

A Time for Judgment (Part 2)

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Date: 04 March 2018

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[0 : 00] do you know what's going to happen after you die? The Bible tells us very clearly, it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.

That means that judgment is just as certain as death. And we know that everybody dies. Death is the one common denominator of all people.

We need to be equally clear that all will be judged. That's what we're going to look at this morning. What judgment will be like for everyone.

I'm talking about both believers, Christians, and unbelievers. I want us to begin where we left off last week in Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

If you're new, we're going through a study of the book of Ecclesiastes. And in this book, we're reminded over and over again that we're going to die.

[1 : 05] And we need to live life in light of the fact that nothing in this world is permanent. But the writer of Ecclesiastes, Solomon, refers to himself as the preacher throughout the book.

He also brings up the subject of judgment from time to time. Look, chapter 3, verse 16.

Today I'm going to put all this on the screen because we're going to be looking at a lot of different passages from throughout the Bible. So it's going to be on the screen this morning. Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness.

And in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. He's talking about in the place where justice was supposed to be. In the place where righteousness, that which is right, where it was supposed to be happening.

It was not. Then verse 17. I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.

[2 : 20] The first thing I want us to think about this morning is a time of judgment is coming for all people. That's what He's saying here in verse 17. That's really going to be the main focus of this morning's message.

God is not going to just judge unbelievers. We, as Christians, we will be judged.

And we're going to look at some of that this morning. But before we do, I want us to look at the last part of this chapter and clarify what is said about life after death.

Because if you just read it and don't think about who's talking and other things that He said, you might get the impression that this preacher is really an unbeliever, an agnostic even.

So let's look at point two next. A time of judgment is coming, but only if people experience life after death. He's going to raise the question, do people, does everyone, do humans, as He will say it, do they go up?

[3 : 31] Or are they just like the animals and just die and put in the ground? Let's look at it. We saw last week that the preacher began this section by calling attention to the unfairness and injustice in this world in verse 16, what we just read.

We all know life's not fair. That's just a fact. But what He's calling attention to is there's some places where life is supposed to be fair. There's some places where God intends for justice to be done.

He's talking about a court, the legal system, before a judge. That's where we are to expect justice to be done.

That's where we expect the right thing to always be upheld. But in that day and in our day, we know that's not always the case.

Sometimes you can't get a fair shake before a judge. Sometimes the legal system is just not really fair or just.

[4 : 35] And what Solomon is saying here is, where there's supposed to be justice and it's not, that's real evil. Wickedness is the word he uses.

He wants us to understand, to be real clear. There should be justice. There should be a sense of fairness in this world. But there's not. But God has so ordered society in every era, every period of time, in the ancient world up until today, there are supposed to be places where you can count on justice being done.

And where it's not, God takes personal offense. It is wicked. It is evil. It is totally immoral. And as we saw last week, that's one reason why God exercises judgment.

One day God's going to right all wrongs. One day justice will prevail except for where we experience mercy.

We'll talk about that a little bit later. We, we don't always want to get what we deserve, do we? Not before God. That's where the mercy comes in.

[5 : 50] That God graciously doesn't give us what we deserve because Jesus took our punishment. See, God can never be unjust. God's going to either be just and give us what we deserve, or He's going to show mercy to us and not give us what we deserve because Jesus suffered the punishment that we deserve.

Let's move on into verse 18 for what we're looking at now. The time of judgment is coming, but only if people experience life after death.

In verse 18, it seems that the preacher's saying that since people have no more regard for their fellow man than to be so unjust, treat people that way. We treat one another that way.

It seems like we're no better than the animals. Look at verse 18. I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts or animals.

It's the fact that humans and animals share one thing in common: We're going to die. That's what He's talking about in verses 19 and 20. Look at it. For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same.

[7 : 12] As one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath. And man has no advantage over the beasts for all is vanity, futile.

All go to one place. All are from the dust and to dust all return. Here's what He's saying. We all, humans and animals, we stop breathing.

