

“From Tribulation to apocalypse” Pt 3

2 Thessalonians - More About the End Times

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

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Jeff: Our Father in heaven, we give You thanks; we really delight in You. And we are joyful people because of what the Lord Jesus has done on our behalf; we're thankful for that. Were it not for You sending Your Son into the world and then Your Spirit to apply the work of Your Son, we would still hate You; we would be Your enemies. And now we are Your children—sons. And so we thank You; we delight in You. And we certainly love You, knowing that love first came from You. And we ask now, Lord, that You'll continue to bless us and cause that love that we have for You to grow ever abundant. Lord, we ask that it would not only be a feeling that we have, but we certainly pray that the love that You've instilled in us would flow out of us and flow from us toward other people, and Lord, that the sense of *agape* love would reach out to others who are actually unlovable, and that our love for others would mirror the same love that You exercise toward us. And Father, we pray that in doing that we would extend Your kingdom.

We do pray for the coming of the Kingdom. We pray for it to come in the lives of other people, just as it came in ours. We pray that Christ would reign over those folks just as He reigns over ours. And we pray, Father, that as that kingdom comes more and more that it would be visible, that lives would be changed, but also that vocations would be shaped. We pray that local governments would be changed according to Your word. And so, Lord, we pray for Your kingdom to come. We pray for the speed of Your word to infiltrate. We pray, Lord, that Christ would be proclaimed as King.

Father, we pray that in these days that You'll keep us from the evil one. And we pray as Paul prayed that You'll keep us from evil men. Lord, we pray that You'll protect our families. We pray that You'll watch over them and keep them—our grandchildren. And Father, we ask that You'll keep them not only from the evil of men, but we pray that You'll keep them from the evil ideas that men generate. And Lord, we ask that You'll preserve our children and our grandchildren from some of the foolishness that is going around in our world today.

Father, we ask that You'll bless us as we gather here, as we study Your word, as we give ourselves to the study of Your word. We ask that You will bless us through it, because we know that Your word is a means of grace, and you use that to change and shape the lives of Your people, and so change us.

Father, we're thankful for those who came before us in this Bible study. We're thankful for Bruce and for his work, and for all the others who came alongside of Bruce. But Lord, we're also thankful for the people that we get to gather with today. Lord, bless our relationships one with another.

And we think of Kevin. And though he can't be here with us we ask that You will bless him and strengthen him. We're thankful for his wife and her good care. We're thankful for the way in which he just loves the fellowship of men. We ask that you'll continue to bless him in it.

And Father, we thank You for men like the bishop who show steadfast faithfulness, not just in their younger years but also how determined they are in their older years, to show

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forth faithfulness and piety and long-suffering. And Lord, we just praise You for that kind of example, and we ask to be that kind of man. Lord, we pray that You’ll bless us as we find ourselves in 2 Thessalonians. Help us; encourage us in what we read and study. And we ask it in Jesus’ blessed name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Transcriber’s Note: Gary Dunbar makes reference to an upcoming men’s breakfast.

Gary Dunbar: I was incorrect. I think the breakfast is at eight.

Jeff: The breakfast is at eight.

Gary: I don’t want anybody getting there too early. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Boy, that’s a good correction to make. *(Laughter)*

Ted Wood: But for those who are really serious about Jesus, *(Laughter)*

Jeff: You know, I was going to mention our men’s breakfast until he mentioned his. He started talking about the food they had, and he started going through the menu. And I thought I was going to say, “Bring a side.” *(Laughter)* All right, so 8:00 at Memorial Park, not seven, or be alone.

Well I want us to continue thinking about Thessalonians. And today I want us to think about where we’ve been thus far and where we’re going. So let me first of all read to you from 2 Thessalonians. And I’ll read just a bit of this at verse 3, and I’ll probably read to the end of the chapter. So let me have you turn your attention to God’s word.

Ted: What chapter?

Jeff: Chapter 1.

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God, for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions, and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

“This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are also suffering, since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

“To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling, and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: All right. So today we’ve talked about the people of God as we’ve looked at this particular section. And today I want us to round that out by thinking about the punishment of God. And I think this should take us through the end of at least this chapter, at least as we’re going to look at it. And one of the things that I want you to catch—I should ask if there are any questions from last time, or any thoughts that you may

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have from the last time. There was a lot of discussion near the end, and I just want to catch that if there are any. No?

