



**Quote of the Day**

Hope itself is like a star- not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity,  
and only to be discovered in the night of adversity.  
Charles Spurgeon – [www.Spurgeon.us](http://www.Spurgeon.us)



**Supreme Court Agrees to Rule on Gay Marriage**

Richard Wolf, *USA Today*, 1-16-15

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court agreed Friday to resolve the national debate over same-sex marriage once and for all.... They will hear 2 1/2 hours of oral arguments in April and issue a ruling before the current term ends in late June.

The new challenge to states' gay marriage bans is destined to become even more of a landmark than the two cases decided by the court in 2013 — [United States v. Windsor](#), which forced the federal government to recognize gay marriages, and [Hollingsworth v. Perry](#), which made California the 13th state to allow them.

Those rulings ... did not resolve the threshold questions in the debate: whether gays and lesbians have a constitutional right to marry, or whether states have the right to ban the practice. This spring's case will answer those questions. "This is the beginning of the end game on the freedom to marry," said James Esseks ... for the [American Civil Liberties Union](#).

The justices' hands were forced by a split among federal appellate courts, created when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit upheld four states' marriage bans in November. While gays and lesbians can marry in 36 states, most recently including Florida, the practice is banned in Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee, along with 10 other states....

The high court's long-awaited decision to intervene pleases both sides in the debate. National gay-rights groups have been pressing for a 50-state solution. The [National Organization for Marriage](#) and others that oppose gay and lesbian unions also wanted the court to step in.

"We've reached the moment of truth — the facts are clear, the arguments have been heard by dozens of courts, and now the nine justices of the Supreme Court have an urgent opportunity to guarantee fairness for countless families, once and for all," said Chad Griffin, president of the [Human Rights Campaign](#), the nation's largest gay rights organization.

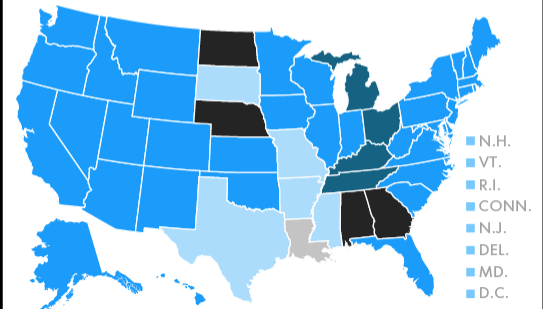
"The U.S. Supreme Court now has the opportunity to issue a long-overdue ruling to restore the freedom of the people to uphold marriage in their state laws as the union of a man and a woman," said Tony Perkins, president of the [Family Research Council](#). "Lower court judges have robbed millions of people of their voice and vote on society's most fundamental relationship — marriage."

The justices will consider two questions — whether the [14th Amendment to the Constitution](#) requires states to license marriages between same-sex couples, and whether it requires states to recognize such marriages when licensed by other states. The Michigan case involves the first question, the Ohio and Tennessee cases involve the second, and the Kentucky case includes both....

**Article:** [www.USAToday.com/story/news/nation/2015/01/16/supreme-court-gay-marriage/21867355](http://www.USAToday.com/story/news/nation/2015/01/16/supreme-court-gay-marriage/21867355);  
See also [www.BeaumontEnterprise.com/nation/article/Supreme-Court-to-rule-on-same-sex-marriage-6020899.php](http://www.BeaumontEnterprise.com/nation/article/Supreme-Court-to-rule-on-same-sex-marriage-6020899.php).

**SAME-SEX MARRIAGE LANDSCAPE ACROSS THE U.S.**

- Ban same-sex marriage
- Allow same-sex marriage
- Bans struck down, appeals pending
- Appeals court upheld ban
- District court upheld ban



SOURCE: USA TODAY research  
Janet Loerke, USA TODAY



**Amendment XIV**

CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS, EQUAL PROTECTION,  
APPORTIONMENT, CIVIL WAR DEBT

Passed by Congress June 13, 1866. Ratified July 9, 1868.