We go to the place of death. We all return to dust. But the preacher then goes on in verse 21 to ask a question that makes him sound like an agnostic or even an atheist.

Look at what he says. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth. That sounds like he's not sure about life after death for people.

Who knows if the spirit of a human being goes up before God, if that spirit of man will continue to live, or if we're just like animals.

[8 : 26] We just die and are buried. If that's all you know about this preacher, as he calls himself, you just wonder, well, who does know?

But that's not what he means because he makes it clear in other places that he believes in life after death. He believes there's going to be a judgment and there's only a judgment for people who continue to live.

Look at verse 17 again. I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked. If there's no life after death, there will be no judgment.

So he doesn't believe that when we die, we're just going to be dead, buried, returned to the dust like an animal. He also, in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, he uses the same language that we see here in verse 21 to describe the fact that people will continue to live after death.

Look at it. The Spirit returns to God who gave it. In chapter 12, verse, the first seven verses, Solomon's talking about how we all just going to get old and age, become decrepit and die.

[9 : 43] Gloomy picture, but the reality is, look in the mirror, no matter what your age, it's going to get worse. If you live, it's going to get worse.

I mean, that is a fact. We're going to deteriorate and we're going to die. But the point is, the Spirit returns to God who gave it.

Here in verse 21, he's talking about what death looks like from the perspective of life lived just under the sun. If all we know is what we see and feel, if all we know is what we experience, then we don't know that there's life after death.

Everybody that you've ever known and loved, when they died, you saw, if you saw them die, you saw them stop breathing. And that's it. That's all you saw. They were buried.

That's all you know for a fact by what you observe, what you see. From a purely earthly perspective, no one does know what happens after death.

[10:57] But, human beings are different from animals. We are a higher form of life from animals.

We're more important than animals. We're above animals. Only human beings are created in the image of God. That's what makes us different. In Genesis chapter 1, beginning about verse 26, the scripture's very clear that when God created human beings, He created human beings differently than everything else under creation.

It's only men and women, male and female, human beings that God created in His image. And that's what makes us different.

The preacher describes how we're different in one way in chapter 3, verse 11, like this. He says, God has put eternity into man's heart.

We looked at that two weeks ago. Because God created us in His image, we know, we just know innately that there's more to life than what we see.

[12:07] Human beings have always been spiritual beings. We've always believed in a higher form of life. Even people who are not Christians, who are not Jews, every culture, every people, no matter what they worship, they worship something besides themselves.

We know there's more than what we see can touch. It's because God has created us that way. In fact, Paul tells us in Romans chapter 1 that God has so created this world that everybody can understand there is a God.

It's called natural revelation. Chapter 1, verse 18, and following, Paul talks about everybody's without excuse in terms of we know there's a God.

And what we know about God, we really rebel against. We don't really want to honor this God. We want to live life our way rather than His way. So he talks about the universality of sin.

In other words, all people in this world, God makes it clear to them something about Himself, but we don't act upon what He shows us in a way that would honor Him.

[13:17] And that's what makes us sinners without excuse before God. He even goes on in chapter 2 to say that God has so put it in your conscience, in your heart, a general awareness of His law, of what's right and wrong.

Because human beings are created in the image of God, we know innately that there's some things, I'm talking about just basic things, that are right and wrong, good and bad. That's how God made us.

So God has put eternity into our hearts. He has made us such a way that we know there's more life than what we see. But there's a whole lot about life we don't understand. That's what He went on to say in chapter 3 verse 11.

Look at it. God has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from beginning to the end. That's His way, the preacher's way of saying, we're never going to figure out everything about life.

There's things that are going to happen in this world, there's things that are going to happen in your life, and you're just going to think, I don't understand why this happens. I don't understand how a great and good God could allow this or cause this, and we're going to go to our grave with those questions.