Ted: Does that have to do with the unity of the church?

Jeff: Yes it does; that was actually the very last thing that I mentioned, the unity of the church. Any thoughts on that that you want to recap on or build on? Okay. So today we’re going to start off by thinking about a happy topic: the punishment of God. And one of the things that I want you to catch in this text is this. Though the punishment of God may be a sobering thing, I want you to know that it’s not something that is unfair. One of the things that you catch when you look at this text is that God is just. And you can see that in the text. If you take a look at it, it says in verse 5 that the judgment of God is a righteous judgment.

God is Himself just. And what I mean by that is that when you think about justice you think about God meting out that which fits the crime. In other words, a judgment that is rendered is one that fits the crime, that meets the crime, that is just.

And so when you think about that you think about *lex taliones*. When you think about affliction and how Paul describes affliction, you think about an affliction that is social in its orientation, economic in its orientation. It was physical in its orientation and it was spiritual in its orientation; remember how he described it. It had all of the dynamics of a whole-person persecution or affliction. And so when God metes out judgment, He metes it out in an appropriate and fit way.

And yet we need to understand that when God repays it is not simply in one category. It is like the affliction that was dealt to His people. It has that full-orbed whole sense to it. And so God will fit His punishment to the crime. In just the same way it was given to us by the wicked, so too God will mete it out to them. And so He will supply affliction for affliction. But it will be just. And it will be just because it will not go over what the unrighteous deserve.

Now that’s kind of hard to fathom when you think about it because when you think about Adam, and you think about him in the garden eating the forbidden fruit, and all of a sudden he and his entire posterity fall into sin and they’re liable to the fires of hell, we have a tendency to sit back and say to ourselves, “Boy, that doesn’t look like it fits the crime.” That punishment doesn’t look like it fits the crime of eating a piece of fruit. So how are we going to explain it? How is it that we would explain the failure of Adam and the judgment of God in its face?

Well, I think we would describe it in a very simple way. I think we would make sense of it in a very straightforward way, and that’s this. I think we would say that God is an eternal God. And He engaged in a covenant with Adam. And He gave Adam not only the commandment to keep, but He gave him the ability to keep it. And then He told him that if he did not keep it, using the resources that God had given him to keep it, that he would face death.

And so why death? Well, because death is separation from God. Why separation from God? It’s because God is holy, and this act would be fundamentally unholy. And the offense would not simply be against another human being but against God Himself who is an eternal God. And therefore the separation must be eternal unless God fixes the gap.

And so there’s a sense in which we have to think not just about the act itself, but the covenant and the resources and the punishment, and all of those things together to make

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sense of this. And so I’m not suggesting that it’s going to be in any way easy for us to understand God’s doling out punishment to the wicked in the end. I’m sure that it’s going to be a little different than what any of us might otherwise think. But we need to understand and I think at least embrace the fact that whatever judgment is meted out to the wicked, it’s going to be a just judgment.

So we need to remember that affliction was whole-person oriented. And in the same way the judgment of God will be whole-person oriented.

Let me stop there and just ask: does that make sense? Are there any questions that you might have on that that you want to wrestle through? Yes?

Don Rimbey: Jeff, how can you talk through the issue of fairness versus justice? Does that make sense to you? People argue that God isn’t fair all the time.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: You know, you said He was just. How do you reconcile those two?

Jeff: Well when you think of fairness, at least when we think of fairness we have a tendency to think of fairness using our own categories. And God uses His categories to judge, and those don’t always match up. And I also think that people are oftentimes faithless. Let’s use John 9.

In John 9 the man is born blind. And you know, people have one way of looking at that. The people in the story had a way of looking at that by saying, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would experience this kind of blindness?”

And Jesus says, “This man is not blind because of his sin or their sin. He is blind because of the glory of God.” Now he is blind because of someone’s parents. And that someone is Adam and Eve. But He doesn’t say that. So you can see just in that story alone the multiple perspectives that one can take on this, either the people who come or Jesus who explains it.

So here you have this man born blind. And Jesus gives the ultimate rationale. These people are coming at it with their tit for tat mentality. Well, his parents must have done something when he experiences that. And Jesus is saying, “That’s not the way it works.”

