

Foundations Lesson #15

Eternal Judgment, Part 1

Eternal judgment refers to those decisions rendered by **The Almighty** which determine the destination and standing of each human for all eternity. The Scripture declares:

For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, 'Every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God (Romans 14:10c-12). / ...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment... (Hebrews 9:27). / Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:13).

Since no one will escape God's judgment, it behooves us to prepare well.

Evangelist Bob Salliby tells the story of an encounter he had with God while he was praying. God asked him, "Bob, how long is eternity?" Now when **The Almighty** asks you a question it's not because he's looking for information. He knows all things. So he has another motive for asking questions – usually, as Peter says, to stimulate us to wholesome thinking. Bob wisely replied, "I don't know Lord. How long is eternity?" I think that's a great answer. God said, "If you take the number of stars in the sky, and multiply that by the number of grains of sand on the seashore, when you've been there that many years, eternity has barely begun."

As Bob was pondering that, God asked him a second question. "Bob, in light of eternity, how long is your life?" Bob answered, "Lord, I suppose it's about **that** long" (and he snapped his fingers when he said '**that** long'). Then God asked him a third and final question, "Bob, will you give me **that**?"

Eternity is a long, long, long, long time, especially in the light of our existence in these physical bodies for a very short and fragile 80 years – give or take. But this very short lifespan is extremely significant, because our choices now determine our standing for ever, and ever, and ever, and ever.

So, going back to our outline, Roman Numeral number one says that there are only two eternal destinations, but there's great variation within each of them. As you can see on the diagram: there's Heaven; there's Hell; and there's a chasm or gulf between the two. The scene that's described by this diagram is related to us by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew's gospel, chapter 25 beginning in verse 31 which says,

Mt. 25:31ff

[Jesus speaking] When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world...

verse 41

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...

So there are two destinations. One is a destination of blessing, full of joy, health, peace, beauty, and righteousness. The other is a destination of having been cursed or damned, and it's saturated with weeping, gnashing of teeth, pain, horror, and ugliness. But within each destination there's also great variety, great variation.

If you look at the diagram on our outline, on the very right-hand edge of the page, you can see where it says, "rich welcome", and then there are all kinds of little lines above that, each line representing millions of people. Peter says this:

2Pt. 1:10-11

Therefore, my brothers be all the more eager to make your calling and election

sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Be encouraged. There are people who will receive a rich welcome by the Lord into their eternal destination. Now I imagine that out of all the people who've ever walked the earth, the majority of them were hoping – and maybe even expecting – to receive a rich welcome. But the reality is that very, very few actually make it. I've tried to describe those elite people who end up receiving a rich welcome by the Lord:

the elite

When they were insulted, they answered kindly. When they were persecuted, they prayed for their persecutors. When they were mistreated, they blessed those who abused them. They were as wise as snakes yet as innocent as doves. They followed the Lamb faithfully with instant obedience wherever he led them, without complaining, grumbling, or any resistance. They loved deeply, and because of their great love they made great sacrifices joyfully for the sake of their God, His kingdom, and His people. They experienced great intimacy with their Lord on a daily basis. They treated even the insignificant and despised people of the earth with honor, dignity, love, and tenderness. They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. They emptied themselves out in serving their God and the people around them. The book of Hebrews declares that they lived their lives by faith; that they were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – ***the world was not worthy of them.***

Now perhaps you're thinking, "Wow. I've got a long way to go." But here's something I want you to know: Every single one of us have been called, invited, beckoned, by ***The Almighty*** to be included in their number. We ***can*** make it. It ***is*** attainable. All the saints from all ages have been invited, but precious few ever actually make it. Our destiny is in our own hands. I may not know today how close to God you are, but I do know this: You're every bit as close to God as what you really want to be, and so am I. If you wanted to be closer to God, you could be. If I wanted to be closer to God, I could be. Why? Because He always helps us get closer to Him if that's what we really want.