[14:28] We're going to go to our grave with a lot of unanswered questions because God has not chosen to reveal everything to us. He's God, we're not, and we cannot, we could not understand all that He would even make known to us if He chose to, because we're not Him.

we don't have His mind. But we do know there's more to life than just what we see under the sun. Most of what we know about life after death is what God has actually revealed to us in His Word and in the resurrection of Jesus. Let's look now at some of the things that God has revealed about judgment, about life after death.

So this is what we're going to do actually is go back now to point one. A time of judgment is coming for all people. And I want you to note how the preacher emphasizes the comprehensive nature of God's judgment.

It's going to include all people. Again, verse 17, God will judge the righteous and the wicked. Look at what He says at the end of Ecclesiastes. The very last verse, chapter 12, verse 14.

[15:41] Judgment is going to include everything we've ever done. For God will bring every deed into justice, into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Let's just be real honest. You've got some secrets. You've got some secrets that nobody in this world knows about.

And so do I. You know what some of mine are? You're an idiot if you think I would tell you. They're secrets. And I don't want you to know. And you've got secrets you don't want me to know.

There are secrets that only Lisa knows about me. You've got some secrets that only a few people know about you. It might be your spouse.

Some of you, you've got some buddies, some friends. They know some real secrets that get you in a lot of trouble. They're going to go to their grave. They're not going to tell it. Well, here's the unsettling part.

[16:43] The things that I don't want you to know, the things that you don't want me to know, it's going to be made public on the day of judgment. I don't know all about what that's going to mean.

But this is not the only place that the scripture is clear that everything about us is going to be laid bare. We're not going to hide it.

We're not going to keep it covered. We're not going to be able to because God knows. God knows what we think. He knows what we feel. He knows what our attitudes are behind our actions and our words.

Jesus even said on one occasion that we're going to give an account on judgment day for every word, every idle word we've spoken. You know, the things that are said in the Bible about judgment, even for us as Christians, it should get our attention.

It should make us just stop and think, it matters how I live. And even though I can get by with some things and keep some things from some people, I can't keep it from God.

[17:56] And one day I'm not even going to be able to keep it from anyone. scary thought, humbling thought. Jesus also taught that all people will be judged, both believers and unbelievers.

And the most lengthy and detailed description is found in Matthew chapter 25. Look with me, beginning in verse 31. Jesus said a lot about judgment, actually. He said a lot of little statements here and there about, we'll give an account for every outer word and that kind of thing.

This is the lengthiest one, beginning in chapter 25, Matthew, chapter 25, beginning in verse 31. I want to encourage you to write that down, read that. We're not going to look at the whole thing today, but it's important.

It's serious. Look at verses 31 to 32 now. Jesus said, when the Son of Man comes in His glory, that's His favorite way to describe Himself. Speak of Himself.

When the Son of Man comes in glory and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. That's the second coming of Jesus Christ. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, all the people.

[19:17] And He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. One day Jesus is going to come back into this world in power and glory.

And it will be an awesome sight and it will be an awesome day. Judgment will take place when Jesus comes back. He's going to really be the one to exercise final judgment.

Jesus explained how all this works. In John chapter 5 verses 22 and 23, look at it. For the Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

God the Father has delegated judgment to God the Son. Some places you read in the Bible about God's judgment, the Father's judgment.

Sometimes you read in the Bible about the judgment of Jesus, the judgment seat of Christ. Both are correct. God judges through His Son, Jesus.

[20:24] Now Matthew 25 describes how Jesus is going to exercise judgment with an image that everyone there that day understood. We don't ever see this.

But He was talking about how a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats at the end of the day. evidently in that day a shepherd had sheep and goats and they just grazed together out in the pasture land.

But at the end of the day when He brought them in they didn't stay all mingled together. He separated the sheep on one side, the goats on another. He would put one pen, one in another pen evidently.

Well that's the image. See, Jesus was a master of painting pictures, word pictures for us to understand what He was talking about. Note how Jesus says this.