And yet certainly the man is blind because of the effects of the Fall. And so when you think about fairness and justice, in our world there isn’t a kind of one-to-one correspondence that meets the two. So how do we talk about it? That becomes the real question. How do you talk about fairness with people?

And you know, I have found that the best way to talk about what God does with us is to talk about parenting, because parenting has some easy correspondence. And people relate to that, right? And so oftentimes the child doesn’t think the punishment is fair. But the parent can explain why it is that the punishment that he or she just rendered fits the crime for that child. But the child doesn’t think it’s fair; the child never does, right?

And that’s the way we are. We never think any kind of discipline is fair. But if we were to listen to God as a parent, He would always be able to explain why it is. So I think those kinds of simple analogies with parents always help, because people, whether they are parents or children, they always get it, right? The child may not want to get it, but he gets it. Yes?

Ted: I’m thinking about an experience I had when I went to Pitt thirty years ago when I was in a Bible study with various folks from various denominations. There were about

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four or five of us. And this was a group of fellows that had not really thought a whole lot about this question.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: And they asked me this question. It was a professor at Pitt, very much loved, a kindly man.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: A good person. And they asked me. “Well, Ted, what do you think?” He had never been known to be a Christian; he never accepted Christ.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: Then one of them said, “Is he going to go to hell—this professor, as good as he was?” And I think it was God who gave me the answer for it. I said, “Do you know if this professor ever expressed his gratitude to God? Did he show any thanksgiving for everything—all his qualities? Did anybody hear that from him?”

And they said, “No, I didn’t hear it.”

So I said to them, “This man will be judged based on his ingratitude, and his assumption that everything he was—

Jeff: Came from himself.

Ted: Or whatever. For the slightest sin we commit, even the act of ingratitude, we’re talking about the Creator of heaven and earth.

Jeff: Yeah, right.

Ted: For any offense against the Creator of heaven and earth we deserve to be emulsified on the spot.

Jeff: Yeah, right.

Ted: They didn’t care for that answer.

Jeff: I’m sure they didn’t. Yes?

Rich Clark: Couldn’t you also say that it’s not fair that Jesus died for my sins?

Jeff: Yes; people say that, right?

Ted: Absolutely.

Jeff: Yes. And this is another one that kind of scratches that itch from a different direction. You read that Judas went away, wept and repented, right? He was regretful, and yet he wasn’t saved. And so how do you explain that?

Well the way you explain that is that you say that Judas was regretful. He seemingly understood that he betrayed an innocent Man. The trouble was that he didn’t think that the grace that this innocent Man supplied him with could cover his sin. That is to say, he believed his sin was bigger than anything the grace of God could cover.

Have you ever met that kind of person, where it’s kind of the opposite of what we’re talking about? My sins are too great for God to cover, as if God could not forgive my sins; that sort of thing. It’s kind of an interesting thing; it’s the flip side of what we’re talking about. Yes?

Don Maurer: I think too that when you were talking about Adam and Eve’s sin, and how eating a piece of fruit could be so horrible, that Arthur W. Pink and others have said that virtually every one of the Ten Commandments was violated in that one act.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: And I think that’s thought provoking.

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Jeff: Yes it is, because it's God's standard. And it's offensive against God Himself because it's the embodiment of His character.

Don: Every sin is an infinite offense.

Jeff: Yes, that's right.

Mike Davis: When somebody says to me that it's not fair that God would choose some and not others, I say, “You're absolutely right. It's not fair that any of us should go to heaven. None of us deserve heaven. When God takes one person to heaven, it's not fair because that person should be in hell.”

Jeff: Yeah.

Mike: You flip the coin because it goes the other way.

Jeff: You say it's mercy.

Mike: Right. Mercy has nothing to do with being fair. If you want to talk about fair, we all deserve hell and we have to stop right there.

Jeff: Yeah, that's right. Well, the rest for the afflicted is speaking about the afflicted who experience the affliction from the evil folks around them, and that rest is coming to them. So in the same way that God will afflict the afflicters he will give rest for the afflicted.

