

**A DIVIDING LINE**

“...those who have done what is good will rise to live and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:29, NIV)

**A** LONG THE EDGE OF EVERY GOLF COURSE is one of the golfer’s greatest enemies—a line of white stakes defining the boundary of play. A ball hit beyond that in competitive action brings a nasty result, known in the rulebook as *stroke and distance*. This is the severest penalty a golfer can receive for a single infraction.

Lines of division are rarely a comfortable thing. Sure, if you land on the good side of such a demarcation, you breathe a sigh of relief. But if your vision is circumspect, you’ll also recognize that your gain may be set against another’s loss.

That’s why the matter of heaven and hell isn’t typical fare for your social lunch crowd. When you start talking about those who will “rise to live” and those who will “rise to be condemned,” expect everyone to squirm in their seats. And understand that an even deeper squirming is going on in their spirits.

But Jesus did not shy away from the most important topics in the world. He drew lines in the spiritual sand. For this he received rebuke and criticism. But he also, from then until now, has drawn belief from those who keep the main thing the main thing—that is, not how uncomfortable hell makes them feel, but how important it is to know how to secure eternal life.

Jesus’ words were not meant to be spooky or emotional. They were fact: some will be *here* and some will be *there*. The question is, where do you want to be?

With that in mind, we must consider what Jesus meant by noting that it is “those who have done what is good [who] will rise to live.” If I am saved by grace, through faith, where do good works fit in? If it is Christ’s righteousness and not ours that counts in the holy judgment, how can I do what is good in a way that God’s mercy is delivered to me? The answer lies again in Jesus’ words, this time from John 15: “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.” Here then is the order that leads to life:

Hear => Believe => Christ in us and we in him => Act righteously => Gain eternity

Only faith in Jesus activates the good that is judged worthy of eternal reward. Turn in faith (and turn others to it!). In this way, you can talk joyfully of eternity.

**Opening questions** How do you normally behave when you find yourself in the midst of an uncomfortable conversation? What is the most uncomfortable spiritual question for you?

**READING** John 5:24-30, Ephesians 2:1-9, John 15:1-8, James 2:14-17

**Jesus in judgment**

Jesus spoke in John 15 of judgment because it is part of his godly role. What about Jesus uniquely qualifies him as humanity’s judge?

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**Death, life, and grace**

What is one’s life like before Christ enters it? And after? What does Jesus do for us that we cannot do for ourselves? How critical is grace in the economy of salvation and eternity?

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**Faith and works**

How do the John 15 and James 2 passages help us see the relationship between faith and works? How do we know that faith comes first?

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