

Key Items from Cornelis Venema's

"The New Heavens and New Earth"

Note: all quotes in this document are from the article.

Can you make connections between Venema's ideas and Wright's (from today's reading)?

Do you see *sola scriptura* at work – a primary trust in scripture as a source of knowledge about God?

Summary

"In this article on the [new heaven](#) and [new earth](#), the author discusses what this "new" means, and what is heaven and the blessings of [heaven](#). The author also discusses [Romans 8:18-25](#) and [2 Peter 3:5-13](#)."

What the "new heavens and new earth" will be like

"...no one knows what the final state of the blessed will be like. Certainly, no one would be so bold as to think that the reality of heaven could be described in anything more than the most inadequate of words. Here one can only stammer like a little child. When it comes to the subject of the new heavens and earth, we face a dimension of the future of which it may be said without exaggeration, *'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him'* ([1 Corinthians 2:9](#))."

"...However, while acknowledging the unspeakable mystery that is the final state of the people of God, we must also be wary of the false modesty and ingratitude that would prevent our saying anything about something of which the Bible does speak. Not only do the Scriptures provide us with a window upon the glory and splendour of heaven, but they also teach us that believers even now have tasted something of the glory that awaits them ([1 Corinthians 2:10](#))... Though we know in part, we truly do know something of what awaits the child of God in the life to come. *'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known'* ([2 Corinthians 13:12](#))."

What does "heaven" mean?

1. "...Life in the new creation is portrayed in terms that are so unlike life in the present state of creation that all continuity between the present and the future is denied. For example, in a considerable body of Christian hymnody, the portrait of heaven is so 'spiritualized' and ethereal that life in the renewed creation has a barren, almost sterile, quality. Familiar is the picture of believers dressed in white robes flitting about in an indefinable space, playing harps and singing in a celestial choir. The expectation for the life to come is so radically other than the richness and concreteness of life in the creation as it is now experienced that heaven takes on a surreal, even dreamlike, quality. Undoubtedly, some of these popular portraits of heaven have been shaped by the imagery of Scripture. But they do not adequately reflect the biblical understanding of heaven and the promise of the life to come."
2. "The term 'heaven' in the Scriptures is commonly used in at least three ways:"
 - a. "First, the term 'heaven' is often used in conjunction with the 'earth' to describe the fullness of what the Triune God has created. To say that God is the Almighty Maker of 'heaven and earth' is equivalent to saying that he is the Creator of all things. Heaven in this sense is a part of creation, distinguishable from the earth but nonetheless, like the earth, a place that God has created to reveal his glory. In [Genesis 1:1](#), we read that *'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'*. In the New Testament Gospels, frequent references to the 'heaven and earth' confirm that heaven is a dimension of God's creation corresponding to, but distinguishable from, the earth."
 - b. "Second, the term 'heaven' can be used as a synonym for God himself. In the Gospel of Matthew, the kingdom of God is referred to as the *'kingdom of heaven'*, a usage that probably reflects Matthew's deference to Jewish readers who were reluctant to use the name of God for fear of misusing it. When the prodigal son returns to his father and confesses his sins before him, he says, *'I have sinned against*

heaven and in your sight' (Luke 15:18, 21). In Matthew 21:25, Jesus asks the Pharisees whether the baptism of John was 'from heaven or from man'. And in John 3:27, John the Baptist declares that a 'man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven'. In these passages, heaven is simply another way of referring to God."

- c. "And third, heaven in its most significant use in the Scriptures refers to the peculiar place of God's dwelling in the midst of his creatures. Though God fills heaven and earth and cannot be restricted to any particular place, he has purposed to draw near to the creation from his special dwelling in heaven. Illustrations of this use of heaven are not difficult to find in the Scriptures. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he taught them to address God as 'Our Father who art in heaven' (Matthew 6:9). In conformity with this form of address, he also often spoke to them of 'your Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 5:16, 45; 6:1; 7:11; 18:14) and of 'my Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 7:21; 10:32, 33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 19). The same idea is expressed by the term 'heavenly Father' (Matthew 5:48; 6:14, 26, 32; 15:13; 18:35). Because God's dwelling is in heaven, the Scriptures also speak of Christ's coming 'from heaven', whether it be his first coming or his second coming at the end of the age (John 3:13, 2 Thessalonians 1:7). The angels who stand in the presence of God and do his bidding are likewise commonly described as being in or coming from heaven (Matthew 28:2, Luke 22:43, Isaiah 6:1-6, Psalm 103:19-20)."

3. Why the definition of "heaven" *matters* to understand redemption and the new heavens and new earth:

- a. "redemption's reach is as broad as the creation itself, embracing heaven and earth...The peace or shalom that mark the life of the renewed creation will be expressed in the reconciliation of heaven and earth. Heaven, the place of God's special dwelling, will come down to the earth and God will dwell in the midst of his people. The promise of the future for believers finds its focus in heaven, but it does not exclude the earth. Rather, all things will be united in Christ, whether things in heaven or things upon the earth (Ephesians 1:10)."
- b. "Consistent with the biblical emphasis upon the reconciliation of heaven and earth, the future state will be one in which all things, whether in heaven or on earth, will have been renewed...The new heavens and the new earth will be more glorious and resplendent of God's power, wisdom and grace, than the creation at its beginning. Once more...the creation will be...a place suitable for the enjoyment of communion and friendship between the Creator and the creature."
- c. "One question that naturally arises at this juncture is: will the new creation be radically unlike the present creation? Or will it be substantially like it though having undergone a transformation?... In the history of the church, both of these views have had advocates. Some have argued that the new heavens and earth will be altogether new; the present creation will be destroyed, and a new creation will take its place, one that is quite unlike the present. Others have maintained that the new heavens and earth will be this creation made new, one that is similar in substance to the present. ⁶ The second of these views — that the new heavens and earth will be substantially similar to the present heavens and earth — seems more likely for several reasons." *Question: Why does Venema think this, and do you agree? Consider the section "2. All things new."*

Extra Time?

1. Later on, Venema interprets Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Peter 3:5-13. What are his main points?
2. In the later section "Life in the Renewed Creation," Venema explores what we *do* know about "what it will be like." What does he have to say about *blessings*, about *life as worship*, about *a rich inheritance*, and about *enjoy[ing] God forever*?
3. Just a note: You may consider reading this article in full before your final structured dialog as additional fodder for your group's discussion! (The "main" material is a 10-minute video, leaving room...)