Now the thing that you read in this text is this, and it's in the same kind of vein. When we think about the idea of the affliction of the wicked, we need to keep in mind that this is affliction that's going to be put upon them in the end. In other words, when the end comes God will repay what they deserve. The rest for the afflicted now—the rest for those who are under the affliction of the afflicters—that rest is not rest that is going to be experienced now.

Now there may be glimmers of that in this life. The Psalmist says that he rejoiced and was glad in the land of the living. That is to say that we experience what Jesus calls the fullness of joy even now. And right now it's a valley of tears, the Valley of Baca. So even now we experience good times, happy times, joyful times. However, the ultimate in rest is going to come not in the temporal, not in this moment, but the ultimate rest is going to come in the *eschaton*, at the very end. That is when God will give His people rest, even though we may experience some of that now.

Now that's an ultimate mindset. And I would say to you that we need that kind of mindset. And I would also say to you that we don't have it. And I can prove to you that we don't have it.

How am I going to prove that to you? Well, I'm going to take you to Luke chapter 12. And you don't have to go there, but you can go there. In Luke chapter 12 Jesus has a different mindset than we do. He has an ultimate mindset and we do not.

In Luke chapter 12 He says it this way. To His disciples and those who are listening He says, “Now listen to me, guys; don't fear the wicked, because all they can do is kill you! That's all they can do! Once you're dead they have no power over you!”

And we say, “Wait a minute, Jesus! I don't want to die!” You see then the difference in the mindset. Jesus says, “Hey, their power over you, the power of evil men and the wicked over you only goes so far. Once you're dead it's done; that power is broken.”

And what do we say? We say, “Don't you dare take away my Second Amendment right, because I want to blow that guy away before he blows me away”—you know, that sort of thing. And I'm a Second Amendment guy, so don't get me wrong. Maybe that

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shows that my perspective is a little bit off. Actually, the Westminster Larger Catechism says that we do all that we can to preserve life. So anyway--, (*Laughter*)

So anyway, my point is that each one of us has a little bit of an angst about well okay, I guess that's right, and it is right. But it's not something—that ultimate perspective of punishment for the wicked upon their death, or rest for the afflicted upon their death—that's not something that gives us in some ways a real settledness. If we had our rathers, we'd say, “Hey, I'll take a little bit of that temporal rest. You know, I'll take a little bit of that ease now; maybe not now when I'm younger, but maybe in my retirement I'll take that.”

But it's not like that. And we've got to wrap our minds around that. And so God is going to come. And when He comes His coming is going to be of a certain character. And it's going to be of a certain character in the main for those who have afflicted believers.

And that character is going to look like this. These are the words that are used to describe it: “*terrifying*,” “*in flaming fire*,” and “*inflicting vengeance*.”

Now that word is a word that I think throws us, because we have a tendency to think from our perspective that vengeance is something that I do when somebody has wronged me. And it feels a little bit out of kilter with justice.

But I want you to know that when we apply it to God it's like this. It's like applying the word *jealous* to God. When we say that God is a jealous God, I think we all have that bit of angst. Wait a minute. I know jealousy, and jealousy is not any good. So how can it be good when it's applied to God?

And the difference is that I'm usually jealous because I want something that's not mine. But God is jealous because He doesn't have what is His. And so God wants what belongs to Him and is jealous for it. We want what doesn't belong to us and are jealous for it.

And so vengeance is that same kind of thing. Vengeance is exercising justice in the face of wrong. But when we think of vengeance we think of it in a negative way. But for God vengeance is not negative. His people have been wronged; His body has been desecrated—we as His body. And so He's going to exact justice—vengeance—on those who have wronged His body. And it's going to be a terrifying advent, if I can put it that way.

And what I want you to notice is this, and I think this is a good place to say it. And here's what I would say. This is where I am in my own view of eschatology. My own view of eschatology is really kind of un-fantastic; it's kind of boring. And what I mean by that is, I believe that at Jesus' ascension the last days started. And at Jesus' coming the last days will end. And so we are right now living in the last days.

Let me give you a sense of what I mean by that. If you go with me to Acts chapter 2, this is the prophecy of Joel in the preaching of Peter. And notice what he says. So here he is; he's standing up amongst the men of Judea. He's preaching, and they're saying, “These men are all drunk” because they hear them speaking in these other tongues. And some of them understand those tongues to be their own, and others hear them speaking in tongues they don't understand; they think they're all drunk.

