

Judgment According To Works

Deeds *Do* Matter

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I listen to and read the news every day—several times a day. You could call me a news junkie. That is part of my job. David Grabbe and I do some of the news that we put up on the World Watch page we have on [cgg.org](http://www.cgg.org). This helps keep me up-to-date, but it has turned into a bit of an addiction. I cannot seem to go but a few hours before listening to the news.

One of the phrases that pops up frequently when you read, watch, or listen to the news is, "according to." "According to The Associated Press, the bomb killed 15 people," or, "According to the Justice Department, crime was down this year," or, "According to team management the running back will not be able to play for the rest of the year," and other such things like that.

This phrase, "according to" gives the audience confidence in the source of the report. It lets them know that the news comes from a reliable source. So, if you trust the Associated Press, then you believe that there were 15 people killed in the bomb blast; and so on.

A dictionary would define "according to" as: In conformity with; as stated or attested; and depending on. Of those three definitions the examples that I gave from the news would be an example of the second definition, which was "as stated or attested." So, as stated or attested by the Associated Press, 15 people died in the bomb blast.

The third definition, "depending on," can be understood from a sentence like, "I'll let you go to Disney World according to how well you do in school this year." That means, depending upon your behavior. "I'll let you go to Disney World depending upon how well you do in school this year."

But, it is the first definition that we are going to be interested in this afternoon—"in conformity with." We could expand this definition to include things like, in agreement with; in harmony with; equal to; or in the same measure as.

Here are some examples from some famous quotations. I am sure you have heard all of these or at least some of them. Here is one from Karl Marx, the founder of Communism. He said, "From each according to ability, to each according to need." Now, adding the definition back in, "From each equal to, or in the same measure as, his ability, to each in

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the same measure as his need."

Here is one from Sir Francis Bacon. He wrote, "We think according to Nature, we speak according to Rules, we act according to Custom."

American Revolutionary Patrick Henry said, "All men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of the conscience."

All of these quotations use "according to" in this sense: in agreement with, in harmony with, equal to, or in the same measure as.

Please turn to Revelation 20 and we will see why this is important to us in this sermon. We are going to read the section that deals with the Last Great Day, specifically the Great White Throne Judgment:

Revelation 20:11-13 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

This phrase, "according to," concerns us today, the Last Great Day, because this holy day pictures a time when all those who were never called to salvation will be raised from the dead, given the opportunity to live a lifetime, or a reasonably long time in near perfect conditions, and at the same time be judged according to their works.

Now, we all understand to some degree what it means to be judged according to works. But this holy day gives us an opportunity to look into it in just a bit more detail. We will see that this is how God judges all the time, not just in this particular time period. It is not just for this particular group of people He decides to judge according to their works, but this is how He always does it.

Those who rise in the second resurrection will get the same standard of judgment that we are facing now.

In my last sermon, [I Know Your Works], given just a week ago, you will remember that I

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went through the Greek and Hebrew words translated "works." We found out in that and going through these scriptures that in both languages the words mean, basically, "deeds, actions, doings, practices, products, and endeavors." There is really nothing mystical or theological about these words. They could be made that way, but when they do, they sometimes obscure the real root-word meaning there.

Works are what people do. Every action we take, every decision we make, are works. We do good things, and those are good works. We do bad things, and those are bad works.

Sometimes it is not that cut and dried, because there are other levels. Some actions are good, while some actions are even better. One might call them excellent works.

The flip side is just the same: We can do bad things, but then, we could also do things that are just outright evil. There is a broad spectrum of works, and every time that we act, every time we speak, every time we decide, we land somewhere on that spectrum. Generally we tend to land near the same place on the spectrum whether good or bad. But we always need to be swinging toward the good end, and once we are there, to begin aiming further beyond that into the excellent range!

Please turn with me to Exodus 23 where we are going to go through several scriptures to look at this phrase, "according to works." If you will remember, I came here during the first sermon, but I want to take a bit longer, especially considering the context here. This is in the midst of the Covenant, and God is telling them what is going to happen once they get into the land.

Exodus 23:22-25a But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. . . .

And then there is a promise of healing.