Going back to our diagram, on the right side of heaven we have those who receive a rich welcome. Now further to the left but still in heaven – and I want you to be careful to notice that it's still in heaven – there are those who enter, as it says on the bottom, "escaping through the flames." Here's what Paul says in his first letter to the church in Corinth:

1Co. 3:13-15

his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

What's that talking about? It's talking about an individual who shows up at the Judgment Throne of the Almighty, and there God tests the quality of each man's work. And the way God does that in this Scripture is by passing it through the fire. If that man's work is gold, silver, or precious stones, the fire has no power to destroy it. He had built well, so his work survives. But if it consists of wood, hay, or straw, it passes through the fire and it's consumed. It's gone; burned to a crisp; kaput. So Paul is describing a theoretical individual who comes before God with all of his accomplishments while he was on earth, and they were all made of wood, hay, or straw and when they were passed through the fire they all got burned up. Gone. Nothing left. And, fortunately, even though he hadn't done anything with his earthly life that would gain him any reward, still, he did trust Christ as his Savior. So he gets to enter into the glories of heaven, even though zero reward accompanies him. So you wonder, how do some people get all their works burned up? One author has said this regarding the lowest in heaven:

the lowest

For ever and ever, they'll bear the reproach of the fact that their lives on earth were wasted, having lived for self. They'll remember with horror how they viewed the things of God as unimportant or insignificant, because they were so focused upon their own lives – their worries, pleasures, cares, or possessions.

Why did all their works get burned up? Because their hearts and their minds were set on earthly things. If you'll notice, the issue here is not sinful activities, it's having the right priorities. What's important to us? What captivates us? Where do our passions and our desires lie? Honestly answering those questions will show us where we're headed.

There's a preacher who was asked, "Who's going to be taken up to be with the Lord when He comes back?" His answer, without blinking an eye, was: "Those who are taken up with the Lord now." If we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, which is the first and greatest commandment – the most important thing we'll ever do – then we'll be just fine.

So far we've only taken a look at the richest and poorest extremes of heaven – those people who will have a rich reward and those who'll make it by the skin of their teeth. Of course, the vast majority of all the citizens of heaven will be occupying positions somewhere in between those two extremes. Fortunately, we can have great confidence in ***The Almighty*** to place each person where they truly belong. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. God will determine everyone's eternal destiny perfectly.

Leaving heaven and going further left on our diagram, there's a chasm or gulf. What that means is that no one can cross over from one of these two destinations to the other. Jesus said, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus,

Lk. 16:25-26

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm (some translations use the word "gulf") has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

Even though we're not given a description of what this chasm or gulf looks like, we do know that it's not crossable. Travel from one side to the other is simply not possible.

Going further left on our diagram to the other side of the chasm, there's a place called hell. You may have read some of the descriptions of this place, and I quote: "outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth... the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever... their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched..." As horrible as hell is, I believe that hell is defined, not primarily by all the torment and pain and suffering, but both heaven and hell are defined by one thing: by either the absence or the presence of God. Heaven is defined by the presence of God. That's why it's so glorious. Heaven is wonderful beyond imagination because of the One who dwells in and governs that place. What did Jesus teach us to pray? "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." In heaven, God's will is never resisted. And when you have such a place, made by the Holy One who sits on the throne of the universe, where everyone and everything joyfully submits to His desire, as a by-product of His presence and His will being carried out, it's incredibly glorious. The main attraction of heaven is not the gates made of a single pearl or the streets of gold or the sparkling beauty of the buildings, the main attraction of heaven is the Lord himself.

Hell, on the other side of the chasm, is also known primarily for one thing: it's known by the absence of God. It's a place that he's turned his back on. And because of that, all that remains is pain, suffering, agony, turmoil, shrieks, horror, and the like. And the worst part of it all may be the hopelessness. When you're there, you know that it's fitting and appropriate for you to be there. You know that justice has been satisfied by your having been condemned to such a place. You know that. You also know that there's no getting out. Ever. This will be your miserable pain-filled existence for the billions of years to come. Period. That is the ultimate in hopelessness.

By the way, God never prepared hell for humans. What did Jesus say? “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire ***prepared for the devil and his angels.***” That's who hell was designed for. So every time a human being drops into hell it's not because God's will has been accomplished, it's because God's will has been resisted. We need to get that straight. Let me read you a couple of passages of Scripture.

