

Judgment Day

Romans 2:5-11

The Bible makes it very clear that there will be a judgment day. A day of judgment is coming for the human race. Even more personal, a day of judgment is coming for me and for you. Hebrews 9:27 says, **“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”**

That statement, as elementary as it might seem, is desperately needed in our time for we live in an age when men doubt that Judgment Day is coming. Ours is an age of relativism, of pluralism, of tolerance and diversity. The watchword of the age is “If it feels right to you, go ahead and do it.”

If you ask the average person today, “Do you believe in a universal day of judgment for the human race?”, the answers you are likely to get—if you get an answer at all—will likely be: “I don’t believe a God of love will judge anybody” or “I’m not worried about it because I’m as good as the next fellow.” According to a Lifeway Research poll last year two thirds (67 percent) of Americans believe heaven is a real place. About 6 in 10 Americans (61 percent) say hell is a real place. Overall, Americans don’t seem too worried about sin or being sent to hell. According to a recent Harris poll, 76% of Americans expect to go to Heaven while only 2% believe they will go to Hell.

How about you? Do you believe there will be a day in which God will judge you? What will be the basis for His judgment? What will be His verdict?

Paul speaks about judgment day in Romans 2:5. Please follow along as I read

Romans 2:5-11

5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

6 who "will render to each one according to his deeds":

7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;

8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness--indignation and wrath,

9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;

10 but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

11 For there is no partiality with God.

In chapter 1 Paul has proven that Gentiles, unrighteous pagan people, are under God’s wrath and are deserving of death because they rejected the revelation they received. They knew God but did not glorify Him as God. Instead they went further and further into idolatry and immorality.

Here in chapter 2 Paul is setting out to prove that the Jews also are guilty of transgressing the revelation they received. In verses 1-4 Paul has just asked two questions that expose the sinfulness of even moral and religious people. First, he asks, do you think that you will escape God's judgment when you're guilty of the very things you judge in others?

The second question he asks is, do you think that because God has not brought judgment upon you but instead has shown you kindness, that this means you have no need for repentance? Do you not realize that His kindness is a pointer toward repentance?

His verdict for all self-righteous people is in verse 5: **But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.**

1. On judgment day God will judge our hearts.

Some of you know or have experienced the medical condition of arteriosclerosis, which is the hardening of the arteries. Paul says the human heart condition is sclerosis of the heart. It is hardened, stubborn, and unrepentant. It's a heart that is unmoved by the preaching of the gospel. Such a person has perhaps been blessed with good health, a good mind, a loving family, a good career, many friends, and even material possessions. But he refuses to be moved toward repentance by these kindnesses.

His heart is hardened. He sees the miracle of a child's birth; he's stubborn and unmoved. He sees God's intervention in a crisis situation; he's stubborn and unmoved. He has heard the gospel. He has seen the countless evidences of God's mercy and kindness. But he sits in stubborn silence instead of confessing his sin to God and calling upon Him for mercy in Christ. With pride and arrogance, he hides behind a religious façade, refusing to humble himself before God.

Paul says here that if you are like that, you are **treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God**. James Montgomery Boice pictures it this way: It's like a greedy man who collected gold coins for years and stored them up in his attic above his bed. But one night as he was sleeping the weight of the gold coins broke through the ceiling in his bedroom and killed him. This is the way it is for those who pile sin upon sin and show contempt for God's kindness. It will eventually all come crashing down.

Then in verses 6-11 Paul gives the basis for how God judges people. The text follows a chiasmic structure (adapted from Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], p. 135):

- A. God will judge everyone according to his deeds (2:6).
- B. Those who do good will attain eternal life (2:7).
- C. Those who do evil will incur wrath (2:8).
- C'. Those who do evil will suffer tribulation (2:9).
- B'. Those who do good will receive glory (2:10).
- A'. God will judge everyone impartially (2:11).

The main point is at the beginning and the end, that God will judge each person impartially according to his deeds.

2. God will judge us according to our works.

What will happen on judgment day? Verse 6 tells us that God **"will render to each one according to his deeds."**

Now that may almost sound like heresy for those of us who believe in salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Because we have been so ingrained with the truth that

salvation is not by works, the idea that God's judgment is based on my works may be a bit uncomfortable for us.

So before we go any further let me stress that Paul is not writing here about how to be saved. Paul will get to that later in chapter 3. He is not claiming in any way that our salvation is based at all on our works. Salvation, as we have already seen, and will see again over and over in the Book of Romans, is by grace. Righteousness is given to those who believe.

But judgment, as we see here, is by works. Our justification, our being declared righteous before God, is by grace through faith in Jesus. But our judgment is in accord with God's justice and is based on our works.

