

Principles of God's Judgment, Part 3

Scripture: Romans 2:6–10

Code: 45-19

INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Human history moves inexorably and unavoidably toward a final sentencing. The writer of Hebrews warned "of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour [God's] adversaries" (10:27). He also said, "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:30-31). God will judge all mankind. Throughout Scripture He has warned us of that judgment.

A question of great importance now faces us. Since all people will face the judgment of God, what is to be the standard for that judgment? On what basis will some be condemned and sent to hell forever? And on what basis will some be sent to heaven forever?

REVIEW

The apostle Paul gives the basis of God's judgment in Romans 2:1-16. There we find that God judges on the basis of knowledge, truth, guilt, deeds, impartiality, and motives.

Romans 2 cannot be isolated from the rest of the book of Romans; it must be viewed as part of a larger picture in which Paul presents the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated "gospel" essentially means "good news." But before one can hear the good news, he must know the bad news. So in Romans 1:18[en]3:20 the news is all bad: man is sinful and immoral. Even at his highest ethical point he falls short of God's standard. Romans 3:19-20 says, "We know that whatever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Romans 1:18[en]3:20 is a set up for the remainder of the book of Romans. Beginning with Romans 3:21 Paul describes how Christ saves man from his lostness.

Romans 1:18-32 is basically a condemnation of immoral men. Chapter 2 focuses on outwardly moral, religious, self-righteous men. But both types end up in the same category: they are condemned.

I. KNOWLEDGE (v. 1)

"Therefore, thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest

another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things."

II. TRUTH (vv. 2-3)

"We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them who commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them who do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"

III. GUILT (vv. 4-5)

"Despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

LESSON

IV. DEEDS (vv. 6-10)

"Who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

A. The Principle (v. 6)

1. The role of works

Revelation 20:12-13 twice informs us that God will judge men according to their works. That basic truth is reiterated in Romans 2:6. It is not a new concept--it is affirmed throughout Scripture.

a) In the Old Testament

(1) Jeremiah 17:10--"I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the conscience, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

(2) Isaiah 3:10-11--"Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

b) In the New Testament

(1) Matthew 16:27--"The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works."

(2) 1 Corinthians 3:8, 12-15--"Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.... If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble--every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall test every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he's built upon it, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be

saved, yet as by fire."

(3) 2 Corinthians 5:10--"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

(4) Galatians 6:7-9--"Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

(5) Romans 14:12--"Every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

God does not judge us on the basis of our profession of faith. He does not judge the Jewish person on the basis of his Abrahamic heritage. He does not judge you on the basis of your identification with a church. Rather He judges people by the product of their lives. Does a person's life manifest obedience to God? One's life pattern is an infallible index to character. In referring to false teachers Jesus said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16).

2. The classes of people

My grandfather used to say there are two classes of people in the world: the saints and the aints! There are only two classes of people in the world: those who obey God and those who do not. None of us perfectly obeys God. But there are some people in the world who don't obey Him at all, while there are others who seek to obey Him. Every man faces an impartial judge who has a comprehensive record of his deeds. That record will determine his eternal destiny.

I remember reading about a relatively new publishing effort in children's books. Through computer printing, a company has designed a storybook series that can feature your child. All you need do is send in your child's name, the names of his friends, his school, the name of his teacher, and something about his likes and dislikes. With that information a story will be written with your child as the main character. Now that's a fairy tale, but God has a book about everyone's life that's true.

3. The facts about salvation

a) It is given by God

Some may accuse me of teaching salvation by works. But I don't teach that because the Bible doesn't.

(1) Psalm 115:1--"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy."

(2) Isaiah 48:11--God said, "For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it; for how should my name be polluted? And I will not give my glory unto another." God promises to fulfill His own promises, and will not pass off that responsibility to anyone else. To maintain glory for Himself in His saving grace, there can be no salvation by man's own works.

(3) Jeremiah 31:31-34--"The days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which, my covenant, they broke, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." The New Covenant is a covenant of mercy and grace extended to unworthy people.

(4) 1 Timothy 1:15-16--Paul said, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Nevertheless ... I obtained mercy."

(5) Ephesians 2:8-9--"By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God--not of works, lest any man should boast."

b) It is confirmed by works

We will be judged by our works, but we cannot be saved by our works. So how do works fit in?

Although we cannot be saved by them, works are an important part of our life.

(1) Philippians 2:12-13--Paul said, "My beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

(2) Ephesians 2:10--"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

We cannot be saved by works, but we have been saved to do good works. Therefore when God judges, He will look at a man's works to determine if salvation has indeed taken place. An unbeliever's works will reveal his unbelief. They will reveal the absence of God in his life because all his works will be unrighteous. Even when he tries to be righteous his works will turn out to be filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). The believer, however, by faith has been given the power of God to produce righteous works. His salvation will be clearly indicated by them.

God looks at a person's works. If He sees manifestations of righteousness, He knows that the person is regenerated. If He sees no such manifestation of righteousness, He knows that the person is unregenerate. Therefore God's final judgment can be rendered on the basis of works.

