

Heaven
OR HELL

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OR HELL

R. A. Torrey



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HOUSE

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This new edition from Whitaker House has been updated for the modern reader. Words, expressions, and sentence structure have been revised for clarity and readability.

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HEAVEN OR HELL

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Chapter 1

Come Out of Hiding

The first question that God ever asked of man is recorded in Genesis 3:9: “*Where art thou?*” God asked the question of Adam on the evening of that awful day of the first sin. The voice of God in its majesty rolled down the avenues of the Garden of Eden. Until that day, the voice of God had been the sweetest music to Adam. He knew no greater joy than that of glad communion with his Creator and his heavenly Father. But now all was different. As the voice of God was heard in the Garden, Adam was filled with fear and tried to hide himself.

This is the history of every son of Adam from that day until now. Every sinner is trying to hide from the presence and the all-seeing eyes of God. This accounts for a large share of the skepticism, agnosticism, and atheism of our day. It is sinful man trying to hide from a holy God.

True Reasons for Unbelief

People will give many reasons why they are skeptics, agnostics, or atheists. But in the majority of cases,

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the real reason is this: they hope to hide themselves from the discomfort of God's presence by denying that He exists. This also accounts for much of the neglect of the Bible. People will tell you that they do not read their Bibles because they have so much else to read or because they are not interested in the Bible. They declare that it is a dull and boring book to them. But the true cause of man's neglect of Bible study is this: the Bible brings God near to us as no other book does, and men are uneasy when they become conscious of the presence of God. Therefore, they neglect the book that brings God near.

This also accounts for much of the absenteeism from the house of God and its services. People give many reasons why they do not attend church. They will tell you they cannot dress well enough to attend church or that they are too busy and too tired. They will complain that the services are dull and uninteresting. But the reason why men and women, old and young, are habitually absent from church is because the house of God brings God near and makes them uncomfortable in their sin.

No one ever succeeded in hiding from God. God said to Adam, "*Where art thou?*" Adam had to come from his hiding place to meet God face-to-face and make full confession of his sin. Sooner or later, no matter how carefully they hide themselves from God, all men and women will have to come from their hiding places and meet Him face-to-face. They will have to make a full declaration of where they stand in His presence.

God puts this question to every Christian and to everyone who is not a Christian: "*Where art thou?*" Where do you stand concerning spiritual and eternal

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things? Where do you stand concerning God, heaven, righteousness, Christ, and eternity? “*Where art thou?*”

Knowing Where You Stand

Every truly intelligent person desires to know just where he is. Every wise businessman desires to know where he stands financially. In our country, every careful businessman periodically takes an inventory of his stock, examines his accounts, finds out precisely what are his credits and debits, and how much his assets exceed or fall below his liabilities.

He may discover as a result of his scrutiny that he does not stand as well as he thought he did. If that is true, he wants to know it in order that he may conduct his business accordingly. Many have failed in business through unwillingness to face facts and find out just where they stood.

I knew a very brilliant businessman who was truly gifted in a certain type of business enterprise. But his affairs got into a tangled condition.

His wise business friends came to him and advised him to go through his books and find out just where he stood. They said to him, “If you are in bad shape, we will help you out.”

But the man was too proud to take their advice. He was too proud to admit that his business was in danger of failure, so he refused to look into it. He resolutely tried to plunge through. But instead of plunging through, he sunk into utter financial ruin. Although he was an exceptionally brilliant man in some areas, he experienced complete financial shipwreck. He never got on his feet again. When he died, he did not

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have enough money to pay for his funeral expenses, simply because he was not willing to humble his pride and face facts.

Many people are too proud to confess that they are morally and spiritually bankrupt. So they are going to grit their teeth and plunge through. They will fall into utter and eternal ruin.

Everyone wants to know where he stands physically. He wants to know the condition of his lungs, heart, stomach, and nerves. He may be worse off than he thinks he is. He may think his heart is sound when it is defective. But he wants to know it, because then he will not subject it to the strain that otherwise he would. Many lie in a premature grave who might be doing good work on earth if they had been willing to find out what their real condition was and to act accordingly.

Every man at sea wishes to know where his vessel is, its exact latitude and longitude. When crossing the Atlantic Ocean some years ago, I sailed for days beneath clouds and through fogs. The sailors were unable to take an observation by the sun and had been sailing blindly. One night I happened to be on deck, when suddenly there was a rift in the clouds, and the North Star appeared. Word was sent below, and the captain of the vessel hurried on deck. I remember how he nearly laid across the compass as he carefully took an observation by the North Star in order to know exactly where we were.

In life, we are all sailing across a perilous sea toward an eternal port. All intelligent men and women will desire to know just where they are—their exact spiritual longitude and their exact spiritual latitude.

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How to Evaluate the Question

Let us consider this weighty question of where we are. We should consider it seriously. It is not a question to trifle with. It is amazing that men and women may be sensible about everything else and would not think of trifling with the great financial questions of the day or with great social problems. But they treat this great question of eternity as a joke.

One evening I bought a paper from a little newsboy on the street. As he handed me my change, I asked him, "My boy, are you saved?" The boy treated it as a joke. That might be all you could expect of a poor, uneducated newsboy on the street. But it is not what you would expect of thinking men and women when you come to these great eternal problems of God, eternity, salvation, heaven, and hell.

