

What do we say about near death experiences?

What do we say about books like *Heaven is for Real*, by Chip Ingram, which claim that near death experiences give us real information about heaven?

Reports of near death experiences are common today. Most have a similar pattern -- a tunnel, light, serenity.

What kind of "real" is this? Consider the following:

1. Oxygen deprivation, as during a heart attack, can produce such experiences.
2. LSD can produce such experiences.
3. Most significantly, such experiences are found in other religions than Christianity.
4. Very, very few report a bad near death experience.

Luther spoke critically of a dramatic religious experience that he had:

"Christ once appeared visible here on earth . . . and according to the divine purpose of God finished the work of redemption. . . . I do not desire that he should come again in the same manner, nor that he would send an angel to me. No, even if an angel would appear before my eyes, **it would not add to my belief**; for I have my Savior, bond and seal; **I have his Word, Spirit, and sacrament; on these I depend, and desire no new revelations.** And the more steadfastly to confirm me in this resolution to hold solely by God's Word and not to give credit to any visions or revelations, I tell you what happened to me: On Good Friday last, I was in my room in fervent prayer when suddenly appeared upon the wall a bright vision of our Savior Christ, with the five wounds, steadfastly looking upon me, as if it had been Christ himself corporally. At first sight, I thought it was some celestial revelation, but I reflected that it must be an illusion and juggling of the devil, **for Christ appeared to us in his Word**, and in a meaner more humble form; therefore I spoke to the vision: **Away with you, confounded devil**: I know no other Christ than he who was crucified, and who in his Word is pictured and presented to me. Whereupon **the image vanished**, clearly showing of whom it came" (WATR 1:287, 8-27; emphasis added).

Luther often cited 2 Corinthians 11:14: "...even the devil disguises himself as an angel of light" – to dissuade people from putting their trust in religious experiences.

But, we ask: Doesn't God still do miracles? To be sure, he does. The only problem is to sort out where. Begin here: A team of medical professionals is resident at Lourdes to guarantee that there are no natural causes for the Marian "miracles" which occur at Lourdes. Moreover, there has never been a miraculous restoration of a lost arm or leg.

Recall Luke 16:31, the point of this parable: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced if some one should rise from the dead."

But, some say, near death experiences comfort people. How can you object? The answer: The cross and resurrection are more than enough; here is true comfort. How can we risk putting hope in a religious experience, even an angel of light that appears on

our wall or in a dream? That angel may turn out to be the devil in disguise (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Eternal life with Christ is real life and far more glorious than all our imaginings, all near death experiences (1 Corinthians 2:9; Ephesians 3:20 KJV). We have his word on that.

Finally, what about all those books and movies today that make it seem as if we should have, or want to have, a private sign from God, a new revelation? As Raymond E. Brown points out in his famous commentary on the Gospel of John: John 16:13 must not be taken out of its context in John 16:14-15. As in John 14:26 and 15:26, the Holy Spirit does not bring new revelation. His job is to re-present Christ. **The cross and resurrection of Christ are enough.**