Here are the first instructions about how they were to deal with the various peoples of

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Canaan whom they were going to dispossess in the land. The instructions are very simple. They were to go into the land. God would then drive these various peoples out, and then at that point, they would take over. It was as simple as that. That is how God wanted it to go. It was very easy. All they pretty much had to do was show up, and God would take care of the hostiles in the land of Canaan. He said that He would do it by hornets, and whatnot, and then they would just simply take over. They would have cities there for themselves ready-made so they could just move right in, and live.

Well, you know that the Israelites never got the chance to do that because of their own works.

Part of this, however, that they were supposed to do—there was more than just showing up, obviously—when they got into the land was to destroy all vestiges of Canaanite religion. Strike down their pillars, cut down their groves, destroy their temples, and all their idols. They were just supposed to wipe those things clean out of the land.

Then they would establish God's place of worship, and follow His way. Thus, they would be serving God, and He would bless them. It was a real simple formula.

Now, it says, especially here, that they were not to adopt Canaanite gods, nor do according to their works.

To some looking at this it seems very general and vague—do not do according to their works. Some people may think too much and say that this is beyond our ability to comprehend all these weird practices. One could even come away from this scripture thinking that God did not want the Israelites to learn anything from the Canaanites. "You are not do to according to their works."

You can make this really general and say any of their practices, or all of their practices were evil, and should not be done.

So, if the Canaanites had a better agricultural system, they were not supposed to learn that? If they had a better construction technique, they were not supposed to learn that either?

We do know that the Philistines were there, and they worked metals better than just about anyone else. They had the iron that made them very ferocious and formidable in battle. Maybe God did not want them to learn that either!

But, it is really not what He means.

In this particular series of phrases, ". . . you shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them . . . nor do according to their works . . ." it is clear what works that God means here. He did not want them to pick up any of the Canaanites' religious practices, or any of their behaviors that sprang from those practices.

I do not know if you have read very much about Canaanite religion. It is an arcane subject. Most people probably would not want to read too much about it. But I have done a fair amount of reading in archaeology, and other things—even a book like James Michener's "The Source," would be informative in this regard because he goes through a whole rather long chapter on child sacrifice and the trauma that this put this one man through. He did not want to lose his boy! But, that was what the gods demanded, and what the community demanded in order for the crops to be good in the next year.

I do not know if any of you have ever read the short story, "The Lottery" but, this is a modern short story that is along the same theme—that this group of people would choose by lot one person who had to die for the community. It too goes through the trauma of this sacrifice.

This is the kind of thing that the Canaanites practiced. They had a fertility religion. They had a lot of strange rites that went from silly superstitions from not stepping on the threshold because of respect for some evil spirit sleeping there, to things like ritual prostitution where each virgin in the community was required to act as a temple prostitute for a set period of time before coming into adulthood. In some instances it was even the young men who were made to do this.

And there were brutal practices as well, like the child sacrifice, offering their children in the fire.

These practices, when it came down to their product, resulted in a society that was superstitious, promiscuous, and brutal. There was no regard for human life, no regard for keeping oneself pure.

God did not want that for His people. He wanted them to be pure. He wanted them to be gentle. He wanted them to be a nation like Him; and He is not any of those bad things.

In this situation in Exodus 23, we see an example of God making a judgment on the Canaanites according to their works.

In Genesis 15:16, which we will not go to, in a prophecy that God gives to Abraham He tells them that He would bring his descendants into the land after the iniquity of the

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Amorites was full. He tells him that it would be about 400 years. Then, the works of the Amorites will have reached such a nadir, or apex, of evil that He would then wipe them out; and it would be their just desserts.

And so, He was punishing them, then, for their wickedness, according to their works.

Let us go to another situation a bit later in the history of Israel. Turn over to Nehemiah 6. This is some interesting history here about what Nehemiah had to contend with in the land after the exiles returned back to the land of Judah.

Nehemiah 6:1-3 Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm. So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"

He gives them, basically, an excuse for why he could not meet with them. He was really saving his skin! But, he gave them a valid excuse. He needed to oversee the work. Verse 4:

Nehemiah 6:4-7 But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner. Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand [to leak out, and be seen]. In it was written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, 'There is a king in Judah!' Now these matters will be reported to the king [of Persia]. So come, therefore, and let us consult together.