SECTION. 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

## Homosexuality is Wrong – So Is Buddhism, Islam, Adultery, and Robbery: Question before *American* Christians Is about Constitutional *Rights*

Michael G. Maness

Come June 2015, we might see the Supreme Court making gay marriage legal in the USA – not just in 36 states in which it *already* is legal. If so, another cultural shift will take place similar to the Emancipation Proclamation, women votes, and the 60s' civil rights progress. This “progress” in gay rights has come faster than even gay scholars have anticipated, and I, myself, do not see Christians being able to stop this, not now. Not totally unrelated, a cultural twist in terms is already underway, when you hear leaders using the term “traditional” marriage values, and some are already saying “traditional” Christian values. As though there is a large difference between an old and new Christian faith. We do not need to debate the already loaded terms of “gay Christians” and “born this way,” not here at New Bethel among the few groups where such debate is not needed – here, homosexuality is wrong. For most it is “wrong” and *worse* than Buddhism and Islam. For a Baptist, *anyone* who has accepted Christ is saved, though they might fall morally – once saved, always saved! Yet someone who *truly* adheres to Buddhism or Islam is going to hell – *hell!* Hell is worse than a “fallen” saint, no matter if that “saint” be on death row, a rock star, or married to one of the same sex.

The point of this little exercise is to point out that religious freedom is a cherished Baptist value, a story going back to Rhode Island founder Baptist Roger Williams (1603-83) and before, a story in which Baptists were among the most significant in getting the First Amendment passed.<sup>1</sup>

If we value religious freedom, like allowing a Buddhist *equal* citizenship, that does not mean we *approve* of Buddhism. Today this is about state rights versus federal intrusion. As dear, what does the Constitution *mean* regarding *equality* of beliefs, freedom of expression, and *rights* to “life” and “liberty”?

Robbery – crimes against a person’s property or against *another* person’s rights to liberty – must remain crimes. And there are more sex crimes than we want to conceive. Gay “rights” cannot equate to robbery.

What are we left with? Not too many options, it seems to me, except that we as Baptists have been among the most influential Christians for religious liberty. There is hardly a good Christian in the USA or in the world among the Protestant and Catholic/Orthodox faiths that truly believes homosexuality is “okay” – that is, “good” Christians as defined by my conservative *Baptist* understanding. By the Constitution, I am an equal a citizen with those who believe different, equal citizen to the Buddhist, the atheist, and local drunk.

Some Christians have not endorsed the lifestyle, not any more than they would Buddhism, but still support “rights” to life and liberty for both the Buddhist, the gay, and the lurid rock star. In other words, two stances stand out in Christendom: 1) some Christian leaders and adherents support gay rights and *not* the homosexual lifestyles, and 2) there are those who support both the rights and lifestyle. The Constitution even supports the rights of radicals to *believe* in zero rights for a Buddhist, atheist, rock star, or someone gay, as long as the radical does not *act* to infringe upon the Buddhist’s freedom. Rock stars have security guards.

Given the speed of the shift to acceptance of gay marriage in the last decade, I wish more Christian scholars had articulated how legal civil marriage benefits (state and/or federal) could be transferred to “civil” rights for gays, and thus allow a preservation of “definition of marriage” solely between a man and a woman and *avoid* the term “gay marriage” altogether. There should have been a way to preserve the civil rights and not confound the definition of marriage, but that has not transpired in the last decade. Now days, the civil rights and marriage definition are wedded for better or worse, and the definition’s future is in grave peril.

I hope the SC will vote “No” and push the issue back to the states. **I do not see that happening.**

At this point, if the SC votes to allow gay marriage in June 2015, it will be a seismic shift in our culture that will become irreversible. Some will call it progress, others will call it loss. There will be no return.

See Strong here: [www.PreciousHeart.net/Books/Strong-Church-State-1892.pdf](http://www.PreciousHeart.net/Books/Strong-Church-State-1892.pdf).

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<sup>1</sup> See Augustus Hopkins Strong’s (1836-1921) little book *State and Church in 1492 and in 1892* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Pub. Soc, 1892; 43 pages), perhaps the *best* short treatise on the Baptist contribution to religious freedom. He was president of Rochester Theological Seminary for 40 years, 1872-1912. See [www.PreciousHeart.net/Books/Strong-Church-State-1892.pdf](http://www.PreciousHeart.net/Books/Strong-Church-State-1892.pdf).



