite them to talk again.*

## 2 Partaking of the Calling

*Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus...*  
Hebrews 3.1

*To understand and embrace*

There is a heavenly calling, a summons from God in heaven to a life more in line with the priorities and purposes of heaven, a life *oriented* to heaven, and that *ends* in a heaven of rest in God, where sin and death can reach us no more.

To the secular men and women of our age, the idea of such a calling seems foolish. Trapped in an “under the sun” existence, they consider all such talk about heaven and a heavenly calling as a waste of time.

But for over two millennia multiplied millions have found this heavenly calling to be true, and have devoted themselves to partaking of that calling as the driving force, organizing motif, and overarching objective of their lives. In the process those who have shared in this heavenly calling – “holy brethren” – have contributed more of beauty, goodness, and truth to the human experience than any other people who have ever lived.

There is, therefore, a heavenly calling, and it is possible to partake of this calling, so that the reality of it becomes real to us as well. To share in the heavenly calling means to understand its priorities and promises and to embrace them as one’s own. It means becoming one of the *holy brethren* who consider Jesus as their Lord and High Priest. It means gaining a new hope and new aspirations, a new outlook on life, and new values, as well as a raft of new practices which enable us to show the reality of that heavenly calling to the watching world.

*Beginning the heavenly calling*

How does one begin to partake of this heavenly calling?

We cannot enter this calling unless we first hear God Himself summoning us to turn away from the life of sin, deceit, and wickedness, which offends His holiness and frustrates our desire for happiness. God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible, where, through prophets, apostles, and His own incarnate Son, He makes known to us His displeasure against those things that violate the tenets of love for God and neighbor, and calls us to embrace His heavenly calling, so that our lives reflect more and more His eternal and glorious will.

Those who believe in Jesus are set apart from the world of their day as sons and daughters of the living God. They are *holy brethren* in the Lord, because of the holiness of Christ, by Whose holiness they are saved, and into Whose holiness they are being daily transformed.

The key to beginning to partake of this calling is, as our text says, to “consider Jesus.” Jesus was sent by His Father to earth, the Word of God incarnate, to accomplish deliverance from sin for all who believe in Him (Heb. 1.1-3). It is in this sense that Jesus is our “Apostle.” We receive Him as sent by God, and we embrace the mission He came to accomplish by repenting of our sinful way of life and looking to Jesus to lead us in the way we should go, in the heavenly calling that is following Him. We become “holy brethren” *in* Him and *by* Him and *for* Him.

But we do not do this on our own. Jesus is not only our Apostle; He is also our High Priest, and this means He lives forever to intercede on our behalf, and to preserve us in our participation in the heavenly calling (Heb. 7.25). As our High Priest, Jesus is able to “save to the uttermost” all who look to Him in faith and take

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up the heavenly calling to which He summons us. That is, He brings us into ever fuller possession of the gift of eternal life, and increasingly works out in us His heavenly calling and great salvation (Heb. 2.1). He does this by giving us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us, teach and remind us, work out our salvation, and transform us increasingly into the very image of Jesus Christ Himself (Phil. 2.12, 13; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

### *Believing in Jesus*

Believing in Jesus thus establishes us in that heavenly calling. If we believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, then we have begun to partake of the heavenly calling, and to bring our lives, as holy brethren, more into line with His.

If we have no sense of that heavenly calling, and little or no desire to partake of its promises, precepts, and commands, or to increase in the calling to holiness, then it's likely we've never truly considered Jesus, or understood what He requires of all who wish to follow Him, or begun to partake of His heavenly calling.

The calling to a life deriving from, in line with, and bound for the eternal glory and joy of heaven can be ours by considering Jesus, trusting in Him as Savior and Lord. If we confidently profess Him and make His hope our hope, we will partake of the heavenly calling in ways that become richer and fuller every day.

### *For reflection*

1. Why is Jesus the key to beginning to partake of the heavenly calling?
2. Is it possible to believe in Jesus and *not* partake of the heavenly calling? Explain:
3. Why is it reasonable to expect that those who believe in Jesus will begin to evidence a different way of life – a *holy* lifestyle – than those who do not believe in Him?

*Next steps – Preparation: Do you have a sense of having partaken of that heavenly calling? How can you tell? How can you make sure that you are a partaker of the heavenly calling of God?*



### 3 Faithful as He is Faithful

*And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.* Hebrews 3.5, 6

#### *Found to be faithful*

Those who have truly begun to share in the heavenly calling will demonstrate their participation in that really real world consistently, through every day of their lives.