Understand that Paul is not referring to salvation in Romans 2:6, so don't get confused. He doesn't bring up the topic of salvation again until Romans 3:21. At this point he is dealing with one of the elements of judgment.

What implications does the truth that God judges us by our works have for you? If there's nothing in your life to indicate righteousness, then righteousness isn't present in your life. Paul said, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). With no manifestation of a new creation, there can be no salvation. There may be periods of time when we walk in disobedience, but a life barren of righteous deeds cannot claim to be redeemed. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30).

B. The Groups (vv. 7-10)

1. Those who receive eternal life (vv. 7, 10)

a) Their actively seeking it (v. 7)

"To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life."

(1) "Glory"

The highest and most wonderful goal of any believer is glory. He seeks to glorify God in the present and attain the glory of God in the future. He seeks to follow 1 Corinthians 10:31, which says, "Whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." To give glory to God basically means to manifest His essence or nature. The believer seeks to be a vehicle through which God's glory can be manifest. Someone who doesn't have the desire to glorify God cannot be a Christian because the basic desire of a true believer is to glorify God. We look toward that future day when we will see Jesus Christ and be transformed into His image, radiating His marvelous glory for all eternity (1 John 3:1-2). The goal of a true Christian is to reflect God's glory. As a result his life will manifest a righteous pattern.

(2) "Honor"

In a sense honor is the result of glory. One who reflects the glory of God receives divine honor. As Christians our desire should be to please God and hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." As you seek to manifest the glory of God, seek also that God would honor and reward your faithfulness.

(3) "Immortality"

Ultimately we seek immortality (incorruption). The glory and honor we seek will become a reality

when we become like Jesus Christ in the resurrection.

A believer has a heavenly perspective. The true objective of the saint is to live for that which is eternal. As Colossians 3:2 says, "Set your affections on things above."

Basically eternal life is the life of God in the soul of man forever. First John 5:20 says, "[Jesus Christ] is the true God, and eternal life." Possessing eternal life means having Jesus Christ live in you. Paul said, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20).

Eternal life is not a quantity of life but a quality of life. The life of God in the soul of man will always produce a righteous pattern. If you're a Christian and your life is presently characterized by unrighteousness, you are fighting against the very nature God created in you at salvation. That's like holding your breath--it's a lot harder than breathing. Once Christ comes to live in you, God's life should begin to dominate. But we fight and resist it in our human sinfulness.

Commentator John Murray said, "Works without redemptive aspiration are dead works. Aspiration without good works is presumption" (The Epistle to the Romans [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959], p. 64). People whose aim is heavenward will be judged by the life God has produced in them. From the time of Adam, a true believer will patiently seek to do what is right.

b) Their actually receiving it (v. 10)

"Glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." All that we seek we receive. We seek glory; God gives glory. We seek honor; He gives honor. And when we seek immortality, He gives peace--for when we enter into eternal holiness in the presence of God, the battle with our corruption will be over and the result will be eternal peace.

(1) The proof

When God sends the righteous into His eternal heaven and the unrighteous into an eternal hell, those who enter eternal heaven will have sought glory, honor, and immortality. Paul didn't say they deserve it, but they will have had aspirations for what is heavenly and godly. They will receive the glory, honor, and peace of eternal life because they have done good. If no such good works are visible, then the person's alleged salvation obviously wasn't genuine. We will be rewarded for our deeds because they are the proof of the righteousness within us.

(2) The recipients

The reward applies to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. God will give heavenly and eternal blessing to both. The Jewish people had thought the Gentile would be shut out from God's blessings. Although that isn't true, the Jews were first in priority in the covenant and chronology since Christ came to them first, so Jewish believers will be rewarded first.

Along with their priority in salvation, the Jewish people also have the priority in judgment.

Condemnation will be more severe for the Jewish person who rejects God's truth. Amos 3:2 says, "You [Israel] only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities." Israel's punishment will be severer because of the intimacy they had with God. There's no exemption from judgment for Jew or Gentile, and no exemption for the moral, religious man.

2. Those who receive wrath (vv. 8-9)

"Unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek."

a) The unbeliever's rejection (v. 8a)

(1) They are contentious

The Greek word translated "contentious" (erithia) was probably derived from the verb meaning "to act as a hireling" or "to work for pay." Here it refers to those with selfish, mercenary ambitions. An unrighteous person is wrapped up in what pleases him. Second Timothy 3:2 says that men will be lovers of their own selves. That is the basic problem of unregenerate man. Second Corinthians 5:15 says the Lord "died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves." Looking

out only for yourself leads to a contentious attitude toward the Lord.

(2) They don't obey the truth

When a person is self-seeking he will resist what God says. Although God speaks the truth, unregenerate man is not interested in what God says or wants. He wants only what he wants. Man rebels against God and is quarrelsome with Him--a reflection of the egotism of sin.

(3) They obey unrighteousness

No man lives in a vacuum--he either does right or wrong. Out of rebellion comes disobedience and then dire sinfulness.