Anyone who trifles with questions like these is a fool. I don't care about your culture, social position, or reputation. Unless you face the great question of your spiritual condition with the most profound earnestness and seriousness, you are playing the part of a fool.

We should consider this question honestly. Many people today try to deceive themselves, others, and even God. They know in their innermost hearts that they are wrong, but they try to persuade themselves, others, and God that they are right.

You cannot deceive God. It will do you no good to deceive anybody else, and it is the height of folly to deceive yourself. The biggest fool on earth is the man who fools himself. Be honest. If you are lost, admit it; if you are on the road to hell, acknowledge it; if you are not a Christian, say so. If you are an enemy

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of God, face the facts. If you are a child of the devil, realize it. Be honest with yourself, honest with your fellowmen, and honest with God.

We should consider the question thoroughly. Many people are honest and serious to a certain point, but they don't go to the bottom of things. They are superficial. They give these tremendous questions a few moments' thought, and then their weak minds grow weary. They say, "I guess I am all right; I will take my chances."

No one can afford to guess on questions like these. We must be absolutely certain. It will not satisfy me to hope I am saved; I must know that I am saved. It will not satisfy me to hope that I am a child of God; I must know that I am a child of God. It will not satisfy me to hope that I am bound for heaven; I must know that I am bound for heaven. Do not lay these questions down until you have gone to the bottom of them and know for certain just where you stand.

We should consider these questions prayerfully. God tells us in His Word, and we know from experience, that "*the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*" (Jeremiah 17:9). There is nothing that the human heart is as deceitful about as our moral and spiritual conditions. Every man and woman is by nature sharp-sighted to the faults of others and blind to their own faults. We need to face this question in prayer. You will never know where you stand until God shows you.

We must pray like David, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me*" (Psalm 139:23-24). Only when God sheds the light of His Holy Spirit into

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our hearts and shows us ourselves as He sees us will we ever know ourselves as we truly are. To see ourselves in the light of God's presence, as God sees us, will only be in answer to definite and earnest prayer.

Are You a Religious Person?

One morning I met the minister of a church that formerly I had pastored. He said to me, "Brother Torrey, I had an awful experience this morning."

I said, "What was it, Brother Norris?" He mentioned a member of the church.

"You know she is dying. She sent for me to come and see her this morning. I hurried to her home. The moment I opened the door and entered the room she cried from her bed, 'Oh, Brother Norris, I have been a professing Christian for forty years. I am now dying and have just found out that I was never saved at all.'"

The horror of it! To be a professing Christian for forty years and never find out until your life is at an end that you have never really been a Christian at all. It is better to find it out today than in eternity.

Many men and women have been professing Christians for years but were never saved. In a paper edited by a clergyman, I read a letter complaining about our meetings. The writer said, "These men produced the impression that some of our church members are not saved." Well, that is the impression we tried to produce, for that is the truth of God. In churches throughout the world, you will find many men and women who are unsaved.

Once more we should consider this question scripturally, according to the Book. God has given to you and me only one safe chart and compass to guide us on

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our voyages through life toward eternity. That chart and compass is the Bible. If you steer your course according to the Book, you will steer safely. If you steer according to your own feelings, according to the speculation of the petty philosopher or the theologian, according to anything but the clear declaration of the Word of God, you steer your course to shipwreck. Any hope that is not founded on the clear, unmistakable teaching of God's Word is absolutely worthless.

You Can Be Sure

In one of my pastorates, a young married couple had a sweet little child entrusted to them by the heavenly Father. Then one day, that little child went home to be with the Lord. In the hour of their sorrow, I went to call on the grieving parents. Taking advantage of their tenderness of heart, I pointed them to the Savior with whom their child was safely at home. They promised to accept Jesus as their Savior.

After some days and weeks had passed and the first shock of the sorrow had gone, they began to drift back into the world again. I called on them to speak with them. Only the wife was at home. I began by talking about the little child and how safe and happy he was in the arms of Jesus. She gladly assented to all of this. Then I turned the topic a little bit and said to her, "Do you expect to see your child again?"

"Oh," she said, "certainly. I have no doubt that I will see my child again."

I said, "Why do you expect to see your child again?"

"Because the child is with Jesus, and I expect when I die I will go to be with Him, too."

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I said, "Do you think you are saved?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "I think I am saved."

"Why do you think you are saved?"

"Because I feel so," she said.

"Is that your only ground of hope?"

"That is all."

I said, "Your hope is not worth anything." That seemed cruel, didn't it? But it was kind. I asked her, "Can you put your finger on anything in the Word of God that proves you have everlasting life?"

"No," she said, "I cannot."

"Well, then," I said, "your hope is absolutely worthless." Then she turned on me, which she had a perfect right to do. It is quite right to talk back to preachers. I believe in it, and she began to talk back.

"Do you expect to go to heaven when you die?"

I responded, "Yes, I know I will."

"When you die, do you expect to be with Christ?"

"Yes," I said, "I know I will."

"Do you think you have everlasting life?"

"Yes," I said, "I know I have."

"Can you put your finger on anything in the Word of God that proves you have eternal life?"

I said, "Yes, thank God, John 3:36: '*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.*' I know I believe in the Son of God. On the sure ground of God's Word, I know I have everlasting life."