And Peter says this in verse 15: “*For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet*

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Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be,’ God declares, ‘that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh.’”

Now listen to that: “*in the last days.*” In other words, what you now see and hear is the inception of the last days. And so we are in the last days. The last days are not something that comes later or in the future in the eschatological calendar. It’s something that started at the ascension of Christ, and it will be brought to an end. We will be out of the last days when Jesus returns.

Now having said that, I want you to notice that the text that we’re dealing with says that at the coming of Christ—“*in terrifying flaming fire, inflicting vengeance*”—at that time He’s going to judge both the good and the bad. And the good will receive the rest, and the bad will receive vengeance. In other words there will be a general judgment.

Now do you see what I’m saying? What I’m saying is this. There is not going to be an earlier rapture where we’re taken out of the world, where at the end only the bad are left and are judged. This text seems to indicate very clearly that there are good and there are bad remaining; there are believers and there are unbelievers remaining. And they will experience at that time a general judgment.

That’s my own view. I realized it’s not shared at least today broadly in evangelicalism. There’s more of a kind of *Left Behind* series view of the end. But I’m just pointing out that in this text it appears very much to be this sense of a general judgment—a judgment of vengeance on the bad and rest to the good. So I’m willing to be stoned for that; (not really!) (*Laughter*) Tomatoes are fine; rocks are not. (*Laughter*) Did you want to talk about that at all a little bit? You do? You know, any time somebody does this—they’re relaxed and they lean forward,—uh-oh, here it comes! (*Laughter*)

Ted: It could be Leonardo da Vinci. (*Laughter*) I’m not going to argue that point because I think a lot of the end times theology is an invention of the last 100- to 200 years.

Jeff: Yes, sure.

Ted: It doesn’t have much historic standing.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: But I’ve been perplexed by this question, because I’m looking at 1 John 3:14.

Transcriber’s Note: 1 John 3:14, NKJV. “*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.*”

Ted: “*We know that we have passed from death to life.*” We will not know the judgment.

Jeff: Say that again: 3:14?

Ted: I want to get that straight. I have 1 John 3:14.

Don Maurer: “*Because we love the brethren?*”

Ted: There’s another one in John 5:24. “*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*” That’s 1 John 3:14.

Jeff: What was the first one that you said? 5 something?

Ted: I’m not sure. One of the joys of dying is that I no longer—

Jeff: Yeah, right.

Ted: John 5:24.

Jeff: Oh, yes.

Ted: And then there’s 1 John 3:14.

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Jeff: Yes. So John 5:24: *“Truly I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”* I think that’s speaking of regeneration. The spiritually dead will hear and live.

Ted: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My words and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*

Jeff: Where is that now?

Ted: That’s in John 5:25. So I would rather like to believe, and to find verses that support this, that there isn’t going to be a judgment of me.

Jeff: There is going to be a vindication of you.

Ted: I like that; keep going. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I guess I’m taking a lot for granted here. This is good; thank you for raising this. So when I say that there’s going to be a judgment of the good, what I mean is—and I appreciate you raising this,—

Ted: Thank you very much.

Jeff: What I mean is that those who are in Christ have already been justified.

Ted: We’ve been judged in Christ.

Jeff: We have been judged in Christ. So for instance, let’s put it this way. I am here. The future judgment has been pulled in this direction and declared to me. I am not guilty. I am in Christ and He has been judged for me. So when I get to the *eschaton*, the judgment of those who are in Christ is going to be a vindication of Christ’s work in them; that is this. In other words, our works will precede us into judgment. What works? The works that He has prepared in advance for us to do. And those works will be a sign that Christ has done His work in us. And so they will vindicate us. We won’t stand in judgment because of them. We’ll be rewarded because of what Christ has done for us. Isn’t that something?

Ted: Yeah.

Jeff: But the good works that will accompany us—Revelation says they will actually proceed us into judgment—are the good works that come from a life that’s regenerated. They’re not works that are going to gain us anything or merit us anything, because they are good works that have been enabled in us by Christ that just vindicate His work in us. Hold on just one more quick second.