That is, as *holy brethren*, they will be faithful – as Moses was faithful, and as Jesus was faithful to God, Who sent Him to us for our redemption, and Who now receives His ongoing intercession on our behalf. Those who partake of the heavenly calling will be found to be faithful as holy brethren in the Lord, and they will persist in faithfulness “firm to the end.”

But to what – or whom? – are they to be faithful? Moses and Jesus were faithful to God, to do whatever He appointed for them. Like them we also must be faithful to God, or it will be difficult to tell that we are partakers of the heavenly calling. We are being faithful to God, our writer informs us, when we “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope.”

OK, but what does that mean?

#### *Holding fast our confidence*

What does it mean to “hold fast” the confidence we have of being partakers of the heavenly calling?

Let’s ask: In what are we confident? If we have believed in Jesus we should understand that we have begun to partake of the heavenly calling. Are you confident of that? Do you get up every day completely assured that your sins are forgiven and your eternal destination is secure? And do you, on the basis of that confidence, make plans, as holy brethren, to live within the parameters of your heavenly calling throughout the day, knowing that the God Who gave you that calling will be with you and will never fail nor forsake you (Heb. 13.5)? Do you go forth confident of God’s presence with you, of His pleasure in your chosen lifestyle, of His Spirit’s working in you to make you willing and able to do what pleases God (Phil. 2.13), and of Jesus’ ongoing intercession for you with the Father (Heb. 7.25), so that you lack nothing you will need to live for Him each day?

If we are confident of these matters – *really* confident – and if we hold fast to that confidence every day of our lives, it will not be long before it begins to be clear to everyone around us that our lives are following a trajectory which differs markedly from the narcissistic, relativistic, materialistic, and secular lifestyle of the people around us. We seem to have been *set apart* from an “under the sun” existence to a completely different way of life, a *holy* life “under the heavens” with God.

#### *Rejoicing in our hope*

But being faithful also involves *rejoicing* in our hope. If we are filled with and partaking of the hope of glory – now and for eternity – then that should be a matter of some importance to us. It should be just the kind of thing that would give us great joy, and make us eager to talk about, to urge others to consider, to share with others who share in this way of life, some of the ways we are discovering the really real nature of our heavenly calling.

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Those who partake of this calling will find themselves rejoicing in it and boasting about it, so that others might seek an explanation of the transformed and confident ways they see us living (1 Pet. 3.15).

We are being faithful to God, and thus following our faithful Jesus, when we hold fast our confidence, firm to the end, and rejoice and boast in our hope at every opportunity. This is the way holy brethren express their participation in their heavenly calling.

Now obviously, this suggests an approach to life that differs in many ways from the people we meet each day. This should not surprise us; after all, it is a *heavenly calling* that we are pursuing, life “under the heavens” and not merely “under the sun,” and not just one career among many. We partake of this calling by believing in Jesus. We are faithful as we share in this calling by going forth each day in the confidence of our salvation, living and rejoicing in that confidence, and boasting to one and all about the calling from, for, and to heaven that we have embraced from God Himself.

We begin to partake of that heavenly calling by trusting in Jesus. But we continue to partake of it only to the extent that we, like Moses and Jesus, are faithful to Him Who called us.

#### *For reflection*

1. In what ways are Moses and Jesus good examples of what it means to be faithful to God?
2. How would you counsel a fellow believer to work at building up his confidence in the Lord?
3. What areas of your life would you like to see impacted more consistently by your confidence in the Lord? In what ways?

*Next steps- Conversation: Talk with a few Christian friends. Are they confident in their calling? Are they rejoicing in it, and boasting about their heavenly calling with others? Are you? Consider some ways you might encourage one another in these two aspects of our heavenly calling (Heb. 10.24).*

## 4 Considering Jesus

*For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house.* Hebrews 3.3

*Fix your mind*

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that those who have begun to partake of the really real heavenly calling from God must be in it for the duration. They must *hold fast* their conviction and hope, “firm to the end” (v. 14). If they do, they will not *earn* God’s rest because of anything they have done; rather, they will *demonstrate* that they are the very people – holy brethren – for whom that rest has been prepared from before the foundation of the world.

But they must persist in this heavenly calling of being faithful to God through all the days of their lives.