If you know what is going on here, now they are spreading lies and rumors that Nehemiah was going to proclaim himself king, and that he had hired false prophets to tell everybody that there was a king in Judah, and that they had rebuilt the wall so that they could defend themselves, and proclaim themselves independent of the Medo-Persian Empire. So they threaten him with reporting these things to the king of Persia,

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and therefore they would think, then, that the king would come down hard on Judah and Nehemiah, and could then take over the power that they had before Nehemiah came back. Verse 8, Nehemiah's reply:

Nehemiah 6:8 Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart."

"These are coming out of thin air, guys! There's nothing like this! We are doing what God told us to do, and we have the permission of the king of Persia to do these things."

They should have known better. He was the Emperor's cup-bearer. He knew that he could not get away with something like this—a huge rebellion. Verse 9:

Nehemiah 6:9 For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done."

So, their ultimate aim was to stop construction on the wall, because once the wall got up, then they had an amount of strength that these others could not overcome. The end of verse 9, Nehemiah says a kind of an aside to God:

Nehemiah 6:9-10 Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you."

You have to understand what was going on here. Shemaiah, as said here, was a secret informer. He was working for the enemy. He was telling Nehemiah that he should hide in the Temple, and shut the doors, and that would save him from the plot that was in the works to kill Nehemiah.

But, there was another factor that we need to add in here. Nehemiah was a Jew. He was not a Levite. He was not a priest. He could not go into the sanctuary and close the doors. He was not allowed in there. And so we have verse 11:

Nehemiah 6:11a And I said, "Should such a man as I flee?"

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Meaning, "Should someone in my position just run to save his life? What kind of example would I be setting for the rest of the people?" He goes on:

Nehemiah 6:11b . . . And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life?

What he is saying here is by saying, "who is there such as I," [meaning a non-Levite] was, "I'm not allowed to go into the Temple to save my life."

He could have grabbed the horns of the altar—of course, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem would not have honored that. But, he could not as a Jew, even though he was the governor, go into the Temple to save his life. God would kill him.

So, he said:

Nehemiah 6:11c . . . I will not go in!"

It is obvious, here, who he feared the most—God!

Nehemiah 6:12-13a Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin. . .

Often it is the fear for our life that makes us contravene God's law in order to, as we think, save our skin, or justify ourselves in that, saying that "I was running for my life. I had no choice!"

But Nehemiah says, here, that he certainly did have a choice, and he would fear God, and he would do the right thing. He would not only be a good example to his people, but he would honor God and stay out of the Temple as the command was.

Nehemiah 6:13 For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

Now verse 14. Another direct address to God:

Nehemiah 6:14 My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

We went through all this just to get to verse 14, because what Nehemiah has done for us is to lay out these works of Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and Noadiah and the other prophets. Here we are talking political acts. These, their works, consist of plotting and intrigue, intent to murder, spreading rumors and lies, strong-arming, bribery, inducing others to sin, and inciting the whole populace to terror—not to mention their attempts to obstruct the will and plan of God in the rebuilding of the wall.

I came to this to show you how broad the idea of works are here. This is an entirely political situation. But, it is included in the idea of God judging according to works. And here, Nehemiah asks, that when God decides to remember the actions and deeds of these men that He would include these among them and give them what they deserve.

Go, now, a bit further back in history found in Ezekiel 33. This is a summary of what is given throughout the whole chapter of Ezekiel 18. If you remember your chapters, that is "the soul that sins shall die" chapter. Or in a more positive light, "the soul that repents shall live" chapter. He goes through all those examples that if the father sins, the son will not die because of the father's sins; and if the son repents, he will live.

Ezekiel 33:17-18 Yet the children of your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' But it is their way which is not fair! When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die because of it.

Righteousness is "right-wise-ness"—that is the original formation of the word, "right-wise"—and it basically means, "right actions."

Ezekiel 33:18-20 When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die because of it. But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it. Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, I will judge every one of you according to his own ways."

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God says that that is eminently fair, because each person is going to be judged according to his own doings, his own ways.