That’s why I always say that in union with Christ there’s a twofold grace of God. Union with Christ brings both forensic benefits—justification, adoption. But it also brings sanctifying benefits, transforming benefits—in other words, good works. And I can’t have one without the other. I can never say, “I’m just a forensic Christian. I’m just a justified Christian; I don’t have any good works for me. I’m going to live like hell; I don’t care, because I’m justified.” That’s not the way it is; that can’t be the way it is.

Nor can you say, “I’m just a good works Christian. I don’t know anything about justification or adoption; I’m just going to get this on the good works.” No, you’re not, because your good works are nothing before God.

In other words, in union with Christ you have been made righteous by the work of Christ. You’ve been forgiven your sins, and thus enabled to do the good works prepared for you by Christ. So union with Christ is that whole package. So the judgment is forward, and our works precede us, which vindicate us, that we’ve been justified in Christ. Does that make sense? Don, are you—

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Don Maurer: I’m just pondering.

Jeff: Okay, all right; you’re smiling at me. And you always have an insightful kind of look. But he always saves it until afterwards. And then he comes up to me and he goes, “ya know, Jeff?” *(Laughter)* So I’m just kind of coaxing it out now, you know?
(Laughter)

Don Maurer: It’s interesting to me that there are passages that say that we will all have to stand before the judgment seat of God to give an account.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: So how does that enter into it?

Jeff: Well, I just think that in that sense of giving an account, that’s the vindication, right? So we go into judgment in Matthew 25. And we’re going into judgment like “Oh, no!”, right? And Jesus says, “You gave this cup of cold water. You clothed this naked person. You went to visit this person in prison.”

“When did we do that? When did we do that to you?”

“When you did it to your siblings—your brothers and sisters in Christ.” Those are the good works that precede us into judgment that are indications that our good works were reaching for Christ when we did these things to others, yet so were part of His work in us.

Don: Yes, right.

Jim Hamilton: Acts 2:21 simply says, “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*”

Jeff: Yes, right.

Jim: That seems pretty easy.

Ted: Regardless of how they live?

Jim: It doesn’t have a qualifier.

Ted: So I just go to a crusade, walk forward, and if I call on the name of the Lord I’m saved.

Jim: All you have to do is call on the name of the Lord.

Jeff: Well, right; acceptably. That’s it, right? So the beginning of my Christian life is to call upon the name of the Lord. When you think about these things, He calls me effectually by His grace. The Spirit regenerates me. The regeneration of the Spirit in me gives faith and repentance, right?—calling on the name of the Lord. And that’s how those calling on the name of the Lord will be saved: through faith and repentance.

But what happens as a result of being regenerated and this being its fruit? What happens then is that faith is the instrument of justification and adoption; I’m adopted. But then there falls out of this faith a sanctified life—the good works that He prepared in advance, that I should walk in them; Ephesians 2:10, right? So yes, but the Christian life is expansive, right? Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: It seems to me that on the cross the final judgment has taken place.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: If it has taken place it can’t take place again when Christ comes for those that are in Christ.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: It has taken place, period.

Jeff: Right; absolutely. Would you agree, or would you have a different take on vindication at the end?

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Bishop: Oh, vindication? Yes, of course.

Jeff: Okay. The judgment for the people of God has taken place on the cross. That’s an excellent point. Yes?

Mike: What I see in 1 Corinthians 3 is that our works will be seen as wood, hay and stubble, or refined gold.

Jeff: Right.

Mike: Some things we have done on our own. Some were prepared in advance for us to do. The things where we were faking it aren’t going to matter.

Jeff: Right.

Mike: The other thing is that our names are already written in the book of life.

Jeff: Yeah.

Mike: John 3:18 talks about those without the Son standing condemned already, or we’ve been set free.

Jeff: Yes. So put election up at the top there, right?

Gary Craig: I just wanted to say that it seems like you got sidetracked, because your first point was that you didn’t believe there was going to be an out due to the rapture; there’s no rapture before the final coming. And then Ted starts talking about what happens whenever we get off the track. But it’s sort of two different tracks.

Jeff: Yes, but when haven’t we gotten off the track in this Bible study? *(Laughter)* So let me get us back on track. Yes?