So the writer urges his readers, as part of being faithful to Him Who called them, to consider Jesus, to strive for the glory of Jesus, and to fix their minds on Jesus as the key to knowing daily strength for faithfulness (Heb. 12.1, 2). What does this entail?

Is it really possible to look to Jesus to *consider* Him? As Peter admitted, we can’t see Him now, in His exalted state (1 Pet. 1.8). He doesn’t come into our communities in bodily form, like He did in Israel in that day. We can’t really talk with Him like His first followers did.

Still, the apostle Paul said that we can see the glory of God in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4.6), and that we should set our minds on Him and all the things that are above, in the heavenly realm (Col. 3.1-3). There must be some means by which we can *consider Jesus* and thus know His glory and find sustaining power to help us remain in our heavenly calling all the days of our lives.

So how shall we look to Him?

*Where to look*

The writer of Hebrews admits that he learned to look to Jesus by paying attention to those who had known Him, listening carefully to their words, and laying hold on them with faith (Heb. 2.1-4). As he heard the apostles and studied the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the picture of Jesus presented there began to become increasingly clear.

Considering Jesus begins and must be rooted in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

The writer saw Jesus being taught in the Psalms – such as Psalm 2, 45 and 110 (cf. Heb. 1.5, 8, 9, 13). He understood Jesus was written about in such historical books as 2 Samuel, Genesis, and Exodus, as well as in several of the prophets – which Old Testament books he cites or quotes in the process of developing his own portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had said that all the Scripture was about Him (Jn. 5.39), and the writer of Hebrews took Him at His word.

The lesson is plain: Jesus is being revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Wherever we read or study in the Scripture, Jesus is present, making Himself known. We can see Jesus throughout the Bible, and consider Him as He is presented to us, in all His majesty, beauty, and power. Our responsibility is to read the Bible in such a way as to recognize what God is revealing about His Apostle and our High Priest, Jesus Christ.

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### *The need for discipline*

Now it's certain we will have a difficult time considering Jesus, knowing the glory that radiates from Him, and laying hold more firmly on our heavenly calling if we do not take the time to read and study Scripture regularly. The life to which we have been called by God involves letting His Word dwell richly within us, and especially, learning to see Jesus in all the pages and passages of the Bible.

This is hard work in any age, but in a day like ours, when reading is largely scorned, study is considered a waste of time by many, and distractions abound on every hand, unraveling the mysteries of Scripture and the revelation of Jesus Christ can be an elusive pursuit. Many people who claim to believe in Jesus have not yet begun to consider Him as He is revealed in His Word. Such people will find it difficult to sustain the pace or realize the joy of their heavenly calling.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable to equip us for the good work of pursuing our heavenly calling (2 Tim. 3.15-17). And all Scripture has something to teach us about Jesus Christ, the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12.2). If we have begun to share in our heavenly calling, looking to Jesus in Scripture will be an important part of our being faithful to Him Who calls us.

### *For reflection*

1. Meditate on Psalm 45. Can you see how the writer of Hebrews might see Jesus in this psalm?
2. Now do the same for Psalm 100.
3. What other passages of the Old Testament come to mind when you think about considering Jesus?

*Next steps – Transformation: Start right away to consider Jesus in all your Bible reading. Keep a notebook or journal where you jot down thoughts about Jesus as He reveals Himself throughout the pages of Scripture. Like the writer of Hebrews, share what you are learning with the people around you.*

## 5 Look to Your Heart

“Therefore I was angry with that generation,  
And said, “They always go astray in their heart,  
And they have not known My ways.” Hebrews 3.10, quoting Psalm 95.10

### *The heart of the matter*

How can we tell whether, in all our efforts to be faithful, we’re really on the path of that heavenly calling?  
Might we not be simply deceiving ourselves?

In fact, I suspect that a good many people who *think* they’ve begun to partake of that heavenly calling have never really considered Jesus or started being faithful to God through Him at all. They are indeed deceiving themselves, if this is the case in their lives. So is there some place we can look, some reliable measure we can observe that will indicate whether we’re being truly faithful in this heavenly calling?

There is: Look to your heart.

In our passage, the writer contrasts people with two different hearts – two very different sets of *attitudes* and *affections*. We’ve already begun to look at one of these. Those who partake of the heavenly calling are full of confidence and exuberant and rejoicing in boasting about the Lord. They demonstrate great eagerness in seeking the Lord, and they rejoice in the hope of glory He gives them. Those who partake of the heavenly calling are firm in their resolve and persistent in their path. They have *pliable* hearts, hearts that are being shaped and molded by God from within, and they are acquiring new affections that create in them a longing to please God and a growing desire to know and share in His ways.