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## ‘Boy Who Came Back From Heaven’ Actually Didn’t – Books Recalled

Ron Charles, *Washington Post*, 1-16-15

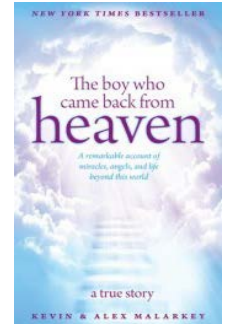
Tyndale House, a major Christian publisher, has announced that it will stop selling “The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven,” by Alex Malarkey and his father, Kevin Malarkey.

The best-selling book, first published in 2010, purports to describe what Alex experienced while he lay in a coma after a car accident when he was 6 years old. The coma lasted two months, and his injuries left him paralyzed, but the subsequent spiritual memoir – with its assuring description of “miracles, angels, and life beyond This World” – became part of a popular genre of “heavenly tourism.”

Earlier this week, Alex recanted his testimony about the afterlife. In an open letter to Christian bookstores posted on the Pulpit and Pen Web site, Alex states flatly: “I did not die. I did not go to Heaven.”

Referring to the injuries that continue to make it difficult for him to express himself, Alex writes, “Please forgive the brevity, but because of my limitations I have to keep this short.... I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention. When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible. People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough. The Bible is the only source of truth. Anything written by man cannot be infallible.”...

**Article:** [www.WashingtonPost.com/blogs/style-blog/wp/2015/01/15/boy-who-came-back-from-heaven-going-back-to-publisher](http://www.WashingtonPost.com/blogs/style-blog/wp/2015/01/15/boy-who-came-back-from-heaven-going-back-to-publisher).



## To Heaven and Back? – Really?

Michael G. Maness

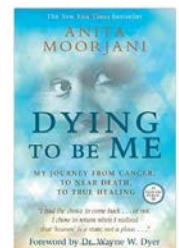
On Aug. 5, 2014, Anderson Cooper hosted an hour-long CNN Special Report, “To Heaven and Back,” recounting the life-after-death or near-death stories of Dr. Mary C. Neil, M.D., Anita Moorjani, and Ben Breedlove. That reminded me of an old best-seller that I’ll share last.

Dr. Mary C. Neal’s [\*To Heaven and Back: A Doctor’s Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again: A True Story\*](#) (WaterBrook Press, 2012; 240p.) tells her story of a kayak accident in which she drowns and comes back. She is a respected orthopedic spine surgeon, married to her husband who is also orthopedic surgeon for 26 years. Credible. She talked with Jesus. Saw a host of angels. Was told of her husband’s ailment, which, after she awoke and he was checked out – wow – he *did* have a heart problem that had they waited would have killed him. See [www.DrMaryNeal.com](http://www.DrMaryNeal.com) and Her YouTube video: [www.YouTube.com/watch?v=wW2TLZLYgm4](http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=wW2TLZLYgm4).

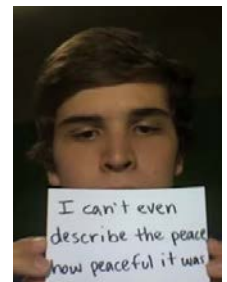


Anita Moorjani, [\*Dying To Be Me: My Journey from Cancer, to Near Death, to True Healing\*](#) (Hay House, 2014; 216p.), recalls her life in Hong Kong, her friend’s cancer, then her four-year battle with deadly cancer that began to shut her body down into a coma for 30 years. She died on Feb. 2, 2006, and went to heaven, where he felt “accepted for the first time in her life.” Then she began to heal, miraculously, and is to this day cancer free. No longer fears death.

See her YouTube video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhcJNjBRJ6U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhcJNjBRJ6U).



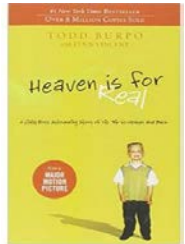
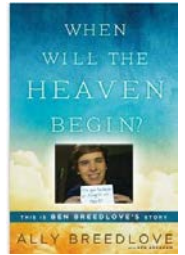
Benjamin Daniel Breedlove (1993-2011) cheated death four times from a fatal heart condition, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy which thickens the heart muscle causing high blood pressure and other problems. He became an internet personality in Austin from his posts on YouTube. He questioned his mother about death and dying and heaven. After few near-deaths, he recalled his experience on the other side in vague terms, “I can’t even describe the peace, how peaceful it was.” In early December 2011 he died at school and the emergency techs brought him back. And he described another experience of heaven.