Ted: So for the Christian Christ was crucified for us, while we were also crucified with Him.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

Ted: That is a critical understanding of what’s going on. Jesus died for me, but I died with Him.

Jeff: Yes, and rose with Him.

Ted: It’s a great mystery.

Jeff: It’s like what Romans 6 says: we rose with Him to newness of life.

Ted: And ascended, and we’re seated with Him in heavenly places.

Jeff: Sure; that’s right. The Christian life is an expansive life.

Ted: But it’s a life in union with Christ.

Ted: So I would say that it’s not only the good works that we do. It’s not our good works, but it’s Christ’s work. He is doing the work in our lives.

Gary Craig: It’s through us.

Ted: It’s through us. So the blessing we get from good works is really Christ working in us.

Jeff: Sure.

Ted: Rather than, you know, we accept Christ. We start living the Christian life, and Christ gives us graces to kind of enhance the flesh.

Jeff: Yeah, right.

Ted: It’s not an enhanced fleshly life.

Jeff: No.

Ted: You know, the only good works I ever do are the good works that Christ is doing in me.

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Jeff: Yes. *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”*

Ted: Amen. And that is so important. So much of Christian teaching, so much of evangelical teaching strikes me as, if you accept Christ you’re going to have an enhanced fleshly life.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right; sure.

Ted: You will just be a better person.

Jeff: Right.

Ted: I mean, I even hear that. There was a radio advertisement. When I became a Christian I became a better husband. Well, what in the heck does that have to do with anything? *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Well, that’s a good thing. *(Laughter)* I’m sure the wife would think it’s a good thing. *(Laughter)* Well, if you’ll excuse me I need to get on to the next controversial point. *(Laughter)* The reasons for this judgment are not knowing the Lord and not obeying the Lord.

Now I want you to see that. These are the reasons in 2 Thessalonians; this is in verse 8. *“In flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”*

Now here is what I want to tell you. This covers two large segments in society. This covers those who have never heard the gospel’ they do not know the Lord. And it covers those who have heard the gospel but have rejected it. And so it covers every person.

And what I mean by that is, Romans chapter 1 verse 18 clearly says that the people who have never heard the gospel will come into judgment and face judgment for having rejected the God that is so plain in creation.

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 1:18-19,ESV. *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.”*

Jeff: The people who have heard the gospel will come into judgment because they have rejected the Son that the God of creation sent into the world to save them. And so the unbelievers in these two categories, both of them will come into the judgment.

My own view—and I think I can support it from the Scriptures—is that if you want to talk about sort of the severity, if you want to talk about God sort of repaying sin with vengeance for the crime, I’m struggling with that—the whole idea of meting out justice today.

Ted: That’s okay; it’s COVID fog.

Jeff: COVID fog. It’s COVID fog long after COVID. *(Laughter)* It’s the long COVID. But the idea then is that, well wait a minute. Should they be judged as harshly as somebody who has rejected the gospel? I think not. In other words, I think that even in hell there are going to be people who suffer more and there will be people who suffer less, because even in hell that judgment is not sort of like a blanket judgment. In hell there will be people who suffer, but people who suffer less than others. Some will suffer more than others. And I think that just matches God’s justice.

In other words, the person who goes to hell never having heard the gospel but for being a pagan idolater in some part of the world where the gospel never reached them,

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he’s going to hell. But they are likely going to have less suffering for not having rejected the Son. But the person who rejects the Son is going to have more suffering in hell. Don?

Don Maurer: Jesus said that.

Jeff: Well, that’s great! *(Laughter)*

Don: In Luke 12, verses 47-48,

Transcriber’s Note: Luke 12:47-48a, NKJV. *“And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.”*

Don: He says that those who did not know the master’s will will receive a light beating.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: I’m getting it backwards. But those who did know and did not obey will receive a severe beating.

Jeff: Yes. And he says the same thing in the woes. “Woe to you, Chorazin! If the works that had been done in you had been done,” yeah.

Don: There are people though who say, “How can that be fair, that someone who never heard the gospel through no fault of his own would be sent to hell?”

Jeff: Yes. And the answer to that is that what they see in creation is plain; it’s not hidden. And yet they choose to worship creation rather than the Creator. Yes?

Brave Man: So Jeff, does that open up a classification for someone who has not heard the gospel but recognizes creation, and that there must be a Creator?