He's going to divide people in two categories immediately when He comes. Look at it. This is verses 22 and 33. 32 and 33. For Him will be gathered all the nations and He will separate people from one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

[21 : 32] He will place the sheep on His right and the goats on the left. Think about what the image is. Jesus returns. All people are before Him.

He separates one group, His people, that He refers to as sheep, on His right. And then the others who are not His people designated the goats on His left.

what I want us to understand is when Jesus comes, He doesn't determine, or out of this whole big group, some of them are sheep and some of them are goats.

The determination has already been made. When Jesus comes, there are sheep and there are goats. Judgment Day is not going to be the day when people are designated to be believers or not. Judgment Day is just going to reveal who the believers are and who the believers are not.

Judgment Day just reveals who the sheep, who His sheep are, who they are not.

[22 : 43] The people on the right, the sheep on the right, as He uses the term, they're the people who trusted Jesus as their Lord and Savior before He arrived. They had a relationship with Him before He arrived.

And when Jesus came, He knew His sheep immediately. Those on the left, they didn't have a relationship with Jesus when He arrived. And when He arrived, it was too late. And they were put on the side separate from the sheep immediately.

This makes it clear that everyone's eternal destiny is decided before Judgment Day. On Judgment Day, Jesus makes it, just makes it known who's who. Now I want you to look next at the destiny of the sheep and the goats.

Look first at the sheep. Verse 34, still in Matthew 25. Then the King will say to those on His right, come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Those on His right, those who have a relationship with Him, those He is designating as sheep, they're eternally blessed. They're going to inherit the blessings of the kingdom of God forever.

[24 : 04] Now note the destiny of the goats, those on the left, those who are not the sheep. Then He will say to those on His left, depart from me, you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

It's going to be too late on the Day of Judgment for those who are not believers. They're going to be eternally condemned right then. And Jesus makes it clear that these final states, they are eternal. Look at the last verse that we're talking about in Matthew 25.

And these, He's talking about the goats now, these will go away into eternal punishment. That's the wicked, the unrighteous. But the righteous into eternal life.

Look at that word, eternal punishment, eternal life. On the Day of Judgment, our relationship with the Lord will be made known.

It will be permanent. There's not one thing anybody can do about it. So let's just make this real personal right now. What would happen if Jesus came back today?

[25 : 15] Which group would you find yourself in? If you have a real relationship with Christ as your Savior and Lord, all is going to be well. You don't have to fear the judgment.

You're going to find Jesus to be a very gracious and merciful shepherd who's going to bless you with an eternal inheritance in the kingdom of God.

It'll be an awesome sight, but it's going to wind up well for all who truly trust Jesus and are His. But if you don't have a relationship with Jesus, all will be lost.

You will find Him to be a just judge who will condemn you to eternal punishment in hell as a result of your sinful choices, your own personal decisions to live life your way and not God's way.

We all know that we're going to die one day. We know that. Well, we need to also let it sink in that judgment is just as certain as death.

[26 : 34] None of us know when our death's going to come, so none of us know when our judgment will be. But we can be ready whenever it is by having a right relationship with God through faith, trust, commitment to Jesus Christ as our own Savior and Lord.

You know, the New Testament often encourages us to be ready for the day of judgment by pointing out something very positive, that God's going to reward His faithful people.

That's the last point I want us to look at this morning, the rewards of the righteous. You know, there's several, many actual passages of Scripture that talk about rewards for Christians in some way.

I want you to look at a very clear-cut example from Peter. Some things happened. The rich young ruler that Jesus had an encounter with, he seemed to be interested in being a follower of Jesus, but when Jesus told him the real story, what he needed to do, he just walked away.

And it caused Peter to think and have a question. I want you to look at it. Peter's talking to Jesus. Then Peter said in reply, see, we have left everything and followed you.

[27 : 59] They left their family, they left their jobs, they left life as they knew it. We've left everything and followed you. What then will we have? And Jesus said to them, truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel and everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands or anything.

For my sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. You know, you could think Peter was a, Peter was the real deal.