Paul teaches this idea consistently in his writings, but this is not just Paul's teaching. We find this idea consistently throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

Job 34:10-12 - "Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding: Far be it from God to do wickedness, And from the Almighty to commit iniquity. For He repays man according to his work, And makes man to find a reward according to his way. Surely God will never do wickedly, Nor will the Almighty pervert justice."

Ecclesiastes 12:14 - For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 - "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? 10 I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

Jeremiah 32:17-19 - 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You. 18 You show lovingkindness to thousands, and repay the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them--the Great, the Mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts. 19 You are great in counsel and mighty in work, for your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings.

Matthew 16:27 - For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

John 5:26-29 – "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

2 Corinthians 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Revelation 20:13 - The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Revelation 22:12 - "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

Why would God judge our hearts by our works? What is in my heart will be evidenced by what I do. This is the key truth that helps us to understand why God's judgment is rightfully based on our works.

Why are your works so important? Simply because your works reveal what is in your heart. Whatever is inside must eventually come out. This is a great principle that reveals itself in many ways. If you are angry inside, that anger must eventually reveal itself. If you are bitter, that bitterness will bubble to the surface. If you are a greedy person, your greed will show itself in your actions. If you are a bigot, you can't hide your bigotry forever. If you are a chattering fool, soon enough you'll open your mouth and prove it to the world. Likewise, if you are merciful, mercy will come forth. If you are gentle, the world will soon see your gentleness. If you are thrifty or wise or trustworthy or loving or a peacemaker ... whatever you are on the inside will be seen in the way you live.

That's why God judges by works. Not to establish the way of salvation but the basis of judgment. You are saved by faith and judged by works. Is there a contradiction? Not at all. Your works ultimately reveal what is in your heart—either faith leading to life or unbelief leading to judgment.

As we have seen consistently so far in Romans, in the end there are really only two kinds of people – those who are God-centered and those who are self-centered. In this passage, verses 7 and 10 describe those who are God-centered and verses 8 and 9 describe those who are self-centered. And in both cases, we find that what people do merely reflects what is in their hearts.

A. Eternal life for those seeking glory, honor, and immortality.

Let's look first at verse 7 and those who are God-centered. Paul says that as God judges our hearts according to our works he renders **eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality**. The word "patient" there conveys the idea of perseverance. So the idea here is that these people persevere in doing good in their lives. And in the second half of verse 7 we see the heart attitude that leads them to consistently do good deeds. There are three things that they seek for, three things in which they delight:

Eternal life means, life pertaining to the age to come, and since that age will not end, it means life that goes on forever (Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 117). But also, it refers to the quality of life in the very presence of God. As Jesus prayed (John 17:3), "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." As such, eternal life begins the moment that we come to know God through faith in Jesus Christ. It grows sweeter as we grow to know Him better in this life. But it will be indescribably deepened and forever expanded the moment we step into God's presence in eternity, free from all sin.

Paul describes this eternal life by four words: glory, honor, and immortality (2:7); and, peace (2:10). Glory refers to the hope of all believers, that we will be transformed into the image of God's Son, so that God's glory will be reflected in us (Rom. 5:2; 8:18, 21, 29-30; 9:23; 1 Cor. 2:7; 15:43; 2 Cor. 3:12-18; 4:17; Col. 3:4).

Honor is similar to glory, and focuses on the approval that God will give us in contrast with the scorn that the world gives us now and the eternal disgrace that God will pour out on the wicked (1 Pet. 1:7). To receive honor will be to hear from the Lord Jesus, "Well done, good and faithful slave.... Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21). All glory and honor that we receive in heaven we will immediately turn back in praise to the risen Lamb as we sing (Rev. 4:11), "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to

receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed and were created.”

Immortality refers to the hope of the resurrection, when we will receive new bodies that are not subject to disease, aging, and death (1 Cor. 15:42, 50, 52-54). Paul says that those who seek for glory, honor, and immortality receive eternal life (2:7). But in the parallel verse (2:10), he mentions glory and honor, but substitutes peace for immortality.

Peace refers to “peace with God and peace of heart and mind in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity” (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], p. 67). It is the eternal peace of “deliverance from sin and its conflicts” (James Boice, *Romans* [Baker], 1:227). These four terms show that as believers, our hope is not in this short life, but in eternal life with God. Thus, as Paul says (Col. 3:1-4), we should be seeking the things above, where Christ is, because when He appears, “then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4).

But, Paul also mentions the other eternal destiny:

B. Eternal wrath and anguish for those who do not obey the truth.

Paul says that the wicked receive “indignation and wrath” from God (2:8), resulting in “tribulation and anguish” for them (2:9). Wrath, as in Romans 1:18, is God’s abiding anger towards the ungodly, whereas indignation points to the outbreak of His anger on the day of judgment.