It has become very evident just in these few verses here that God judges all men at all times according to this principle. From the very beginning, all the way (as we have and will see) to the very end of humankind, He always judges according to one's own works.

No one gets special consideration because of his nationality, birth, connections, or even his own physical and/or mental abilities. No one's skill is going to make God fudge in his favor. Each person will be judged solely on merit. His merit will be clearly seen in what he does. And God sees everything.

We are not going to sneak anything by the Judge.

It is like a parent who watches his children like a hawk. The children are often not aware that the parent is watching. But, the parent sees just about everything that kid does. (Most of the time!) It is not always one hundred percent, but the child is not aware of the parent's vigilance over him. And oftentimes the parent will catch the child doing something that he thinks that he got away with. There have already been stories about that so I will not go into one right now. But, I know with my four kids, they all could probably come up with some story about where I saw, or Beth saw them do something that they thought they got away with, and then they got it.

So, we judge them according to their works, too.

Now, on to Jeremiah 17:9-10. These are memory scriptures. What we have here in verse 9 is a question and it is basically answered in verse 10. These two verses go together naturally.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

That is the question. The heart is such a devious thing. It leads us into all kinds of messes. Sometimes we cannot read our own hearts. We have lusts and desires that we have not consciously accepted, maybe, or thought of. But, our heart draws us to things.

And it is such a thing as this where we do something that seems totally against our nature that prompts this question. "Who can know it?" Who understands the heart and how it leads one to do things that one's mind may not consciously accept to do? Now,

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here is the answer:

Jeremiah 17:10 I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.

Why does God know our heart so well? Because He wants to judge us! Because He needs to judge us! Because He needs to see if we are worthy! Because He needs to see where we will fit in His plan, or how well we will fit into His plan!

The question is, "Who knows what people's intentions are? Who knows exactly how good or how bad a person is?"

God answers, "I do! Because I not only know what a person is thinking, and what his motives are, but I also test men to see how they will react. Then by knowing both head and heart, and seeing their responses to the tests, I can judge them accurately."

Another point that comes out of this (verse 10) is that God does not judge a person on one incident—one fault—but rather He judges us over a lifetime of thoughts, and words, and choices, and behaviors.

A person's ways imply his manner of life overall. It is not just one time, one incident, or one event, but rather over his manner of life. A person who is generally righteous, but slips up from time to time out of weakness, or maybe out of ignorance, will be judged with his normally good behavior weighing heavily in his favor. God understands our intent to do good, and He knows the record of our deeds have been generally good. And so He takes that into account.

Do not you do this with your own children?

I know that I do. I do not know if I am the perfect example of this. I doubt I am. But, I will use Courtney as an example. (I hope she does not mind. She is getting old enough now to really let me know whether she likes something or not!) I know that she generally conducts herself well. If she slips up in something I am more apt to say, "Ok. You slipped up this one time. I understand. You gave into a bit of weakness. Just don't do it again."

She is home schooled and she does not like math very well. Last year she skipped a few tests, and this bothered her. She knew that she was supposed to do those tests.

We got through to the end of the year and through the summer, and it was still bothering her. And so, at the beginning of the new school year, she finally confessed, "Mom, I didn't do all my tests last year. Do I have to go back and do them?" That is the worst thing that Beth could have made her do.

But, because she is generally good, and because she had such a guilty conscience about it, and she knew she had done wrong, and she had confessed her sins to us, we said, "Ok. No, you don't have to go back and do them. You have proven that you can do the math." She did real well on her final end of the year tests. We know she could pass her grade level with ease. So, we let that one slide. She will not do it again! And, not because I am up here telling all of you this story, but because she genuinely felt repentant about it. She was very sad. Now she is doing every one of her tests. She may become the next Einstein, or something. You just never know.

But, God does the same thing with us if He knows that generally we have done everything right. He is willing to forgive us our sins especially if we are in the attitude where we know that we have done wrong and we come with sincere repentance. And now, we turn around and we do what is right.

God is willing to do that.

On the other hand, (I will tell one on John). . .

We have a dog. One of the daily duties of having a dog is picking up after its messes. Our dog Sydney has a few areas in the yard that she likes to spread her doggie 'diamonds' around in and one of them happens to be under our bedroom window. So, of course, we know when Johnny has not done his "doggie diamond duty!" All we have to do is lift the window, and the aroma comes right in.