“He said he was in a white room,” said his mother Deanne, “and that the peace was more than he could explain. He couldn’t describe it.”

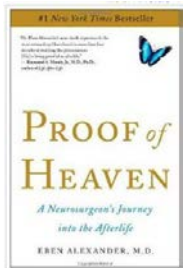
See his YouTube video, [www.YouTube.com/watch?v=tmlTHfVaU9o](http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=tmlTHfVaU9o), viewed by over 8 million, only 3:58 minutes long. His sister, Ally Breedlove, wrote [\*When Will the Heaven Begin?: This Is Ben Breedlove’s Story\*](#) (NAL Trade, 2013; 320p.). See [www.CBSNews.com/news/ben-breedloves-video-message-of-an-afterlife](http://www.CBSNews.com/news/ben-breedloves-video-message-of-an-afterlife).

Ben died on Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, 2011, from cardiac arrest.

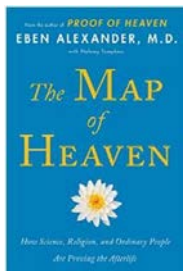


Nebraska pastor Rev. Todd Burpo wrote [\*Heaven is for Real: A Little Boy’s Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back\*](#) (Thomas Nelson, 2010; 163p.), telling story of his four-year-old son who during an medical emergency goes unconscious and enters heaven. After waking, the family has a hard time believing, until the child tells them things about relatives long dead that he met in heaven, things he could never have known.

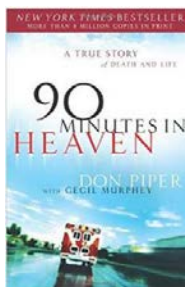
Neurosurgeon Dr. Eben Alexander, M.D., [\*Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife\*](#) (Simon and Schuster, 2012; 196p) recounts his experience of his brain illness that put him into a coma for seven days. When the doctors considered stopping all treatment, his eyes opened, his recovery a medical miracle. While in a coma, an angel guided him to another realm and he spoke “with the Divine source of the universe itself.” Before, he was an “unbeliever”; after, he believed.



Then in 2014, Alexander, with coauthor Ptolemy Tompkins, wrote [\*The Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion, and Ordinary People Are Proving the Afterlife\*](#) (Simon & Schuster, 2014; 208p.), in which Amazon.com gave this teaser: “Dr. Alexander met and heard from thousands of individuals whom his story has affected.... studied what the world’s religious traditions, philosophers, and scientists have had to say about the soul’s survival of death. He has been deeply surprised at how often those voices from the past sync up with what he hears from people today.... the stories that people have told him and links them to what the world’s spiritual traditions and its latest scientific insights have to say about the journey of the soul. Part metaphysical and scientific detective story, part manual for living, *The Map of Heaven* explores humankind’s spiritual history and the progression of modern science from its birth in the seventeenth century, showing how we forgot, and are now at last remembering, who we really are and what our destiny truly is.”



Don Piper and Cecil Murphey, [\*90 Minutes in Heaven: A True Story of Death and Life\*](#) (Revel, 2004; 208p.), where Piper tells the story of his near-death experience in 1989, which – hold your breath – was on the New York Times best-seller list for five years and sold over six million copies! On the way home from a semi-trailer hit his Ford Escort as they crossed a bridge. No signs of life, they covered him in tarp as they waited for the medical examiner. Piper visited heaven, met family, joined in the heavenly choir, and has now, according to the Wikipedia article, “recounted his narrative before 3,000 live audiences that included more than 1.5 million people and appeared on numerous television and radio programs” (accessed 1-18-15).



See also his web site: [www.DonPiperMinistries.com](http://www.DonPiperMinistries.com). Looks very much like the story itself has become his “ministry” and main source of income. Don’t suppose life could be easier.

## Into the Wild: The Souls of Zoo Animals

Nicole Crowder, *Washington Post*, 1-2-15

In her ongoing series “African Souls,” Kulpa photographs animals in captivity across zoos in Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and the Czech Republic....

Article: [www.WashingtonPost.com/news/in-sight/wp/2014/11/28/the-souls-of-animals](http://www.WashingtonPost.com/news/in-sight/wp/2014/11/28/the-souls-of-animals).