Jeff: So that’s a great point. The thing about that is, the answer is no. It doesn’t open up a category where somebody can see that there is a God—a Designer—and then be saved on that basis. Why? Because that was the basis on which Adam could be saved. Adam could be saved on the basis of what he saw in general revelation and God’s positive statement. “Don’t eat from that tree in the middle of the garden. If you don’t you’ll live, and if you do you’ll die.” That’s really what Adam had the opportunity to do and failed to do it.

General revelation has no power to save fallen man. It had the power to enable resources to Adam, who could have stood in the time of testing and lived. But the point is that because he failed, general revelation—what God did in the world—is not able to save the fallen person.

Brave Man: So is it better said then that not knowing the gospel condemns that person, not the twofold sin of not knowing the gospel and the rejection of creation?

Jeff: Yes. In one sense it’s not knowing the God of creation who sent His Son into the world. The only thing I struggle with a little bit is Romans 1 verse 18, where it says, *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.”* And then he goes on to talk about those invisible qualities. Do you know what I’m saying to you?

Brave Man: I do. I think it might be impossible then for somebody not to have heard the gospel and to recognize that there is a Creator God.

Jeff: Yes; that’s right, because the gospel opens the eyes too, right?

Brave Man: Right.

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Jeff: And in that sense, that continuum sense, you’re absolutely right. The person who has had his eyes open by special revelation sees the God of creation for who He is. The person who has not had his eyes opened by the gospel may recognize design in creation, but he can’t get beyond that to the God who sent His Son into the world. And so they don’t have the gospel. That’s a good point; I like that. I think that’s an ingrained thing in me because of R. C. Sproul. You know, he’s always making that distinction. But I think that’s a valid point to make.

Don Rimbey: How does Abraham fit into that?

Jeff: Abraham?

Don: Yes, because he believed pre-Christ, and it was credited as righteousness. So he didn’t—

Bishop: But he believed in the word of God.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: But back to the point, he just believed, right?

Jeff: But think about what Paul says in Galatians 3:7-9.

Transcriber’s Note: Galatians 3:7-9, NKJV. *“Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. For the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”*

Jeff: Abraham had the gospel preached to him and he believed it. And then he quotes from Genesis 12:3.

Transcriber’s Note: Genesis 12:3, NKJV.

*“I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

Jeff: So Abraham had the gospel preached to him. He believes that gospel and it is credited to him as righteousness. Yes?

Ted: I’m sorry. There’s this great scene in “The Ten Commandments.” Remember the scene where Moses is cast out by Ramses in the desert? And Ramses gives him a bag of water, a sack of water. And you have that scene where he’s kind of squeezing the bag, and then the last curtain drops out. He starts crawling through the ground in the desert. And Cecil B. DeMille says this; it’s so good I wish I had recorded it. He says basically that Moses had come to the end of himself, not even knowing the name of the God who would save him.

And I think that’s what it says in Hebrews. I think that these folks did not see Jesus. But they believed that God would save. They put their trust and faith in the God who would save. Like Moses, they did not even know His name.

Jeff: Yes, but you have to think about this. Abraham saw Jesus’ day and rejoiced.

Ted: I know.

Jeff: And so—

Ted: What does that mean? Does it mean that he saw Jesus, or Jesus’ day in the judgment?

Jeff: I think what it means is that he saw Jesus through the types, shadows and promises—those kinds of things in the Old Testament.

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Ted: But he did not have a name for Him; he could not name Him, except that He was God’s Savior—Joshua; God saves. And he would trust Him; that’s what I believe. I’m sorry.

Jeff: No, this is good; this is really good. I have to take it up next time. I’ve got to get going. So why don’t we pray? Thanks for leaving us on that note, Ted. *(Laughter)*

Ted: anything for you. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Father, thank You for this time that we’ve had together. Lord, we thank You that we learn so much from Your word, and it’s depths are a wonderful thing to explore. We ask that You’ll bless us today as a result of having been in Your word. Lord, we pray that You’ll not only bless us, but bless others. Father, thank You for the time and for the Lord Jesus Christ and for the Spirit who resides in us. Make this day useful not only to us but to Yourself and to the glory of Your kingdom. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. *(Applause)*