

CLASS #1

The Question and the Quandary

Thank you so much for being here in class today. I hope you get something from the next few lessons and feel edified. Let's jump right into it with a hypothetical question: Imagine for a moment, as the prophet Alma said to his people, that you "were called to die at this time" (Alma 5:27) and were required "to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body" (Alma 5:15). Here is what I want to know: If you died and were to be judged today, which eternal kingdom do you think you would go to?

The Celestial Kingdom (the top)

The Terrestrial Kingdom (the middle)

The Telestial Kingdom (the bottom)

If you could please anonymously write down your answer on a piece of paper and pass it forward to me, I'm interested to see what your answers are.

I have asked this question to hundreds of youth across America, and the answers are usually similar. Looking at the responses from our class, we fall right into roughly the same pattern as well. Here is how our class broke out:

52% of you think you will make it to the celestial kingdom.

40% of you think you are going to go to the terrestrial kingdom.

5% of you think you are going to the bottom kingdom, the telestial glory.

And one of you thought he or she is going to go to outer darkness with the sons of perdition. That wasn't even an option!



Dirk: Well, I heard that outer darkness is where you go if you have a prompting from the Holy Ghost and don't follow it. It's called like, denying the Holy Ghost or something, I think. So I'll 'fess up: that person was me. Sorry, dude, but I put it down because there are times when I know I should do something and I don't do it. You know, I get a prompting and don't follow it.

Thanks for 'fessing up, Dirk, but I think you might be being a little harsh on yourself. You are right, in that the sin against the Holy Ghost is an unforgivable sin (see Alma 39:5-6); but not following a personal prompting from the Spirit is much different than the sin against the Holy Ghost that makes you a son of perdition.



Olivia: Well, so what do you have to do to sin against the Holy Ghost and go to outer darkness then?

The Prophet Joseph Smith answered that question. He said: "What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against Him. . . . He has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it; he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it."¹ President Spencer W. Kimball taught that "the sin against the Holy Ghost requires such knowledge that it is manifestly impossible for the [average member of the Church] to commit such a sin."² In other words, it isn't a punishment that anyone in this class needs to worry will happen to them because it is nearly impossible for ordinary Church members such as us to commit that kind of sin.



Dirk: I'm suddenly feeling much better now. Thanks, bro.

I'm glad that helped. Thank the prophet Joseph Smith and President Kimball for clarifying that for us. Now let's get back to the

I'M NOT PERFECT. CAN I STILL GO TO HEAVEN?

poll about which kingdom you feel you will go to: as a class, your overall answers reveal an unsettling phenomenon and mindset among many of the youth of the Church and many adults for that matter. I would assume that most all of you in this class go to church pretty much every week. You serve in the priesthood and in class presidencies and callings. You probably attend Young Men and Young Women fairly often. Most of you are enrolled in seminary. I bet some of you even spend your summers paying to go to gospel oriented camps like EFY, right? So what I want to know is why roughly 50% of you—a group of youth who are striving and struggling to do what is right and who are active in the Church—don't think you are going to make it to the celestial kingdom? If you aren't going to make it to heaven, then who will?



Olivia: Well, people like the prophets and apostles and other good Church leaders, I think.

I'll agree with you on that one, Olivia. If anyone is going to make it, it will be the Lord's prophets and apostles. So there are a few hundred people out of a few billion. Not very good odds. Anyone else going to make it?



David: Little kids who have died before the age of eight. They are guaranteed, right?

Good, Dave, you're right on with that one as well. Joseph Smith, in a vision of the celestial kingdom, said that all kids who die before they are eight years old will automatically be saved in the celestial kingdom (see D&C 137:10). But, still, if you don't fit into that small minority of God's children who are prophets or unaccountable children who have passed away, it almost appears near hopeless. None of us in this room fits into either of those two categories.



Justin: Not yet. David probably will fit into the "prophet"

category soon though. He's like a modern-day Nephi. So he might make it.

So prophets, young children, and David will go to heaven. At least we think one of us in here might squeeze in! Why do the rest of you think you won't make it?