Ez. 18:30 “Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. **verse 32:** For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

Do you sense the urgency in those verses? Can you feel the heart of God pleading with his people? He's not interested in anyone going to hell. [pause] God is just. So as much as he has a personal preference for everyone choosing to enter heaven with him, justice demands that what we have chosen is what we receive. Some may say, “I don't know of anyone who has ever wanted to live in hell forever. Nobody's ever chosen that.” But whether they realized it or not, when they chose not to have God in their life, when they chose against welcoming the presence of God into their hearts while they lived on earth, they were also choosing the absence of God for eternity. A few more Scriptures:

2Pt. 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

1Ti. 2:3-4 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

What does God **want**? He doesn't want anyone to perish. What does God **want**? He wants all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. The desire of God is clear.

Scripture also gives us indication that hell will be a lot worse for some than for others.

Mt. 11:21-24 [Jesus speaking] “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Lk. 10:10-12 [Jesus speaking to the 72 he's sending out] But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

What does all that tell us? In hell, it'll be more bearable for some than for others, and for that reason on our diagram, we have on the right side “more bearable” and on the left, “less bearable.” Jude even tells us that blackest darkness has been reserved for godless leaders forever. The Scripture doesn't define what “more bearable” or “less bearable” looks like, or what blackest darkness is compared to darkness that's less black, but let's just realize that there is a continuum that extends from the highest place in heaven to the lowest place in hell, except that there's a chasm in between that no one can cross. The lowest spot in heaven is still far, far, far better than the most bearable spot in hell, but there is a continuum. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #15

Eternal Judgment, Part 2

With the groundwork that's been laid in part one, let's now take a look at Roman Numeral number two on our outline. God will judge us according to... and then there's a list of eight standards, eight criteria, eight gauges that he'll measure us by. It's so wonderful of the Lord to have given us the standards he's going to use at the Judgment Throne. If we know what's going to be on a test, we have a much better shot at doing well on that test. And the good news is that in God, every test is an open book test. So in his goodness and grace, he's decided to show us in advance what's on the test, partially because he wants every one of us to do really well on the test. He's delighted to give us rewards. He rejoices in being able to give lavish gifts to his sons and daughters. He just won't compromise his justice to do it. That wouldn't be right – and the judge of all the earth always does what is right. He is fully righteous.

So, the first standard: God will judge us according to our actions, according to what we've done. Jesus told us that if someone gives even a cup of cold water to one of his followers that they won't lose their reward. One of the very important factors to come up for evaluation will be how we treated our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus said that as much as we have done it unto one of the least of these brothers of his, we've done it unto Him. Another factor deals with what we did with our time. Everyone is given 24 hours in a day. What did we do with the precious gift of those 24 hours? And what about our finances? Did we handle our money and our possessions according to God's desire? Everything we have, we've been graciously given by the Lord himself. How did we use it? And what about our giftings? Everyone's been given abilities, talents, giftings, with which they can be a blessing to other people. What did we do with them? Even the things that we didn't do that we should have done will come up for review. A story is told of a third grader who asked his teacher, "Should someone get punished for something they didn't do?" The teacher replied, "No, Johnny. No one should get punished for something they didn't do." So Johnny said, "Good, because I didn't do my homework." I think we all realize that there are some things we're supposed to do, and if we don't do them, there are consequences. James 4:17 says, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." So even those things get evaluated by **The Almighty**; all of that gets included in our being judged according to our actions.

2Co. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Mt. 16:27 [Jesus speaking] For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

Ro. 2:6-10 God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Secondly, God will judge us according to our words.

Mt. 12:33-37 [Jesus speaking] "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil

things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

You might be thinking, "That's a tough standard: every careless word. Who can live up to that standard?" Let me ask you a question. Why do people speak careless words? [pause] Do you know what the main reason is I believe we speak careless words? We speak careless words because we care less. If we took time to weigh our words before we spoke them, we wouldn't be inclined to speak carelessly. Jeremiah 12:11 says, "the whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares."

So all our words will come up for review before God, not just the ones we want. Of course, the things we repented of while we were on earth, they got wiped out. There's no record of them in heaven. Those things were washed clean by the blood of Christ, they were forgiven. We can take comfort in that. But we have to understand that Jesus said, "by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Lk. 19:22a [Jesus, giving the Parable of the Ten Minas] "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant!'