Now, he does not like doggie diamond duty. Who does? But, it needs to be done, every day. We have our two youngest Jarod and Aric running through the backyard with no thought at all to where they step, and we have mom and dad who want to have a nice sleep without smelling dog stuff throughout the night. So, we have had to get on John quite a bit to do his duty. Because he has not done his duty so often, we have to get a bit stricter, and more judgmental about him doing these things, and having to punish so that the chore will get done.

God does the same thing with us. If we are neglectful in our duties, if we do not pick up after ourselves, if He has given us a chore, and we do not do it, He may be very encouraging at the beginning to try to get us to change, but every time that we fail to do

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one of those things, our works do not fit what He is given us to do, He has to increase the pressure, because He is judging us according to our works. Works show themselves by whether something gets done or not. There is proof there in the doing—in the practice.

Remember I said earlier that each person will be judged solely on merit which will clearly be seen in what he does. So, God, as a Good Parent, does what we do—or we do, actually, what He does! (That is the correct way of looking at it.) We judge our children by their works, just as He judges us by ours.

This is what is going to happen in the Great White Throne Judgment. It is the same exact thing as what happens with us. He will judge them on their merits, and not just on one incident, but over a lifetime of incidents—over a lifetime of growth. This is another reason why we believe that this period of time in the Great White Throne Judgment will be a fairly lengthy one.

As my dad mentioned this morning, Isaiah 65:20 seems to imply about one hundred years. It says that the baby will be a hundred years old, and the old man will be a hundred years old.

That is a good long lifespan in order to prove one's general trajectory and way of life; or "ways" as it says here in Jeremiah 17:10, "according to his ways."

And, there is another phrase, here, "according to the fruit of his doings."

Fruit, we have to see in a plural sense. Fruit is what is produced over a long process of growth. When you plant a seed in the ground, it takes a while for that plant to mature and produce fruit.

You have to nurture a tree through several years. If you follow God's law on that, you cannot really partake of the fruit of the tree until the fifth year. It takes at least that long to produce good fruit. So this is the same sort of thing.

It takes time to show God your fruit. Fruit is not immediately produced. Fruit takes time. God knows that people who have just come out of Satan's world will take time to adjust to His ways. They are not going to be doing mature spiritual works right away. God calls them babes.

Just as we watch our children grow from babes to adolescence and teenagers, to mature adults, and further beyond that with marriage and kids, and go through life, work,

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and then retire in their old age having time for other things; it is a whole lifetime of maturity, growth, and producing fruit. God does the same with us spiritually. He looks at us in that way. He looks for trends and trajectories of our choices and behaviors to see if we are conforming to His image or not.

He, more than fairly, gives us a great deal of time to produce these things.

Remember that I said that we should look at this in a plural sense—fruits—because any tree will produce maybe hundreds of pieces of fruit.

I have got a pear tree on the side of my driveway. I thought it was a Bradford pear, which does not produce fruit, but it turned out to be a dessert pear (maybe Bartlett), which produces a lot of fruit. And, it is next to my driveway with fallen fruits, and I have to be careful that the cars are not splattered. But, I know that on that tree (maybe 7 or 8 years old now) I will get many dozens of pears. But I also know that I will get a small percentage of fruit that is unusable—rotted, deformed, affected by the weather, or insects, and just never develop correctly, and maybe fall prematurely.

It is the same way with us. Not every one of our fruits comes to maturity, and is good enough to be "eaten." Sometimes we fail to produce fruit in certain areas. God knows that. God knows that we are not going to be perfect in everything. But He looks and sees the fruit that we do produce, and hopefully sees only a small percentage of those fruits that have not come to maturity.

He looks and says that He weighs them as if on a scale, "Here are the good fruits," and they are hanging the basket low. "And here are some of the immature, unusable fruits on the other side, and the good fruit far outweigh the unusable, or bad."

So, He does take that into consideration. He knows that we are not going to be perfect. In His judgment, God weighs everything in proper proportion. Some sins have greater consequences, and affect more people.