He was a faithful follower of Jesus. Earlier in Matthew, Jesus had commended him because he said, he made this great declaration of faith, speaking on behalf of his disciples, of all the disciples. We believe that you are the Christ. You are the son of the living God. And, and, and Jesus just commended him. God has shown you that Peter. That's not something you figured out. God has opened your eyes.

You and all these who follow me. God has made it known to you. You are true believers. He commended them. They were not in it for wrong motives or anything.

[29 : 18] They were genuine followers of Jesus because they, they believed in him. They loved him. They were committed to him. They wanted to serve him. They wanted to do God's will. But on one occasion, Peter just said, we've given up everything in this world to follow you.

Will we get anything in return? Will we be rewarded? And Jesus didn't put him down. Jesus didn't say anything, not even hint that there was anything wrong with Peter asking that question. The fact is, Jesus said that his faithful followers will be rewarded, what, a hundredfold? We rewarded in all kinds of ways, some in this life.

But ultimately, and most importantly, we're going to be rewarded with eternal life. You know, we don't know a whole lot about the kinds of rewards we'll experience in heaven.

There's going to be something in heaven. Heaven, let me rephrase that. When all is said and done after Judgment Day, there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth. We're going to live and know people and be known.

[30 : 31] We're going to do stuff in heaven. We're not going to be sitting around on these clouds playing a harp like some kind of stupid illustration you've read or seen somewhere. That's just ridiculous. We're going to live forever in the presence of God and with other people.

We're going to do stuff in heaven. There's going to be rewards. There's going to be categories of rewards. I don't know a whole lot about what that's really going to be and nobody else does either. We can all have some thoughts and opinions.

There's not a whole lot of concrete ideas, evidence of what it will exactly be like. But we can be certain of this. All rewards in heaven are based on God's grace.

We don't deserve them. We don't deserve our salvation. We're saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, period. Everything that we have from God is a gift of grace, so we need to understand that.

But Paul said two things about eternal life that will be our greatest reward. He said it in the context of describing the second coming of Jesus to the Christians in the church of Thessalonica because they were concerned about some of them had loved ones, family members and friends who had died, and they were wondering what has happened to them.

[31 : 49] So Paul, in chapter 4, he tells them some things about what's going to happen at the second coming. He tells them some things about their family members and their friends.

They're going to see them again. But I want you to note there's two things he says in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 about how we're going to be blessed in heaven, and these are the ultimate rewards. Number one, verse 17, we will always be with the Lord.

Heaven is where Jesus is. Heaven's where the Father is. And we're going to be with them for all eternity. That's going to be the number one blessing and benefit of heaven.

But number two, note verse 17, he says, we will always be with the Lord. Who's he referring to with that we? He's talking about Christian family members and friends that you know and love and will see and spend eternity with.

I want you to look at how he describes this. Christian family members who have died, what's going to happen? Look, we're going to read in chapter 14 or chapter 4 beginning in verse 13.

[32 : 57] Paul says, we don't want you, members of this church, we don't want you to be uninformed brothers about those who are asleep, that's people who died, that you may not grieve as others who have no hope.

Christians grieve. Don't you ever think that it's something wrong with somebody you know and love you're close to when they die and it breaks your heart? Well, that's just the way God made us.

When somebody you know and love dies, they're not here. You know they're in heaven, but you still, you grieve, you're hurt because they're not here with you. And that's normal. That's natural.

That's being a human and a Christian human.

It's okay to cry. It's okay to grieve. It's okay to be sad. It is not unspiritual. The person who doesn't grieve is the one who something's wrong with.

But we don't grieve like people who don't have a clue as to what happened to their family members.

We don't grieve like people whose family members were not believers. Look what he says.

[34 : 05] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Your family members, friends who've died as Christians, when Jesus comes back in this world, they're going to come back with him.

Look at the next part. And the dead in Christ will rise first. That's when they get their new resurrected body. Look at the next one. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

That's when we get our new bodies if we're alive, when Jesus comes back again. And there's that last phrase. And so we will always be with the Lord. Paul intended for that to comfort or encourage us.