Jas. 5:9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

Ps. 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

The next standard according to which we'll be judged is by our motives. In the first 18 verses of Matthew's gospel chapter 6, there are people who were doing three things: they were giving to the needy, they were praying, and they were fasting. Now those are good things to be doing. Even Jesus said "**when**" you do those things, not "**if**". But interestingly enough, he identifies the people he's talking about who were doing those good things as **hypocrites**. That's right, hypocrites. Why? Because they were doing those good things for the wrong reasons, with the wrong motives. They didn't do what they did in order to please God, they did what they did in order to be seen by men. They were far more interested in having a fine reputation than they were in the needy, or in seeking God, or in fasting. Hypocrisy is a matter of motive. It's possible for any one of us to do wonderful things, but to have a foul motive for doing those things. So when we stand before God's Judgment Throne, not only will our actions and our words come up for review, but so will our motives.

1Co. 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

1Chr. 28:9b for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts.

Ro. 2:16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Lk. 12:2 [Jesus speaking] There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

So if you're like me and you still have a lot of foul motives, take heart. You're a candidate for receiving the cleansing power of **The Almighty**. God can change any of us, and he'll be delighted to

do that as we ask for his forgiveness and trust him to clean us up. God can purify any motive!

Moving on, God will judge us according to the light we have received. To whom much is given, much is required. The more light, the more revelation, the more grace we've received – or could have received because it was available – the more will be required of us.

Mt. 11:20-24 Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Because God performed great miracles, He expected a great response – a great turning to Him in faith and repentance. To whom much is given, much is required.

Lk. 12:47-48 [Jesus speaking] “That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

On a bookshelf in my office, I have a dozen translations of the Holy Bible into English. Twelve. There are tribes in Vanuatu who don't even have John 3:16 translated into their language. In the English speaking world we've received **way, way, way** more light than what they've received in the mountains of Nepal or in the deserts of Mongolia. So we have to realize that before the Judgment Throne of **The Almighty**, more will be required of us because we have had more available. We shouldn't feel guilty about having more. It has pleased God to bless us. He loves to be abundant in the gifts he gives. But we will be held accountable for what we did with the great amount of light we've received.

Next, God will judge us according to the way we judge others.

Mt. 7:1-2 [Jesus speaking] “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

If we've been harsh in evaluating other people, guess what standard we just presented to the Lord to judge us by? God will use the same harsh standard on us that we spoke over somebody else's life. So if you feel convicted right now, if you feel uncomfortable because you know that you've judged others badly, rejoice! Why?? Because you and I still have time to change; we still have opportunity to repent! And our feeling bad is God's grace and kindness to us, letting us know that we need to turn from our ungodly ways. So long as we're in this body, we can still repent – and that's exactly what God wants. He wants us to do better, to rise to the occasion, to realize the error of our ways, to turn, and to have new **life** because of it. And he'll help us do that!!

Lk. 6:37-38 [Jesus speaking] “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Mt. 6:14-15 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Ez. 7:27b I will deal with them according to their conduct, and by their own standards I will judge them. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

So God will judge us according to the way we judge others. Then, God will judge us according to the truth. Someone could claim that Abraham Lincoln was 3' 7" tall with sandy brown hair. But that doesn't change the fact that he was 6' 4" with very dark brown hair. People say all kinds of things that aren't true. But, at the Judgment Throne of God, it's only the truth that will prevail. No false testimony, no incorrect assumptions, and no lies will be able to stand. They'll all bow to the truth. Any incorrect testimony will fall to the ground like dry leaves falling off a tree in October. We can take comfort in that.

Ro. 2:2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

Rev. 16:7 And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

Ps. 96:13b He [the LORD] will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.
Also, we'll be judged according to his own word.

Jn. 12:47-49 [Jesus speaking] "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.

Jn. 5:45-47 [Jesus speaking] "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

So God will judge us according to his own word. Lastly, God will judge us according to his own impartiality. I have two sons. When they were growing up they had their occasional altercations, and I'd have to listen to both sides of the story and then try to make whatever judgment was appropriate. I found that I had a tendency to side with one of my sons more than the other because in personality I was more like him than his brother. So I had to make a very conscious effort to pray and ask God to help me be impartial. To the degree that we have similar experiences with people or have a similar makeup as people, to that degree we'll tend to show favoritism toward them, even if we don't notice it. The good news is that God's not like that. He's created every single one of us, and he's felt what every one of us feel. So because he's 100% pure and holy, and because he knows all things, he's also 100% impartial.

1Pt. 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

Ro. 2:11 For God does not show favoritism.

Ac. 10:34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism

Dt. 10:17

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

God's judgment of every one of us will be perfect, because he's perfect. In his great kindness to us, he's revealed the standards he'll use when we stand before his Judgment Throne. So let's live our lives now with a passion to please **The Almighty** with every thought, every motive, every attitude, every deed, and every word. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #15

Eternal Judgment, Part 3

Up to this point, we've studied the **doctrine** of eternal judgment – what it means and how it works – but now we're switching to how this doctrine should affect us. In other words, how should we live, how should we conduct ourselves in the light of God's eternal judgment. With that in mind, let's go to the second page of the outline, Roman Numeral number three, where it says, “In light of God's eternal judgment, we should...” and then there's a list of eight ways to apply that doctrine to our lives.

The first one tells us that we should better understand and appreciate God's authority. He is the judge of all the earth! He is **The Great King**. He sits on the throne of the universe. **All** authority in heaven and on earth belongs to him. We cannot know God properly apart from his authority.

Do you remember what Abraham said when he was interceding before God for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? He said, “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). Now unless you have the closeness of relationship with God that Abraham had, I wouldn't recommend talking to **The Almighty** like that, but the question presents a very clear and powerful truth: The Judge of all the earth always does what is right. Every single time. Without fail. He is righteous. His judgments are always just and true. The wise acknowledge his authority and bow before it. The foolish resist his authority and suffer because of it. But everyone will have to stand before His Throne of Judgment.

Ps. 47:2, 7

How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!
For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise.

Jer. 10:10

But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath.

Ps. 99:1

The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.

Heb. 12:23b

You have come to God, the judge of all men,

Secondly, in light of God's eternal judgment, we should fear God. Now some people have a problem with the fear of God. I think I understand a bit of their concern. When we fear someone on earth, we're usually afraid because they might abuse us or take advantage of us or overpower us or do something to us that's bad. It's completely true that we don't have to fear God abusing us, or mistreating us or taking advantage of us. He loves us. He's good. He's holy. But over and over again Scripture says that we should fear God. So why should we fear God? Because he's way, way, way, way, way more powerful than we are, and he's way, way, way, way, way more holy than we are. And that's a fearsome combination if we understand it properly.

Let me ask you a question: Last year on the 12th of December at exactly 3:41 in the afternoon, what were you wearing? What were you thinking? What were the last 10 words you had spoken? Who were you with? If you're like me, you have no clue what the answers to those questions are. But here's the amazing thing: God could answer each one of those questions correctly without hesitation – not only for December 12th but for any other date or time you could pick. He knows you that well. Now consider that he could do that for each one of the roughly 7 billion people living on the planet right now. Oh, and by the way, he knows that much detail for every blade of grass, every fish in the sea, every scissor-tailed fly catcher, and every one of the more than 110,000 different species of the common fly he's created. I think you get my point. Isaiah powerfully declares, “his understanding no one can fathom.” What he knows is so overwhelmingly vast that you and I can't even wrap our heads around it. We can't fathom it. That's the God we're talking about. Please don't ever make the mistake of thinking of Him in terms of mere human abilities. He's way, way, way, beyond that, and it's not even close.

Or have you ever considered that he's the **sustainer** of all things? Hebrews 1:3 tells us that he is. That means he's the glue that holds everything together, including us. So if he ever decided not to be sustainer any longer, then all of us – and everything else – would simply stop existing; everything – including us – would not be there any more. Poof. Gone. Now he's not going to do that, but he certainly has the power to do it. Do you get just a glimpse of why fearing God might be a good idea?

Ecc. 12:13-14 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Dt. 5:28b-29 [God speaking to Moses about the Israelites] Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!

Ex. 20:20 Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”

1Pt. 2:17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

Ac. 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

Heb. 12:28-29 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”

We need to appreciate God's authority; we need to fear God; and then thirdly, in light of God's eternal judgment, we should not fear man. One of the natural results of fearing God correctly is that we wouldn't be left with any fear of man. If we have a healthy fear of the Lord, there's no reason to fear any human being. When we see how powerful **he** is, and that everything bows before **his** throne, what on earth can man do?? Jesus put it this way:

Lk. 12:4-5 [Jesus speaking] “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

I believe there's benefit for us to face our fears and bring them to their logical conclusion in the

light of God's word. So, with that in mind, what's the absolute worst thing that anybody could do to you? Kill you? If they do, it's only because God has allowed it, and if he allows it that means it must be the absolute best time for your life to end, because he does only what's in the very best interests of his sons and daughters. And, by the way, the Bible says that "to die is gain," so for you it would be graduation day! Seen properly, it's cause for rejoicing.

Maybe you're thinking that being tortured would be worse. OK, let's examine that. The Bible says in Romans 8:18, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." And again in II Corinthians 4:17, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." What "light and momentary" troubles had the guy faced who wrote those verses? Oh, little things. You know. Small stuff, like beatings, imprisonments, riots, sleepless nights, hunger. He says, "three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers" (see II Corinthians 11:25-26). And he goes on. Most of us haven't even come close to dealing with the troubles that guy had. Yet he wrote for us that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us, that the eternal glory they are achieving for us far outweighs all those troubles and sufferings. You can picture the scales of justice with two ounces of troubles being added to our life on one side, and God saying, "OK, I'll take care of that." And so He plops down 15½ pounds of glory on the other side which **far outweighs** the trouble. So every time we suffer, that's heaping more and more glory – beyond comparison – into our account and into our being for all of eternity. So if these things are true, what on earth are we afraid of?? Let's not fear man.

Pr. 29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

Dt. 1:17 [Moses charging newly appointed judges] Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God.

Mt. 10:25b-26 [Jesus speaking] If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!
"So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

Heb. 13:5-6 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."
So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Next on our outline, we should learn to excel in being merciful.

Jas. 2:12-13 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

Mt. 5:7 [Jesus speaking] Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Mic. 6:8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Do you know what it means to love mercy? Someone said that if you love mercy, you'll pray every morning, for a solid week, that God would give you an opportunity that day to be merciful. Now

if you do pray that, I suggest you fasten your seat belt. People will probably treat you so badly that you have the option of showing them judgment or mercy. But that would give you great opportunity to grow in being merciful. God absolutely loves to show mercy. Aren't you glad for the mercy he's shown you?

Mt. 12:7 [Jesus speaking to some Pharisees] If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.

Eph. 2:4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,

So we need to excel in being merciful.

Then, we should not judge others. We've already mentioned that, but we need to understand that God is qualified to judge others. He has some characteristics that qualify Him for the job. So let's name a few. First of all, he's the creator of all things, and a creator is qualified to judge that which he has created. Also, he is sinless. In his sinless, holy state, he has no favoritism, no bias, no partiality which would hinder Him from making a good, true and just judgment. Thirdly, he knows all things. To say that He has all the information needed to make a right judgment would be an understatement. The reason I mention these characteristics is that the very factors which qualify God to be judge, disqualify us. We haven't created any other human being. We aren't sinless, far from it. And we don't even come close to knowing all things. So since we're so very, very unqualified, it would be quite arrogant and inappropriate for us to judge others. But Scripture tells us in several places not to judge, probably in part because we're so prone to do it, even though we're not close to being fit for the job.

Mt. 7:1-5 [Jesus speaking] "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Ro. 14:4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Jas. 4:11-12 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbor?

When I was in Bible school, there was a chapel service where a classmate of mine was leading worship. I felt he was guilty of driving – not leading – the people into the worship of God, and I wasn't ashamed of telling people how I felt. About two years later when I was an assistant pastor, a board member of that church approached me about my worship leading. He said he couldn't put his finger on the problem, but there was something not quite right. So I listened to a tape of the service and sure enough I discovered that the worship leader on the tape, me, was driving the people rather than leading the people into the worship of God. I've since come to understand that ***we are most prone to be critical or judgmental in those areas where we are personally deficient***. Two years earlier, I had judged a classmate, with no mercy, largely because I had the same problem without knowing it. Fortunately, the story has a good ending. After thanking the board member for his input, I asked and trusted God to change me. A few years after that, I was at another service where I felt the worship leader driving instead of leading the people, but this time, without even thinking about it, I just started

praying for the worship leader. I'm grateful that the judgmental attitude I'd had five years earlier wasn't there any more.