For instance, we may lie about something, and maybe it does not go anywhere that we can see, but then again, we may lie about doctrine to someone and deceive them, and cause them to stumble and leave the church. God will judge that sin much more harshly than the other little lie that did not do as much damage.

Remember the warning that Christ gives about harming one of these little ones. It would be better that a millstone were cast around his neck and he be thrown into the sea, than to offend one of these little ones.

God judges all these things in proper proportion, according to our ways, according to the fruit of our doings. This does not mean that we can ignore certain personal sins because "they're not all that bad. . ."

I am not saying that at all! Everything that we become aware of as sin should be repented of and not done again, because if we have the reasoning that we are not going to worry about that because it is not important, it is going to get us into real hot water with God. That is an even bigger sin!

Let us go back to the book of Proverbs. Here is another area that God looks into regarding judgment that God considers when He judges us. Solomon writes:

Proverbs 24:12 If you say, "Surely we did not know this," does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?

The question concerns God's accounting for our ignorance of His will, or of His law. They said, "Surely we didn't know this; we were ignorant of this. We didn't know that this was wrong." That is what they are saying here.

God's answer to this is that He considers one's ignorance. But, He is still going to judge according to works. That is what He says. "He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And, will He not render to each man according to his deeds?"

We think that ignorance of the law makes a great deal of difference. But to God, it is not a big part. It does not come up a great deal because as it says a bit later on in Romans 2:12-16, humans have an innate sense of what is right and wrong. He talks about, "do not even the Gentiles know these things naturally?"

In a way, when we say, "Oh, we didn't know that," it is a cop-out in most cases. We know when we are doing something wrong. About 99.99% of the time! We also know when we are doing well. There is a feeling that we get of satisfaction when we do something right, whether we know the law or not.

So, ignorance of the law is really no big thing. We cannot come to God with that excuse very often. But, He does consider it. It is part of His evaluation.

Now, as for the Great White Throne period, we know from Isaiah 65 that this will not be a problem at all. God says:

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Isaiah 65:24 It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.

He is letting us know just how close He will be to these people in this time period. It is not like today where God seems so remote. In this future time, God will be so close that He answers before they even ask the question.

Habakkuk 2:14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

There is not going to be much of an excuse for ignorance during this time.

Please turn to the book of Matthew.

Matthew 16:24-27 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

The same judgment that we saw in the Old Testament is now being applied in the New Testament, and in this case, it is speaking of the time of the first resurrection, and the judgment of us. But it does not have to stop there. It continues. He will continue to sit on the throne as Judge.

Notice what Jesus opens up this section with: actions—they are all actions. One must deny himself. One must take up his cross. One must follow. He speaks of sacrifice. He speaks of working to gain, and striving to overcome.

These are all works. These are all the types of things that He is looking for in His judgment. And, He will judge to reward a person on works.

Works matter!

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Works matter to Jesus Christ. He is the Judge. As I said before, they are the proof of our belief and our growth. They are proof of our way and manner of living. They are proof of our fruit of our overcoming.

Let us go a bit further to Romans 2. This is a section on which a whole sermon could be devoted regarding God's judgment. We will read the first eleven verses, and then verse 16:

Romans 2:1-11, 16 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. . . in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

He begins by informing us that because of our sins, we really do not have the capacity to judge righteously, especially talking to people like the Corinthians (here he is talking to the Romans). Remember in I Corinthians 3:3 he tells them that they were still carnal. They were still doing a lot of the things that they were judging each other on. In fact, part of the problem with the Corinthians was that they were not judging enough, and not developing that sense.

But, here he is comparing man's ability to judge—which is very limited because of their sins (we are judging other people and doing the same things)—to God, who is perfectly righteous, never done a bad thing, never had a bad thought, never done evil in any wise, Who sees all, Who judges fairly, and will give us what we deserve according to our works.

God judges according to truth because He sees everything that we do. He sees things as they really are. He sees reality, as we heard in the Trumpets sermon. God is a realist to the nth degree. He does not fantasize about how we will be. He sees us as we are, and builds us up to the point that we will be.

He does not put blinders on Himself and dismiss our evil. He deals with it. He judges according to our works.