Look at the last verse. Therefore encourage or comfort one another with these words. Here's the point. Our greatest rewards in heaven will be relationships.

We will be there with those we love the most. The Lord Jesus, our Heavenly Father, and our Christian friends and family members.

[35 : 17] People we shared life with in this world. We're going to share eternity with them as well. I read several articles, I'm sure you have too, about the death of Billy Graham.

Well, Franklin Graham, his son, describes where his father is right now in a way that emphasizes the truth of what I'm bringing out about Paul and about relationships in heaven.

Franklin said this about his dad after he died. What joy he has to be welcomed by God the Father and be reunited with my mother in the presence of Jesus.

That's the great reward. To be in the presence of Almighty God and the Lord Jesus Christ with your friends and family members who were Christians.

It'll be great. It'll be great. It'll be great. It'll be great fellowship. Real relationships forever and ever in a perfect place.

[36 : 28] You know, seeing what Franklin Graham said about his dad, how will your family members think of you following your death?

And what I'm asking is, what kind of hope will they have? Everybody that I've ever known and loved when they died, as I thought about them, I've always thought about where they were right then.

If they were Christians, I've always thought they're in the presence of the Lord. And while I may be still sad, there's a whole lot of peace in knowing that they're in perfection, in paradise now with the Lord.

How do you think of yourself following your death and judgment? Do you have comfort?

Or are you afraid? One thing that we need to be, must be clear about, our salvation is not based on our good works. Understand, if you don't hear anything else this morning, the New Testament clearly teaches that your salvation is not dependent upon you being good or bad.

[37 : 46] Your salvation, your home in heaven, is not a reward for the good deeds that you do. It's not something that God does because you do more good than bad in the world.

Our salvation is based on the goodness of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is based on who He is and what He's done.

You see, Jesus lived the only perfect, righteous life that's ever been lived. And when we trust Him as our Savior and Lord, His perfect life is credited to us.

Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He lived a perfect life. He didn't deserve to die, but He chose to die as our substitute. He chose to take our sins upon Himself and incur God's wrath against our sin, to incur God's punishment.

He chose to suffer the pain and punishment of hell, separation from God, for us, so that if we will trust Him, His death for sin will count as our death. And that's how we get to be forgiven.

[38 : 55] We're saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus and Him alone. Look at what Paul says. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

We who are Christians should not fear death. We should not fear the judgment. But I want you to be real clear about what it means to be a Christian. The New Testament teaches that saving faith is continuing faith.

The New Testament knows nothing about somebody just making a profession of faith or getting baptized, and nothing ever changes about them.

The New Testament tells us that what God starts, He finishes. Look at how Paul describes it in Philippians. And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus saves a person, He changes that person from the inside out. Now, no one is instantaneously changed and made perfect. It's a lifelong process. But people who have been born again by the Spirit of God will be gradually changed by the Spirit of God.

[40 : 05] Slowly but surely, if the Spirit of God lives within us, we will be developing the fruit of the Spirit, the character of Jesus, which is things like love and joy and peace and patience and kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

There's not a person in this room who fully demonstrates this full-blown fruit. But if the Spirit of God lives within you, there is within you a desire to develop such character, to grow in the development of such character.

There will be a desire within you to put forth the effort to cooperate with God as He works in you to develop that kind of character. And if the Spirit of God has been living in you for any length of time, there will be some signs of such fruit in your life now.

Sometimes, you know, you can see some evidence, but then there's some times you sort of go back and you don't see quite as much.

But over time, we ought to see how God is chipping away at our old sinful, selfish ways and developing these spiritual fruit qualities, character qualities in us.

[41 : 24] Jesus said clearly, By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. On Judgment Day, our lives will be evaluated, not by an empty profession of faith, but by a fruitful demonstration of faith.

Does your life bear spiritual fruit? This is how we know who is truly saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus.