



# Heaven Rules

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him...* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

I've been thinking a lot about heaven. I've been thinking about what will happen when we get *there*. But first, before we continue, we need to define our terms and remember the limitations of our minds and our language.

Heaven = wherever God is. Going to heaven means being with God. God is omnipresent, that is, present in all places at all times. When we are invited into God's kingdom of heaven we will eternally be with him—in his presence. "When" and "there" are terms that have reference to time and space, and therefore they are logically incompatible with the topic of heaven. Heaven is where God is—God is present in all places at all times, therefore time and space do not define or limit heaven.

Now that we understand that, and for the three of you who are still interested, let's talk about what's going to happen when we "get to" heaven. Everyone seems to have an idea about heavenly realities. For some reason, people ask me about what I think. Here are my heavenly absolutes—six of them:

## Rule #1:

What's going to be one of the most common reactions to heaven? Two words—jaws dropping. Jaws will drop, mouths will gape in astonishment, and when we are finally able to say something, the predominant comment will be "Oh, I see—so this is what heaven is really like." Heaven isn't like anything any of us ever imagined.

## Rule #2:

Heaven is BIG. The population is larger and the city limits of heaven stretch further into the horizon than most of us think. There will be lots of people in heaven. Heaven is and will be filled with throngs of people,

and the vast majority will not have shared our earthly religious experience.

Most of us have been taught, at one time or another and in one way or another, that heaven is reserved primarily for those who belong to our religious club. Since the time of Jesus, ideas about spending eternity with God have been defined as spending eternity with those who look, think, talk, dress and act exactly like we do.

I'm a German-American. I like some German food, most German cars, almost all German beer and lots of the Germans I have met—but, you know, the idea of spending eternity with a bunch of rigid, mechanistic, predictable Germans is boring. No gospel music? No Thai food, no enchiladas, no Cajun rice and beans? I don't think so.

## Rule #3:

Speaking of food, let me clarify this vitally important issue. In heaven, there's only one kind of food served in the cafeteria: Italian! Ravioli, lasagna, manicotti, all kinds of pasta with marinara and pesto sauces. Eggplant parmigiana, pizza of every variety, minestrone soup and antipasto. For dessert, spumoni, cannolis and, of course, tiramisu. Now that we've decided that issue, here's

## Rule #4:

Laughter and humor—lots of it. Rollicking, side-splitting, rib-tickling laughter. Self-deprecating humor will abound, with, I suspect, much of the laughter focused on our previous, earthly lives. One of the great times of merriment will be when we meet people we once thought would never be in heaven. Another jaw-dropping time.

Imagine sitting down at a heavenly Starbucks (yes, four new Starbucks open every day!), next to the River of Life, talking with this person you thought didn't have a snowball's chance in hell of being in heaven; someone who had the same thoughts about you. Imagine enjoying a heavenly blend to

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gether and pondering the love of God that knows no limitations—and how his grace will eternally provide you both with one surprise and deeper insight after another.

**Rule #5:**

I heard that a heavenly building permit was just granted for an amusement park to be called "What Were We Thinking?" This park will offer endless thrills, laughter, insight and fun for all. From what I understand, rides, exhibits, museums, sound and light spectaculars about our sincere, well-meaning but pathetic attempts to explain God, to proclaim his kingdom and to build the body of Christ on earth are already on the drawing board.

I'm sure the exhibits will always be presented in a positive way—never demeaning anyone, for we will all have incredible insight about how imperfect we used to be. "What Were We Thinking?" will be great fun—and even though God hasn't asked me I am working on some ideas for the many attractions and lesson-like rides. None of them are about me, of course—mostly about other people who have done some really silly things.

**Rule #6:**

Reunions—lots of them. Connecting with people you haven't seen for decades. Finding out what happened to them. Looking at scrapbooks of photos, of their families, of where they lived, what they did with their lives, and more than that, how God's grace came to fill their lives. Family, friendship and fellowship are important words in heaven.

What's that? You don't agree with my six heavenly rules? You don't want to be in "my" heaven? Well, neither do I. We all really want to be in *God's* heaven, don't we?

And no matter how breathtaking we visualize heaven, the reality of God's heaven is far more than we could ever hope for (1 Corinthians 2:9). □

—Greg Albrecht

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