This is the heart of those who partake of the heavenly calling. But what is the heart like of those who do not?

### *Hearts astray*

Our writer mentions those whose hearts “go astray.” He is careful to note that these people were traveling along the same path with those who had good hearts and right attitudes. Forty years they had wandered together in the wilderness (v. 9), some with pliable hearts, and some with hearts that were hard (v. 8).

Those whose hearts had gone astray were complainers. They grumbled about everything. They didn’t want to do the hard work of learning God’s ways; they just wanted God to do for them whatever they needed. Our writer says these people had evil and unbelieving hearts (v. 12). All that grumbling and grouching, and that indifference to God and His ways, revealed that they had never begun to partake of the heavenly calling; they were too busy pursuing whatever seemed best for them, and impatient with God for not meeting their needs on their schedule.

Our writer says that God was *angry* with those who had hard, complaining hearts, and who did not seek to know Him or His works as He had revealed them. These people, while still present among the people of Israel, sinned against God, and He allowed them to come to their deaths in the wilderness, without ever realizing the precious and very great promises of God in the land of Canaan.

The writer, quoting Psalm 95, urgently pleads with his readers to guard against the attitude of sin, unbelief, self-serving, and rebellion that characterized those who died in the wilderness.

We are not on the path that pleases God, and we have not begun to partake of His heavenly calling, if our attitudes reveal that we’re really more interested in ourselves and what we can get for ourselves, than in God

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and His promises, purposes, and will.

Those whose attitudes are not what they should be tend to justify themselves. They have plenty of good reasons why they're always complaining or talking about themselves or finding fault with others – and with God. Those who have begun to partake of God's heavenly calling, yet who find themselves from time to time slipping back or going astray into those old attitudes and ways, recognize their error at once, and repent of it immediately. They keep a close watch on their hearts (v. 12) and listen as the Spirit of God searches their attitudes and thoughts to expose and eliminate anything that should not be there (Ps. 139.23, 24). When they are shown to be straying from the Lord and His path, they quickly repent, amend their ways, and return to the Lord's calling (Ps. 119.59, 60).

### *Look to your heart*

Look to your heart. Consider the kinds of attitudes you harbor throughout the day – toward your situation, the people around you, and God Himself. Are you all about yourself and your needs? Do you expect others to conform to your will and whims? Or are you all about the Lord, confident in Him, boasting about His goodness, and rejoicing in the hope of glory in which you stand?

Your heart will tell you whether you have truly begun to partake of the heavenly calling of God. And if you have not, it's never too late to begin considering Jesus and getting on course with Him.

### *For reflection*

1. To what does the "heart" refer, and why does it matter so much?
2. How does the heart function in the soul, say, in relation to the mind and the conscience?
3. Meditate on Proverbs 4.23. How would you counsel a new believer to practice what Solomon advises?

*Next steps – Preparation: Suggest some ways to monitor your attitudes and the condition of your heart throughout the day. Run these by some Christian friends for their response. Then, find a friend who'll join you in practicing these disciplines. Meet regularly together to share and pray.*

## 6 On Guard against Unbelief

*Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God...* Hebrews 3.12

*Lose your salvation?*

The Book of Hebrews has been a source of consternation for certain believers. To some, it seems to suggest, in chapters 2, 3, and 6, that believers can “fall away” from or “lose” their salvation. We need to understand the writer’s intent in these places.

In Hebrews 2.1 the writer warns us to be careful about what we believe “lest we drift away” from it. Those who believe in Jesus don’t suddenly renounce Him or His heavenly calling. They drift, and some, it seems, drift entirely away.

In chapter 6 he writes, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance...” (vv.4-6). Fall away from *faith*?

And here in chapter three, the writer of Hebrews qualifies our possession of God’s heavenly rest – and thus of our heavenly calling – by saying that we will truly share in it *if* we hold fast and persevere, so that we are able to keep from being led to depart from the living God (vv. 6, 12). And *if* we don’t hold fast?