Ro. 2:1-3 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

1Co. 4:5a Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.

Ro. 14:10-13 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

Next, in light of God's eternal judgment, we should carefully judge ourselves. I'm kind of shocked, amazed and perplexed in the body of Christ, generally, how much we tend to excuse ourselves rather than judge ourselves. There's something about us that doesn't want to ask the difficult questions of how we are **really** doing – we'd rather live in a fantasy world of encouragement, thinking that everything is wonderful. But, as Scripture says,

1Co. 11:31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

Why? If we allow God in this life to convict us, and we say, "Yes, God, you're right," then we're judging ourselves. If we do that, God can deal with the faults and errors he's trying to get us free from. And once they're dealt with, they'll never show up when we stand before God's Judgment Throne.

The Psalmist cried out to God:

Ps. 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

What was the Psalmist doing? He was inviting the King of the universe to reveal to him the things in his life and heart that needed to be cleansed. Every time God corrects us it's good news for us! We can go higher, because we have the opportunity to turn from whatever sin or defect he's revealing to us – we can cry out to Him and trust Him to transform us from who we are to who we're supposed to be. And, by the way, when we do that, he'll take care of business! He'll do the work. He's faithful. We can count on that. So we should carefully judge ourselves.

Next, in light of God's eternal judgment, we should learn to entrust the injustices of this life into the Lord's hands. Some years ago I was working as a seasonal tax professional. For two years my boss had been very good to me, but in the third year her attitude toward me changed drastically. One of the other employees at the tax office warned me at the beginning of the season that the boss was out to get me. The injustices, the lies, the favoritism, the double standards kept increasing. At the beginning of April, about two weeks before the end of tax season, she had the district manager come in and the three of us talked for about 45 minutes. Right after that, the district manager handed me a "final written warning," my boss had written, listing six accusations and leaving me a millimeter away from getting fired. I was shocked and horrified.

I went home and prepared my reply. At the end of my reply I wrote that I was deeply grieved over

the busted relationship between my boss and me. Then I added these words, and I quote: "God will judge between you and me." You see, we have the privilege, as sons and daughters of **The Almighty** to invoke the name of God and thus release His hand into the situations we find ourselves in. I did absolutely nothing to my boss other than to state my case before the district manager and to invoke the name of God.

By the time the dust settled, my "final written warning" had been reduced to a single verbal warning, which I admit was totally fair. My boss, on the other hand, was not allowed to come back to the company as an office manager ever again. A few months later, totally unrelated to anything I ever did, my boss got fired. A few months after that, I got a phone call from the manager of a different firm inviting me to prepare tax returns for his company. Changing companies turned out to be the single greatest business blessing I have ever received.

So what am I saying? In light of the fact that God is the Judge of all the earth, in light of the fact that He knows every detail of every motive, and every word that's ever been spoken in the universe, in light of the fact that He takes perfect care of every iota of our existence, we have to realize that there's no point in struggling against man over the injustices of this life. None. We can, as Peter says, commit them into the hands of our faithful Creator and continue to do good. As we cease from taking matters into our own hands and instead trust God, he'll take care of business. God is large and he's in charge.

1Pt. 2:23 When they hurled their insults at him [Jesus], he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Ps. 37:5-6 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

So we should learn to entrust the injustices of this life into the Lord's hands. Lastly, in light of God's eternal judgment, we should have great passion and faithfulness in leading others to Christ. In light of the fact that we're all going to have to stand before **The Almighty**, in light of the fact that there are only two eternal destinations – one glorious beyond description and the other horrible beyond description – anything and everything we can do to help people **not** end up in hell is worth it.

2Co. 5:10-11a For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.
Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.

2Co. 5:20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

QUOTE "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for."
- Charles Spurgeon

I want to close this lesson on eternal judgment with a quote from a tombstone found in an Indian cemetery. It reads:

*Pause, stranger, as you pass me by.
As you now are, so once was I.
As I am now, so you will be,
So prepare for death and follow me.*

Below this inscription, someone had scribbled the following reply:

*To follow you I'm not content,
Until I know which way you went.*

And with that, we end our lesson on eternal judgment. God bless you all.