No one will escape His judgment. As it says in Romans 14:10, "All must come before the judgment seat of Christ." No one is going to slip by. He is the Perfect Judge. He judges according to truth. He judges according to our actual works and fruit. Now, verse 4:

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

This verse shows that God's mercy, which He splits out into these three areas—goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering. God's mercy has been shown in the fact that He has not obliterated us into grease spots for our sins. Instead, He has extended His goodness to us to get us to repent. It is God's mercy that allows Him to wait patiently—to forbear with us, to put up with us for such a long time in our sins—and all the while leading us to change our lives so that our works show good things, and products; and then He can evaluate us on those things!

If we fail to repent after all this longsuffering, after His mercy and patience and goodness, what are we doing but despising Him and His offer of salvation? Even though He judges us according to our works, He gives us a long time to show the good ones, to get us to repent.

We do not want to despise the riches of His goodness, as it says. That He does this for us is a very wonderful, loving thing. That He gives us so long to produce the fruit because by right and by law, once we sin—zap! We are gone!—if He did not have mercy.

His justice could take over and wipe us out; but in His goodness He gives us a chance to repent—many chances to repent, sometimes years to repent of things! That is something that we can go before Him and thank Him for! That He does judge us according to our works, but that He also judges in mercy and gives us opportunity to

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give good fruits to Him instead of the bad ones that we have been showing Him in this particular area.

So, if we fail to repent we are despising Him and His offer of salvation, and we will merit His wrath, "in the day of wrath," He says, when He reveals His "righteous judgment" of us "according to [our] deeds."

There are really just two ways this can go. On the one hand, He can give us eternal life. He can give eternal life to those who patiently and continually do good. They showed the correct trajectory toward the Kingdom of God and putting on the image of Jesus Christ. And as He says, here, our doing of good, of being righteous people, our good behavior, is motivated by the glory, honor, and immortality that He sets before us—the immortality that He promises to those people who grow and mature in His Son's image.

On the other hand, the other result, the other judgment, He can give us indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish.

It is a real easy choice, if you ask me!

Revelation 20:14-15 calls these same things, "The Lake of Fire," which is the "second death." The ones who merit this are those who are self-seeking and disobedient to the truth. They are the ones who do evil. It is plain and simple.

So, which do we want to merit? Which will the people in the Great White Throne Judgment merit? If we would go back to Revelation 20, we would see that some choose life but some do not; and those who do not are cast into the Lake of Fire.

From Genesis to Revelation the judgment of God is shown to be the same. From Adam to the last person who is ever judged, He is going to judge according to works.

It says in Malachi, "He changes not!" And in the New Testament, "Jesus Christ: the same yesterday, today, and forever!"

He is the Judge. His standard is always the same. Whether it is today, the Millennium, or the Great White Throne Judgment period, His judgment is always the same. He judges everyone on the basis of his actions, his behaviors, his deeds, his decisions, his manner of living—his works.

Again, He judges us the very same way.

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We know from I Peter 4:17 that judgment has begun on the house of God, which we belong to. We are the body of Christ and He is now judging us.

A scripture that my dad turned to this morning applies to us. We should take this, and have this in the back of our minds always:

Hebrews 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

We need to remember at all times that we are under judgment.

God calls us the "apple of His eye." That means that His eye is upon us at all times. Most of the time we consider this in a good way in terms of how He cares for us. The Hebrew expression is, "The little man of the eye." It means that one is so close to God that he could see his own reflection in the eye of God.

You have to be pretty close to someone to see your own reflection in their eyes. That is how close God is to us.

But, there is a flip side to that here in verse 13. We are so close to Him that He sees everything that we do, good or bad. We need to remember that we are always in His presence, and He is always judging us according to our works.

Let us close in I Peter 1. As we leave here today, or tomorrow, let us remember this admonition from the apostle Peter. He says, starting in verse 13:

I Peter 1:13-14a Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children . . .

As children who do their chores! As children who obey their parents.

I Peter 1:14-19 As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance [When God had not revealed Himself fully.]; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you

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were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

So, as we leave here, let us remember this admonition: Conduct yourselves throughout this time of our conversion in godly fear so that our works will be acceptable before our Judge.