Tribulation and anguish describe the trauma experienced by those who are the objects of God’s wrath and indignation. Tribulation means “pressure,” and is illustrated by a ancient form of capital punishment where the victim had heavy weights placed on his chest to crush him to death. Anguish refers to confinement. Together, Paul uses both words here to describe the eternal punishment for “every soul of man who does evil.” Soul here refers to the entire person. Those in hell will suffer conscious torment “away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:9). The Bible consistently uses frightening descriptions of the agonies of hell to warn, “You don’t want to go there!”

So Paul clearly says that every person will stand before God in judgment, resulting in either eternal life or eternal wrath. Ro 2:8-9 teach that the self-seeking person ultimately rejects truth and follows evil. The one who lives only for himself or herself will come face-to-face with God’s wrath and anger and will end up in terrible trouble and deep distress.

So, at this point the crucial question is, Which path are you on? Are you doing good as you seek for glory, honor, and immortality? Or, are you doing evil as you live for yourself, disobey God’s truth, and obey unrighteousness? Maybe you’re thinking, “I kind of do both, depending on the situation!” But you can’t straddle the line! You can’t go down two roads heading in opposite directions at once. You’ve got to choose the path of righteousness that leads to eternal life and then persevere on that path. So, how do you get on the right path?

The way to persevere in doing good is to experience the power of God for salvation through believing the gospel.

Here is where we come to grips with the question, Is Paul contradicting himself? Is he saying here that we’re saved by works? But later, he clearly says that we’re saved by faith (Rom. 3:20-28; 4:4-5; Gal. 3:11; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9; etc.). Which is it?

I assume that Paul was smart enough not to contradict himself in the space of a couple of chapters. He has already said (Rom. 1:16) that the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (the same phrase that he uses twice in our text).

The power of God that saves us is not anything that sinful people can effect by their works. It is God’s resurrection power by which He imparts new life to those who were dead in their sins (Eph. 1:19; 2:1-6). He makes us new creatures (2 Cor. 4:4-6; 5:17). He changes our hearts, giving us new desires.

Formerly, we loved the darkness and hated the light, but after God saves us, we hate the darkness and love the light (John 3:20-21; Eph. 5:8-14). By nature, “there is none who seeks for God” (Rom. 3:10). But here we see people who persevere in seeking for glory, honor, and immortality, which can only come from God. What explains the change? They have experienced the power of God in salvation by believing in Jesus Christ.

Genuine saving faith always results in a life of good deeds. Good deeds are not the basis of salvation, but rather the evidence of it. As Paul clearly puts it (Eph. 2:8-10), “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Good works do not earn salvation, but they are the essential evidence that a person is on the path to glory, honor, and immortality. We have to lean on God’s grace not only for salvation, but also for perseverance in good works. So we will be judged by our works, which reveal whether our faith in Christ is genuine or mere empty profession. Paul and James say the same thing: your faith is demonstrated by your works.

John Piper states that whatever else our text teaches us, one thing is abundantly clear and immeasurably important: Namely, when your life is over on this earth...God will give you either eternal life or wrath and indignation. You will receive glory and honor and peace or you will receive tribulation and distress. Heaven or Hell awaits you when you die.

And so the apostle Paul says, there you are, two kinds of people. Two kinds of people in the world. And we must all take stock of ourselves, and ask ourselves, what do our lives say about who we are? What do our desires say about who we are? What do we really want, because in the end, we will get what we really want. If we are God-centered, if our hope is in Him, that hope will be consummated. But if we haven’t ultimately wanted Him, then He will grant us our wish. And we will forego Him forever.

And so the apostle Paul wants us to see ourselves, and then see the judgment of God. Not so that we will work harder to save ourselves, but so that we will cease from attempting to justify ourselves before God, and run to Christ for mercy, and ask Him to make us stand righteous before God.

Conclusion

Two concluding thoughts:

First, to think that that you will get into heaven without good works because you prayed a prayer once or because you claim to believe in Jesus is foolish. Jesus said (Matt. 7:21-23), “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out

demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'" Genuine conversion means that God has changed your heart. If the direction of your life is not to "do good" out of love for God, you need to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus for salvation.

Second, live with your sights on eternity and the hope of hearing "well done" from the Lord who knows your heart. Would you have lived differently last week if your mind had been on that great day when you stand before Christ? Would you have spent your time differently? Would you have treated others differently? If God exists and He promises to reward those who persevere in doing good and to punish those who live selfishly in sin, it is foolish to live for this short life only. Since God will impartially judge each person according to his deeds, persevere in doing good in light of eternity!