Here is not the place to resolve these difficult passages. Suffice it to say that the writer is not teaching that a *true* believer can fall from grace or lose his salvation. Instead, he is saying that true believers *daily prove that they partake of the heavenly calling* by the way they practice faithfulness to God, and by guarding against every inroad of unbelief and sin. Their faith in the unseen things of heaven bears *evidence* in the way they live (Heb. 11.1).

In our media-rich, secular age, we must be especially vigilant against unbelief finding its way into our hearts. The heavenly calling of God is really real, and we can really partake of it. But we’ll need to be continuously on guard against ideas and messages that can undermine our confidence, stifle our boasting, rob us of the reality of our experience of Christ, set us adrift from the Lord, and end up proving us to be someone other than we thought.

*Lose the reality of your salvation?*

Francis Schaeffer was once asked why it is that the Christian life doesn’t seem real to so many people. They don’t act like people who are partaking of a heavenly calling. The really real life with Christ *under the heavens* seemed mostly humdrum and indistinct. What is the cause for this loss of reality, this failure to partake of the heavenly calling?

Schaeffer explained in *True Spirituality* that “the greatest reason for a loss of reality is that while we say we believe one thing, we allow the spirit of the naturalism of the age to creep into our thinking, unrecognized.” We profess to be on the path of a heavenly calling, but in fact, we’re trudging around in the desert with all the other grumblers and complainers, so busy looking out for number one and hankering after this world’s fare that we’re missing the life God intends for us. Instead of focusing on the promises of God, and taking heed to His Word, we’re looking for our satisfaction and happiness in worldly things and ways, all the while protesting our faith in Jesus and hanging around with His people.

Many believers have allowed “the spirit of the naturalism of the age” to undermine their experience of the heavenly calling. Their priorities and values are fixed on material possessions, agreeable circumstances, and

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successful careers. They look for pleasure in fleeting entertainments. They worship in churches where the health of the Body of Christ is measured in attendees, budgets, buildings, and programs, rather than in Biblical criteria. They fill up their time with work and frivolous diversions, so that they have little strength or inclination left for serving the Lord.

Such people may be Christians, or they may be merely *wanting* to be Christians. But they will never know the true joy, hope, power, peace, and righteousness of the heavenly calling until they shake off the fetters of our materialistic and relativistic age, fortify their hearts with the vision of Christ exalted, and take up the path of faithfulness toward God which the writer of Hebrews outlines in chapter 3.

#### *Constant vigilance*

In an unbelieving age like ours, we need to be constantly on guard against anything that threatens to lead us astray from our heavenly calling. If we will not do this, and if we prefer instead to follow every side-path of self-indulgence, every distracting dead end of frivolity and foolishness, or every invitation to make more, have more, spend more, or just have more fun, we will discover – sooner or later – that the path our feet pursues reveals the reality that is in our hearts, and that hearts committed to the spirit of the age cannot truly be regarded as treading the path of the heavenly calling of God.

We will indeed have drifted and fallen away, but not from *true* faith in Jesus, only from the sham of it.

#### *For reflection*

1. Is it possible that some people who believe themselves to be Christians may not really be believers at all? Meditate on Matthew 7.21-23 as you formulate your answer.
2. If some people who never began to share in the heavenly calling – considering Jesus, being faithful to God, daily in the Word, and so forth – suddenly “fall away” from their profession of faith, have such people “lost their salvation”? Explain.
3. Peter says we should give all diligence to shore up our confession of faith. Meditate on 2 Peter 1.5-11. How does Peter’s teaching fit into the idea of the heavenly calling?

*Next steps – Conversation: Talk with some Christian friends about Francis Schaeffer’s observation. Do you agree? How can we keep from having the spirit of the naturalism of the age undermine our partaking of the heavenly calling?*



## 7 Sharing in Jesus Christ

*For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end...* Hebrews 3.14

### *Ready for partaking*

We have seen that the heavenly calling is a calling *from* heaven, *for* heaven, and *to* heaven. It comes to us from God, speaking out of His Word. It summons us to a higher life, one that mirrors the beauties and virtues of the throne room of God. And living such a life will deliver us ultimately into the eternal bliss and glory of the heavenly rest of God.

Because to partake of our heavenly calling is to partake of Jesus Christ Himself – to know and rest in Him, to experience Him growing in us and reaching out through us, to have His words and deeds determine the course of our daily lives, and to rejoice and find the greatest pleasure being in Him.