Mikayla: I'll be brave and speak up. I wrote down that I thought I would go to the terrestrial kingdom. The reason that I put that is because I've made some mistakes in my life so I don't think I'm really worthy of the celestial kingdom. At the same time, I'm not like a murderer or anything so I don't think I'll go to the telestial kingdom.



Dirk: That's kind of the way I was thinking, too. It's, like, the celestial kingdom is perfect and pure and holy, and I'm just not that. But the bottom kingdom is for, like, real bad sinners, you know? Rapists and adulterers and stuff, and I'm not like that either. So I just thought, hey, glad God made a middle kingdom for dudes like me!

Thanks for your thoughts, you guys. Your answers are very enlightening, and I suspect that your reasoning is similar to most others in the class who feel that they aren't going to make it to the celestial kingdom. Most of us use similar logic when it comes to the kingdoms of glory. We think: Well, I still make mistakes and I'm far from perfect, so I won't go to the celestial kingdom. But, I'm not a horrible person, so I won't go to the telestial kingdom, either—looks like it's the middle of the road in the terrestrial kingdom for me!



Katie: But isn't that kind of what the scriptures teach? I've read and heard lots of verses that say things like, "Heaven is spotless, so if you are guilty of any sin you can't go there, or it won't be spotless anymore," or something like that.

I'M NOT PERFECT. CAN I STILL GO TO HEAVEN?

Yes, there are a lot of verses like that in the scriptures. Nephi is the one who taught that. Let's take a look at a few scriptures that are similar to the ones Katie is referring to. Katie, will you read 1 Nephi 15:33–34?



Katie: Sure, it says: “If their works have been filthiness they must needs be filthy; and if they be filthy it must needs be that they cannot dwell in the kingdom of God; if so, the kingdom of God must be filthy also. But behold, I say unto you, the kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God; wherefore there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy.”



David: Here is another one in Alma 11:37. It says, “And I say unto you again that [God] cannot save [us] in [our] sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; . . . Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins.”

And just to top it off, let me add this one where the apostle Paul teaches us that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Thanks, Paul, for that little pick-me-up! We all feel much better now. The logic then is this: we all sin, and our sins make us filthy, and the kingdom of God—the celestial kingdom—cannot have anything filthy in it or else it will become filthy, so there must be another place that filthy people like us who have made mistakes go, right?



Katie: But everyone has sinned. Isn't that why we have repentance, so we can be forgiven of those sins?

Yes, it is. But even though we may have repented of some of our sins, does that mean we have repented of *all* of our sins? Are there other sins and shortcomings we are carrying that we haven't overcome yet that are making us imperfect, even if we are repenting of others?

If somehow we do repent of ALL our sins and become perfectly clean, how long does it take before we sin again, and once again are filthy, even in the least bit?



Justin: About 1.5 milliseconds for me.

So what are the odds that when we die, we will be in a perfect state of sinlessness?



Trevor: C'mon . . . now you're depressing us. I thought you said this lesson was going to uplift us and help us. After what you just taught us I think that the 50 per cent in the class who thought they were going to the celestial kingdom should change their vote. You're worse than Paul and his "pick-me-up."

Oh, Trevor, I haven't even shared the most depressing verse yet. This is the scripture that usually causes most of our celestial discouragement. Go to Matthew 5:48. What does Jesus say? "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This verse poses a serious dilemma: God wants us to be perfect: perfectly clean, perfectly obedient, and perfectly worthy. But other than Jesus, none of us are perfect. Since we all live in a state of sinfulness to one degree or another and therefore fall short of perfection, the majority of us don't think we will make it to the celestial kingdom.



Mikayla: Well, it looks like maybe we were right in thinking that only the prophet and little kids will go to heaven. Who else will make it, then?

You sound just like Jesus' disciples when the Savior told a rich young man—who was doing all he could to keep the commandments—that he still lacked the qualities of perfection (see Matthew 19:16–24). After this encounter, the scriptures say: "When his disciples heard

I'M NOT PERFECT. CAN I STILL GO TO HEAVEN?

it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:25). Sound familiar?



Katie: Well, then, I'm serious—who really can be saved? It's frustrating.

Listen to what the Savior says in the next verse of the story, and we'll pick up there in our next class: "But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).