The road to hell is simply defined: a spirit of antagonism toward the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Therefore the road to heaven must be the opposite: an attitude of submission to the lordship of Christ. God wants you to seek for glory, honor, and immortality. Although we won't attain all those things in this life, we're to have a seeking heart. And when we fail there is to be an attitude of brokenness. Eternal life belongs to those who show the work of God in their hearts by living in obedience to the lordship of Christ. Those who refuse to do so are unregenerate and will experience God's wrath.

b) God's reaction (vv. 8b-9)

Sin is basically an attack on God and precipitates a holy reaction.

(1) "Indignation"

The root of the Greek word translated "indignation" means "to rush along," "be in a hurry," or "breathe violently." It was used from Homer through the centuries to refer to the rage that swells within man. It was used to describe Pharaoh's desire to kill Moses (Heb. 11:27), the rage of an angry crowd that wanted to throw Jesus off a cliff (Luke 4:28), and a riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:28). God's indignation will burst out like a consuming fire against those who oppose the lordship of Christ.

(2) "Wrath"

This is another term for anger. It speaks of reaching a pitch of fury. At this point mercy and grace have ended. God's tolerance ends in a swelling furious final anger.

(3) "Tribulation"

The Greek word (thlipsis) speaks of putting pressure on something. In Acts 11:19 it refers to the crushing persecution endured by the early church. It is used of the struggles of the saints (Rom. 12:12), of Paul's persecution that nearly led to his death (2 Cor. 1:8), and of Christ's sufferings (Col. 1:24). It refers to affliction that results in personal suffering.

(4) "Anguish"

The Greek word translated "anguish" means "narrow"--referring to the narrowness or confinement of a place. Think of it this way: God is going to be angry. His fury will reach a fever pitch. The result will be affliction in a narrow place. I can't think of a better definition of hell than that. That confinement produces unimaginable discomfort.

The New Testament describes hell as an everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:46), an everlasting fire (Matt. 25:41), a furnace of fire (Matt. 13:42, 50), a lake of fire (Rev. 20:15), fire and brimstone (Rev. 14:10), an unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12), and a place of suffering (Matt. 10:28). That will be the final resting place for everyone whose life pattern is continually evil.

God judges according to deeds just as He judges according to guilt, truth, and knowledge. True righteousness produces true good deeds. Unrighteousness, no matter how religious it may try to be, will produce only evil deeds. And God will judge all equally. There will be absolute equity in ultimate judgment.

How Can I Produce Good Works?

Now that you know those who will avoid the eternal judgment of God will produce righteous works,

how do you do that? Romans 3 says, "The righteousness of God apart from the law is manifested ... even the righteousness of God which is by faith [in] Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe ... being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (vv. 21-24).

The only way to produce righteous deeds is to possess the righteousness of Christ. The only way to possess the righteousness of Christ is to have faith in His redemptive work. Do you believe He died for your sins? Do you believe He rose again for your justification? Do you believe He is alive even now interceding for you? Do you believe He will soon come back to complete the redemptive plan? If you believe all that and receive Christ into your life, He will enable you to produce righteous deeds. When the day of judgment occurs, God will see your righteous life and know it could only be the product of the indwelling presence of the living Christ, and you will experience eternal life in its fullest sense.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is Paul's emphasis in Romans 1:18[en]3:20? What part does chapter 2 play in the overall picture (see p. 1)?
2. Cite some Scriptures that show God judges men according to their works (see pp. 2-3).
3. What is an infallible index to character (see p. 4)?
4. Does the Bible teach salvation by works? Support your answer with Scripture (see pp. 4-5).
5. What is the purpose of works in a believer's life (see pp. 5-6)?
6. What three things do believers actively seek? Explain each (see p. 7).
7. What is the true objective for the saint (Col. 3:2; see p. 7)?
8. Define eternal life. What does it produce (see p. 8)?
9. What does the believer receive in return for what he has sought (Rom. 2:10; see p. 8)?
10. What is unique about the position the Jewish person holds both in regard to reward and judgment (see p. 9)?
11. What three things characterize those who have sought to do evil (Rom. 2:8)? Explain each (see pp. 9-10).
12. What is the road to hell? What is the road to heaven (see p. 10)?

13. What four things characterize God's final reaction to sin (Rom. 2:8-9)? Explain each (see pp. 10-11).

14. How can one produce good works (see p. 12)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. What is true of every Christian? Read Ephesians 2:10 and Philippians 2:12-13. What should characterize every Christian? Do the actions of your life manifest that? Give specific examples. Are there things you're currently doing that could give someone the wrong impression about where your allegiance lies? Ask God to help you turn from those things and live in obedience to Him.

2. Romans 2:7 says believers patiently seek for glory, honor, and immortality. Is that true of you? Is your highest motivation reflected by 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Whether ... you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (NASB)? Begin today to apply that verse to everything you do. Before you start some new task or activity, ask yourself if it will bring God glory. If it won't, don't do it. That may be difficult to do at first, but as you faithfully seek to do what will clearly glorify God, you will see God reward your faithfulness.

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