All of this, all this glorious heavenly calling, is ready for us to partake of by considering Jesus, trusting in Him, and through knowing and obeying Him, being faithful to God. The true Christian is the one who, having professed faith in Jesus, strives each day to partake of the heavenly calling, filled with hope, joy, confidence, and resolve to honor God with all our heart, mind, words, and deeds.

And if we persist in this life, thus proving that we do, indeed, belong to Jesus, the day is coming, our writer promises, when we will actually *partake of* Jesus in a richer and fuller way.

The apostle John looked forward to the day when we would finally see Jesus face to face. He said that on that day we would be like Jesus – like Him, but not *Him*. We who believe are not on our way to becoming little gods. But we are on our way to becoming *like* God, and to sharing in the resurrection and glorified life of Jesus Christ in the new heavens and new earth (1 Jn. 3.1-3).

### *A coming day*

What does this mean?

It means that a day is coming when our bodies and souls will be completely delivered from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. We will be *saved to the uttermost* by our great High Priest, Who is even now interceding for us and preparing a place for us to be with Him forever. All our thoughts and affections – pure! All our desires and conversations – holy! All our actions toward others – just and loving! All our interactions with God’s new creation – perfect stewardship! All our worship of God – entirely in the Spirit and truth of the Lord! No longer will guilt or shame depress or drag us down. No longer will physical weaknesses or ailments keep us from enjoying life. No longer will we have to fear the trials of life, threats of danger, or the coming grave. When we see Jesus, and begin fully to partake of His life and glory, then our heavenly calling will make complete sense, and we will be very glad – eternally glad – that we diligently pursued that heavenly calling during the years of our earthly sojourn.

What about you? Do you have the sense of being endowed with a heavenly calling, caught up in it, carried along by it, eager to realize more of it? Have you heard the Word of God calling you to leave behind your unbelieving, sinful ways, and to embark on a life of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18)? Have you trusted in Jesus – really trusted in Him, so that you partake of His heavenly calling, and strive to be faithful to God every day? Do you seek the face of Jesus in His Word, for the glory revealed there? Do you cast aside all grumbling, complaining, and every self-seeking, self-serving way, to show and share Jesus with others? Is it the highest joy of your life to pursue a daily walk with Jesus, and to anticipate the day when you will share in Him fully, forever?

## *Our Heavenly Calling*

Are you living under the heavens, or merely under the sun, professing to believe in Jesus, but looking to the things and conditions of this world to give you peace?

### *Serious about the heavenly calling?*

Friends, the world is weary of two-bit Christians. If you call yourself a Christian but you really aren't serious about partaking of God's heavenly calling, then admit right now that your faith is not genuine, not yet really real, and either lay it aside and get on with your disappointing life under the sun, or seek the Lord truly and serve Him with every ounce of your being.

There is a heavenly calling, and it is really real. If you partake of it, you know it, and you want more than anything else to know more of Jesus and His heavenly calling every day.

But if you don't, if your experience of being a Christian is confined to one or two niches in your life, and is not the consuming passion of your every waking moment, well, it can be. Consider Jesus. Cling to Jesus. Hold fast to your profession. Work out (not *for*) your salvation. Run, run, run the race that is set before you, fixing your eyes on Jesus. Live this life as though eternity bliss and joy determined it and depended on it. Take up the heavenly calling of Jesus today.

The question is whether you will? Well, that's entirely up to you.

### *For reflection or discussion*

1. What is heaven? What does it mean to go to heaven? What's the difference between going to heaven and the new heavens and new earth?
2. What's the difference between being *like* Jesus and *being* Jesus? What was Jesus like in His resurrection body?
3. How should knowing the *destination* of our heavenly calling affect our *daily progress* in that calling?

*Next steps – Preparation, Conversation: How would you present the heavenly calling to an unsaved friend? Make a little outline, practice saying it with some Christian friends, then try it out in a conversation with an unsaved neighbor or co-worker. As you do, listen for God to guide your conversation while you listen to your friend's responses and questions.*

*Our Heavenly Calling*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What do we mean by a “heavenly calling”? How would you recognize someone who had taken up this calling as the defining motif of his life?
2. What can keep us from taking up this calling? What can hinder us in the pursuit of it?
3. Why do some people who profess faith in Jesus seem to *drift* from Him, or even to *fall away* from faith in Jesus?
4. What’s the difference between the hearts of those who partake of a heavenly calling and those who don’t, or who merely profess faith but demonstrate little evidence of it?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you incorporating that lesson into your walk with and work for the Lord?

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.